

**What it Means to be Modern: A Messy History of Mass-Media Revivals in the Gilded Age
and Progressive Era, 1875-1920**

by

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B.A., University of Victoria, 2011

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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American historians tend to oppose “modernity” and “modern religion” to pre-modern and “traditional” faith, a binary that has privileged certain religious forms and displays of sacredness over others. This thesis challenges the structuring dichotomy of modernity by arguing that Protestant evangelical revivals were sites on which “modernity” was made, defined, contested, and remade at the end of the nineteenth century. Examining the major revivals of Dwight Moody and Billy Sunday, among others, it rejects grand narratives and insists on understanding revival campaigns as existing in a braided relationship with the “secular” public sphere: one player in a symbolic marketplace where various partisans attempted to demonstrate that they were uniquely “modern.” This “modernity” was constructed through multiple categories of gender, age, class, ethnicity, and race, linking claims of “modernity” to common-sense masculinity, idealized family roles, and Anglo-Saxon identity as site upon which “Americanness” was made.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Illustrations	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Revival in the Press	19
Chapter 2: A Plain Religion for a Common-Sense Age: Masculinity, Populism, and the Contested Grammar of Rationality, 1875-1920.....	47
Chapter 3: “Christ is in this City!” Materializing the Sacred in the Urban Revival, 1875- 1920.....	84
Chapter 4: The Family Bound: Imagining Children and Mothers in the Gilded Age and Progressive-era Revival	117
Conclusion: Mass-Media Revivals and “Fundamentalism” as an Interpretive Fiction, 1920-1930	148
Bibliography	161

List of Illustrations

Image 1.....	64
Image 2.....	73
Image 3.....	96
Image 4.....	99
Image 5.....	100
Image 6	103
Image 7.....	103
Image 8.....	108
Image 9.....	112
Image 10.....	114
Image 11.....	119
Image 12.....	119
Image 13.....	133
Image 14.....	139

Introduction

As 1893 drew to a close, the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago showcased "modern" America to the world. The landscape itself told a story. Hundreds of thousands of tourists crowded through the half-mile long "White City," named for the shining alabaster buildings decorated in white stucco which clashed sharply with the brown tenements dotting the Chicago skyline. A short distance away in the Midway Plaisance, the same onlookers could witness "primitive" Africans and indigenous people display "traditional" customs, contrasting their primeval savagery with the shining magnificence of downtown. Between these two extremes, numerous other players sought to stake their claim in the new America that was presented to audiences. Mormons, long viewed by many Americans as a fringe anti-Christian sect, displayed their newfound cultural legitimacy at the "Utah Building," replete with a life-sized statue of Brigham Young, presaging Utah statehood just over two years later.¹ At the same time, other groups were denied such representation. African-American leaders, including Frederick Douglass and Ida B. Wells, protested their exclusion from the American pavilion, instead being forced to attend as part of the Haitian delegation. Douglass and Wells correctly understood that, by denying them representation as part of the United States, Exhibition organizers were symbolically associating whiteness with modern American civilization and black bodies with the "primitiveness" and savagery of the colonized world. The geography of the Fair was much more

¹ Reid L. Nielsen, *Exhibiting Mormonism: The Latter-day Saints and the 1893 Chicago World's Fair* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), Kindle edition, 1102-1106.

than coincidence; it revealed the boundaries of who was and was not authentically part of the modern America organizers were attempting to demarcate and define.²

The Mormons were not the only religious movement jockeying for legitimacy at the Exhibition. Hundreds of representatives of a panoply of religious faiths sought a place in the World's Parliament of Religions, an unprecedented ecumenical attempt by the liberal Presbyterian John Henry Barrows and Swedenborgian Charles Carroll Bonney to organize a conference of the world's major religions. For the first time, Eastern faiths such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam were displayed to western audiences alongside new religious movements such as Christian Science and Transcendentalism. But the display of religious diversity was meant to illuminate more than the multiplicity of global religion. Barrows and Bonney intended to prove that religion could be and was part of the modern world exhibited at the World's Fair. Instead of the sectarian, superstitious faith of the Middle Ages, the Parliament would showcase religions' power to transcend divides and unite with the potential of the White City: "it was felt the tendencies of modern civilization were toward unity. Some came to feel that a Parliament of Religions was the necessity of the age."³ Rather than showcasing medieval superstitions, the Parliament asked participants to explain their religion, articulate its moral and social value, and prove its necessity as a force for good. By inviting both new religious movements and Eastern religions, Barrows and Boney were able to both demonstrate religions' universality and the power of Americans to discuss religion rationally, demonstrating that there was nothing mystical or incomprehensible in true spirituality.

² For general literature on the World Colombian Exhibition, see James Burkhart Gilbert, *Perfect Cities: Chicago's Utopias of 1893* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (University of Chicago Press, 1987); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 31-41.

³ John Henry Barrows, "History of the Parliament," in *The World's Parliament of Religions: an illustrated and popular story of the World's First Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in connection with the Columbian exposition of 1893* (Chicago: Parliament Publishing Company, 1893), 5-6.

A short distance from the Parliament, a different kind of religion was also competing for a place in the White City. Dwight Moody, still America's most famous evangelist and a living symbol of Anglo-American evangelical culture, set out to use the World's Fair as a chance to hold a new great revival in his home city. Moving between a series of churches and theaters, because no one structure could be found large enough to accommodate the crowds, Moody was able to attract 150,000 attendees a week during the final month of the Exhibition, half of those on Sunday alone.⁴ He even rented out Forepaugh's circus, attracting crowds so large that Forepaugh cancelled his other Sunday shows.⁵ As legions of young volunteers handed out fliers emblazoned with Moody's name or shouted temperance slogans from one of Moody's two travelling "Gospel Wagons," spectators were greeted with a display of evangelical religiosity that pulsed through the city. Whether in the Musical Hall on Haymarket Square or holding meetings under a canvas tent, Moody's revival was a visible display of the continued power of evangelists to claim space in the modern metropolis.⁶

Rather than constructing one single image of a shining Zion, the 1893 Columbian Exhibition highlights the contested and fractured nature of what it meant to be modern and American at the close of the nineteenth century. The World's Parliament of Religions and the Moody Tabernacle were not synonymous claims to religious authority. The broad, inter-faith movement of Barrows and the pre-millennial Protestantism of Moody represented competing visions of what it would mean to be religious in the twentieth century. On the fairgrounds shared by Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Free Thinkers, liberal Christians, and Protestant evangelists, multiple modernities were constructed and tested against one another. The struggles that entailed

⁴ Henry Burns Hartzler, *Moody in Chicago; or the World's Fair Gospel Campaign* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1894), 177.

⁵ William Moody, *Life of D.L. Moody* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1900), 415-416.

⁶ See James Gilbert's chapter on the Moody campaign. James Gilbert, *Perfect Cities*, 169-207.

would gradually favour some modernities over others, marking out who sat within the White City of the twentieth century and who was relegated firmly to its margins.

This thesis is a study of evangelical, mass-media revivals from the beginning of the Gilded Age to the end of the First World War. It begins with the wildly popular 1875 Boston revival of Dwight Moody, whose reputation for plain preaching and direct, sentimental style made him a household name in Protestant America until his death in 1899. It ends with the decline of mainstream, urban revivals in the early 1920s, as the aggressive, populist rhetoric of men like Billy Sunday, the “hayseed of the hayseeds,” receded into relative obscurity amidst the evolution controversies of the middle of the decade. Its structure implies that these temporally dispersed series of meetings and campaigns can be connected into a narrative that reveals something of the relationship between American mainstream Protestantism and the “modern” America the Columbian Exhibition showcased in 1893. These revivals, rather than belonging firmly within the special realm of religious or theological history, were intertwined and inseparable from the categories of class, gender, ethnicity, and race on display to Chicagoans in the White City. When revivalists claimed they were common, manly, rational, or urban, they embedded religion in multiple categories of analysis and laid a claim to the public sphere that brought them into competition with other groups over what it meant to be modern and religious in America.

Revivals are a well-worn topic in the annals of American history. One early study of revivals in the Gilded Age and Progressive era by William McLoughlin characterized the religious campaigns as the “Third Great Awakening,” referring to the “Great Awakenings” of the eighteenth and nineteenth century famously studied by mid-century historians such as William Warren Sweet and Perry Miller. McLoughlin connected the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-

century revivals to a centuries long tradition that was “the shaping power of American culture from its inception,” a place where America’s “cultural verve” and “self-confidence” was cleansed and restored during moments of profound crisis and change.⁷ Revivals in the view of McLoughlin and others were “an Americanization of Christianity,” a central and repeating institution of American life, perhaps even the most important institution where “Americanness” was made.⁸

Since the 1980s, the historiographical ground upon which McLoughlin’s history rested has begun to give way. In his critique of the “Great Awakening,” Jon Butler shattered the consensus surrounding the importance of revivals by arguing that the Great Awakenings were an “interpretive fiction” invented by historians to give a sense of unity to the American past.⁹ While later historians critiqued aspects of his argument, especially the timing of the emergence of the Awakening fiction, Butler’s deconstruction made it more difficult for historians to write large, progressive narratives of the revival as the emergence of a mythic Americanness.¹⁰ Instead, Butler forced a re-examination of revival cultures as more specific and fragmented phenomena, historically constituted by the cultures that created them into re-assuring narratives of unity and progress.

This thesis follows Butler in viewing large scale, coherent, and progressive narratives of revival as fiction. There was no First, Second or Third Great Awakening except in the minds of historians and some religious people who afterwards attempted to build the competing series of

⁷ William McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 1-2; also see William McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1959).

⁸ William Warren Sweet, *Revivalism in America* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1944), xii.

⁹ Jon Butler, “Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretive Fiction,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (Sep., 1982), 305-325; also see Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faiths: Christianizing the America People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

¹⁰ Frank Lambert, “The First Great Awakening: Whose Interpretive Fiction?,” *The New England Quarterly* Vol. 68, No. 4 (Dec., 1995), 650-659.

revivals, church-building campaigns, and travelling evangelists into a comprehensible movement. But, as the chapters that follow reveal, I continue to believe that there is a basis for viewing revivals collectively as places where religion helped create gendered, ethnic, and racial identities that were in some sense understood as both “modern” and “American.” Revivals remain historical phenomena as rich, complex, and central to understanding American culture as the frontier; historians can ill afford to do without a theory that explains their relationship to American history.

The alternative is a history of revivals as piecemeal, isolated events. This approach has been popular in the biographical tradition in American religious history. While Dwight Moody and Billy Sunday have both attracted dozens of biographies, few have attempted to connect their history with a larger world of late-nineteenth century revival that was both distinct from the past and future landscape of evangelism. This sub-literature has contributed a great deal of value in understanding the intellectual and cultural world of particular evangelists, but in the absence of a larger interpretive map has also contributed to a ghettoization of the field. As Martin Marty once quipped, the significance of a figure like Dwight Moody was more than the “merely quaint... world of cigar-store Indians, Mississippi river steamboats, Fourth of July orations, and Mrs. O’Leary’s cow.”¹¹ An emphasis on biography and a dearth of synthesizing work has left historical studies of Moody, Sunday, and other contemporary evangelists largely antiquarian compared to the wealth of literature on the earlier “Great Awakenings” and the twentieth century.¹²

¹¹ Martin Marty, Foreword to James Findlay Jr., *Dwight L. Moody: American Evangelist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 1.

¹² For some important biographies, see William G. McLoughlin Jr., *Billy Sunday Was His Real Name* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955); Lyle Dorsett, *Billy Sunday and the Redemption of Urban America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991); Roger Bruns, *Preacher : Billy Sunday and big-time American Evangelism*

This leads us to a necessary question — what precisely, in the terms of this study, is a revival? A simple definition is both necessary and difficult. I define the revivals under examination below as cultural events rooted in Protestant theology but created and experienced through the media of the press, the geography of urban landscapes, and the rhetorical languages of the public sphere. Like other historical concepts, the meaning of revival is fluid, situational, and historically constituted; revivals are rituals whose purpose, form, and place change over time. In the eighteenth century they were associated with emotional, primitive, and “promiscuous” religion outside of the official sanction and control of the church. Revivals were disreputable, popular affairs used by fringe denominations like the Methodists to criticize institutional churches and to manifest the Holy Spirit on Earth, leading some authors to describe eighteenth-century revivals as profoundly revolutionary affairs.¹³ In the nineteenth century, revivals evolved into the mainstream and developed a business-like model, as men like Charles Finney wrote books and tracts on how to conduct revivals without the “disorderly” character that had previously haunted them. But the revival, though now institutionalized, continued to be understood as existing to “heat up” and enliven Christians whose faith had become cold and rote in the practice of everyday life, metaphors which inspired the name of the “burned-over” district of upstate New York that was the geographic locus of many large-scale revivals in the early nineteenth century.

(New York : W.W. Norton, 1992); James Findlay Jr., *Dwight L. Moody, American evangelist, 1837-1899* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1969); William R. Moody, *The life of Dwight L. Moody* (New York and Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1900); this is not to deny that many biographers were eager to connect Moody to the well-known evangelists of the eighteenth century or the “First” and “Second” Great Awakenings. But these authors, for the most part, did not connect their subjects to the cultural world of evangelism and revival in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, presenting Moody and Sunday as singular, novel figures on the American landscape, rather than participants in a vibrant and active religious culture that was distinct from both the past and future.

¹³ George Rawlyk, *The Canada Fire: radical Evangelicalism in British North America, 1775-1812* (Kingston, Ont.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994); Curtis D. Johnson, *Islands of Holiness: Rural Religion in Upstate New York, 1790-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

Revivals tell multiple stories of American cultural life in the Gilded Age and Progressive era, stories that fail to fit together neatly into the kind of large, coherent narratives once favoured by historians like William McLoughlin. But their untidiness may reveal a great deal. In recent years, historians of sexuality have turned to writing “uneven” or “queered” histories in order to “dramatize incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations” of biology and sexual identity, revealing how normative categories of “heterosexual” and “homosexual” are historically constructed.¹⁴ Reacting against both biological essentialism and histories that impose fixed sexual categories on the past, queer historians argue that uneven, disordered narratives in fact more closely approach historical reality. Drawing on queer theory for inspiration, I have chosen to construct this thesis as a “messy” history to avoid such a pitfall. Revivals were created in multiple places, told multiple stories, and created multiple meanings. Rather than flatten all the competing evangelists and revivals in the Gilded Age and Progressive era around a unified, neatly organized theme, I have intentionally tried to leave the chapters slightly cluttered and untidy, structured around subjects that blur at the edges. It is my hope that a messy history of the revival may reveal connections, relationships, and tensions that remain hidden in more neat and coherent stories, reflecting the kind of chaotic, fluid world in which Americans found themselves at the end of the nineteenth century.

At least three qualities make the large-scale, mainstream, mass-media revivals of the period from 1875 to 1920 distinct. First, they captured national media attention, exerting an influence far beyond their immediate audiences. Thousands of newspapers covered revivals in detail, reprinted sermons on a daily basis, and inserted the revivals into American cultural life to

¹⁴ Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: University Press 1996), 3; for an “uneven” approach to the history of sexuality, see Regina Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy: an Uneven History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

a degree that, were it not for the success of Billy Graham, would be scarcely imaginable today. Large revivals in the Gilded Age, perhaps for the first time in American history, became a media phenomenon where their impact on culture was largely outside of the service itself. Further, mass-media revivals were urban and associated with America's largest cities. While in the eighteenth century revivals had targeted the backwoods and small towns of upstate New York and in the nineteenth the Midwestern enclaves of Illinois and Iowa, mass-media revivals in the Gilded Age focused themselves on the largest and most culturally and financially powerful of America's cities: Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago. These cities also rapidly expanded in the last third of the nineteenth century from communities of generally no more than a few hundred thousand to metropolises numbering in the millions, an urban transformation more radical than at any other time in American history.¹⁵ I am not interested in the longstanding and vibrant American tradition of rural revival, or the continuing circuit riders and Midwestern "corn and hog circuit" workers whose tent services had for the better part of two centuries helped to define rural Protestant-American religious life.¹⁶ While these traditions remained vibrant and important in the Gilded Age, the revivals under examination here were urban phenomena: created in cities, experienced through the urban press and advertisements, and making claims to urban space.

Second, mass-media revivals were culturally mainstream. Traditional arguments against the revival as a form of religious "excitement" which encouraged dangerous inversions of church hierarchy continued to appear occasionally in the religious press, but in dwindling numbers. Indeed, for the first time in American history, revivals were widely accepted by churches of

¹⁵ For information on the growth of America's cities in the Gilded Age, see Robert G. Barrows, "Urbanizing America," in *The Gilded Age: Perspectives on the Origins of Modern America*, Charles William Calhoun ed. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 101-118.

¹⁶ See Patsy Sims, *Can Somebody Shout Amen!: Inside the Tents and Tabernacles of American Revivalists* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988).

virtually every denomination as not only valuable, but a primary means of maintaining Protestant religiosity. In the second half of the nineteenth century, mass-media revivals achieved a legitimacy in American culture they had never before approached, reflecting an influence as an institution that probably reached its apex in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The revival's sheer conventionality and appeal as an institution granted it significant power as a site upon which American definitions of religious identity were made.

For both this reason and their greater presence after 1920, this thesis does not closely examine Pentecostal revivalists such as Aimee Semple McPherson or Maria Woodworth-Etter, despite their massive popularity. This exclusion shapes the argument and narrative of the paper in crucial ways, and therefore requires an explanation. Pentecostalism, despite its intensive coverage in the press, was never truly a mainstream phenomenon in the American religious landscape. Even at the height of her fame, McPherson was widely attacked for her practice of faith healing and her gender, making the media coverage of her campaigns as much about the controversy and sensation of the Angelus Temple as the religious message she presented. The practice of healing the sick placed McPherson well outside normative medical discourse of the time, while her personal ministry and public persona led her to be the constant target of accusations of infidelity, events that came to a head in her 1926 kidnapping scandal.¹⁷ While McPherson certainly also had her supporters, the revivalists under examination here all managed to establish themselves as mainstream representatives of American Protestant Christianity. While they too were sometimes the target of criticism and scandal, they sought to define a “normal” that Pentecostalism, no matter how popular, would always reside outside of.

¹⁷ For a pro-McPherson account of the kidnapping trial, see Daniel Mark Epstein, *Sister Aimee* (New York/San Diego/London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993) 296-322; for a more critical account see Lately Thomas, *The Vanishing Evangelist* (New York Viking Press, 1959); also see Edith L. Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: the Assembly of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 165-167.

Third, mass-media revivals were self-consciously interdenominational, including Protestants of various (though not all) stripes. Long before ecumenicalism had become a catchword for Liberal Protestants and Catholics, Gilded-Age evangelists created revivals as events which unified, rather than divided, American Christians. In fact, mass-media revivals succeeded precisely because their sermons and presentation appealed to audiences that were denominationally diverse and whose commitment to formal religion varied. Mass-media revivals emerged at a time when religious forms of practice were in a state of flux, destabilizing older forms of religion and empowering new expressions. The American revival was by its very nature a public, inclusive event. By advertising in papers, selling tickets, and mimicking the tactics of popular lecturers and entertainers, the revival was an institution premised on a belief that America was a nation largely united behind Christian values. While revivals might welcome any denomination, even sometimes including Catholics and unbelievers, this was only because it could generally be accepted that critics still adhered to an underlying value system consistent with the Protestant values revivalists held dear.

However, this move for unity concealed significant exclusions. While Catholics were in theory welcomed, Billy Sunday marketed his revivals through a “plain Anglo-Saxon” language that was unlikely to appeal to Italian and Irish-Catholic immigrants. Unitarians and Christian Scientists were also excluded and pathologized as not heretics but non-Christians, excluded from the camp of legitimate religion altogether. By defining themselves as interdenominational, Gilded Age and Progressive era revivals sought to mark the bounds of acceptable religion, regulating what was, and was not, Christian in America.

Before moving on, the category under analysis must be shrunk further still. Studying something as ephemeral and widespread as mass-media revivals is necessarily a process of

exclusion. For this reason, I focus on the revivals of seven figures who attracted significant media attention in the period between 1875 and 1920: Dwight Moody, J. Wilbur Chapman, Charles Stough, Reuben Torrey, William Biederwolf, Billy Sunday, and Gipsy Smith, although Moody and Sunday receive by far the greatest focus. These were the evangelists whose campaigns attracted mass media attention in numerous cities throughout the Gilded Age and Progressive era, achieving a level of popularity and cultural clout that differentiated them from their less successful competitors. Other figures are occasionally mentioned, such as De Witt Talmage or William Asher, but they are excluded from central attention because they were either not revivalists, were not successful or famous enough to be considered truly a mass-media phenomenon, or because sources on their lives and work were lacking. The claims I make are based on the campaigns of these men; additional revivalists may paint a somewhat different picture of the era and reveal trends which are here neglected or overlooked.

Many Ways to be Modern

At the World's Parliament of Religions, the German liberal writer and theologian Paul Carus began his talk on "Science and Religion" with the following words:

A French author of great repute has written a book entitled ... '*The Irreligion of the Future*,' in which he declares that religion will eventually disappear; and he whose opinion is swayed by the diligent researches of such historians as Bucke and Lecky will very likely endorse this prediction. It is quite true, as these authors assert, that the theological questions of past ages have disappeared, but it is not true that religion has ceased to be a factor in the evolution of mankind. On the contrary, *religion has so penetrated our life that we have ceased to notice it as an independent power.* [Emphasis Added]¹⁸

¹⁸Paul Carus, "Science as Religion," in *The World's Parliament of Religions* (Chicago, Ill.: Parliament Publishing Company, 1893), 978.

Paul Carus' quote came from the heady and optimistic moment of the Columbian Exhibition, and the seeming possibility of a united, cross-religious spirituality it evoked. But his comments also touched on something that many observers and scholars in the following century frequently struggled to understand. Religion as a category is as dynamic, fluid, and changeable as class, race, or gender; it exists not as a stable unit of analysis across time, but as a historically constituted and constantly re-articulated substance. It exists both within theology and within the social experiences of groups. It can be found in the relationships between people and things, in the spaces they inhabit, and in the worlds in which they work and live. Religion in the modern world is so omnipresent and expansive is that its influence is often missed, invisible within the fabric of the everyday.

Debates over secularization, modernity, and the “un-modern” or “pre-modern” remain a well-worn field in American historiography. While scholars have largely ceased predicting the decline of American religion in the wake of the evangelical resurgence of the 1970s, they have continued to use “modernity” as a useful label to separate the present world of religious pluralism and scientific materialism from the more devout religious worlds of the past. This model fits within the classic articulation of the public sphere by Jürgen Habermas, who argued that the modern “public” was a space where rational debate was fostered on Enlightenment ideals of reason and the rational individual. In Habermas' original theorization, religion — a subjectivity that violated his belief in a space where ideas could be argued based on individual reason — existed by definition outside of the public sphere. In this model, religion as a ‘public’ force was destined to decline and recede before the emergence of a truly democratic, modern state; a narrative historians of the 1960s and 70s saw borne out in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversies of the 1920s and the declining power of churches to influence or decide public

policy.¹⁹ But in the wake of Ronald Reagan and Pat Robertson, secular models of the public sphere began to fall out of favour. Craig Calhoun and others, including Habermas himself, have more recently searched for a way to understand religious practices and subjectivities as one of a number of multiple publics that are integral to the larger public sphere.²⁰ Developments in religious studies have mirrored such work, moving towards a model of secularity as interlaced with religion. Rather than faith and reason occupying entirely distinct categories, a number of historians and philosophers have pushed to reduce the ontological space between the two, positioning religion and secularity as multiple orientations through which modern life is defined and experienced.²¹

Many of these debates center around a definition of modernity as a place outside of and separate from the religious: a realm of rational debate, scientific fact, and a general acceptance of material reality juxtaposed against a “pre-modern” world of religious enthusiasm and irrationalism.²² Modern religion is defined as religion that has reconciled with the scientific, contemporary world — a personal, rational religion drained of “superstitious,” and therefore pre-modern, beliefs. Robert Orsi has described this form of “modern” religion as a “normative

¹⁹ See Jürgen Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*; for older religious literature, see Norman F. Furniss, *The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918-1931* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954); Martin E. Marty, *The Modern Schism: Three Paths to the Secular* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

²⁰ *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT press, 1992), esp. Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” 109-142; David Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early-modern England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 259-288; Craig Calhoun, “Secularism, Citizenship, and the Public Sphere,” *Rethinking Secularization* Rethinking Secularization, ed. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 75-91; *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan Vanatwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), esp. Charles Taylor, “Why we Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism,” 34-59, Jürgen Habermas and Charles Taylor, “Dialogue,” 60-69.

²¹ For additional literature on re-orienting secularization, see Cornel West, “Prophetic Religion and the Future of Capitalist Civilization,” *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, 92-100; Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, M.A. and London: Belknap Press, 2007).

²² For literature on “modernity” and its relationship to religion see Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Guy G. Stroumsa, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2010); Eric J. Sharp, *Comparative Religion: A History* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1986) [originally published 1975].

discourse” that “always entailed both descriptive and prescriptive dimensions; it inscribes one way of being religious as ‘religion’ itself.”²³ Religion that is not “modern” in this context denotes a cultural ontology that is incompatible with rational, modern life — a way of living and experiencing the world that is at odds with how academics understand the relationship of the spiritual to the material. In both popular culture and academia, such orientations are frequently labeled as “bad religion” or religious extremism, for example in Islamic Jihadi movements that are understood as perversions of “legitimate” religiosities.²⁴

Numerous authors have problematized the relationship between modern and pre (or un)-modern, but the term continues to appear regularly in the field as both a method of separating past and present and an orientation for understanding the decline of religion in public life. R. Scott Appleby made a particularly apt criticism when he — quoting his mentor Martin Marty — compared the attempt by academics to demarcate the boundaries between a “secular” and “fundamentalist” (and therefore anti-modern) religion to the medieval cartographers who labelled unknown land “HERE BE MONSTERS,” situating their own subjectivity as normal by articulating the other as a monstrous diversion.²⁵ In his own critique of the modern/pre-modern binary, Robert Orsi rejected the notion of “pre-modern” religion while continuing to use the phrase “unmodern.”²⁶ Unmodernity is meant to imply an alternative to modernity that is distinct

²³ Robert Orsi, “Everyday Religion and the Contemporary World: The Un-Modern, Or What Was Supposed to Have Disappeared But Did Not,” in *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes*, Samuli Schielke and Liza Debever eds. (New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012), 146-161.

²⁴ John Gray, *Al Qaeda and What It Means to Be Modern* (New York: The New York Press, 2003); Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 179-180.

²⁵ R. Scott Appleby, “Rethinking Fundamentalism in a Secular Age,” in *Rethinking Secularism*, Craig Calhoun ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 227. Also see, 234-235.

²⁶ Robert A. Orsi, “My Specific Form of Disorientation,” *Studying Religion and Society Sociological Self-Portraits*, Titus Hjelm and Phil Zuckerman eds. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 153; also see Robert Orsi, “Everyday Religion and the Contemporary World: The Un-Modern, Or What Was Supposed to Have Disappeared But Did Not,” in *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes: an Anthropology*, Joska Samuli Schielke and Liza Debevec eds. (New York : Berghahn Books, 2012), 157-160; literature on ‘multiple modernities’ is also relevant. See R.W. Hefner, “Multiple

from the rational, private religion that has become normative in the West since the eighteenth century, but that is neither necessarily anti-modern nor archaic. Whether Bronx Catholics believing that the city water that runs near the church of St. Lucy has spiritual qualities or snake-handling Pentecostals in Georgia who trust in their faith to protect them from venomous poison, unmodern religion exists apart from the Enlightenment ideal of spirituality while still being intensely current and possessing a variety of possible relationships to the modern world.

While Orsi presented the “unmodern” as a term to refer to the everyday religious worlds that persisted in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it also holds value for the study of Gilded Age and Progressive-era revivals. The revivals under examination here considered themselves to be uniquely modern, rational, scientific institutions that had their finger on the pulse of American cultural and intellectual life. Yet, the religious practices they materialized and gave form to in their meetings violated many of the limits of modern religion that contemporaries were in the process of demarcating. Billy Sunday boxed the devil from the podium for using dance, cards, and booze to steal young men and women from the church, while Dwight Moody taught that prayer had the power not only to regenerate sinners but to bring rain, blurring the supernatural and sacred with the mundane and material. “Unmodernity,” as I understand it and make use of it in this thesis, is also a term meant to destabilize the solid division between the modern and anti-modern, revealing how both categories are embedded in multiple systems of meaning that blur the distinction between one another. The revivals were both implicated in modernity and not of it, inhabiting an ontological place that violates the conventional norms of “modern” religious history. Robert Orsi’s idea of “braided” history may also be useful here: unmodern and modern religion exist as separate orientations, but are so

Modernities:’ Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism in a Globalizing Age,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, no. 27 (1998), 83-104; S.N. Eisensadt, “Multiple Modernities,” *Daedalus*, Vol. 129, No. 1 (Winter, 2000), 1-29.

intertwined and embedded that in practice studying them as distinct categories is virtually impossible.²⁷ This thesis will therefore search for modernities that are religious and religious cultures that are modern, alive to how religion is a category articulated and experienced in different spaces and through different mediums.

But as with any finite work, this thesis emphasizes certain intersubjectivities over others, not because they are the only connections that matter, but because they were the most accessible and clearly defined in my research. Gender is the most privileged site of connection in the chapters that follow. Revivalists and their critics used gender as a signifier of authority, a means by which they established their relevance and power in both the public sphere and the tabernacle. They relied on gendered populist identities to connect with their audiences, using a notion of “common” manhood to place firm binaries on identities that in practice could be fluid, contradictory, and diverse.²⁸ Gender blends here with age and class in how the family structured the revival and its notion of normalcy.²⁹ Middle-class notions of the Victorian family, timeworn and splintered by the 1870s, retained a mythic power in the revival as an ideal, shaping how both sin and redemption were constructed.

Class, ethnicity, and race receive less space in this study, but remain crucial to understanding the complex identities that were created and re-created in the revival. While

²⁷ Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 9.

²⁸ My notion of gender is shaped in particular by Jeanne Boydston. See Jeanne Boydston, “Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis,” *Gender and History*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Nov, 2008), 558-583, particularly 563-565; for gender as a signifier of power, see the classic work by Joan Scott, “Gender: a useful category of analysis,” *American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 5 (Dec, 1986), 1053-1075.

²⁹ A great deal of work has also been done on the cross-sections of class and gender in the revivals of what is typically referred to as the Second Great Awakening, arguing that they were crucial in the formation of the nineteenth-century cult of domesticity. See Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the middle class: the family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women’s Activism and Social Change* (Lanham, M.D.: Lexington Books, 1984); for an important study that links gender to the First Great Awakening, see Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics & Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994).

gauging the class background of revival audiences is difficult, mass-media revivals attracted their greatest support from the middle-class urbanites and recent migrants of the white working class who most aspired to respectability and status.³⁰ Ethnicity and race moulded the notion of what a common and manly Christian was, largely excluding African Americans and Catholic immigrants from the revival community, all while continuing to champion the inclusiveness of the campaign.³¹ Both categories acted as additional axes of exclusion from the “modernity” in creation in the revival, defining modern Americanness through what it was not.

³⁰ For work connecting class to religion, see William Sutton, “Tied to the Whipping Post: New Labor History and Evangelical Artisans in the Early Republic,” *Labor History*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 251-281; William Sutton, *Journeyman for Jesus: Evangelical Artisans confront capitalism in Jacksonian Baltimore* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); Paul Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York : Hill and Wang, 1978); for an important Canadian example of the link between gender, class, and religion see Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

³¹ See especially *The New Black Gods: Arthur Huff Fauset and the Study of African American Religions*, Edward E. Curtis IV and Danielle E. Brune Sigler eds. (Bloomington/Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 2009); *Women and Religion in the African Diaspora*, Marie Griffith and Diana Savage eds. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006).

Chapter 1: Revival in the Press

“READY FOR THE REVIVAL”

PREPARING THE WAY FOR MOODY

THE WORK OF REVIVAL BEGUN

- *The Boston Globe*, January 29, 1877, 1.

It was with a self-satisfied air that the Reverend John MacPherson, a close supporter of Dwight Moody’s 1876 revival in Boston, remarked that

Every newspaper had its paragraph, in which, for the most part, criticism was somehow disarmed. ... In the train, in the busy mart ... no place was too secular, no business too pressing ... to reference the topic of the day. Everywhere the new songs of Zion fell upon your ear.³²

MacPherson had reason to celebrate. Press coverage of Moody’s revivals in Scotland, Ireland, and England from 1873 to 1875 had made him an Anglo-American celebrity at the age of 38, famous internationally as both a common-sense preacher and a prolific saver of souls. Even before he had completed his first major revival campaign, the *New York Herald* declared him to be “the greatest evangelist of his generation.”³³ The *New York Times*, days before the beginning of Moody’s first American revival, placed an obituary for Charles Finney, the Second Great Awakening evangelist who had devoted more than sixty years to religious work. The obituary read that he was “the Moody of his day.”³⁴ The *Chicago Times* went still further, writing that “without education, a man of the masses... [Moody] has aroused religious faith with a success

³² John MacPherson, *Revival and Revival-work, a record of the labour of D.L. Moody and I.D. Sankey and over evangelists* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1876), 43.

³³ *New York Herald*, September 12, 1875, 8.

³⁴ *New York Times*, August 17, 1875, 4.

that rivals the first period of the apostolic age.”³⁵ Before Moody had set foot back on American soil, the mainstream white press had already constructed him as a legend. One Moody acolyte summed up all the press support by proudly proclaiming that in Boston “every daily paper will be a religious tract for the next three months.”³⁶ Given this level of support, it is hardly surprising that Moody was equally positive about the press, declaring that “a free press is a terror to evildoers ... and sensationalism protects the world.”³⁷

Historians have paid relatively little attention to the special relationship between evangelicals and the “secular” media that existed from the 1870s revivals of Dwight Moody until the later revivals of Billy Sunday in the early 1920s. Both contemporaries and later academics tended to explain Moody’s success as a result of personal magnetism or the appeal of his message to American audiences.³⁸ The same is true for later revivalists, whose histories have largely emphasized either the personal ability of evangelists (in hagiographic accounts) or their cultural context (in critical accounts). Few have explored what Reverend MacPherson and Dwight Moody readily acknowledged; the media — and in particular newspapers — were so crucial to the scope and success of revivals in the Gilded Age and Progressive era that they re-invented the revival in print.

B.J. Evensen has gone part way to understanding the relationship between the media and the revival through his work on the Moody campaigns, arguing that the mainstream press acted

³⁵ *Chicago Times*, reprinted in *Daily globe*. (St. Paul, Minn.), Nov. 1, 1883, 3.

³⁶ *Boston Globe*, January 26, 1877, 8.

³⁷ “Anecdotes of the Great Revival,” Moody Bible Institute archives, miscellaneous, 269.2, A578; for earlier religious views of the press see R. Lawrence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

³⁸ For near-contemporary work on Moody and his revivals, see his son’s biography, William Moody, *The Life of Dwight Moody*, and J. Wilbur Chapman, *The Life of D.L. Moody*; for more recent scholarship that tends to highlight Moody’s personal abilities and portray the revivals as the result of Moody’s talent and presentation, see J. F. Findlay Jr., *Dwight L. Moody: American Evangelist 1837–1899*; L. W. Dorsett, *A Passion for Souls: The Life of D.L. Moody*.

as the “machinery of the revival.”³⁹ Evensen’s work reveals Moody’s reliance on newspaper coverage to successfully attract audiences, and the importance his campaigns placed on good relations with the press. His book is merely a beginning however, and does not examine the relationship of revivalists and the press beyond Moody. Further, Evensen examines how evangelists understood the press, but is less interested in how the press understood evangelists, leaving the larger question of why the media was so eager to champion the revivals unanswered.

This chapter will argue that the public aspects of Gilded Age and Progressive era revivals were media representations created by the mainstream white press as part of the emergence of mass media in the United States. The notion of a “secular” press in the nineteenth century is somewhat misleading; America’s newspaper editors and reporters tended to embrace revivals because the press remained part of a Protestant public sphere in which narratives of Christian redemption continued to hold power. As numerous academics have demonstrated, “news” is a narrative technology through which meanings and identities are woven together through the authoritative form of the report.⁴⁰ Newspapers did not only cover the news, they built it into genres and tropes that structured American cultural binaries of race, class, and gender. Studying the stories that American newspapers told and retold about religion reveals much about its place in the public sphere and blurs the space between “secular” journalists and the religious evangelists they covered.

Salvation in Print: The Independent Press and the Public Sphere

³⁹ See Bruce J. Evensen, *God’s man for the Gilded Age: D.L. Moody and the rise of modern mass evangelism* (Oxford; New York : Oxford University Press, 2003), 173-177.

⁴⁰ In this understanding of news, I have drawn from Lisa Duggan’s work in *Sapphic Slashers*; Also see Dan Schiller, *Objectivity and the News* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981); Tom Koch, *The News as Myth: Fact and Context in Journalism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990). Also see Jurgen Habermas, *Structural Transformation*.

Newspapers have exerted a crucial cultural influence in America since the beginning of the eighteenth century, but it was at the start of the nineteenth that they truly achieved a national audience. The American press expanded dramatically in the antebellum period, leading to a transformation in the presence and power of the media in daily life. As America's cities and towns grew rapidly, rising literacy rates and population created the market for a spectacular increase in the number of American newspapers, from 512 in 1820 to more than 3000 on the eve of the Civil War.⁴¹ Rapid advances in printing technology also facilitated the growth. By 1846 the *New York Herald* could boast of an unprecedented steam-powered six-cylinder press capable of printing 12,000 sheets an hour; by 1860 the Hoe press was capable of printing 20,000.⁴² Moreover, the decreasing price of print allowed newspapers to target new audiences. The 1830s saw the birth of the penny press, which for the first time marketed affordable, four-sheet papers to the working class, taking advantage of the mass enfranchisement of men and the growing political consciousness of Americans of all classes.⁴³ By the 1860s, America was blanketed in newspapers that could claim to reach a larger portion of the population and provide them with more news than at any time in the Republic's history.

But this growth came at the expense of traditional sources of support that had provided limited security and stability to newspapers in the antebellum era. In 1860, Congress formally ceased providing funds to newspapers, a policy long justified on the grounds that federal subsidies protected the press' essential function in providing up-to-date political information to citizens. But patronage also tended to support a "spoils system," where Whigs and Democrats used congressional funds to reward papers that were loyal to them. The result was that most of

⁴¹ David Copeland, *The Media's Role in Defining the Nation: The Active Voice* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 69.

⁴² Michael Emery and Edwin Emery, *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1996), 117-118; Thomas C. Cochran, "Media as Business: a Brief History," *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (1975), 155-165.

⁴³ Dan Schiller, *Objectivity and the News* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 47-75.

the nation's successful newspapers were explicitly partisan and reliant on some measure of government support for their solvency. As the number and nature of newspapers multiplied and diversified, the patronage system was attacked for its expense, corruption, and obsolescence in an America where news was readily accessible to everyone. The State Department continued to reward certain papers by granting them exclusive permission to publish congressional laws until 1875, but abolished the policy amidst the numerous corruption scandals of Ulysses Grant's second term, ending formal newspaper patronage in the United States. The market, not the government, now dictated the fate of papers.⁴⁴

Cut off from traditional supports and faced with a large but diverse market, newspapers, in order to survive, sought new ways to attract audiences and retain legitimacy as sources of news. By the 1870s, the tactic more and more newspapers adopted was to market themselves as "independent." This label did not imply bipartisanship. Horace Greeley, the press baron who unsuccessfully ran for president in 1872, denounced "neutral" reporters for yielding the sacred responsibility of journalists to advocate for the public good.⁴⁵ Instead, independence implied a willingness to place moral or political principles above partisan or financial loyalties. Murat Halstead, the editor of *The Cincinnati Enquirer* who had been financially devastated when he turned against President Grant in 1872, argued that journalists must remain loyal to a party in order to take events "by the handle or the helm," writing "according to his principles" and effecting change on that basis.⁴⁶ Independence did not mean that the journalist was objective, but that they were active partisans for the public good as they perceived it. Journalism in the 1870s was not yet understood as a preserve of empirical observation, but was still conceived as an

⁴⁴ Culver H. Smith, *The Press, Politics, and Patronage: The American Government's Use of Newspapers 1789-1875* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977), 245; Copeland, *The Media's Role in Defining the Nation*, 109-112; Ted Curtis Smyth, *The Gilded Age Press, 1865-1900* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003), 49-50.

⁴⁵ Ted Curtis Smyth, *The Gilded Age Press*, 20.

⁴⁶ Murat Halstead, "Maxims of the Press," *New York Tribune*, January 24, 1889, 7.

arena where parties and political ideologies competed for the attention and support of the public.⁴⁷

It is important to note at this point that the “news” as a concept was and is not transparent. Papers created stories from current events, or in some cases even manufactured the events themselves. To take one famous example, in 1835 the fledgling *New York Sun* published a series of articles that claimed a powerful American telescope had seen bats and bison-like creatures on the Moon, a hoax that was intended to embarrass the more established and expensive New York City papers that immediately picked up the story without verification.⁴⁸ While certainly an example of bad journalism, the scandal demonstrated how much power the press had in inventing the news it reported, and how readily audiences would accept what they read as true.

In an era of vast expansion of the market for print, the Gilded-Age press did not simply report the news, they created it. The nineteenth century witnessed an enormous increase in the number and scope of professional reporters. The percentage of published news collected by reporters rather than clipped from other papers increased from 32% to 55% over the antebellum period, as fledgling papers attempted to scoop stories that would give them an advantage over competitors.⁴⁹ Editors hired reporters and stationed them at sources of “regular” news such as government offices or police departments. These reporters, often young college graduates, succeeded or failed based on their ability to produce stories from these locales that could generate public interest. When a potential news event hit, these new legions of journalists leapt into action in order to build the contradicting series of incidents, facts, or court hearings into a

⁴⁷ Dan Schiller, *Objectivity and the News*, 70-75.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 76-80.

⁴⁹ Michael Emery and Edwin Emery, *The press and America: an interpretive history of the mass media* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1984), 111.

story that would sell papers. Whether sensation, scandal, or spectacle, the news was invented in the gaze of reporters who constructed the “facts” into convenient narrative forms readily comprehensible to their audience.

The ability of journalists and editors to imagine and concretize issues of the day into the rubric of an authoritative, independent report was crucial in defining the symbols which structured much of American culture in the Gilded Age. As Lisa Duggan and others have shown, the narrative forms reporters used to present their stories were a repetitive mantra of stock characters, plots, and resolutions. Lynching stories in the mainstream press would regularly portray the same themes of sexual danger and punishment of African-American men, not because these tropes truly existed in nature, but because they presented moral parables that appealed to and met the expectations of audiences. By framing the news into stories that reassured audiences of the durability of the social order, newspapers both reinforced common stereotypes and demonstrated the importance of their own voice in the public sphere.⁵⁰

It is also important to understand that many editors saw their role as involving a public trust. A sense of responsibility in serving the public was a dominant theme of American journalism by the 1850s.⁵¹ Numerous scholars have identified the growth of the nineteenth-century press as crucial to the emergence of the “democratic market society” founded on Jacksonian notions of mass democracy and public debate.⁵² While newspapers moved away from narrow political support, they continued to understand themselves as advocating for an imagined public based around a white, largely middle-class, and male image of American identity.

⁵⁰ For work on race and newspapers, see Sandra Gunning, *Race, Rape, and Lynching: The Red Record in American Literature, 1890-1912* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Lisa Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers*, 1-6 and 20-35.

⁵¹ Dan Schiller, *Objectivity and the News*, 125-149; Richard Kaplan, *Politics and the American Press: The Rise of Objectivity, 1865-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 22-54.

⁵² Michael Emery and Edwin Emery, *The Press in America*, 111.

The explosion of print and publishing in the nineteenth century has been linked by numerous authors to the emergence and solidification of the “public sphere” in America. Classically defined by Jurgen Habermas in 1961, the public sphere was initially conceptualized through print as a figurative space where citizens gathered as a community of equals based around a belief in a set of common values: equality, individuality, private property, and rationality. In the eighteenth-century “Republic of Letters,” bourgeois male citizens formed a common community that had relative freedom to criticize the state and exert influence over the government through public opinion. This public sphere peaked in the nineteenth century expansion of the press, before declining in the last third of the century as the emergence of advertising and public relations led to the “management” of public opinion rather than its free expression.⁵³

Habermas’ initial thesis has been criticized in many corners and by many authors, not least of all by Habermas himself. What Habermas noted and other authors have fleshed out in greater detail, was that the public sphere was built on a series of exclusions from the rational: placing women, racial minorities, children, and much of the working class outside of the “inclusive” public sphere.⁵⁴ Yet the genius of the public sphere lay in the myth of its own inclusivity; newspapers spoke as if they were reaching a universal audience, united by common attitudes about the importance of transparent politics, efficient civil service, and a non-sectarian religion. By claiming to speak for the nation, newspapers exerted a crucial influence on how the nation was defined and who was included or excluded from it.

⁵³ For the classic elucidation of the public sphere, see Jurgen Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 181-211.

⁵⁴ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in Craig Calhoun ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT press, 1992), 109-142; also see essays in *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*, ed. Johanna Meehan. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 117-137.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, newspapers were newly reliant on the public for their support, shaped stories into cultural narratives meant to appeal to audiences, and frequently saw themselves as participants in the struggle to maintain the public good. All of these factors are crucial to understanding how and why newspapers covered evangelical revivals. The public sphere in late nineteenth-century America was still partially defined through religion. Even as American churches lost their ability to force conformity to church values, the media continued to embrace cultural Protestantism as foundational to American identity.⁵⁵ The rise of Sunday ballgames and newspapers reflected the decline of religious control over public life, but not necessarily a decline of religion in the public sphere. Instead, the mainstream white American press embraced a non-sectarian and “independent” form of Protestant identity that mostly closely matched their own values and ideas. In the revival, newspapers found a narrative that they could embrace and sell to the public, championing a Christian-American identity while safeguarding their role as keepers of the public good.

The Press as Participant: The Secular Media Revives America, 1875-1920

Dwight Moody’s warm relations with the press in the 1870s were far from unique. Later revivalists were equally positive about the reception they gained from newspapers. J. Wilbur Chapman, who was the virtual successor of Moody in the 1890s, had the press coverage of his 1909 Boston revival described by a supporter in the following terms: “The general public was astonished to see the secular press of the city devoting whole pages, day after day, to the revival. ... The Christian people of Boston ... purchased these papers by the thousands, sending them to all parts of the world.”⁵⁶ Such adulation for the press was often calculated to flatter and

⁵⁵ For literature on the decline of the church’s ability to enforce discipline over American forms of entertainment, see R. Lawrence Moore, *Selling God*.

⁵⁶ A.Z. Conrad and D.D. Chairman, “The City of Boston,” in *Account of the Boston Awakening*, edited by A.Z. Conrad (Boston: The King’s Business Publishing Company, 1909), 26.

encourage further support, but this only demonstrated how important the support of the secular media was in advertising revivals. Billy Sunday, the “baseball evangelist” whose success in the 1910s would dwarf even Moody, frankly admitted in one sermon that

I don't know how I could carry on this work I am doing with the cooperation of the newspapers. So important is the part the newspapers take that instead of announcing that Bill Sunday is going to have a religious campaign in Kansas City, they should have announced that the newspapers of Kansas City ... are going to have a religious revival aided and abetted by Billy Sunday.⁵⁷

Progressive era and Gilded-Age evangelists understood just how crucial the press had become to their very existence. The evangelical paper *The Revival Times* summarized the contemporary situation aptly: “Nationwide campaigns are no longer conducted by oratory. The speaker is but a supplementary aid to the printed message. ... Men can refuse to attend church... but they cannot close their eyes to the printed page. They toss it aside, but the next day they find it confronting them ... practically everybody can be reached by an active press.”⁵⁸ For many, if not most Americans, revivals existed primarily as a media phenomenon — and a mediated phenomenon — witnessed, consumed, and experienced through the press.

Even evangelicals and revivalists who continued to make traditional arguments against Sunday newspapers and sensationalist tabloids were by the 1870s praising the newspaper as a tool of the revival. De Witt Talmage, the New York evangelist and editor who was widely regarded as a successor to Henry Ward Beecher, was highly critical of “immoral” papers that advertised card parties and other worldly entertainments. But despite his reservations, he still acknowledged the unrivalled place of the newspaper in reaching and shaping the values of the public:

⁵⁷ Billy Sunday, “Newspaper Men’s Talk, 1917,” Billy Graham Center Archives (Wheaton, Ill.), Papers of William Ashley “Billy” Sunday and Helen Amelia (Thompson) Sunday, CN 61, Box 9, Folder 68.

⁵⁸ “Press to Aid the Glorious Revival Work,” *The Revival Times* (June, 1915), Vol. 1, No. 1 (Chicago, Illinois), 2, Billy Graham Center Archives (Wheaton, Ill.), Papers of William Edward Biederwolf, CN 195, Box 2, Folder 3.

The newspaper is the great educator of the nineteenth century. There is no force compared with it. It is book, pulpit, platform, forum, all in one. And there is not an interest--religious, literary, commercial, scientific, agricultural, or mechanical--that is not within its grasp.⁵⁹

The orthodox Reuben Torrey, co-editor of *The Fundamentals* series that would help define “fundamentalist” anti-modern Protestant theology after 1910, was forced to agree. Though no fan of “the idle talk of newspapers,” Torrey was amazed at the power papers had to reach and convert audiences not reached through other means.⁶⁰ In one anecdote, Torrey remembered being called to the bedside of a dying woman. Finding her “rejoicing in Christ,” Torrey inquired as to how she had been converted. In response, she handed him a torn piece of an American paper that she had found wrapped around a parcel sent to her from Australia. The paper contained an extract from a sermon by Charles Spurgeon, the famous British evangelist. At the sight of a woman converted by a mere scrap of newsprint from around the globe, Torrey was forced to admit that even “idle” papers had the power to transform the soul.⁶¹

Such praise was not ill-founded. The press often had the power to make revivals a success or damn them to obscurity. Henry Stough’s revival in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, is a case in point. Stough arrived in Lancaster in January, 1915, to revive the city for six weeks and achieve 40,000 conversions for Christ, along with recapturing 5000 backsliders and 10,000 nominal Christians.⁶² However, the revival did not go as planned. In the first weeks, the local *Lancaster Journal* hailed Stough’s revival for attracting massive crowds and leading a “record number of converts” to conversion.⁶³ But the tone of the coverage gradually began to change as

⁵⁹ T. De Witt Talmage, *The Abominations of Modern Society* (New York: Adams, Victor & Co., 1872), 48.

⁶⁰ R.A. Torrey, *Revival Addresses* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1903), 58.

⁶¹ Reuben Torrey, “The use of Tracts,” in *How to Support and Conduct a Revival*, ed. by Reuben Torrey (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1901), 126.

⁶² “Wanted! A Great Revival of Religion!” *Lancaster News Journal*, Charles Stough Press Clippings, Billy Graham Center, CN 106.

⁶³ *Lancaster News Journal*, March 19, 1915. Charles Stough Press Clippings, Billy Graham Center, CN 106.

Stough badly mishandled his relations with the press. When attendance began to falter during Holy Week, Stough made critical remarks about the state of religion in Lancaster and lambasted its newspapers for misquoting him. The *News Journal* was more than slightly vindictive in its response: “Meetings scarcely attended, devoid of features — sermon a comedy event... [Stough] calmly told the audience that Lancaster was the hardest town religiously that he had ever struck, and declared he would say a lot of things more, if there were no reporters there. [So] The reporters left the building.”⁶⁴

From this point, the relation between Stough and the press quickly degraded. Stough derided “the inky atmosphere thrown from the reporters’ pen” for sabotaging his revival.⁶⁵ For their part, the *News Journal* depicted Stough as “hurling remarks” at an audience that “squirmed in their seats,” giving an aura of desperation to the campaign.⁶⁶ Events came to a head when the *News Journal* transferred away a reporter who had been converted during the revival, leading Stough to accuse the paper of censorship.⁶⁷ The *News Journal* denied any wrongdoing, and proceeded to denounce Stough for doubting the paper’s commitment to the public good: “The policy of the *News Journal* is and always will be to boost a cause that is just and right.”⁶⁸ When the Lancaster campaign ended a week later, attendance was faltering and Stough was eager to move on to a city more sympathetic to mission work. While the press was by no means the sole cause of the lackluster results in Lancaster, Stough had failed to learn the lesson taken to heart by Dwight Moody and Billy Sunday. Good relations with the press were now mandatory if revivals were to achieve success.

⁶⁴ *Lancaster News Journal*, March 31, 1915. Charles Stough Press Clippings, Billy Graham Center, CN 106.

⁶⁵ *Lancaster News Journal*, April 8, 1915. Charles Stough Press Clippings, Billy Graham Center, CN 106.

⁶⁶ *Lancaster News Journal*, April 2, 1915. Charles Stough Press Clippings, Billy Graham Center, CN 106.

⁶⁷ *Lancaster News Journal*, April 7, 1915. Charles Stough Press Clippings, Billy Graham Center, CN 106

⁶⁸ *Lancaster News Journal*, April 8, 1915; April 2. Charles Stough Press Clippings, Billy Graham Center, CN 106.

On the reverse, the press could and did transform obscure evangelists into celebrities. Pennsylvania Pastor Charles Russell had led his own evangelical organization, the International Bible Students, since 1879. The Bible Students were a small network of a few thousand Christians located mostly in the Midwestern United States, based around a common millennial belief that the Great Tribulation was due to begin in 1914. For twenty-five years Russell toiled to build his movement, achieving minor success with a network of roughly 10,000 subscribers by the early 1900s.⁶⁹ But then in 1903, Russell's success at a series of religious debates spurred three newspapers to offer to syndicate his sermons. The work grew rapidly, convincing Russell that newspaper coverage held the potential to evangelize to a far larger audience than could be reached by colporteurs or volunteers.⁷⁰ By 1912, the number of papers syndicating Russell had grown from 3 to 1,500; two years later the number rose to 2,024 papers across the English-speaking world, turning the leader of a previously obscure evangelical movement into an international celebrity reaching a potential audience in the hundreds of millions.⁷¹

It is also important to note that not all newspapers held the same relationship to the public sphere. The Catholic, black, and labour press occupied a marginal space in the American media, defining their own alternative publics. *The Catholic World*, in an article entitled "Revival in Frogtown" (a sarcastic epithet for Philadelphia), mocked Moody's sermons as superficial and dubbed him "the Rev. Eliphalet Notext." The article suggested Moody had begun as "the business manager of a circus," and accused him of being a shameless showman for Christ:

⁶⁹ Timothy White, *A people for His name; a history of Jehovah's Witnesses and an evaluation*. (New York: Vintage Press, 1968), 26. James Penton, *Apocalypse delayed: the story of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 41-42.

⁷⁰ "Millions of sermons have thus been scattered far and near; and some at least have done good. If the Lord wills we shall be glad to see this 'door' keep open, or even open still wider," *Zion's Watch Tower Magazine* (New York), December 15, 1904; Timothy White, *A People for His Name; Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of Christ's Kingdom* (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1993), 49-50.

⁷¹ Timothy White, *A People for His Name*, 49; *Proclaimers*, 53-54.

“immediately upon his arrival in Frogtown he grappled the newspapers. He begged, bullied, or badgered the editors until they noticed him.”⁷² Another Catholic paper, *The Boston Pilot*, barely covered the revival in the city, except to note that one anonymous Methodist had called the “singing, acting, and weeping” of the revivalists deplorable.⁷³ African Americans were likewise often unimpressed with Moody’s practice of segregating revivals, leading Frederick Douglass to contrast Moody with the Agnostic Robert Ingersoll, who, although an “infidel,” “never turned his back upon his colored brothers as did the evangelical Christians [of the Moody revival].”⁷⁴ But criticisms from the margins and the *Catholic World’s* resentment at Moody’s “badgering” of the press only demonstrated how thoroughly the mainstream, white, and Protestant newspapers of America had become participants in evangelical revivals, leaving critics sidelined and unable to penetrate the popular enthusiasm and support surrounding the campaigns.

Consecrated Pens: Deconstructing Mainstream Press Narratives of the Revival

Why were Protestant revivals such an easy fit with the mainstream press? One possible reason is that revivals fit within the “independent” identity of many papers in the 1870s. Men like Dwight Moody or Billy Sunday were self-consciously interdenominational, and while they had little success attracting Catholics, many papers championed the “common sense” and “non-sectarian” nature of the revivals for placing values above doctrine.⁷⁵ Even magazines that were frequently critical of religion championed revivalists like Moody in these terms. *Truth* magazine described Moody as having displayed “a degree of common sense almost amounting to genius,” and declared that all the “Bishops” of the Methodists, Congregationalists, and Baptists “possess[ed]

⁷² “A Revival in Frogtown,” *Catholic World*, Vol. 32, No. 131, 1876, 700.

⁷³ *Boston Pilot*, Feb. 17, 1877, 1.

⁷⁴ “Oration of Frederick Douglass,” *American Missionary*, vol. 39, no. 6 (June 1885): 164, quoted in Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: race, religion, and American nationalism, 1865-1898* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 281.

⁷⁵ For one good example, see the press clippings collection in *Zion’s Watch Tower*, Jan 1, 1912.

between them less practical wisdom than this plain, unlettered American preacher.”⁷⁶ The broadness of the revivals and their self-conscious effort to appeal to all Christians — regardless of their denomination — made them a relatively safe form of religiosity for newspapers to market to their audiences.

Papers did not only report on revivals, they constructed them into narratives that neatly matched their own conceptions of American civilization. The rise of Moody and mass-media evangelism coincided with the “Long Depression” of the mid-1870s, a crisis that revealed the growing urban poverty and class tension in America’s cities. Labour tension, immigration, and poverty were more difficult to ignore or explain away as they had been in the past, feeding the rise of movements such as the Knights of Labour, the Progressive Party, and various other militant and moderate reform elements. In the decades that followed, Americans were faced with an increasing diversity of narratives to explain urban poverty and disorder. While America’s independent and left-wing press began to grow rapidly in the 1870s, the well-established culturally Protestant and middle-class newspapers like the *Boston Globe*, *New York Times*, or *Chicago Tribune* were uneasy with working-class reform movements and eager to find an explanation for urban problems that sidestepped class and reaffirmed traditional American associations between Western civilization and religion.

Revivals offered newspapers a narrative that explained the events of the day not as a result of class tension or inequality, but instead as a result of the moral decline of urban Americans awash in a sea of materialism and vice. Moody decried urban entertainment in the form of Sabbath-breaking through card games and bicycle riding, while Billy Sunday targeted

⁷⁶ *Truth Magazine*, 1884; quoted in *The New York Sun*, (New York), July 17, 1884, 1.

dance parties and “matinee gadders.”⁷⁷ Such entertainments led to drink, crime, and impoverishment, explaining dearth and delinquency in the cities. Drawing on a century of temperance activism, Moody blamed the “whiskey gang” for the grip of urban poverty: “[alcohol] is a curse ... I think that if it was not for this cursed liquor traffic we would not have any hard times.”⁷⁸ Thirty years later, Sunday claimed that crime existed because “a large part of the population, particularly in the cities,” were not churchgoers, with “most of the criminals” coming from “this part of the population.”⁷⁹ The solution was moral regeneration, not reform: “[the] trouble that confronts America is a lack of moral principles. ... you can’t raise the standard of morals by raising wages ... you have got to look higher.”⁸⁰ Rather than preaching revolution, revivals offered simple, concrete explanations for America’s urban problems and, through religion and moral regeneration, a readily available solution.

Alcohol was often singled at as the symbol of virtually all urban problems. The decline of liquor consumption following revivals was diligently reported by newspapers, implying that it was intemperance, and not structural inequalities, that lay at the root of urban tensions.⁸¹ Other papers, like the Philadelphia-based *North American*, reported on revival meetings that descended on taverns, resulting in bartenders, patrons, and revivalists joining together to sing hymns and

⁷⁷ Dwight Moody, *Moody’s Latest Sermons* (Chicago: Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1900), 56-57; William T. Ellis, *‘Billy’ Sunday: The Man and His Message* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Co., 1914), 223.

⁷⁸ *Boston Globe*, Feb 3, 1877, 7.

⁷⁹ “Text of the Three Sermons Preached Yesterday by Billy Sunday,” *Evening Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), January 4, 1915

⁸⁰ “Text of the Three Sermons Preached Yesterday by Billy Sunday,” *Evening Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), January 4, 1915, 14.

⁸¹ See for example *New York Times*, September 15, 1875.

ostensibly reform their ways.⁸² Linking in with the temperance crusade, revivals offered the press a simple and satisfying narrative that made liquor the scapegoat for numerous social ills.⁸³

The implication that the root of poverty and crime in the city lay in the morality of the poor was not lost on critics of the revival. John Reed, the labour activist and author of *10 Days that Shook the World*, wrote an exposé of the 1915 Sunday revival in Philadelphia with the purpose of understanding the impact of Billy Sunday on Americans, and especially his effect on the working class. In his characteristic literary style, John Reed related an interview he had conducted with a local pastor on the effect of the Sunday revival:

‘Does Sunday’s preaching have any particular effect on social and political conditions?’

‘It will’ said the Reverend Bickley enthusiastically. ‘It will redeem men from the improvidence that comes with drinking. Slums, you know, are largely the fault of those who live there...’⁸⁴

Fabricated or not, Reed acutely picked up on the essential difference between Sunday’s message of redemption and the labour movements’ drive to organize. For this reason, Sunday’s revivals attracted organized opposition from vocal components of the radical labour movement such as Emma Goldman, who referred to Sunday as a “frothing, howling, huckster,” and the I.W.W., who accused Sunday of being a pawn of the employers.⁸⁵ But opposition from the radical labour movement counted for little. Critics like Reed or Goldman sniped largely from the margins, and

⁸² See *The North American* (Philadelphia), July 1, 1901. Billy Graham Center Archives (Wheaton, Ill), Papers of John Wilbur Chapman. CN 77.

⁸³ For larger work on narratives of alcohol and redemption in the nineteenth century, see Elaine Frantz Parsons, *Manhood Lost: Fallen Drunkards and Redeeming Women in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 2003); also see Dan Schiller, *Objectivity and the News*, 172-178.

⁸⁴ John Reed, “Back of Billy Sunday,” reprinted in Lehman, *John Reed & the Writing of Revolution* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002), 243.

⁸⁵ For Emma Goldman’s “frothing, howling, huckster” quote, see *Mother Earth*, May, 1915; “I.W.W. Leader Charges Billy Sunday Broke Unions,” *New York Times*, March 18, 1915; also see “Anarchists Study Sunday’s Doctrine,” *New York Times*, April 18, 1915

were unable to shake the widespread sympathetic coverage of the revivals in the mainstream press.

Printed narratives of revival were almost always structured as redemptions stories, where initially sinful and sedate cities were transformed through the power of evangelism into beacons of Christian civilization. Newspapers would faithfully report on the positive social impact of the revival, often emphasizing the easing of class tension that followed in their wake. The *New York Times* praised Moody's campaign in Liverpool for bringing about "meetings of trade and labour." Instead of assembling to agitate for class warfare, workers were now gathering "for religious purposes."⁸⁶ *The Globe* reported that Moody's revival in Boston had attracted "a hundred or more men in the leather trade" as an example of its phenomenal success, winning converts who might otherwise have ended up in the gin mill, as criminals, or anarchists.⁸⁷ Regardless of how representative such displays were, they raised the possibility that social problems could be solved through personal salvation. Even as the revival was just beginning, Denver papers covered Gipsy Smith's 1909 campaign in the following tone:

With hands clasped in supplication; eyes bedimmed with the tears of repentance and faces bowed in humbleness, old and young, rich and poor, black and white, church member and non-church member, knelt reverently on the hard stone floor of the Auditorium ... seeking the solution of this life's problems and the promise of a life hereafter.⁸⁸

Ten years later, *Washington Times-Herald* columnist Jean Eliot constructed the "unity" of a Billy Sunday revival in almost identical terms:

He'll find the derelict, with a week's growth of beard and shabby overcoat buttoned tight about the neck where shirt and collar ought to be; and the Nell Brinkley girl, daintily

⁸⁶ *New York Times*, September 15, 1875.

⁸⁷ *Boston Globe*, Feb 6, 1877, 1.

⁸⁸ "Sobs of Sorrow and of Joy Fill 'Workers' Room at Revival," unidentified newspaper clipping (Denver), 1909, Billy Graham Center Archives, Gipsy Smith, Folder 16.

dressed and shod . . . He'll find the sailor boy and the lad in khaki, always quite numerous present either with his best girl or with his buddy, and the little dressmaker in whose gray life there is little of the light and color and enthusiasm, which gets hold of her here.⁸⁹

The actual impact of the revival on the working classes was more complicated than the image presented in the pages of the mainstream press. Some employers instructed their workers to attend the revival as a mandatory work function, such as occurred when Union Pacific employees were made to attend Sunday's 1915 Omaha revival en masse.⁹⁰ But what mattered was the narrative. Revivals provided newspapers with a story that demonstrated the continuing endurance of Protestant culture in America and, fictive or not, the role of religion as a potential antidote to urban problems. Newspaper after newspaper reported in detail the number of converts "won" in revivals, drawing a direct correlation between those "saved" and the positive impact on the community. By reporting "immense meetings" or the "great rush" to the tabernacle, the newspaper was able to demonstrate that hundreds of thousands of urban Americans were still willing to stand up and participate visibly in a mass Protestant culture. Such was the power of newspaper narratives of revival: New Yorkers could read about Billy Sunday damning their city as "self-satisfied, conceited New York," only to witness within weeks the evangelist's triumph against great odds in restoring the city to Zion. Every revival was constructed as a quest to save urban America from the forces of disorder, vice, and sin, with every new victory serving as a testament to the hidden hand of providence still guiding America's cities.⁹¹

Newspapers argued for the practical benefits of revival, but this is no reason to believe that they *only* supported religion because they saw it as socially useful. Editors, just like

⁸⁹ Jean Eliot, "Size and 'Pep' at Tabernacle thrill our Jean," *The Washington Times-Herald*, January 18, 1918, 10.

⁹⁰ *Omaha daily bee.*, October 10, 1915, 13.

⁹¹ *New York Herald* (New York), April 19, 1917; also see Lyle Dorsett, *Billy Sunday and the Redemption of Urban America*.

attendees of the revival, often embraced the events as an expression of Protestant-American identity at a time when the boundaries between sacred and secular seemed increasingly unclear. As the editor of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* — a paper that was one edited by Walt Whitman and no consistent fan of organized religion — put it: “it is refreshing in these days of agnosticism, indifference, and contempt to find a keen observer and a plain speaking man like Mr. Moody not despairing at the Christian Republic.”⁹² Plain, interdenominational religion served as an antidote to the “spiritual crisis of the Gilded Age,” and grounded the nation’s morality: “People get weary of doubting and denying. Communities, like individuals, have their spells of atheism and despair ... [but] society finds that religion is, after all, a social necessity, and that though churches, like dwellings, are not perfect, they are better than the bare ground and the bleak winds.”⁹³ There is little reason to doubt A.Z. Conrad and D.D. Chairman, supporters of Chapman’s 1909 revival in Boston, for their explanation of the wide cooperation of the secular media:

The proprietors and editors of Boston's newspapers are men of intellectual acumen and high moral purpose. They saw the inevitable benefit from a social and civic standpoint which must accrue from the kind of preaching.⁹⁴

The mainstream white press and the revivalists shared a common definition of the nation, and coalesced around a narrative of the revival that was beneficial to both. By embracing evangelism, editors not only participated in but helped create the religiosity of the event, reviving America through the press.

Some editors saw themselves as evangelists in their own right. Jacob Riis, the future social reformer and muckraker, was converted at a Methodist revival in 1874 by the circuit-riding evangelist Ichabod Simmons, and decided to become a preacher until Simmons convinced

⁹² *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 21, 1884, 2.

⁹³ *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 21, 1884, 2; also see Paul A. Carter, *The Spiritual Crisis of the Gilded Age* (Dekalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1971).

⁹⁴ A.Z. Conrad and D.D. Chairman, “The City of Boston,” in *Account of the Boston Awakening*, 26.

him that in modern America there was a greater need for “consecrated pens” than travelling evangelists.⁹⁵ While the connections between Progressive-era social reform and Christianity are well known, it is worth remembering that Riis was first and foremost a press publisher.⁹⁶ He saw no contradiction between his desire to make money and his desire to improve the state of the nation: “I was following the course he [Simmons] had laid down.”⁹⁷ Whether professing Christians or not, newspaper editors in the Gilded Age and Progressive era often operated from a Christian cultural framework that gave them common ground with revivalists. Billy Sunday certainly agreed. Discussing the role of the newspaper editor as a man “with a shirt tail full of type and a cheese press,” Sunday summed up their position as “just one lap behind the missionary ... Every newspaper man ... can become an evangelist. ... I know that many of you are Christians, and that all of you are for those three handmaidens of the highest type of christianity [sic], the church, the school, and the newspaper.”⁹⁸ Sunday’s words were calculated to win support, but his connection between editors and evangelists was accurate — in an era when journalism was still defined as articulating and defending the public good, the distinction between a consecrated pen and an evangelist could become indistinct.

Despite Dwight Moody’s death in 1899, by the end of the century mass-media revivals had become so popular in the United States that Reuben Torrey could confidently declare that “revival is in the air.”⁹⁹ And at the heart of the revival was the press. Newspapers covered sermons, represented evangelists, and constructed revivals in the public sphere. When Wilbur

⁹⁵ Jacob A. Riis, *The Making of an American* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901), Chapter VI.

⁹⁶ For literature on the connection between Progressive-Era reform movements and religion, see Robert Crunden, *Ministers of Reform: The Progressives’ Achievement in American Civilization, 1889–1920* (New York: Basic Books, 1982); Thomas C. Leonard, “Religion and Evolution in Progressive Era Political Economy: Adversaries or Allies?,” *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (2011), 429-469.

⁹⁷ Jacob A. Riis, *The Making of an American*, Chapter XIII.

⁹⁸ Billy Sunday, “Newspaper Men’s Talk,” 1917.

⁹⁹ Reuben A. Torrey, “Preface,” in *How to Promote and Conduct a Successful Revival*, fourth Edition, ed. Reuben A. Torrey (London/Edinburgh: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1901).

Chapman revived Boston in 1909, religious observers responded with pride at how commercial and religious interests blurred:

The fact is, the liveliest and best news of the entire period was the news of the revival, and good newspapers want news, and are ready to recognize what will claim the attention of the great public.¹⁰⁰

In such a context, identifying where revivals ended and newspaper coverage began became not only difficult, but impossible. The press was revival, and the revival was press.

The Press as Observer: The Uneven Decline of the Mass-Media Revival, 1920-1930

Beginning in the 1910s, the relationship between the mainstream press and revivals showed signs of deterioration. First, interaction between journalists and evangelists became more managed. Rather than simply allowing reporters to cover revivals however they wished, younger evangelists became more concerned with controlling their public image, and therefore more critical of the press. Sunday, like Moody before him, painstakingly cultivated good relations with newspapers. However, his organization was also much more careful in whom it granted access to, and insisted on a degree of conformity and control that Moody or Chapman had never demanded. When the socialist John Reed attempted to gain an interview with Billy, ‘Ma’ Sunday demanded to know whether he was a Christian, and when he affirmed he was not she refused to allow him to interview the pastor.¹⁰¹ As the 1910s advanced, the press was less likely to be viewed magnanimously as a friend and support of the revival. At times, even Sunday, who was usually effusive about the religious potential of the media, situated himself as a defiant enemy of his critics in the newspapers: “All the preachers in the world may frown and all the editors in the

¹⁰⁰ A.Z. Conrad and D.D. Chairman, “The City of Boston,” in *Account of the Boston Awakening*, 27.

¹⁰¹ John Reed, “Back of Billy Sunday,” reprinted in Daniel Wayne Lehman, *John Reed & the Writing of Revolution*, 240-261.

world may sneer but I will go right on preaching a personal devil and an eternal hell because they are in the Bible and I won't abate one iota, jot or tittle for any of them!"¹⁰²

Immigration and the changing demographic and cultural landscape of America's cities may have been a factor in the waning of mass-media revivals in the public sphere, although its impact was likely limited. By the 1920s, American cities like New York and Boston had been transformed through repeated waves of immigration into truly cosmopolitan environments.¹⁰³ However, an increase in numbers did not necessarily translate into a greater penetration of the public sphere. America's mainstream media in the 1920s remained culturally white, Anglo, and Protestant, still dominated by press barons from long establish Anglo-American families.¹⁰⁴ While the alternative publics of Catholic immigrant and black communities developed their own definitions of the relationship of religion to Americanness, their influence over the media and public sphere in the 1920s was not so great as to explain the decline of the mass-media revival.

More important was the emergence of the journalistic ideal of objectivity, which threatened the relationships upon which press revivals were built. While "scientific" language and the principle of objective reporting had been present in American news since the 1830s, as late as World War I editors still understood their articles to be explicitly political. An editor's role was to influence society for the political and social good, whether in the realm of government or religion. The political crises of the 1890s and the rise of the Populist Party temporarily breathed new life into the "independent" model of journalism, but by the end of the 1910s the new discourse of objectivity was gradually achieving hegemonic status. As the era of

¹⁰² *The Day book.*, April 28, 1915.

¹⁰³ Frederick M. Binder and David M. Reimers, *All the Nations Under Heaven: An Ethnic and Racial History of New York City* (New York: Columbia University, 1995), 93-148.

¹⁰⁴ See Ben Proctor, *William Randolph Hearst: The Later Years, 1911-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), esp. 3-52.

progressive reform and patriotic fever waned, reporters increasingly linked their authority to “objective” news coverage. Journalists became less eager to advocate openly for a particular political position and were more eager to present themselves as impartial observers of events.¹⁰⁵ While press barons like Hearst would continue to see themselves as the “sword of the people, to battle for their privileges,” newspapers now positioned themselves at a greater distance from the stories they covered.¹⁰⁶ As a result, they increasingly viewed revivals not as crusades to morally reform America, but as curious events that were somewhat outside rational and “modern” America.

By the early 1920s, this shift in journalistic discourse was having an impact on how revivals were covered in the press. While Aimee Semple McPherson attracted massive media attention in the 1920s for her elaborate meetings in Los Angeles, the press focused heavy attention on proving or disproving her use of faith-healing, an emphasis which McPherson resented as distracting from her own religious work.¹⁰⁷ Magazines and newspapers were now more likely to distance themselves from the emotional and sentimental aspects of the revival, and to be more critical of their “unifying” influence. The newly created *Time Magazine* scathingly criticized McPherson’s 1928 campaign in London, claiming it appealed only to the working-class “mob:” “10,000 strong, they packed and sweated in, to learn about sinnin' from 'er. . . . The meagreness of thank offerings collected on the first night was disheartening. Worse still, a mere 2,000 slummy people paid admission the second evening.”¹⁰⁸ While class and gender prejudice

¹⁰⁵ For literature on the rise of objectivity in journalism, see Richard Kaplan, *Politics and the American Press*, 170-175; Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).

¹⁰⁶ See Ben Procter, *William Randolph Hearst : final edition, 1911-1951* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 53.

¹⁰⁷ Daniel Mark Epstein, *Sister Aimee: The Life of Aimee Semple McPherson* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993), 162-166.

¹⁰⁸ *Time*, October, 22, 1928, Vol. 12, No. 17, 15.

shaped *Time's* critique, their obituary for Billy Sunday was also firmly tongue-in-cheek, mocking Sunday's homey and rural persona by dramatizing his arrival into heaven: "Howdy do, Isaac, where is Jacob? Hello, Joseph! Say, old man, that was a rough deal they tried to put over on you down in Egypt, when that woman tried to tempt you and you looked her square in the face and pushed her away. Say, Joseph, I like you."¹⁰⁹ *Time* ended its obituary with a disdainful summation of Sunday's final years:

No longer an influence in the religious life of his time, he was 72, his fortune spent on his errant sons, his health gone in preaching on what he called "the kerosene circuit." To his wife whom he always called 'Ma' he said: 'Oh, I feel so dizzy.' Then he died.¹¹⁰

The *Time* coverage demonstrated the new distance between the mainstream media and revivals in the 1920s. The narrative of urban redemption that the press had been eager to report in the 1900s and 1910s was increasingly obsolete in a new journalistic ethos that privileged a mythic objectivity and a dispassionate, fact-finding identity for reporters. The emotionalism and sentiments of the revival were a threat to the scientific garb the press now sought to wrap itself in.

Nowhere was the shift in how revivals were typically covered more visible than in the Scopes Trial, which more than any other single event hastened the break between the press and evangelicals. William Jennings Bryan's campaign in Dayton, Tennessee against the teaching of evolution was initially conceived of as a publicity stunt that would spark a revival similar to the campaigns of the 1910s.¹¹¹ However, the Dayton trial failed to reconstitute the mass-media revival and demonstrated the increasing distance between revivals and much of the mainstream press. H.L. Mencken, reporter for the *Baltimore Sun*, set the tone by mocking the crowds of

¹⁰⁹ *Time*, November 18, 1935, Vol. 26, No. 21, 52.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ In fact, Bryan invited Billy Sunday to come to Dayton to conduct a revival for the trial. Sunday declined.

evangelicals who came to Dayton as speaking “degraded nonsense which country preachers are ramming and hammering into Yokel skulls.”¹¹² He went on to portray the crowds of evangelicals who came to Dayton as “peasants,” “hillbillies,” and “poor ignoramuses” who were being manipulated by men like Bryan.¹¹³ Whereas only a handful of years earlier the revivals of Billy Sunday had achieved widespread newspaper support, now a new narrative of revival emerged which portrayed it as rural, backward, and opposed to modern scientific developments. While Mencken’s coverage did not destroy the mass-media model, it challenged the sense of common identity upon which the model was based. Journalists now most often approached revivals as observers and outsiders, whether they opposed them as irrational expressions of backwards prejudice or supported them as still representing a form of social good.

Evangelists, for their part, were also becoming more reliant on their own sources of alternative media. Rather than depending on newspapers like *The Boston Globe* to popularize the message of evangelism, evangelicals were now able to draw on their own newspapers, journals, and new forms of mass communication. Aimee Semple McPherson, the major Protestant celebrity of the 1920s, founded her own magazine *The Bridal Call* in 1917, her own radio station in 1924, and made heavy use of tracts and “gospel cars,” which gave her some control over media representations of her campaigns and made her church of the foursquare gospel less reliant on the secular media.¹¹⁴ Other members of the emerging “fundamentalist” movement strengthened older evangelical magazines and founded a plethora of new ones. Magazines like *The King’s Business*, *Watchman-Examiner*, *The Bridal Call*, and, perhaps ironically, *The Moody Monthly* populated American evangelical households by the 1920s and reported on the

¹¹² Ray Ginger, *Six Days or Forever?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 129.

¹¹³ S.L. Harrison, “The Scopes “Monkey Trial” Revisited: Mencken and the Editorial Art of Edmund Duffy,” *The Journal of American Culture*, Volume 17, No. 4, pp. 55 -63.

¹¹⁴ Aimee Semple McPherson, *This is that: personal experiences, sermons and writings of Aimee Semple McPherson*. (Los Angeles: Echo Park evangelistic Association, 1923), 222.

“materialism,” “higher criticism,” “and “secular modernist” orientation of American society. As their media expanded, many evangelists gradually withdrew from the common public sphere they had participated in earlier, in the process creating a religious public that viewed “secular” America as corrupted and opposed to Christianity.

However, the mass-media model did not die in the 1920s, and historians should beware of presenting the secular turn as a neat narrative of decline. That decade also saw the rise of a new wave of Pentecostal evangelists, especially children like Uldine Utley, who captured mass media attention. These revival girls, who frequently continued to tour as teenagers, mixed sexual allure with innocence and drew on popular commercial tactics and flapper styles to win converts.¹¹⁵ New evangelical revivals would emerge in the 1940s, continue to attract crowds, and retain an important impact on American cultural life. Billy Graham set new records in a mass series of meetings after 1947 that attracted crowds far beyond even Billy Sunday’s records. And, just like in earlier generations, he did so through the support of the press. Henry Luce, editor of *Time Magazine*, and William Randolph Hearst both embraced Graham, partially because his middle-class business persona and anti-communism fit well within the framework of the Cold-War 1950s.¹¹⁶ Papers honoured Graham with titles such as “Old Time Religion Goes Modern,” making revivals “as modern as the atomic bomb,” proof that the mass-media revival still held cultural salience in the mid-twentieth century.¹¹⁷

However, the language of objectivity was now central to how most journalists approached the revival. Editors and reporters praised Graham for lacking the “sweaty urgency”

¹¹⁵ Thomas A. Robinson and Lanette D. Ruff, *Out of the Mouths of Babes: Girl Evangelists in the Flapper Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 51-66.

¹¹⁶ Randall E. King, “When worlds collide: politics, religion, and media at the 1970 East Tennessee Billy Graham crusade,” *Journal of Church and State*, 1997; William Martin, *A Prophet with Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991), 117.

¹¹⁷ *Daily News* (Los Angeles), September 30, 1949, 3.

of earlier evangelists, and for appealing not just to “the conventional evangelist's final, heart-rending orgy of emotion,” but also the mind.¹¹⁸ Rather than bend their newspapers towards the mission of revival as Progressive-era journalists had done, postwar newspapers situated themselves as reporting on an event that appealed to those interested in a productive, “modern” Christianity. The press were now less likely to see themselves as participants in the revival.¹¹⁹ Further, the Graham campaigns could not win over many avowed “fundamentalists,” who considered his appeal to non-Christians and liberals in the “modern Bhaal” to be heretical.¹²⁰ With few exceptions, journalists and evangelicals could no longer find enough common ground to build the narratives of redemption they had earlier shared. In the end, both groups emerged from World War II telling two different stories about themselves, America, and the possibility of salvation. The press and revivalists lacked a common language through which they could communicate to one another and the masses, destroying much of the foundation upon which the mass-media revival had been built.

¹¹⁸ “The New Evangelist,” *Time Magazine*, October 25, 1954.

¹¹⁹ Michael G. Long, *Billy Graham and the Beloved Community* (Houndsmills: Palgrave McMillan, 2006).

¹²⁰ For an example of early opposition to Billy Graham’s campaigns, see Ernest Pickering, *Should Fundamentalists Support the Billy Graham Crusades?* (The Independent Fundamental Churches of America, 1957).

Chapter 2: A Plain Religion for a Common-Sense Age: Masculinity, Populism, and the Contested Grammar of Rationality, 1875-1920

Granddad wore a coonskin cap, rawhide boots, blue jeans, and said ‘done hit’ instead of ‘did it,’ ‘come’ instead of ‘came,’ and ‘seen’ instead of ‘saw.’ He drank coffee out of his saucer and ate peas with his knife.

- Billy Sunday, describing his childhood in rural Iowa¹²¹

Let’s be common folks together today. Let’s be men, and talk sense.

- Billy Sunday¹²²

When Billy Sunday emerged onto the national stage in 1912, he had already spent fifteen years as an evangelist. Abandoning his career as a successful Chicago Whitestockings player in the 1880s, Sunday entered fulltime revival work in 1896 after a stint as a Y.M.C.A. teacher. Far from being an instant success with his ball-player lingo, he instead toiled for years in his mentor Wilbur Chapman’s evangelical “corn and hog” circuit, which covered most of Indiana and Northern Illinois. Beginning with a revival in Garner, Iowa — a town with a population hovering around 1,000 — Sunday conducted over sixty revivals in the next twelve years, half in towns of a population of less than 2,500, relying on word of mouth and an influx of farming families to gather enough numbers to pay his way from donations.¹²³ Sunday would later term these towns the “Kerosene Circuit,” a phrase he meant not as a testament to the region’s fiery Christianity, but as a comment on its humility and relative poverty; the farms of Indiana and northern Illinois still lacked electricity and relied on kerosene lamps, unlike the booming urban center of

¹²¹ Billy Sunday, *The Sawdust Trail: Billy Sunday in his own words*, introduction by Lyle Dorsett (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), 3.

¹²² William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday – The Man and His Message* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Co., 1914), 207.

¹²³ Doug Frank, *Less Than Conquerors: The Evangelical Quest for Power in the Early Twentieth Century* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2009) [originally published 1986], 174; Roger Bruns, *Preacher*, 77.

Chicago.¹²⁴ After 1902, Sunday's campaigns would sweep the largest cities in America — New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Detroit — but his revivals would always retain the language and outlook of the small-town and economically-depressed Midwest of the 1890s.

While it was true that Sunday had grown up in rural poverty in Iowa, he rarely mentioned that he also attended prep school at Evanston Academy as a baseball player, studying elocution and English literature.¹²⁵ Sunday's "commonness" was therefore not just a reflection of his homely rural past, but a conscious component of his pastoral identity that was intricately linked to larger discourses of masculinity, class, and populism. He would damn silk suits and out-of-touch preachers because they failed to speak the language of plain people: "I want people to know what I mean and that's why I try to get down to where they live."¹²⁶ Authenticity in the Sunday revival was a performance of commonness set against the elite, the artificial, the foreign, and the feminine: "What do I care if some puff-eyed, dainty little dibly-dibly preacher goes tibly-tibbling around because I use plain Anglo-Saxon words."¹²⁷ Billy Sunday might be a rube who "knew as much about theology as a jack rabbit knows about ping pong," but he spoke the "jargon of the diamond and the slang of the street," and was therefore just the kind of preacher America needed.¹²⁸

The rhetoric of commonness was a structuring language in Gilded Age and Progressive-era revivals, a means by which evangelists established their authority as representatives of "real" Americans. Billy Sunday, Dwight Moody, and other revivalists presented themselves in their

¹²⁴ Lyle Dorsett, *Billy Sunday and the Redemption of Urban America* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 58-63.

¹²⁵ Roger Bruns, *Preacher*, 48-49.

¹²⁶ William T. Ellis, *The Man and His Message*, 71.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 340.

¹²⁸ "Billy Sunday Saving Sinners With Ball Talk," *San Francisco Call* (San Francisco, CA), February 12, 1909, 14; for the "jack rabbit" quote, see William G. McLoughlin Jr., *Billy Sunday Was His Real Name*, 123.

campaigns not as theologians, but as “common men” whose mindset and lifestyle was consistent with the “average” American man, a claim wrapped up in notions of gender, race, ethnicity, and class. Commonness was also a claim to rationality. The “rational” mind, a notion deeply imbedded in Enlightenment ideas of the autonomous individual, structured how both revivalists and their critics contested for cultural legitimacy, asserting their own movements as common-sense orientations that appealed to a generalized Americanness and those of their opponents as delusional, artificial, and unmanly. Plain preachers of a common-sense faith, Gilded Age and Progressive-era revivalists marked out the boundaries of the normal. In the process they helped to define a modernity that placed their own movements at the heart of American cultural life.

Rationalism, Manhood, and the Revival

Americans in the Gilded Age and Progressive era existed in a world where rationalism was fast becoming a dominant language of authority. The professionalization of medicine, law and eventually psychology led to a new cultural interest in defining the “normal,” a phrase which John Carson has concluded was not in common parlance in its current meaning until after the middle of the nineteenth century.¹²⁹ The Victorian era was a time when numerous professionals were searching to “discover the normal” in both nature and human society. Inheriting an Enlightenment framework, they sought to define the “real” and natural from the artificial and the fake, in the process privileging a notion of the individual as a rational and autonomous creature

¹²⁹ John Carson, “Abnormal Minds and Ordinary People: American Psychologists Discover the Normal,” in *“Normalität” im Diskursnetz Sociologischer Begriffe*, eds. Jürgen Link, Thomas Loer and Hartmut Neuendorff. Heidelberg: Synchron, 2003), 72; also see John Carson, “Minding Matter/Mattering Mind Knowledge and the Subject in Nineteenth Century Psychology,” *Studies in the History and Philosophy of the Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 30 (1999) pp. 345-376; on rationality and the professionalization of law, see Holly Brewer, *By Birth or Consent: Children, Law, and the Anglo-American Revolution in Authority* (Chapel Hill/London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

who was able to discern truth from falsehood.¹³⁰ So integral was this notion of the rational individual to the nineteenth century that it was inseparable from modernity; to be modern was to be rational, and to be rational was to be modern. It was also a means of marking and separating out the irrational, and therefore unmodern. Gender historians have long noted that “rational” identity was an exclusionary category that othered both women and children from the independent, rational self. Linked with the public sphere, notions of mastery were always integral to defining rationality: mastery over the self, the environment, and one’s household and dependents. Rationalist individualism was therefore built through an other; rationality could only exist as long as there was an irrational sphere to set it against.¹³¹

While these categories were gradually expanded to include adult women as citizens, leading to national suffrage in 1920, rationalism always turned on exclusions. The Progressive era saw the reification of the “age of reason” as a firm binary category, formally excluding people under the age of 21 from civic participation and labelling them as less than rational.¹³² At the same time, religious and cultural minorities were targeted and othered from rational modernity. Christian Scientists and faith healers, who believed in the power of religious belief to overcome physical disease, faced a legal campaign of discrimination and persecution from the 1890s to the 1920s, a campaign that was further deeply gendered due to the fact that the vast

¹³⁰ Alex Owen has made a similar argument in the British context. See Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (University of Chicago Press, 2004), 114-147.

¹³¹ See Marie Fleming, “Women and the ‘Public Use of Reason’,” in *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*, ed. Johanna Meehan (New York: Routledge), 1995, 117-137 ; Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in Craig Calhoun ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT press, 1992), 109-142; Holly Brewer, *By Birth or Consent Children, Law, and the Anglo-American Revolution in Authority* (Chapel Hill ; London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York, 1998).

¹³² Brewer, *By Birth or Consent*.

majority of faith healers and their clients were women.¹³³ Other religions, such as theosophy or “occultism” were labelled as both foreign and “mystical,” the latter term implying an irrational interpretation of reality, placing them firmly outside of the progressive West and “modern” religion.¹³⁴ African-American “cults” and new religious movements faced a similar degree of persecution in the 1920s and 30s, linking race and rationality as sites of exclusion. In its 1931 assessment of the all-black Moorish Science Temple of America, the FBI deemed the movement “fanatical” because its teaching of “equality of all races” placed it outside the realm of mainstream, and therefore legitimate, religion.¹³⁵

Rationality was not a language wielded only by the state. American religious movements also actively sought to define themselves as rational, and therefore modern, claiming cultural legitimacy in a Victorian America obsessed with defining the boundary between the normal and the abnormal. Alex Owen has noted how occultists in Britain constructed their pursuit of ancient truths through the “rationalized experience” of the mystical, rejecting strict empirical science while continuing to privilege the subjective ability of the individual to interpret reality.¹³⁶ In America, public agnostics like Robert Ingersoll framed themselves as plain-speaking rationalists who appealed to a natural mind free from the “slavery” and superstition of religion.¹³⁷ Seeking to appeal to the reason and higher faculties of men and women, each group contrasted themselves with the servitude and backwardness of traditional “Dark Age” religion.

¹³³ James Opp, *The Lord for the Body: Religion, Medicine and Protestant Faith Healing in Canada, 1880-1930* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 64-90.

¹³⁴ See Thomas Laqueur, “Why the Margins Matter: Occultism and the Making of Modernity,” *Modern intellectual history*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2006), 111-135.

¹³⁵ Sylvester Johnson, “Religion Proper and Proper Religion: Arthur Fauset and the Study of African American Religions,” In *The New Black Gods: Arthur Huff Fauset and the Study of African American Religions*, Edward E. Curtis IV and Danielle E. Brune Sigler eds. (Bloomington/Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 2009), 153.

¹³⁶ Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 115-118.

¹³⁷ Susan Jacoby, *The Great Agnostic: Robert Ingersoll and American Freethought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

Rationality was a contested grammar in the late nineteenth century for multiple players who sought to make a claim to modernity by identifying themselves as rational and others as unmodern. I use the word grammar intentionally, because rationality structured the relations of individuals to modernity and one another. Rather than simply being an objective, philosophical approach to the material, rationalism was a means of interpreting reality that was historically constituted and contestable, as multiple groups attempted to claim and re-define rationality to their own purposes. Rationalism, as defined in this chapter, was not merely a philosophy inherited from Kant or Aristotle, or a style of rhetoric that privileged evidence and observation. It was a means of organizing language to grant authority to one group to be “modern” by denying modernity to another. Whether or not evangelicals were truly rational in an empirical sense, claims to rationality defined the sensible from the absurd.

A number of historians have studied rationalism as an intellectual rhetoric integral to evangelical self-identity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, connecting it to a radically democratic tradition in American Protestantism since the Second Great Awakening.¹³⁸ Intellectual and social historians of the twentieth century have likewise noticed the prominence of rationalist language in the literature of “fundamentalist” Protestantism from the 1920s onward.¹³⁹ But when it comes to understanding how “normative” religion and gender was defined in evangelical revivals between the 1870s and the early twentieth century, historians

¹³⁸ For work on the inclusion of Scottish Enlightenment rationalism into American Protestantism see Joe Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition and American Culture* (University of North Carolina Press, 1995); for work on the nineteenth century, see Nathan Hatch, *Democratization of American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

¹³⁹ George Marsden has linked evangelical culture, and particularly early “fundamentalist” thought, with a Baconian rationalist tradition. This argument has been important in helping to explain the intellectual world of evangelicals in the early twentieth century, especially in revealing how evangelicals viewed themselves as possessing a common-sense understanding of reason and science that was more deductive than secular science. See George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: the Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 55-62.

have tended to emphasize a culture of “virile masculinity” over rationality. A number of authors have agreed with Margaret Bendroth that evangelists after 1900 were dedicated to stopping “the masculine retreat from religion.”¹⁴⁰ Movements like the “Men and Religion Forward” campaign of 1910-1912 sought to reclaim the “3,000,000 missing men” from church, while the “muscular Christianity” of the YMCA rejected the effeminate, Victorian pastor and the feminine religion he represented. Critical in this historiography is an understanding that Victorian-American religion had, since the early nineteenth century, been feminized as a private-sphere alternative to the masculine world of work and business. Following the work of Ann Douglas in the 1970s, sentimental Victorian pastors, “disdainful or incapable of the competitive mobility of contemporary life,” were understood to have allied with women in the churches and served as a counter to the male values of hardiness, aggression, and industrialism — meaning that they “approximated rather closely the conventional feminine ideal.”¹⁴¹ To maintain relevance in the changing world of the Gilded Age, where the “self-made” Victorian man was increasingly irrelevant in a bureaucratized economy and a rising feminist movement was demonstrating women’s ability to enter the public sphere, religion needed to be “masculinized.” Gilded Age and Progressive-era revivals “called upon manly men to spread the Gospel,” re-achieving cultural legitimacy by presenting an active faith that was able to attract and keep men in the church.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Margaret Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender, 1875 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 20.

¹⁴¹ Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977), 90-91.

¹⁴² Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 3-4; for literature on the ‘masculinization thesis,’ see especially Gail Bederman, “‘The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Long Enough’: The Men and Religion Forward Movement of 1911-1912 and the Masculinization of Middle-Class Protestantism,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Sep, 1989), 436-437; Margaret Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*, 68-72; Betty Deberg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 88-93; Barbara Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism and Temperance in Nineteenth Century America* (Middletown, Conn., 1981), 125-27; for one recent, but various preliminary, critique of the masculinization thesis, see Margaret Bendroth, “Why women loved Billy Sunday: Urban Revivalism and Popular Entertainment in Early Twentieth-Century American Culture,” *Religion and American Culture*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2004), 251-271.

The rest of this chapter will seek to both advance and complicate the “masculinization thesis” in American Protestantism by examining how rationality structured gendered metaphors in Gilded Age and Progressive-era revivals. By becoming plain, common-sense preachers, revivalists attempted to legitimate mainstream Protestantism as a rational religion. In doing so, they drew on multiple languages of authority that were in practice deeply interconnected: masculinity, race, ethnicity, and class. Although definitions of what constituted valid science, and therefore what was rational, were always contested and would by the 1920s be the subject of ferocious debate, the script of “common sense” and “plain” religion was one means by which Protestants sought to ‘make’ themselves modern.

“A Plain Uneducated Man:” Manhood and Rationality in Gilded-Age Revivals, 1870-1896

As America entered the 1870s, the binaries upon which Victorian middle-class society had long been built seemed increasingly frail, incoherent, and contested. The campaigns of first-wave feminists to achieve suffrage became increasingly hard to ignore, while the closely-linked temperance movement placed women in the political sphere, calling into question what a “citizen” was. Though always largely fictive, the notion of “separate spheres” between the maternal world of the home and the masculine world of work and politics were revealed as increasingly nonsensical in a world where suffragists could publically claim to be rational individuals. Following her arrest for casting a ballot in the 1872 presidential election, Susan B. Anthony undertook a nationwide speaking tour, calling on “intelligent, patriotic woman of the nation” to, like the American Revolutionaries, refuse to submit to taxation until they were granted the right to vote: “in the monarchical [government] people are subjects, helpless, powerless, bound to obey ...serf or slave ... bring to me a common-sense woman property holder [denied her rights as a citizen], and I will show you one whose soul is fired with all the

indignation of 1776.”¹⁴³ The Reverend John T. Sargent recognized the power of Anthony’s metaphor: “concede that she has a rational soul, and you concede the equality of her rights.”¹⁴⁴ Such arguments would prove increasingly difficult to answer in the years ahead.¹⁴⁵

As suffragists unravelled Victorian notions of what it meant to be a citizen in America, another group in the 1870s questioned what it meant to be moral. Beginning in earnest in the 1860s, various Atheists, Unitarians, and Agnostics, who usually defined themselves as “sceptics” or “free thinkers,” toured America’s major Northern cities and conducted talks, lectures, and symposiums that were meant to establish the legitimacy of their own philosophical positions and discredit and delegitimize their religious opponents. Robert Ingersoll, the “Great Agnostic,” achieved the height of his fame in the 1890s, attacking Christianity as a set of beliefs that were logically indefensible in the light of modern scientific knowledge: “[the Bible] must be thrown aside. It is no longer a foundation. It has crumbled.”¹⁴⁶ But more pointedly, Ingersoll believed that religion itself also enslaved the mind, making it incompatible with a truly independent and rational identity:

Religion teaches the slave-virtues -- obedience, humility, self-denial, forgiveness, non-resistance. ... Religion does not teach self-reliance, independence, manliness, courage, self-defence. Religion makes God a master and man his serf. The master cannot be great enough to make slavery sweet.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Susan B. Anthony, “Is it a Crime for a Citizen of the United States to Vote?,” 1872.
<http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/anthony/anthonyaddress.html>

¹⁴⁴ *History of Woman Suffrage, Volume I*, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage eds. (Rochester, N. Y.: Charles Mann, 1889) [originally published 1881], 272.

¹⁴⁵ For literature on the suffrage movement, see Ellen Carrol DuBois, *Feminism and suffrage: the emergence of an independent women's movement in America, 1848-1869*; for information on temperance in the Gilded Age, see Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty 1873-1900* (Philadelphia, 1980); and Barbara Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity*, 125-27.

¹⁴⁶ Robert Ingersoll, *Foundation of Faith*, 1895.
http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/robert_ingersoll/foundations_of_faith.html

¹⁴⁷ Robert Ingersoll, *What is Religion*, June 2, 1899,
http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/robert_ingersoll/what_is_religion.html

Ingersoll closed the piece with one of his most famous quotes: “Religion can never reform mankind because religion is slavery.”¹⁴⁸

In line with this thought, sceptics and freethinkers lobbied in the 1870s against attempts to amend the constitution to declare America a “Christian nation,” building an alternative tradition that championed reason and Enlightenment figures like Thomas Paine, styling themselves as the true inheritors on the American Revolution.¹⁴⁹ Postbellum sceptics did not only attack Protestants, but sometimes connected their notion of reason to an attack on both Catholic immigrants and women. The Free Thought periodical *Truth Seeker* depicted the Pope and Cross replacing the Statue of Liberty, torch snuffed, as its comment on the wave of Italian and Irish immigration in the 1880s, concluding that “the price of popery is eternal slavery.”¹⁵⁰ Gender was also a hotly debated issue in Free Thinker circles, relating to the perception that American Protestantism was largely female. A number of female sceptics lobbied to rescue women from “feminized religion” in America, blaming religious superstition for warping women’s natural rationality and making their minds “dulled and morbid.”¹⁵¹ But other, largely male, sceptics concluded that women were biologically incapable of true rationality: “[Religion] is a constant appeal to the emotional nature and inner feelings. . . . Woman, as phenology and observation demonstrate, is strongly emotional, and therein lies the secret of her being more religious than men.”¹⁵² Other sceptics linked women’s minds with children and African Americans, arguing

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Evelyn A. Kirkley, *Rational Mothers and Infidel Gentleman: Gender and American Atheism, 1865-1915* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 6-12.

¹⁵⁰ *Truth Seeker*, July 24, 1886, 465, quoted in Evelyn A. Kirkley, *Rational Mothers and Infidel Gentleman: Gender and American Atheism, 1865-1915* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 9.

¹⁵¹ Susan Wixon, “The Church — Has it Been an Advantage or Disadvantage to Women?,” *Boston Investigator* (Dec. 26, 1888), 1-2, quoted in Evelyn A. Kirkley, *Rational Mothers and Infidel Gentleman*, 39; for a similar source base in Canada, see Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 44-47.

¹⁵² C. Severance, “Religious Nature of Women,” *Boston Investigator*, Nov. 8, 1882, 1, quoted in Evelyn A. Kirkeley, 29.

that if women were enfranchised children and even horses would have to follow suit.¹⁵³ Given the close association between rationality and masculinity, it is little surprise that the sceptic movement was heavily male.¹⁵⁴ In the view of sceptics and Free Thinkers, religion was no longer compatible with the identity of a modern American man: intelligent, independent, and reliant only on his own mind and reason to interpret the world and its meaning.¹⁵⁵

Evangelists in the Gilded Age sought the same cultural legitimacy as feminists and sceptics, and situated themselves within the same language of rational modernity to secure their place in a rapidly shifting social landscape. From the 1870s through the 1890s, both revivalists and Christian writers repeatedly criticized “traditional” Christianity for its lack of appeal to common-sense values, out-of-touch with the real world, everyday concerns of men. “Ministers do not preach plain enough. Their sermons are too foggy,” declared Moody from his tabernacle in Boston in 1876, “it is not sermons we want so much as to make the Word of God plain.”¹⁵⁶ Plainness and common sense were core components of the Moody revivals, contrasted with the artifice, complexity, and passivity of church orthodoxy. “Dead Orthodoxy” and “isms” had robbed Christianity of its living power, making it a religion of feelings and formalisms: “orthodoxy, dead, is an abomination to God and man. We want to hold these truths, not in any formal way, but living in power.”¹⁵⁷ Evangelists like Moody were drawing on a tradition of natural law in theology, tracing back to the merging of Enlightenment ideas into evangelicalism

¹⁵³ See L.D. Crine, “The Female Peril,” *Truth Seeker*, Dec. 11, 1909, 798-799, quoted in Evelyn A. Kirkely, *Rational Mothers and Infidel Gentleman*, 119.

¹⁵⁴ Kirkley concluded that the nineteenth-century Free Thought movement was roughly 4/5ths male. See *ibid.*, 20-21.

¹⁵⁵ For additional literature on Free Thought, see Dean Grodzins, *American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Susan Jacoby, *The Great Agnostic: Robert Ingersoll and American Freethought*.

¹⁵⁶ Dwight Moody, *To All People: Comprising sermons, Bible readings, temperance addresses, and prayer meeting talks* (New York: E.B. Treat, 1877), 68.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

in the eighteenth century.¹⁵⁸ But they now sought to translate theology into an American rhetoric that could compete with sceptics and unbelievers in the public sphere. By making appeals to reason in their sermons, evangelists contested that it was they, and not sceptics, who were the true rationalists. In the 1890s, the New York evangelist and prolific writer De Witt Talmage echoed Moody in an essay denouncing “lugubrious Christianity:” “who wants a religion woven out of the shadows of the night? Why go growling on your way to celestial enthronement? ... Let us be plain. Let us be earnest. Let us be common sensical.”¹⁵⁹

A plain religion was also a scientific, logical one. Reuben Torrey was fond of couching his sermons as scientific arguments; God’s existence was a hypothesis, his evidence was the Bible and the natural world, and his proof was the inability of any “honest” sceptic to provide a cogent argument disproving him.¹⁶⁰ Moody was noted to travel with a “trunk of huge envelopes” filled with “clippings and statistics” which he used to provide scientific evidence for his sermons.¹⁶¹ Billy Sunday, like almost all evangelists, refused to respond to specific sceptical arguments against the Bible, but claimed that sceptics attacked the surface “evidences of Christianity: virgin birth — miracles — resurrection” while ignoring the common-sense proofs of religion in nature: the existence of sin, death, and man’s sense of his own morality.¹⁶² To Moody, the very order of the universe, the hand of Providence in history, and the high state of civilization in the West were self-evident proofs of the truth of Christianity: “I am no match for

¹⁵⁸ See Joe Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition and American Culture* (University of North Carolina Press, 1995); David Bebbington has also argued that evangelicalism was created through the merging of natural law and Protestant theology during the Enlightenment. See David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989); also see George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

¹⁵⁹ Thomas De Witt Talmage, *Evils of the Cities: a Series of Practical and Popular Discourses Delivered in the Brooklyn Tabernacle* (Chicago: Rhodes and McClure, 1891), 150-151.

¹⁶⁰ For an example of this approach in Torrey’s writings, see Reuben Torrey, *How to Bring Men to Christ* (New York: Fleming H Revell Co., 1893), 65-76; also see essays in *The Higher Criticism and the New Theology: Unscientific, Unscriptural, and Unwholesome*, ed. Reuben Torrey (New York: Gospel Publishing Company, 1911).

¹⁶¹ “Anecdotes of the Great Revival,” Moody Bible Institute archives, miscellaneous, 269.2, A578.

¹⁶² Billy Sunday, “Hebrews 13:8,” Papers of William Ashley “Billy” Sunday and Helen Amelia (Thompson) Sunday, CN 61, Box 31, Folder 28.

infidels, but the Word is. ... the Scriptures cannot be broken. All the devils in hell cannot break God's Word. ... All the infidels in Boston cannot break it."¹⁶³ Sunday would later put it more bluntly: "I HAVE POWDER ENOUGH in this old book — the Bible — to blow their skeptical heads INTO THE GULF OF MEXICO."¹⁶⁴ In an intellectual tradition examined by George Marsden, evangelical revivalists contested sceptical claims by asserting an alternative definition of rationality, science, and religion based on the incontrovertibility of the Bible, sin, and morality in the natural world, a truth any sensible, unbiased American would recognize.¹⁶⁵ Infidel arguments were represented as ineffectual and pathetic in comparison to the plain truth of the Bible. The Reverend Joseph Cook, a supporter of Moody's Boston revival, contrasted scientific religion with the pseudo-philosophy of unbelief: "where is there in Boston anything in the shape of scepticism that will bear the microscope? ... Boston has impudence, but no scholarship; rattles, but no fangs."¹⁶⁶ Wilbur Chapman echoed a similar sentiment: "It is absolutely impossible for a man to sit down before the four gospels with an unbiased and honest mind, determined to find out the truth, and come to any other conclusion."¹⁶⁷ While some "dead" Christians may be guilty of the sins sceptics accused them of, revivalists positioned themselves as the true rationalists, grounded on a faith of concrete facts.

And if sceptics persisted in their denial of Christ, they could only be in opposition to the rational itself, and therefore delusional. This was precisely the stance that Reuben Torrey would take by the early 1890s. "The consequences of skepticism," Torrey wrote, could only be

¹⁶³ Dwight Moody, *To All People*, 51-52.

¹⁶⁴ Billy Sunday, "Hebrews 13:8."

¹⁶⁵ For an intellectual history of how evangelicals constructed alternative definitions of "science" based on a Victorian notion of natural observation and Biblical truth, see George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 212-221; also see George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 122-181.

¹⁶⁶ Joseph Cook, "introduction," in Dwight Moody, *To All People*, xxi-xv.

¹⁶⁷ J. Wilbur Chapman, *Evangelistic Sermons* (New York and Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1922), 10.

“delusion and damnation.”¹⁶⁸ “If the man will follow this rational course, it will result in every case in the skeptic coming out into the clear light of faith in the Bible. ... No man that is living right doubts that there is a difference between right and wrong.”¹⁶⁹ Sunday claimed that sceptics hated the Bible because it “knows all about you,” using humour to deflect irreligious attacks as merely distractions from the real issue of sin: “Bob Ingersoll wasn’t the first to find out that Moses made mistakes. God knew about it long before Ingersoll was born.”¹⁷⁰ Scepticism was, and could only be, either dishonesty on the part of those who refused to accept what they knew to be true, or the delusion of those suffering from a mental or spiritual defect.

But Christianity was not simply scientific; it was a religion of plain, common truths easily discernible to men regardless of their education. Part of the essential appeal of “common sense” preaching was the claim that it presented simple truths readily understood by the intellect of “common” men. Describing Dwight Moody’s early success, one American observer admired how “no attempt was made to proselytize. ... They have proved the power of elementary truths over the hearts of men more mightily than all the learned professors and eloquent pastors of England could do.”¹⁷¹ These “elementary truths” were never fixed; their power was that they were so common and obvious that they did not need to be identified any more than did the fact that a dog barked or a cat meowed, to draw on another popular Sundayism. When responding to praise for his speaking style, Moody succinctly summed up the rhetorical focus of evangelists throughout the Gilded Age: “eloquence and oratory are all very well in their way, but they are not much use unless the third quality of common sense is to accompany them.”¹⁷² By appealing

¹⁶⁸ Reuben Torrey, *How to Bring Men to Christ*, 66.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 70

¹⁷⁰ William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday – The Man and His Message*, 77.

¹⁷¹ William Moody, *The Life of Dwight Moody*, 253.

¹⁷² “Anecdotes of the Great Revival,” Moody Bible Institute archives, miscellaneous, 269.2, A578.

to men's intellect without disguising Christian truths behind complication and artifice, revivalists established their identity as common:

Biederwolf is different. He is not simply an exhorter and an exciter; he is a preacher, a herald of great truths that grip and move the soul. His message is not only to the heart of man but to his intellect. His stay here will be a great stimulus to thinking people.¹⁷³

Decades later, a reporter at the Billy Sunday revivals summed up a similar sentiment in a few words: "The one outstanding impression he [Billy Sunday] gives is that he is sincere."¹⁷⁴

The gospel of common sense became a constant mantra in evangelical revivals in the Gilded Age. As much as evangelists varied in style and approach, they shared a need to present their religious message in a language that audiences found plain. William Biederwolf was described as being as "common as an old shoe" by one author, a trait that made him instantly likeable to audiences. Moody's sermons were characterized by his religious admirers and in the press as "rugged," and supporters were eager to contrast his conviction with the "eloquence" of lesser preachers. The Pastor Henry Drummond described Moody's power as lying in his "tremendous conviction: "Whatever canons they violate, whatever faults the critics may find with their art, with their rhetoric, or even with their theology, as appeals to the people they do their work with extraordinary power."¹⁷⁵ Moody's supporters made a virtual cult out of his poor diction and Midwestern accent, presenting them as proof that he was an authentic representative of the "common" classes most in need of evangelizing:

Dwight L. Moody, a robust, strong, earnest man ... a plain uneducated man ... a man without grace, without polish, without even good grammar — but a man whose soul is

¹⁷³ Ray Garrett, *William Edward Biederwolf: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1948), 94.

¹⁷⁴ *Omaha daily bee.*, October 10, 1915, 13.

¹⁷⁵ William Moody, *The Life of Dwight Moody*, 435.

filled with the one idea that without Jesus man must be lost. ... They inject into their hearers their own earnestness — they compel them to accept it, because they believe it.¹⁷⁶

This lack of polish led British critics to muse at Moody's popularity, noting that he was:

“thoroughly American in style” and mispronounced “are” as “air” and “over there” as “ober dere.”¹⁷⁷ Another American Unitarian critic decried Moody's tradesman lingo and elocution as making a mockery of the pulpit:

Oh, the way that man does mangle the English tongue! The daily slaughter of syntax at the Tabernacle is dreadful. His enunciations may be pious, but his pronunciations are decidedly off color. It is enough to make Noah Webster turn over in his grave and weep...¹⁷⁸

But the same idioms that alienated some foreign observers were crucial to the popular image of the evangelist. Moody's “plainness” as a rough, even crudely inarticulate man was linked to his authority as an evangelist, markers of his authenticity as a true American man.

Class was a fluid, inchoate substance in the revival. The rhetoric of Moody, Chapman, and Torrey was clearly meant to appeal to an urban audience that privileged both men and a respectable “plain” Americanness. In this sense, it blurred middle and working class identity beneath the label of the common. Both “society” elites and the “bleary-eyed, low-down, staggering men and the scum of God's dirt” who populated the streets and taverns were excluded from the “plain” American community, but revivalists intentionally kept their rhetoric broad and general enough to attract everyone else.¹⁷⁹ Moody's manner and presentation was frequently identified in the press as “business-like.” The theologian Lyman Abbott described Moody as “not an orator ... he looked like a businessman; he dressed like a businessman; he took the

¹⁷⁶ *The Findlay Jeffersonian.*, November 05, 1875, 2

¹⁷⁷ *John Bull* (London, England), April 03, 1875, 228.

¹⁷⁸ I.A.M. Gunning, *Tabernacle Sketches* (Boston: Times, 1877), quoted in Gamaliel Branford, *D.L. Moody – A Worker in Souls* (New York: Doran, 1927), 104.

¹⁷⁹ Billy Sunday, “Get on the Water Wagon,” reprinted in Lyle Dorset, *Billy Sunday and the Redemption of Urban America*, 204.

meeting in hand as a businessman would; he spoke in a businessman's fashion [image 1]."¹⁸⁰ But Moody also contrasted men who earned their living "shaving notes," owning railways, or "watering stocks" with the more "noble" profession of farm work, with honest labour marking the truly "successful" man.¹⁸¹ Such language was likely meant to appeal to the "middling sorts" of the white working class, many of whom were only recent migrants to the city. In the revival, explicit class divisions were erased in favour of a generalized, authentic masculinity that connected all "real" American men to the mission of the campaign.

Plain truths and commonness were deeply gendered concepts, comprehensible only when positioned against an other. While Moody highlighted simple, readily understandable truths as the mainstay of his campaigns, he associated tempermentality and changeability with the feminine: "A great many women make trouble on account of their tempers."¹⁸² At a time when feminists were fighting to be recognized as rational beings, Moody identified the sins of women as lying in their "fretful" and "irritable" nature, which inclined them to a lack of self-control over their words or emotions.¹⁸³ The New York evangelist and successor to Henry Ward Beecher De Witt Talmage spoke of the "attitudinizing, frivolous, married coquettes of the modern drawing-room" who were neglecting marriage and motherhood for dance parties, further cementing the association between femininity and a superficial, mercurial character.¹⁸⁴ Sceptics were likewise

¹⁸⁰ Lyman Abbott, "Introduction," Dwight L. Moody, *Echoes from the Pulpit and Platform* (Hartford, Conn.: A.D. Worthington and Co., 1900), 31.

¹⁸¹ Dwight Moody, *To All People*, 309.

¹⁸² Dwight Moody, *To All People*, 394.

¹⁸³ Dwight Moody, *Latest Sermons*, 89.

¹⁸⁴ De Witt Talmage, *The Wedding Ring: a series of discourses for husbands and wives and those contemplating matrimony* (New York: Christian Herald, 1896), 89; Also see Karen Haltunnen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: a Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982); also see E. Anthony Rotundo, "Learning about manhood: gender ideals and the middle class family in nineteenth century America," in *Manliness and morality: Middle class masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940*, ed. J. A. Mangan and James Walvin (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 36-40.

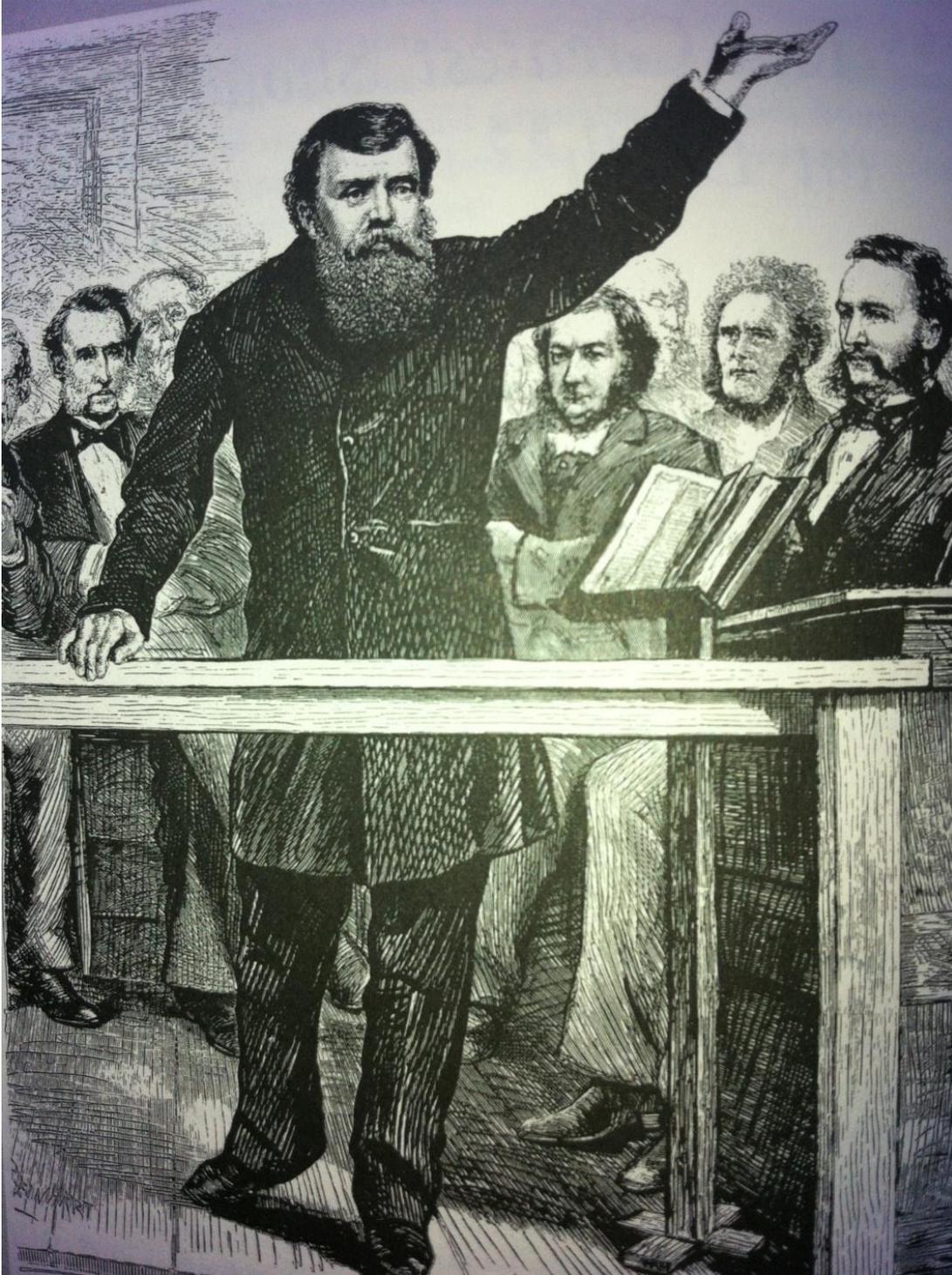


Image 1. In this image from Harper's Weekly, Moody's unministerial middle-class business suit is prominently displayed, highlighting the "commonness" and ruggedness of Moody as a speaker.

Source: *Harper's Weekly*, March 11, 1876, reprinted in B.J. Evensen, *God's Man for the Gilded Age*, 94. sometimes portrayed in gendered language. Joseph Cook referred to the philosophy of sceptics as "limp and lavender," terms that evoked the contemporary image of the "mollycoddle," a weak

man whose effeminacy made him an unreliable ally in politics or personal life.¹⁸⁵ Both women and sceptics helped to define the plain, common world of the Gilded Age revival by being placed outside of it as neither rational nor common.

The Hayseed Billy Sunday and the Populist Persuasion: Gender and Rationality in
American Revivals, 1896-1920

The 1890s saw a new wave of dramatic change in American culture, once again destabilizing old relationships and necessitating new orientations. The continued growth of the first-wave feminist movement accompanied a significant transformation in how women were depicted in the public sphere. Bicycle-riding, athletic, and openly-sexual Gibson girls challenged the image of the Victorian matron, confronting Americans with an image of women's bodies as lithe, physical, and healthy outside the domestic sphere. While the absolute growth of women in wage work remained small, for numerous male critics the "new woman" — implicitly young, urban, sexual and material — had become a site of anxiety and tension by the 1890s, motivating what a number of authors in the past have labelled a "crisis" in how masculinity was defined both within and outside of the home.¹⁸⁶

At the same time, class and ethnicity were also contested terrains. The deep depression of the 1890s, and the labour tensions it revealed through events such as the 1894 Pullman strike, galvanized both working and middle-class Americans to recognize the deep inequalities in

¹⁸⁵ For information on the contemporary link between sexual and political discourses in the Gilded Age and the use of the "third sex" or "invert" as a political label, see Kevin P. Murphy, *Political Manhood: Red Bloods, Mollycoddles, & the Politics of Progressive Era Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 11-37.

¹⁸⁶ See introduction to Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*; Martha H. Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

America's cities.¹⁸⁷ A vast new tide of immigrants from southern Europe also greatly increased the size of America's northern cities and therefore the scale of its urban poverty.¹⁸⁸ The Progressive reform movement began a twenty-year campaign to fight the "slums" in America by both providing and regulating services to the poor while disseminating middle-class morality through institutions like the Settlement House movement.¹⁸⁹ As factory conditions and urban poverty became increasingly visible in the press and in literature, such as Jacob Riis' 1890 study of New York tenements entitled *How the Other Half Lives*, political movements that appealed to a mass "popular" identity, whether rural or working class, gained favour and support. The People's Party won support in 1892 by presenting an image of imminent collapse: "we meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political, and material ruin ... we seek to restore the government of the Republic to the hands of the 'plain people,' with which class it originated. ...one united brotherhood of free men."¹⁹⁰ Politicians like Teddy Roosevelt, who in 1912 came out of retirement to run on the Progressive ticket, increasingly linked both masculinity and class identity in their politics, demonstrating that through the hard work of the "strenuous life" America's character as a white supremacist, Protestant, and deeply patriarchal nation was still secure.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Larry Peterson, "Photography and the Pullman Strike: Remolding Perceptions of Labor Conflict by New Visual Communication," in *The Pullman Strike and the Crisis of the 1890s: Essays on Labor and Politics*, Richard Schneirov, Shelton Stromquist, and Nick Salvatore eds. (1999), 87-129.

¹⁸⁸ Robert G. Barrows, "Urbanizing America," in *The Gilded Age: Perspectives on the Origins of Modern America*, Charles William Calhoun ed. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 106-107.

¹⁸⁹ Mina Carson, *Settlement Folk: Social Thought and the American Settlement Movement, 1885-1930* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003); Kevin Murphy, *Political Manhood*, 104-124.

¹⁹⁰ Populist Party Platform, 1892. Great Neck Publishing, 2009. Accession Number: 21212861; also see Worth Robert Miller, "Farmers and Third-Party Politics," in *The Gilded Age: Perspectives on the Origins of Modern America*, 283-305.

¹⁹¹ Arnaldo Testi, "The Gender of Reform Politics: Theodore Roosevelt and the Culture of Masculinity," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 81, No. 4 (1995).1509-1533; James Chace, *1912: Wilson, Roosevelt, Taft, and Debs - The Election That Changed the Country* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004).

It was in this historical moment that a new generation of evangelists, moulded by both Dwight Moody and the political and economic climate of the 1890s, emerged. While Moody had presented himself as an uncouth but sober businessman, younger evangelists instead highlighted a rural or “rube” identity that situated themselves as representatives of a mythic, white, and “plain” Anglo majority. The notion of a “common sense” identity, connecting rationality, masculinity, and class, linked the Gilded Age to the Progressive-era revivals. “Religion needs a baptism of horse sense,” declared Billy Sunday on the eve of World War I, “you can have spiritual blessings as regularly as the farmer can have corn, wheat, oats, or you can have potatoes and onions and cabbage in your garden.”¹⁹² Just as Moody had rejected the “isms” of Christian doctrine for a plain, transparent, and manly Christian identity, his successor Billy Sunday rejected “all this tommy-rot of false doctrines,” instead demanding that Christians “get out and hustle and do things for God.”¹⁹³ Sunday’s biographer William Ellis adequately summed up his appeal as a populist American: “his American birthright of plain common sense stands Sunday ... He is a ‘practical man.’”¹⁹⁴

In the 1890s, populism and class were integral to how evangelists defined the “plain” or “common-sense” gospel of the revival. Michael Kazin has defined cultural populism as a political language of radical equality, originally dating back to the 1830s notion of a “common man,” that by the 1890s became a “flexible mode of persuasion” politicians could rely on to sway the electorate.¹⁹⁵ Outside of temperance crusades, few evangelists used their populist appeal for explicitly political goals, but the success of their campaigns rested on their ability to tap into the same rhetoric of commonness. As a result, evangelists presented the world of the

¹⁹² Billy Sunday, “The Need of Revivals,” in William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday: The Man and His Message* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Co., 1914), 290-291.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 292.

¹⁹⁴ William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday — The Man and His Message*, 61.

¹⁹⁵ Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion* (New York: Basicbooks, 1995), 4.

Bible in language and metaphors that were meant to be readily accessible to audiences that considered themselves to be “common” Americans. In this sense, the populism of mass-media revivals connected directly with the grammar of rationalism. Revivals did not require knowledge of theology or doctrine to be understood, only a critical mind capable of comprehending “plain” truths. A formal education or the trappings of elite culture obscured this underlying rational mind and took evangelists away from the authentic, common religion readily understood by “real” Americans. Rationalism — in a uniquely American form — was critical to the rhetorical construction of the populist revival.

Nowhere was the link between populist appeal and “plain” rationality more explicit than with Billy Sunday. Sunday forefronted his poor, rural upbringing in Iowa in his sermons, claiming that he had “clawed through the sewers of experience” and “went through the college of hard knocks.”¹⁹⁶ Such experiences had taught him to speak the “jargon of the diamond and the slang of the street.”¹⁹⁷ Sunday further built his public identity around a sense of his ruralness, referring to himself as a “rube of the rube and hayseed of the hayseeds.”¹⁹⁸ “Horse sense” was a phrase that neatly encapsulated both Sunday’s populism and his belief in the unity between Christianity and the rational mind. As his official biographer William Ellis described it,

"Horse-sense," that fundamental American virtue, is Sunday's to an eminent degree. A modern American philosopher defines this quality of mind as "an instinctive something that tells us when the clock strikes twelve." Because he is "rich in saving common sense," Sunday understands the people and trusts them to understand him. His most earnest defenders from the beginning of his public life have been the rank and file of the common

¹⁹⁶ Theodore Thomas Frankenberg, *Billy Sunday: His Tabernacles and Sawdust Trails* (Columbus, Ohio: F.J. Heer Printing Company, 1917), 179.

¹⁹⁷ "Text of the Three Sermons Preached Yesterday by Billy Sunday," *Evening Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), January 4, 1915, 14; "Billy Sunday Saving Sinners With Ball Talk," *San Francisco Call* (San Francisco, CA), February 12, 1909, 14.

¹⁹⁸ Theodore Thomas Frankenberg, *Billy Sunday: His Tabernacles and Sawdust Trails*, 179.

people. His critics have come from the extreme edges of society— the scholar, or the man whose business is hurt by righteousness.¹⁹⁹

To be “common” was to possess an “instinctive something” that gave the individual a sense of good and bad, rational and irrational. Juxtaposed with this commonness were the civility, artifice, and manners that marked inauthenticity. Sunday frequently mocked politicians and preachers who were so “fettered by conventionalities” that they had forgotten the language of the people: “I want people to know what I mean and that’s why I try to get down to where they live.”²⁰⁰ From the pulpit, Sunday bragged about not being born with a “silver spoon” in his mouth, claiming his lack of sophistication and education forced him to speak plainly about his beliefs: “I would rather go through the world without knowing the multiplication tables than to never know the love of Christ.”²⁰¹ As contemporary Sunday biographer Julius Ward put it, “there was only one thing he was afraid of, and that was dignity.”²⁰² Rather than simply being carnivalesque antics to attract attention, Sunday’s performances were calculated appeals to a populist rhetoric that was crucial to his success.

Talk of “plain” sermons and common-sense religion was always implicitly gendered. Evangelist Gipsy Smith called on Denver men to attend his 1909 revival by promising them an authentic experience that played on both their gender and class identity. Smith used the popular contemporary idiom of “all wool,” as a metaphor for the high quality of manhood in the revival:

Men, Come!

¹⁹⁹ William T. Ellis, ‘Billy’ Sunday: *The Man and His Message*, 23.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 352.

²⁰² Julius A. Ward, “The apostle of the People,” 1. Billy Graham Center Archives (Wheaton, Ill), Papers of William Ashley “Billy” Sunday and Helen Amelia (Thompson) Sunday, CN 61.

Gipsy Smith, world exponent of the simple gospel; advocate of the ‘straight-from-the-shoulder’ doctrines of Christianity, denouncer of fake and fad, pleader for the yard-wide and all-wool Christian, has a big corner in his heart for men.²⁰³

The independent and “straight” gospel was understood to be a religion that appealed first and foremost to men. Another reporter attributed Smith’s success to how “those who watch him at his work of saving souls observe no clap-trap methods, no striving for dramatic effects ... To all ... he conveys the impression first, last, and all the time, that he is a man.”²⁰⁴

An “all-wool” gospel was only comprehensible against a “fake and fad” alternative. Women were associated with the artificial, mirroring the earlier Moody campaigns, but this time with a greater emphasis on consumer culture. Billy Sunday and Gipsy Smith attacked women’s fashion in church and the “excessive” attention to appearance of “frizzie-headed” girls, marking modern hair styles as proof of women’s tendency to superficiality and vanity.²⁰⁵ But it was the Men and Religion Forward movement that made the contrast between femininity and “plain preaching” most clear. “There will not be a trace of emotionalism in the campaign” explained Men and Religion evangelist Henry Rood, “the gospel of Jesus Christ — and its practical application to our practical daily life — is presented calmly, sanely, logically, so that it will convince the average man, who is a man of sane, logical, common sense. Women have no part in this movement.”²⁰⁶ Biederwolf and Sunday agreed, but added a class component by attacking the “society woman,” who was understood to be a young, urban participant in the material culture of the city: “The average society woman has about as little sense as God could well put in a human

²⁰³ “The Gipsy Plans Program For Men — Yard Wide Gospel,” unidentified newspaper clipping, 1909, Billy Graham Center Archives, Gipsy Smith, Folder 16.

²⁰⁴ “Gipsy Unsparing of Christian Pretender,” unidentified newspaper clipping, 1909, Billy Graham Center Archives, Gipsy Smith, Folder 16.

²⁰⁵ Bruns, *Preacher*, 142. Despite the colloquial meaning, Sunday used the term “sissy” to refer to both men and women who were urban.

²⁰⁶ Henry Rood, “Men and Religion,” *Independent* 71 (December 21, 1911), 1364, quoted in Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 139.

being and still let her pass for a woman .. if some of you'd fall in the water ... your head is so empty it'll float you to shore."²⁰⁷ Tropes of the spiritual mother continued to hold power in the 1910s, making attacks on women as much about age and social status as gender, but Progressive-era revivalists clearly marked women as incompatible with "all wool" Christianity and the common-sense gospel.

Sceptics and non-evangelical Christians were likewise un-manly by definition: uncommon, elitist, and dishonest. Traditional anti-revivalist Christians were possessed by the spirit of the "sectarian," placing superficial differences before the common traits and elementary truths of Protestant Christianity. Sectarianism, "the spirit of conflict," was explicitly gendered feminine in Charles Russell's early twentieth-century campaigns: "Sectarianism has within the very recent past, been placed in the balance. Shall she be found wanting?"²⁰⁸ But it was Billy Sunday who mocked traditional pastors for speaking "in a weak, effeminate, apologetic, negative sort of voice, 'that there was a splendid topic this evening, but he had not much time to prepare.' ...They haven't got strength enough to put out a clothesline."²⁰⁹ For all their education, these "time-serving, hypocritical ministers" had forgotten how to speak the language of common men, and instead stayed locked up in their seminaries "until they get cold enough to practice preaching."²¹⁰ So too were sceptics "grafting ... pliable, plastic" men who were hopelessly removed from the strong, plain truths of the Bible.²¹¹ By contrasting their own masculinity and common-man credentials with the artificiality and effeminacy of opponents, evangelists

²⁰⁷ "Evangelist Biederwolf at Bradford," *The National Trail-Hitter*, July 3, 1915, 9, Papers of William Edward Biederwolf, CN 195, Box 2, Folder 2.

²⁰⁸ *Zion's Watch Tower*, January 1, 1912.

²⁰⁹ "Text of the Three Sermons Preached Yesterday by Billy Sunday," *Evening Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), January 4, 1915, 14.

²¹⁰ William T. Ellis, *The Man and his Message*, 183; "Text of the Three Sermons Preached Yesterday by Billy Sunday," *Evening Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), January 4, 1915, 14.

²¹¹ Billy Sunday, Show thyself a man, 3, Billy Graham Center Archives (Wheaton, Ill.), Papers of William Ashley "Billy" Sunday and Helen Amelia (Thompson) Sunday, CN 61, box 8.

legitimized their own authority and the authority of the revival. The choice men faced was to “be strong and show yourself a man” by joining the revival, or to be “a mut or a mollycoddle or a milk-sot [sic]” by staying outside of it.²¹²

Class remained integral in defining what it meant to be “plain” in America. Sunday’s rural persona, aggressive oratory, and Midwestern accent placed him within a religious populist tradition linked to William Jennings Bryan, the “Great Commoner” whose three presidential campaigns had made him a hero to many rural Anglo-Americans.²¹³ Sunday used lingo in his sermons that mimicked the urban vernacular and played heavily on his status as a former baseball player, playacting an umpire to out sinners or “stealing” souls for Jesus on stage. This style of “acrobatic preaching” played up both Sunday’s common Americaness and his physical prowess as a man [image 2]. Kathryn Oberdeck has noted the “evolutionary vernacular” of working-class evangelists in the Progressive era, who drew on Darwinistic imagery to construct working-class men as rugged and virile against the over-refined effeminacy of the bourgeoisie.²¹⁴ Such a message also held considerable appeal to middle-class audiences eager to embrace the “strenuous life” of Teddy Roosevelt, Jack London and Edgar Rice Burroughs (of *Tarzan* fame), who all contrasted the primitive masculinity of “savages” with the “softness” of modern men.²¹⁵ But while reform-minded evangelists like Alexander Irving used evolutionary lingo to criticize rapacious capitalism and advocate for class solidarity, Sunday drew on the same language to elide class differences in favour of a broad American constituency of “real” men who succeeded or failed by virtue of their own work ethic. Hard work was all it took to be successful in

²¹² Billy Sunday, *Show thyself a man*, 4.

²¹³ In fact, Bryan and Sunday would occasionally share a pulpit during the latter’s temperance campaigns in the 1910s. See Roger Bruns, *Preacher*, 173-175.

²¹⁴ Kathryn J. Oberdeck, *The Evangelist and the Impresario* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 218-237.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 235; for middle-class concerns of over-civilization in the Progressive era and their connections to masculinity and race, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 217-239.



Library of Congress Archives

Image 2. In these staged photos, Sunday displays some of the physical antics he employed in the pulpit as part of his style of acrobatic preaching. Sunday would use his physique and background as an athlete to illustrate his sermons and Biblical stories, garnering laughs and groans from the audience while accentuating his denunciations of sin by literally boxing the devil. Source: *Library of Congress Archives*.

America: “do your best and you will never wear out shoe leather looking for a job. Do your best, and you will never become blind reading ‘Help Wanted’ ads in the newspaper.”²¹⁶ The appeal to virile and “common sense” masculinity obscured class in the revivals and replaced it with a broad constituency of true American men.

Sunday’s “plain” appeal was meant to connect his audiences into a common-folk identity that unified Anglo Protestants across the country in its appeal to a homey and manly religion: “The people of New York are just like the people of the corn rows of Iowa ... they are just folks, that’s all, with the same hungering for the old fashioned gospel of Jesus Christ that I have found everywhere.”²¹⁷ But this performance was in essence a fiction. Moody and Sunday retained an outlook and morality most closely associated with the urban middle class — championing separate spheres, equanimity between classes, and salvation as the answer to America’s urban problems. Through Moody’s plain vernacular and the “virile” identity of evangelists like Chapman, Sunday, or Smith, revivalists attempted to appeal to a “normal” American constituency that united elements of the working and middle class together, usually against an “abnormal” defined through gender and class. Chapman’s meetings for men championed the authentic Americanness of the audience by invoking the image of both inverts and society elites: “The speaker said he wasn’t going to speak of any oddity or freak but just the common, everyday man[,] because nabobs [conspicuously wealthy men], dudes [similar to dandies], and “uppity-ups” are scarce anyway.”²¹⁸ Gender and class were both axes for defining the normal. Being everyday was a virtue that belonged to Americans who had rationality and manhood enough to be part of the “real” America that Sunday sought to save.

²¹⁶ William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday —The Man and His Message*, 142.

²¹⁷ Billy Sunday, *The Sawdust Trail*, 80.

²¹⁸ *Syracuse Journal*, January 9, 1906, Papers of John Wilbur Chapman. CN 77.

Being a “real” American also took on an increased racial dimension in the Progressive era. Already in the 1870s, white supremacy and Protestant identity had been linked in the Moody revivals, which almost always excluded African Americans from attendance and therefore “plain,” common-sense Christianity.²¹⁹ In the decades that followed, African-American churches were increasingly marked as emotional, superstitious, and delusional diversions from rational religion. In this sense, revivals were sites on which Christian-Anglo racial and ethnic identities were made through the rhetoric of rationality, demarcating the boundaries of both legitimate religion and legitimate Americanness.

The ways in which rational religion was employed as an expression of white supremacy is revealed in the popular writings of Thomas Dixon. Dixon, a Baptist minister and writer whose book *The Clansman* would inspire D.W. Griffith’s blockbuster *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), made the link between the “scientific” order of the races, religion, and American identity explicit in his work. In the first book of his Ku Klux Klan trilogy, Dixon made the Reverend John Durham his protagonist and exemplar of white potential. Durham was presented as a brilliant young preacher who “never stooped to controversy” and “simply announced the Truth.”²²⁰ Near the novel’s climax, Dixon confronts the African-American preacher Ephraim Fox, whose all-black church is depicted as holding meetings marked by animalistic excitement and a wild, chaotic service. To Fox’s claim that African Americans share grace with whites, Durham responded fiercely that “what they [black people] needed was not a baptism of water. You Negroes need a racial baptism into truth, integrity, virtue, self-restraint, industry, courage,

²¹⁹ Edward Blum, *Reforging the White Republic*, 120-145.

²²⁰ Thomas Dixon, *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden--1865-1900* (Doubleday, Page & Co., 1902), 40.

patience, and purity of manhood and womanhood.”²²¹ Dixon did not need to elaborate, because audiences were readily expected to understand that these plain virtues of Christian identity were coloured white. Truth, manhood, and purity were qualities that only Anglo Saxons could possess — making race a crucial axis of exclusion through which the authority of evangelical identities was established.²²²

The rational minds of African Americans were a target of frequent debate among postbellum middle-class white audiences. Some sceptics and Free Thinkers opposed suffrage for black men on the grounds that they lacked the mental maturity to be full citizens, linking them with the intellectual inferiority of both women and children: “like the negro, woman is guided by her feelings and her impulses rather than her reason.”²²³ Even some suffragists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton opposed granting suffrage to black men following the passage of the 15th Amendment, arguing that black men were uneducated and infantile compared to middle-class, Anglo-Protestant women.²²⁴

Evangelicals repeated similar arguments in how they defined a rational religion, and associated both African Americans and non-white immigrants with a primitive irrationalism outside of the world of modern Protestant Americanism. The New Light theologian Theodore Munger, politically far removed from Dixon, defined Christianity as “a system of deliverance from [the] bondage” of “superstition,” “degrading customs,” and “barbarism” of “Oriental

²²¹ Ibid., 306-308.

²²² For literature on Dixon and White Protestant Americanism see Michele K Gillespie and Randal L. Hall, *Thomas Dixon Jr. and the Birth of Modern America* (Louisiana State University Press, 2006); Kelly J. Baker, *Gospel according to the Ku Klux Klan: the KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915-1930* (Lawrence, Kan.: University of Kansas Press, 2011).

²²³ Frank J. Mead, “Reasons against Woman Suffrage.” *Index*, Jan 11, 20, quoted in Evelyn A. Kirkeley, *Rational Mothers and Infidel Gentleman*, 121.

²²⁴ See Kathi Kern, *Mrs. Stanton's Bible* (Cornell University Press; Ithaca, NY, 2001), 111-112; Elisabeth Griffeth, *In Her Own Right: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.), 124. Stanton's views did attract controversy, and was strongly opposed by Frederick Douglass, who maintained that white women already had an indirect franchise because of their influence on their husbands.

philosophies.”²²⁵ The famous minister and imperial advocate Josiah Strong declared that the Anglo-Saxon was “destined to dispossess many weaker [races]... assimilate others, and mold the remainder until... it has Anglo-Saxonized mankind.”²²⁶ To many Protestant ministers, progressive and conservative, Christianity was synonymous with both a rational understanding of the world and the racial and ethnic superiority of Anglos in the United States.

Such racial constructions often drew on the language of common sense, connecting rationality, ethnic identity, and the revival. During the Great Migration or “Negro Exodus” to the North in the 1910s, Midwestern evangelist William Biederwolf sermonized on the “fallacies” of southern African Americans looking to move north. “Those born and raised in slavery had never dreamed of freedom” before the war, Biederwolf maintained, and “knew not what it was that Lincoln offered them.” Blacks lacked the mental capacity to understand what freedom meant, and mistook citizenship and emancipation to mean they were “forever more freed ... from labor and work.” This was the root of the “race problem” in the south, and the answer was not “making him our neighbour,” but “the education, the enlightenment, and the refinement of the negro where he is.”²²⁷ The mental inferiority of black minds was a justification for the segregation and racial hierarchy of the Jim Crow south, linking religion, reason, and race in the reconstituted white republic of the postbellum years.

Given these associations, it should not be surprising that the revived Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s expressed interest in revivals and sought to define their message of racial and ethnic exclusion through the same tropes as evangelicals. During Sunday’s 1922 revival in Richmond,

²²⁵ Theodore Munger, *The Freedom of Faith* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1883), 168.

²²⁶ Josiah Strong, *The New Era* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1893), 80; for literature on “Anglo-Saxonist” nativism, see Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1981).

²²⁷ William Biederwolf, “Negro Exodus,” n.d., Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton, Ill, Papers of William Edward Biederwolf, CN 195, Box 1, Folder 28.

Indiana, a delegation of twelve uniformed Klansmen entered the tabernacle and presented Sunday with a letter of endorsement that was quoted in full in the next day's newspaper:

We, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, desire that you accept this little token of our appreciation of the wonderful work that you and your associates are doing in behalf of perpetuating the tenets of the Christian religion throughout the nation, and we wish to inform you that we stand solidly behind the teachings of the Christian religion, free speech, separation of church and state, liberty, white supremacy, just law, [and] the pursuit of happiness.²²⁸

Just as Biederwolf and Sunday associated Anglo-saxonism with civilization and blackness with ignorance, the Klan constructed its racial identity as the pinnacle of the rational individual: free to enjoy liberty, justice, and the scientific advances of Western civilization. Far from merely passively accepting white supremacy, revivals were sites on which Anglo-Saxon whiteness was constructed as both rational and American, contrasting Christian freedom and intelligence with the primitive inferiority of others.

In his study of African-American "cult" religions, Sylvester Johnson explained the marginalization of black new religious movements from the American cultural mainstream as lying partly in their anti-racist theology and challenge to the racial and ethnic hierarchy of America: "observing religion has never been separate from the strategic practices and imperatives of colonial authority."²²⁹ Just as African-American movements like the Moorish Science Temple or the later Nation of Islam were defined as "bad religion" because of their "fanatical" and irrational character, white churches, even those associated with the Klan, were identified as both rational and authentic — the church of real men and real Americans.

Contested Meanings of Rationality: The Case Study of Christian Science

²²⁸ *Indianapolis Star*. May 15, 1922. 1 and 15, quoted in A. Cyrus Hayat, "Billy Sunday and the Masculinization of American Protestantism, 1896-1935," M.A. Thesis, Indiana University (2008), 100

²²⁹ Sylvester Johnson, "Religion Proper and Proper Religion," *The New Black Gods*, 155.

One further case study that demonstrates the braided relationship of religion, gender, race, and rationality is the evangelical campaign against Christian Science between 1900 and 1930. Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, situated her movement as a reasonable and scientific alternative to sectarian and “impotent” Christianity. Because Christian Science taught that believers could heal the sick and guard themselves against illness, they presented their religion as more active, and indeed more rational and masculine, than conventional

Protestantism:

A Christianity that is both scientific and practical ... has already come in response to human yearnings. It is *Christian Science*. ... [that] is stirring men to think, and to think for themselves. ... Religious thought is being convulsed at the discovery of its own ignorance and the impotence of its manhood. ... the popular faith is too narrow for Christianity ... this spirit of investigation has led to weighing sectarianism in the balances.²³⁰

Edward Kimbell, in article entitled “the religion of common sense,” further claimed that “Christian Science, as taught by Mrs. Eddy, explains that Jesus’ work was natural, practical, and scientific,” not mysterious and miraculous as other Christians believed: “Christian Science, which purports to be the Science of Christianity, promises to bring to pass a universal and demonstrably true understanding of God, which will tranquilize the awful sectarian strife which has disfigured the ages.”²³¹

Such a definition of rationality could not co-exist with evangelical revivals; it challenged the evangelical worldview and was antithetical to their notion of the relationship of masculinity, Christianity, and reason. Unsurprisingly, evangelicals heaped scorn on Christian Science almost from its birth. Eddy’s position as the leader of the church attracted significant opposition.

“Christian Science exists because a woman did not keep silence” wrote I.M. Haldeman in a tract

²³⁰ Rev. E.R. Hardy, “Manhood,” *The Christian Science Journal*, July, 1893.

²³¹ Edward Kimball, *Lectures and Articles on Christian Science* (Chesterton, Indiana: Edna K. Wait, 1921), 154-156, Mary Baker Eddy Institute Archives, Boston, Mass., non CSPA.

denouncing the movement as “mental assassination.”²³² A.C. Dixon saw Eddy as sitting in an unnatural position over men: “those who fail to do her bidding may be cast out at once. At last we have a woman pope who sits in her Vatican at Concord and commands her votaries!”²³³ Both Betty Deberg and Margaret Bendroth have noted these arguments and linked them with the masculinization thesis in evangelism, with the campaign against Christian Science being related to the effort to masculinize the church after the turn of the century. Just as evangelicals attacked American spiritualist leaders like Victoria Woodhull or criticized the flashy sexuality of Pentecostal leaders like Aimee Semple McPherson, the campaign against Eddy reflected the power of the cult of virile masculinity in the emerging “fundamentalist” movement and the growing fear of female power in religion.²³⁴

However, evangelicals were equally threatened by Christian Science’s claim to be *scientific*. Christian Science not only challenged the church’s general bar on women preachers, it suggested that evangelicals were mistaken in their core assumptions about the nature of reality. Worse, Eddy set up her organization around a notion that both God and rational science were gendered neutral or feminine. In *Science and Health*, Eddy suggested that “Father-Mother is the name for Deity which indicates His tender relationship ... In divine Science, we have not as much authority for considering God masculine, as we have for considering him feminine.”²³⁵ The result was a world-turned-upside-down for evangelicals, where the qualities they associated with masculinity and authority were now reversed. As one male former Christian Science worker

²³² I.M. Haldeman, *Mental Assassination or Christian Science; A Physical, Intellectual, Moral, and Spiritual Peril* (New York: Charles C. Cook, 1912), 237, Mary Baker Eddy Institute Archives, Boston, Mass., non CSPS.

²³³ A.C. Dixon, *The Christian Science Delusion* (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1903), 21, Mary Baker Eddy Institute Archives, Boston, Mass., non CSPS.

²³⁴ Betty Deberg, *Ungodly Women*, 28-29; Margaret Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*, 82.

²³⁵ Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: Joseph Armstrong, 1900), 332 and 517; fine-de-siècle occultists presented a similar fluidity around metaphorical gender roles. See Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 85-113.

turned evangelical confessed, “the women in the congregations are largely in the majority, there being about three women to one man... at least ten women practitioners of Christian Science to one man ... and at least three or four women to one man who write articles for publication.”²³⁶

Another former male member wrote of how Christian Scientists “look down upon marriage” and encouraged women to have children without the presence of fathers.²³⁷ I.M. Haldeman put it most succinctly: “Christian Science is distinctly a female system. ...Its teachers and healers are women. ... Christian Science is divided into females and some men with female tendencies.”²³⁸

If such a system could claim to be a rational, common-sense religion, it threatened to destroy the rhetorical world evangelicals had spent decades constructing. The only possible response was that a “female system” could not, by its very nature, be either rational or scientific. “It is false by every criterion of reason, false by every test of the Holy Scriptures; false by every testimony of experience,” claimed one writer.²³⁹ Evangelist A.C. Dixon borrowed another argument common in denouncing agnostics when he wrote that “Christian Science is a religion of hallucinations. ...It is a religion of inconsistencies. ...It contradicts the experience of all normal, healthy minds.”²⁴⁰ The medicalized language was made even clearer by A.J. Gordon: “their science, so called, is infecting souls with the subtle poison ... the delusion is most insidious.”²⁴¹ The association between Christian Science as irrational and Christian as feminine was sometimes explicit. In his terse analysis of *Science and Health*, Reuben Torrey rejected the

²³⁶ B.C. Odom, *My Reasons for Leaving Christian Science* (Dallas, Texas: B.C. Odom, 1927), 57-58, Mary Baker Eddy Institute Archives, Boston, Mass., non CSPS.

²³⁷ Anonymous, *My Experience in Christian Science* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1920), 11, Mary Baker Eddy Institute Archives, Boston, Mass., non CSPS.

²³⁸ I.M. Haldeman, *Mental Assassination or Christian Science* (New York: Charles C. Cook, 1912), 237-238, Mary Baker Eddy Institute Archives, Boston, Mass., non CSPS.

²³⁹ Gordon H. Baker, *Some Fundamental Errors of Christian Science* (Montreal: The Financial Times Press, 1915), Mary Baker Eddy Institute Archives, Boston, Mass., non CSPS.

²⁴⁰ A.C. Dixon, “Analysis of Christian Science,” in Rev. J.B. Baker ed., *How Christian Science Denies Christ* (Harrisburg, P.A.: Aaron E. Brandt, 1937), Mary Baker Eddy Institute Archives, Boston, Mass., non CSPS.

²⁴¹ A.J. Gordon, *Christian Science: Not Scriptural* (Los Angeles: Bible House of Los Angeles, 1937), 2, Mary Baker Eddy Institute Archives, Boston, Mass., non CSPS.

book as neither serious theology nor serious science because “It savors of the school girl, sophomoric essay. Its style is stilted and artificial.”²⁴² Christian Science was not only heretical, it was a delusion that could not stand against the truth of Christianity — dismissing it was merely “a case of rational and Christian defense of the truth.”²⁴³

Evangelicals also marked Christian Science as foreign, tapping into discourses of Americanness and race. Critics like I.M. Haldeman loved to report stories of Christian converts from India arriving in America shocked to find that the despotic regime of Hinduism had preceded them in the form of Eddyism, whose impersonal God was really the Hindu Brahma concealed beneath Christian symbols.²⁴⁴ The Pastor A.J. Gordon concurred, arguing there were “remarkable points of similarity” between “so-called Christian Science” and the heresy of Theosophy “which has lately bewitched the people of India.” He concluded that Eddy’s philosophy was “Theosophy, esoteric Buddhism, Kabalism, and Pantheism” hidden beneath a Christian surface.²⁴⁵ Charles Stough, in his 1915 revival of Altoona, Pennsylvania, presented a similar explanation of Eddy: “He told of the origins of Christian Science and stated . . . that the religion was nothing but revamped heathenism.”²⁴⁶ If Christian Science could be labelled as foreign, it would by default become unchristian, tying into discourses of racial and ethnic authenticity that were crucial components of evangelical identity.

Evangelical reactions to Christian Science reveal how questions of rationality, gender, and American identity were in practice deeply interconnected. In order to discredit Christian

²⁴² Reuben Torrey, *Practical and Perplexing Questions Answered* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1909), 29, Mary Baker Eddy Institute Archives, Boston, Mass., non CSPA.

²⁴³ Frank Ballard, *Eddyism miscalled Christian Science* (London: The Epworth Press, 1937), 4, Mary Baker Eddy Institute Archives, Boston, Mass., non CSPA.

²⁴⁴ I.M. Haldeman, *Mental Assassination or Christian Science*.

²⁴⁵ A.J. Gordon, *Christian Science: Not Scriptural*, 1 and 6.

²⁴⁶ *Lancaster News Journal*, January 16, 1915, in Charles Stough Clippings, BGC Archives, CN 106, reel 1.

Science, evangelicals constructed it as, in the words of Frank Ballard, “neither rational nor Christian.”²⁴⁷ Because Eddy not only represented herself as rational, but reconstructed rationality as a system that did not respect the masculine/feminine binary, her movement could not be integrated into the interdenominational mainstream. The response of evangelists and preachers put into stark relief the braided and interconnected nature of the language of rationality at the turn of the century.

Conclusion

By not only rejecting the alternative worldviews of sceptics and new religious movements, but pathologizing them into a complete inversion of rational religion, evangelicals delegitimized their opponents and claimed the mantle of rationalism, civilization, and masculinity for themselves. Rationality was a rhetorical battlefield in the Gilded Age and Progressive eras, a contested claim to modernity on the American cultural landscape through which one religious orientation would be labelled as “common sense” and others as uncommon, artificial, foreign, and — in essence — unmodern. The gospel of common sense fused gender, ethnicity, race, class and religion into a legitimate modern Americanness that excluded all other religious (or non-religious) orientations from the realm of rational possibility. So certain were evangelicals of their monopoly on reason, that the conservative and anti-liberal journal *The King's Business* declared that it was on the onus of all “true” Americans to prove that they were not Protestant Christians:

You profess to be an infidel, [but] ... you do many things which the Bible commands; you pay your debts; you live peaceably; you work diligently; you are temperate, and quiet, and earn your own bread ... in all these respects you obey the precepts laid down by Christ and His apostles. In fact you keep a large proportion of the commands and

²⁴⁷ Frank Ballard, *Eddyism miscalled Christian Science*, 5.

precepts which are in the law of Moses; now, by what rule of justice or common sense can I believe you are an infidel?²⁴⁸

Plain preaching was much more than a way to reach the masses. It was a rhetorical claim to the authority to be modern. One's friends possessed a common-sense understanding of the world and their place in it, and one's opponents were not only wrong, but outsiders to the everyday understanding of what "real" religion and manhood were.

Chapter 3: "Christ is in this City!:" Materializing the Sacred in the Urban Revival, 1875-1920

The despair of the present-day Church is the modern urban center.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ "Can you Prove it?," *The King's Business*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1912, 54.

-William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday — the Man and His Message*

From the very first it became evident that the most extraordinary upheaval of modern times had begun. The city may be said to have rocked with it.

-Charles Frederic Goss, "Life of D.L. Moody,"²⁵⁰

"When can a revival be expected?" Billy Sunday asked audiences in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston on the eve of World War I. "When Christians confess their sins one to another. . . . When the wickedness of the wicked grieves and distresses the Church."²⁵¹ In the small towns and farms of rural Indiana or Kansas, whose largest urban center of Kansas City still had a population of fewer than 100,000, the prisons stood empty and the sins of alcohol, gambling, and prostitution had been driven from the state.²⁵² But in the urban sprawl of America's burgeoning cities, Christians still walked with the devil in the streets: "down here the battering rams of vice pound on your homes. Down here the devil has forced the issue."²⁵³ While their rural counterparts rested easy, Billy Sunday's revivals came to remind urban Americans that

Christ is in this city! He has seen every stone laid in Philadelphia. He has heard every lie; seen every false vote; known every vicious thought; every sneer at high and holy things; every yielding to low ideals; every corrupt practice, every oath, every theft.²⁵⁴

Reporters noted that it wasn't Sunday's talk of baseball or rustic morality that garnered the loudest cheers. Rather, "the more the crowd hurraed the more he roasted and condemned all 'hypocrites and followers of the devil.'"²⁵⁵ It was this message of sin — sin in the taverns, sin in

²⁴⁹ William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday: The Man and His Message*, 19.

²⁵⁰ Charles Frederic Goss, "Life of D.L. Moody," in Dwight L. Moody, *Echoes from the Pulpit and Platform*, 61.

²⁵¹ Billy Sunday, "The Need of Revivals," in William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday: The Man and His Message*, 290.

²⁵² Billy Sunday, "Get on the Water Wagon," 12-13, Billy Graham Center Archives (Wheaton, Ill.), Papers of William Ashley "Billy" Sunday and Helen Amelia (Thompson) Sunday, CN 61.

²⁵³ "Text of the Three Sermons Preached Yesterday by Billy Sunday," *Evening Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), January 4, 1915, Night Extra, 14.

²⁵⁴ John Reed, "Back of Billy Sunday," reprinted in Daniel Wayne Lehman, *John Reed & the Writing of Revolution*, 246.

²⁵⁵ "Billy Sunday Saving Sinners With Ball Talk," *San Francisco Call* (San Francisco, CA), February 12, 1909, 14.

the dancehalls, sin in the schools of higher criticism — that marked the Sunday revival as an event: “Come on, you forces of inequity in Philadelphia, that have made the church a cuspidor, and a doormat to wipe your dirty feet on, come on ... you sponsors of harlotry ... you defamers of God.”²⁵⁶ In a cultural event some observers regarded as profoundly ironic, or even pathological, revivalists like Sunday used the landscape, media, and population of the city to wage their campaigns damning the city as a cesspool of vice and materialism.²⁵⁷

Gilded Age and Progressive-era revivals were urban events. They took place in large cities, were attended by urban audiences, and relied on the urban press to achieve the advertising and logistics necessary for their success. Yet, the revivals also damned the city — they rejected it for its commercialism, entertainments, culture, and hopelessly materialistic inhabitants. This central tension was crucial to the form and purpose of the revival. Evangelicals in the Gilded Age and Progressive era were a community being pulled into the reach of the city, becoming deeply urban both in the spaces they lived in and in the material and cultural goods they consumed. And yet they continued to draw on a religious culture that understood urban environments as existing under the footprint of the devil, othered from the Christian world of the mythic American past and small towns in the “heartland.” Revivals were one response to this sense of ambiguity. Evangelicals encountered one modernity in the city and, through the revival, attempted to construct another, re-affirming the relationships, binaries, and hierarchies of rural evangelical Protestant life on a fluid, confused reality. The contradiction between the City of God and the Devil in the streets was a microcosm for the larger contradictions of the era;

²⁵⁶ "Text of the Three Sermons Preached Yesterday by Billy Sunday," *Evening Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), January 4, 1915, 14.

²⁵⁷ See John Reed, “Back of Billy Sunday,” reprinted in Daniel Wayne Lehman, *John Reed & the Writing of Revolution*, 240-261.

evangelicals encountered and made modernity in the city, reconciling (or failing to reconcile) religion, leisure, commercialism, and the urban landscape.

Writing Lived Religion in the Gilded Age and Progressive-era Revival

The history of revivals as cultural events has tended to focus heavily on the “Great Awakenings” of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This pattern traces back to the work of Perry Miller, which linked the early revivals to the emergence of a uniquely ‘American’ mindset and identity.²⁵⁸ The religious revivals of the 1870s through the 1920s have received comparatively less attention, attracting religious biographers and mid-century intellectual historians like William McLoughlin, but less focus from social and cultural historians.²⁵⁹ The significance of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century revivals has continued to be viewed as limited to the historiography of “fundamentalism.” For example, George Marsden included Moody in his history of American fundamentalism as a “pre-fundamentalist” movement that possessed the Biblical inerrancy and evangelical bent of later fundamentalism without its anti-modernist leanings.²⁶⁰ Rather than crucibles for the formation of American identity, the revivals of Moody onward have been viewed as narrow, limited events whose significance mostly lies in the modernist/fundamentalist controversies of the twentieth century.

²⁵⁸ For literature on the First Great Awakening see Perry Miller, *Errand in the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1956); William G. McLoughlin and Jack P. Greene, *Preachers & politicians: two essays on the origins of the American Revolution* (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1977); Rhys Isaac, “Evangelical Revolt: The Nature of the Baptists’ Challenge to the Traditional Order in Virginia, 1765 to 1775,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 3 (July, 1974), 345-368; Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*; also see introduction, 4-6.

²⁵⁹ For older literature on Moody, see William McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, 141-178; James Findlay Jr., *Dwight L. Moody: American Evangelist*; Richard K. Curtis, *They Called Him Mister Moody* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1962; Bernard A. Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River: The Story of the Great Revivalists and their impact upon Religion in America* (Boston/Toronto: Little Brown and Company, 1958), 135-225.

²⁶⁰ George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 32-39.

The culture, rituals, and communal identities of turn-of-the-century revivals, along with their status as uniquely urban events, have been neglected since the pioneering work of William McLoughlin in the 1970s. One recent attempt to break this trend is Edward Blum's monograph *Reforging the White Republic*, which links the revival campaigns of Moody to Northern reconciliation with Southern white supremacy in the 1870s, a thesis which complicates the narrative of Moody's pre-millennialism by placing it within an American racial context.²⁶¹ But Blum's work has yet to attract a more general re-interpretation of Moody and the world of Gilded Age and Progressive-era revivals, or to separate them from the later anti-modernist controversies of fundamentalism.²⁶²

Despite America's longstanding tradition of revival, the evangelical campaigns of the 1870s represented a significant break with the past. The major revivals of Dwight Moody and his successors down to Billy Sunday were, unlike most revivals of the past, based almost entirely in major urban centers like Boston, New York, and Chicago, with populations in the hundreds of thousands or millions. The earlier revivals of the Second Great Awakening had been most successful in the towns of the "burned over" districts of upstate New York or in frontier regions such as Kentucky, areas populated largely by white "plain folk" Protestants. While these had represented major urban centers in the early nineteenth century, they were socially and demographically far removed from the massive metropolises of the Gilded Age.²⁶³ And while evangelists like Finney or Edwards before him had also managed to revive the big cities of their day, they imagined the city in contrast to Christian civilization: the home of worldly streets, immoral depravity, and wicked entertainments that defined the limits of the Godly community

²⁶¹ Edward Blum, *Reforging the White Republic*, 120-145.

²⁶² Also see Michael Hamilton, "The Interdenominational Evangelicalism of D. L. Moody and the Problem of Fundamentalism," forthcoming.

²⁶³ Bruce D. Dickson Jr., *And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1974); Nathan Hatch, *Democratization of American Culture*.

and the beginning of the devil's domain. In the nineteenth century, this image of the perverse and degenerate urban center was omniscient in both the Protestant press and secular media, comprising the genre of "moral sensationalism" literature identified by R. Lawrence Moore.²⁶⁴ Evangelicals confronted lurid texts and images of drunkard fathers, murdered wives, wayward sons, and daughters who had descended into a life of prostitution, all part of the imaginative space of the city as a site of corruption.²⁶⁵

By the 1870s, the demographic makeup of America had shifted to an extent where evangelicals were less able to distance themselves either symbolically or literally from the metropolis. As the utopian and rural spiritual communities of the Second Great Awakening withered in the 1850s and 60s, the post-Civil War industrial boom rapidly transformed America into an urban nation.²⁶⁶ America's urban population grew from 6.2 million to 30 million between 1860 and 1900, rising from 20 to 40 percent of the total.²⁶⁷ Roughly half of these newcomers to the city were migrants from rural America, mainly white Protestants from the Midwest and Upper South.²⁶⁸ Rather than standing outside of urban landscapes or in small towns that rarely numbered more than a few thousand, many formerly-rural evangelicals now found themselves residing in cities that counted in the millions.

In this sense, Gilded Age revivals had a very different relationship to the spaces they inhabited than the evangelical campaigns of two or three generations before. Rather than

²⁶⁴ See R. Lawrence Moore, *Selling God*, 21-39.

²⁶⁵ Also see Robert A. Orsi, "Introduction: Crossing the City Line," in *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape*, ed. by Robert A. Orsi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 4-9.

²⁶⁶ For the growth and decline of Shakerism and other communal, rural utopias, see Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community, and the Mormons* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1991).

²⁶⁷ Robert G. Barrows, "Urbanizing America," in *The Gilded Age: Perspectives on the Origins of Modern America*, Charles William Calhoun ed. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 102; also see Herbert S. Klein, *A Population History of the United States* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 107-144.

²⁶⁸ Barrows, "Urbanizing America," 105.

attempting to create “islands of holiness” cut off from a worldly and sinful America, the revivalists of the late-nineteenth century sought to transform the urban spaces they inhabited into reflections of a broad Christian consensus that demonstrated the power of Christ in the heart of the worldly city.²⁶⁹ Rather than building separate communities or a Zion in the wilderness like Finney had done, revivalists attempted to drive the devil out of the city through the sacred spaces they built, making their campaigns a metaphorical claim to locality in an America that was rapidly being transformed from a rural to an urban nation. The urban world of the Gilded Age and Progressive-era revivals was distinct both from the “Second Great Awakening” of the 1790s-1840s and the fundamentalist controversies of the 1920s. Despite the tendency of Moody or his supporters to compare their own campaigns to the work of George Whitfield and Jonathan Edwards, the revivals of the Gilded Age shared remarkably little with the cultural world of the eighteenth or even early nineteenth century. Instead, they were events in which a newly urban evangelical Protestant identity was conjured, experienced, and embodied.

In studying the cultural history of the revival, the “lived religion” turn in American religious studies is especially useful. In particular, I follow Robert Orsi in searching for how revivals as a culture offered “multiple media for materializing the sacred,” processes by which the divine is concretized into the world of the everyday and the material.²⁷⁰ I also draw inspiration from the work on material religion and spiritual spaces which has attracted the interest of scholars like Orsi and Diane Winston, who have both examined how the sacralisation of space through ritual and experience are crucial pieces of lived religiosity.²⁷¹ Further, drawing on the crucial work of Ann Taves and Leigh Eric Schmidt, I search for how emotion and the

²⁶⁹ See Curtis D. Johnson, *Islands of Holiness*.

²⁷⁰ Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 73-74.

²⁷¹ See the essays in *Gods of the City*.

intangibility of ‘experience’ can be accessed by the historian through the search for religious presence.²⁷² By being alive to the multiple forms by which people can feel, see, and experience the divine, this chapter seeks to both give the revivals of the Gilded Age and Progressive era a history, and to contribute to the new subjective relationship of scholars to the religious worlds they study.²⁷³

Materializing Sin in the Revival: Reprobate Men and Material Women

When asked by the *Boston Globe* whether he would pray with unbelievers, Dwight Moody responded that he would, so long as they believed in sin. Sin, even more than faith in Christ, was the one essential prerequisite to the work of revival: “You must be convicted of sin first, before any good can be done. Conviction comes first and then conversion.”²⁷⁴ Sin was not a relative concept in the revival, nor a metaphor for moral decisions inflected with shades of grey; rather it was a physical, embodied substance against which the human race was perishing as surely as it would from smallpox or influenza. Sin was so material and transparent that Billy Sunday pointed to it as “an open fact” that proved the inarguable need for Christianity: “You can argue against Jesus being the Son of God. You can argue about there being a heaven and a hell, but you can't argue against sin. It is in the world and men and women are blighted and mildewed by it.”²⁷⁵ As

²⁷² See Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience From Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); for an additional study linking revivals with the history of emotions, see John Corrigan, *Business of the Heart: Religion and Emotion in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2002).

²⁷³ For the notion of subjective encounter with alien religious worlds, see Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 177-204.

²⁷⁴ Moody, *To All People*, 176.

²⁷⁵ Billy Sunday, “Atonement in the Blood of Christ,” Papers of William Ashley “Billy” Sunday and Helen Amelia (Thompson) Sunday, CN 61, Box 31, Folder 16.

Moody put it, “the office of the Holy Ghost is to convince of sin, and without this power men will not be convinced or converted.”²⁷⁶

Sin has long been the midwife of religion in Christian identity, tracing back to St. Augustine’s City of God and City of Man and John Bunyan’s “pilgrim” fleeing the City of Destruction for the mountains of Zion. In an American culture shaped by the influence of the Puritans and their emphasis on human depravity and a “Devil [that] would fain hook us with his Temptations,” sin remained central in how many Americans understood their world in the Gilded Age.²⁷⁷ Sin was intrinsic to human nature, placed by Adam’s curse, and nowhere was it more personified as a fearful, unknown corruption than in the streets of America’s cities. This tradition was carried on in the 1890s by moralists like De Witt Talmage, whose books *Evils of the Cities* and *The Abominations of Modern Society* fit within a long Protestant tradition of categorizing and damning urban vice.²⁷⁸ But by Talmage’s time, moral literature could no longer situate itself as an outside observer of urban spaces. Talmage’s status as a life-long New Yorker forced him to orient his authorial voice not as a stranger to the metropolis, but as an occupant who desired to save and restore the city — his city — to a Christian morality:

Pride of city is natural to men in all times... New York is a goodly city, and when I say that I mean the region between Spuyten Duyvil creek and Jamaica in one direction and Newark flats in the other direction. That which tends to elevate a part elevates all. That which blasts part blasts all. All this I promise in opening this course of sermons on the ten plagues of these three cities, lest some stupid man may say I am deprecating the place of my residence.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁶ Dwight Moody, *To All People*, 59.

²⁷⁷ See Cotton Mather, *The Wonders of the Invisible World Being an Account of the Tryals of Several Witches Lately Executed in New-England, to which is added A Farther Account of the Tryals of the New-England Witches* (London: John Russell Smith, Soho Square, 1862) [originally published 1693], 190.

²⁷⁸ For eighteenth and early nineteenth-century antecedents to Talmage, see R. Lawrence Moore, *Selling God*, 20-39.

²⁷⁹ De Witt Talmage, *Evils of the City*, 18-21.

By defending New York's essential 'goodliness,' from the edge of the still-rural Bronx to the already expanding suburbs of New Jersey, Talmage presented himself not as a Jeremiah seeking to denounce urbanity, but as an urban-American whose home was both elevated by virtue and blasted by sin.

Many American revivalists, like Talmage, presented themselves rhetorically in their campaigns as both critics and representatives of the city, inhabiting a blurred ontological space as both Jeremiads and proud civic participants. "Every twenty-four hours three hundred men go down to a drunkards' grave in this country" thundered Dwight Moody from both his pulpit and the press in the 1870s. "In four years there were 38, 512 murders in the United States ... [and] lynchings by the scores and hundreds. Last year we had 25, 000 divorces. See how Sabbath-breaking is increasing, and dishonesty in business. ... Do we not need a reformation?"²⁸⁰ In the eyes of Moody and other revivalists, the answer was a resounding yes. Sin in America had reached a breaking point, and Christ's return could not be far off: "I look upon the world as a wrecked vessel... God has given me a lifeboat, and said to me 'Moody, save all you can.'"²⁸¹ But Moody could not present himself as an 'other' to the urban environments of Boston, Philadelphia, or New York City. Instead, he needed to temper his denunciations with an assurance that God was ready to intercede and consecrate the city. "God is ready to bless Boston. I believe He is hovering over this city, now, and over all New England, but a work must be done in the Church first."²⁸² Unlike eighteenth-century revivalists, whose cities numbered a few thousand, Moody was forced to adapt the revival to a Gilded-Age landscape of radically

²⁸⁰ Dwight Moody, *Moody's Latest Sermons*, 117.

²⁸¹ Dwight L. Moody, "The Second Coming of Christ," in *The Best of D.L. Moody*, Wilbur M. Smith ed. (Chicago, 1971), 193-195, quoted in George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 38.

²⁸² Moody, *To All People*, 87.

transformed urban spaces. Both of the city and spiritually outside it, they adapted old rhetoric into their new subjectivities, positioning themselves in-between urbanity and ruralness.

Even more than a belief in Christ, sin was the rationale of the revival, its reason for existing. But it was not enough to simply label ‘sin’ as a substance. In order to conduct a successful campaign, revivalists needed to convince their audiences of sin, to materialize it in their lives as a presence that was as real as the benches upon which they sat. During an English revival, Reuben Torrey declared that “the footprints of Satan” were visible in the streets of London

in the faces of the men and women on the streets, and, alas! alas! ... in the homes of culture and refinement. What means it that men and women of education, men and women of refinement, fall under the power of all these strange delusions, of Christian Science, Theosophy and all that sort of nonsense? It means that there is a devil—cunning, subtle, masterly, marvelous—more than a match for you and me in cunning and power.²⁸³

Satan’s footprints could be found both in the culture and agnosticism of the elite and the entertainments that threatened to undermine the middle-class family. “Taking up the newspaper of this morning,” declared Wilbur Chapman, “everywhere is the mark of sin. Sin has hurt some father, injured some mother, handicapped the life of someone ... go into the art gallery and in many pictures you will find some suggestion or mark of sin.”²⁸⁴ Billy Sunday, in his characteristically theatrical style, drove the point home most strongly:

Some years ago I turned a corner in Chicago and stood in front of a police station. As I stood there a patrol dashed up and three women were taken from some drunken debauch, and they were dirty and bleary-eyed, and as they were taken out they started a flood of profanity that seemed to turn the very air blue. I said, ‘There is sin.’ And as I stood there up dashed another patrol and out of it they took four men, drunken and ragged and

²⁸³ Reuben Torrey, *Revival Addresses*, 70.

²⁸⁴ Chapman, *Evangelistic Sermons*, 114.

bloated, and I said, 'There is sin.' You can't argue against the fact of sin. It is in the world and blights men and women.²⁸⁵

"The fact of sin" served an important discursive function in the revival. The rapidly changing nature of America's cities and growth of both old and new forms of urban entertainment, combined with increasing ethnic and religious diversity, left many Protestant Americans facing profoundly new cultural and social environments.²⁸⁶ Evangelists flattened this diversity by re-imposing a cultural binary between sin and virtue as plain and readily accessible categories. Evangelical Protestants could rest assured that the changes they witnessed around them fit within a traditional narrative of the biblical war between Christ and the devil, leaving their lifeline to salvation through the church intact.

The revival was a place where sin was exposed, battled, and defeated, a ritual process that was most stark in the theatrics of the Billy Sunday campaigns. Typical of the dramatic physicality of revivalists in the 1910s, Billy Sunday would pound the pulpit as he gave detailed lists of the sins of America's cities, and would occasionally smash his chair into small pieces for dramatic effect [image 3].²⁸⁷ In a typical sermon, Sunday would challenge the devil to a fist fight on stage, shadowboxing to demonstrate the power of Christ and Christian manhood over the sins of the city:

Billy crouches on the platform, knocks on the floor and shouts an invitation for the Devil to come up and take his medicine. Billy admits his own fearlessness and when the bid to Beelzebub is not accepted the audience shares with the champion the delight and

²⁸⁵ Billy Sunday, *Atonement in the Blood of Christ*. Papers of William Ashley "Billy" Sunday and Helen Amelia (Thompson) Sunday, CN 61.

²⁸⁶ On the growth of cities, immigration, and urban entertainment in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, see Frederick M. Binder and David M. Reimers, *All the Nations Under Heaven: An Ethnic and Racial History of New York City* (New York: Columbia University, 1995), 93-148; Elizabeth Alice Clement, *Love For Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

²⁸⁷ Bernard A. Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River* (Boston, Little, Brown, 1958), 248.



Image 3 In this 1910s caricature, Sunday is shown “boxing with the devil” by denouncing the materialism and entertainments of the modern city. Source: William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday — The Man and His Message*, 166.

conquering pose. Cheers ring for the tower of physical strength and spiritual righteousness whom the Boss of Hell dares not meet in combat.²⁸⁸

New York psychologist Joseph Collins attended Sunday's revival meetings when he visited New York in 1917, and agreed that audiences shared Sunday's "delight and satisfaction" when the devil failed to overcome the power of the evangelist.²⁸⁹ Sin was made powerless, weak, and pathetic through the process of the revival meeting, reassuring audiences that, even as the city menaced around them, their religion remained stronger than the works of the devil.

No sin in the revival was emphasized more constantly than alcohol, an old trope in American religious culture. A great deal of work has been done deconstructing temperance campaign "drunkard" narratives, searching for how gendered notions of independent manhood and wronged womanhood could both reinforce Victorian family mores while also providing a space where women could criticize degenerate maleness.²⁹⁰ The same narratives were visible in the revival. Moody, always fond of anecdotes, often recited stories of men whose fall to drink had left them unable to care for their families, degenerating into physically wretched, dependent states: "some poor captive comes in here bound hand and foot with the claims of intemperance."²⁹¹ Billy Sunday frequently denounced alcohol as the sin of men, mocking the "buttermilk-eyed, whisky-soaked blasphemers" who had allowed themselves to become slaves to the "whisky gang," robbing them of the independence and fortitude that were markers of their manhood.²⁹² He also connected his call to men with an ethnically Anglo and Protestant patriotic

²⁸⁸ Robert J. Higgs, *God in the Stadium: Sports and Religion in America* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 256.

²⁸⁹ W. Glyn Evans, *Profiles of Revival Leaders* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1976), 89-90.

²⁹⁰ Elaine F. Parsons, *Manhood Lost*; Barbara Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America*, Middletown (Conn.: Wesleyan University Press 1981); Virginia Brereton, *From Sin to Salvation: Stories of Women's Conversions, 1800 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1991).

²⁹¹ Dwight Moody, *To All People*, 395.

²⁹² William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday: The Man and his Message*, 361.

American identity: "If your manhood is buried in doubt and cheap booze, dig it out. You have to sign your own Declaration of Independence and fight your own Revolutionary wars before you can celebrate the Fourth of July over the things that try to keep you down."²⁹³

Women, especially young women, were also understood as being prone to certain sins, particularly materialism and vanity, reflecting a longstanding Protestant-American association between superficiality, intellectual frivolousness, and femininity.²⁹⁴ One of Sunday's most popular anecdotes involved the "pug woman," in which Sunday rebuked a "fool" society lady who was "hugging and kissing a brindle-nosed pup... and let me suggest that perhaps that is why her husband is not more affectionate, for no real blooded man wants to play second fiddle to a bow-legged bull-dog [image 4]."²⁹⁵ He further denounced women who partook in urban entertainments as "frizzie haired sissies" for their adoption of modern hairstyles, associating them with the biblical daughter of Herodias, whose dancing had caused the death of John the Baptist: "that gum-chewing, fudge-eating, sissified little daughter of Herodias, a lewd, partially nude dancer."²⁹⁶ Ladies' hats were targeted as symbolic of their public materialism. Sunday, Charles Stough, and the evangelist Gipsy Smith attacked Christian women for attending church to "show off" their finery. Gipsy Smith placed signs to the door of his revivals in Denver reading "Ladies, please remove your hats," explaining his policy as such: "Woman is prone to frivolous fancy. ... Because woman adores pretty headwear and is willing to sacrifice much in order to equal her next door neighbours ... she has no call to display her finery [at the revival] [image

²⁹³ Ibid., 352.

²⁹⁴ See Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Ladies, a Story of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982); also see Lawrence Foster, *Sex and the Eighteenth-Century Man: Massachusetts and the History of Sexuality in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).

²⁹⁵ "Text of the Three Sermons Preached Yesterday by Billy Sunday," *Evening Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), January 4, 1915, 14.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

5].”²⁹⁷ Victorian gender roles, with their concomitant negative associations surrounding public women and intemperate men, structured sin and redemption in the revival.²⁹⁸

Youth likewise structured how sin was understood and symbolized. Young people — existing between the categories of childhood and full adulthood — attracted an inordinate amount of attention and anxiety in revival sermons, and were often constructed as the most vulnerable victims of urban sin.²⁹⁹ While sin plagued all Americans, it was most frightening and enigmatic when it afflicted the young. During his Boston revival, Moody stopped his sermon to point to young men and women in the audience and shout: “Now you, young man, and you, young woman ... you have got some besetting sin. I don't know what it is, but you know. Now



Image 4. The “pug woman,” a common target of the Sunday revival, is portrayed riding in a convertible with her cherished pet. Such “society women” were made symbolic of urban vice and the corruption of gender roles in Progressive-era revivals. Source: William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday — The Man and His Message*, 232.

²⁹⁷ “Remove your hats ladies — Don’t Let Vanity Be the Victor,” unidentified newspaper clipping, 1909, Billy Graham Center Archives, Gipsy Smith, Folder 16; also see “Stough Ushers to Hold Hard Berths,” unidentified newspaper, January 5, 1915, Billy Graham Center Archives, Ephemera of Henry Wellington Stough, CN 106.

²⁹⁸ Betty Deberg has made a similar argument. See Betty Deberg, *Ungodly Women*, 13-41.

²⁹⁹ For the category of youth as opposed to childhood or adulthood, see Lynne Marks, *Revival and Roller Rinks*, 88-91.

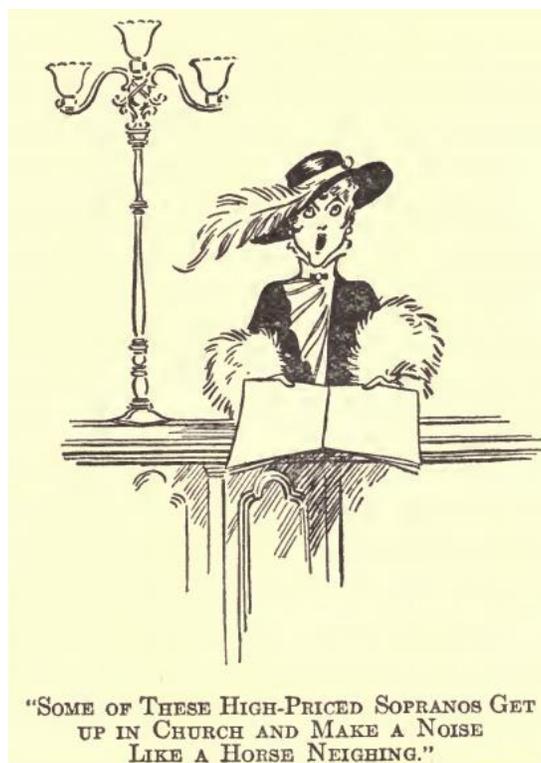


Image 5. The “society woman” is mocked in this caricature for wearing fashionable clothing in church, mixing class and gender attacks by making such women metaphors for the corruptive influence of wealth and materialism in urban centers. Source: William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday — The Man and His Message*, 263.

won't you just carry it to God.”³⁰⁰ Much of the anxiety over the materialism of women centered around their age and relationships with young men, tying into the fear of “rough” male street culture that menaced God-fearing young girls: “young girl, don't go with that godless, God-forsaken, sneering young man that walks the streets smoking cigarettes. ... Don't you go with that young man; don't you go to that dance ... [or] for a joy ride at midnight.”³⁰¹ While women’s sexuality was a primary target of Progressive-era revivalists like Sunday, it was the potential for youth to escape the control of their families that governed the fear of alcohol and dance. The New York evangelist De Witt Talmage, in his book *Abominations of Modern Society*,

³⁰⁰ Dwight Moody, *To All People*, 404.

³⁰¹ William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday: The Man and his Methods*, 223; this “rough” culture may have been exaggerated by Sunday, but it was certainly a real feature of Gilded-Age urban landscapes, where young men ‘loafed’ in the streets and attempted to flirt with, or sexually harass, young women. See Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 81-91.

described the ultimate impact of urban entertainments on the young in a lurid description of a local ‘wine-cellar’ where young people gathered:

Going into the door are depraved men and lost women. Some stagger. All blaspheme. Men with rings in their ears instead of their nose; and blotches of breast-pin. ... A slush of beer on floor and counter. A pistol falls out of a ruffian's pocket. By the gas-light a knife flashes. Low songs. They banter, and jeer, and howl, and vomit.³⁰²

Age, as much as gender, structured how sins were understood and articulated in the revival.

Sunday’s attack on materialism and “society women” was a class attack as well as a gendered one, linking populism with a resentment of the “refined” classes. Sunday attacked male elites, though not as frequently as “society” ladies, for acting as if they could ride to heaven in “Pullman palace” railway cars, and leave “notice with the porter not to call them ‘till Heaven was reached.”³⁰³ Attacks on alcohol could also be made to target elite society, such as when Sunday damned not the “bunch of town loafers in the beer joint,” but “the gilded wine room, where the downward course was started.”³⁰⁴ To be a “society” man or woman was to live an existence warped and perverted by the vices and materialism of urban wealth: “the society woman ... had no occasion to use brains. The society young man was devoted to fast horses, fast women, and drinking. The society girl was given to music, embroidery and painting. ‘And if you kissed her you’d die of painter’s colic.”³⁰⁵ Charles Stough went so far as to portray the devil as an aristocratic east-coast gentleman: “he don’t wear horns... he wears a silk hat... clothed in a broadcloth suit. ...He hasn’t got hoofs—he wears patent leather shoes. He doesn’t carry a

³⁰² De Witt Talmage, *Abominations of Modern Society*, 69.

³⁰³ "Billy Sunday Saving Sinners With Ball Talk," *San Francisco Call* (San Francisco, CA), February 12, 1909, 14

³⁰⁴ Text of the Three Sermons Preached Yesterday by Billy Sunday," *Evening Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), January 4, 1915, 14

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

pitchfork—it's a gold-headed cane."³⁰⁶ Sunday was fond of damning such figures in his sermons by contrasting them with humbler and more “plain” occupations: “if you had to get into heaven on the testimony of your washerwoman, could you make it?”³⁰⁷ [Image 6]. In Sunday and Stough's rural populist framework, elite culture was as dangerous and fearful as the tavern culture of the streets, shaping how the gendered sins of intemperance, dance, and urban entertainment were conceptualized and understood.

Attacks on social elites drew on a working-class narrative of revival often employed by the street campaigns of the Salvation Army or working-class evangelists like Alexander Irving.³⁰⁸ Gilded Age and Progressive-era revivalists like Sunday were eager to attract support from the working class. Prayer meetings were organized in factories, railroad shops, industrial plants, and prisons, usually at the noon hour to avoid time conflicts. These mini-revivals were meant to make the working classes more susceptible to the revival message, and emphasized the connection between manly work and Christian regeneration.³⁰⁹ Chapman's revivals featured sermons by evangelist John Elliot on “Our Lord's Message to Laboring Men,” presenting Christ as a rough, masculine tradesman preaching a practical, earthy gospel: “Christ was a laboring man. He wrought in the shop at Nazareth. He intelligently understood those who toil. He robbed hard toil of its bitterness. He uplifted by spiritual labor.”³¹⁰ Such messages were calculated to appeal to all “plain” Americans, connecting Anglo elements of the urban working class with rural and middle-class whites in a common Christian, Anglo-American identity. There is some

³⁰⁶ “Dr. Stough's Picture of the Modern Devil,” unidentified newspaper clipping [Altoona], January 6, 1915. Charles Stough Clippings, BGC Archives, CN 106, reel 1.

³⁰⁷ William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday — The Man and His Message*, 168.

³⁰⁸ See Kathryn Oberdeck, *Evangelist and the Impresario*, 217-258; Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 140-168.

³⁰⁹ Roger Bruns, *Preacher*, 102; also see William Biederwolf, *Evangelism*, 145-146.

³¹⁰ “Closing Scenes in the Great Chapman Campaign,” *Syracuse Journal*, n.d., Billy Graham Center Archives (Wheaton, Ill.), Papers of John Wilbur Chapman. CN 77.



Image 6. Source: William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday — The Man and His Message*, 168.

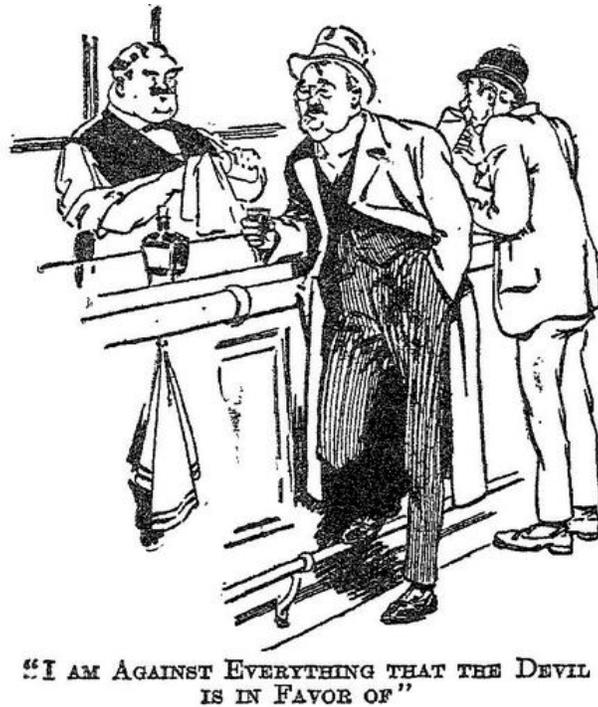


Image 7. In this image, a "society" man is depicted sipping cognac in a pinstripe suit. Sunday often attacked alcohol through the use of classed metaphors, depicting drink as a sin that was uniquely urban and associated with the leisured class. Source: William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday — The Man and His Message*, 186.

evidence that such efforts were successful at attracting elements of the “rough” working class, as conservative or critical papers sometimes used the “disreputable” classes present at revivals as evidence of their disgraceful character. A writer for the Catholic *St. Joseph’s Observer* wrote in 1919 that “the people Billy Sunday “converted” were not of a class that has proven to be of much value to the churches,” and that religion for them was merely a temporary distraction from drink.³¹¹

But the social message of the Sunday revivals was carefully constructed to attack only urban elites and parasitic capitalists, not the underlying economic system on which they relied. Sunday mirrored some of the reform movements of the 1900s when he denounced “child-labor exploiters ... political grafters ... food dopesters” and those employers “who will every year drive hundreds of cases of virtue over the line into vice by the pressure of starvation wages which they pay.”³¹² Urban inequality was identified as sin, but its solution was not reform but spiritual regeneration and personal conversion for the exploiters through Christ. If America was to be saved, it would be saved not through class warfare, but a “revival of the old time religion” that would pay the devil his due.³¹³

Prayer served as an additional means of materializing, exposing, and rejecting sin. Dwight Moody encouraged tabernacle attendees to submit prayers on paper for family members or friends who had succumbed to urban vice. During the meeting, Moody or an aide would read out the details of a particular prayer for a nameless sinner, encouraging the entire audience to focus their prayers in support of the grieved family member. To give one example, the note of a

³¹¹ "Billy Sunday Brand," *St. Joseph Observer* (St. Joseph, MO), July 26, 1919, 1.

³¹² "Billy Sunday on Social Religion," *The Literary Digest* (New York), March 6, 1915, 481; *The day book*, (Chicago, Il.) March 30, 1915, 14

³¹³ See for example "Text of the Three Sermons Preached Yesterday by Billy Sunday," *Evening Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), January 4, 1915, 14.

child praying for the return of his intemperate mother was read before the audience, followed by news that the mother had returned and that the child now prayed for her imminent conversion, providing both a pleasing narrative on the power of prayer and a reinforcement of the importance of motherhood to the family.³¹⁴ Whether effective or not, the ritual of the prayer served the purpose of removing sin from the contestable realm of daily life and materializing it in the space of the revival, where sin could be measured, contained, and defeated. In Boston, Moody prayed that “infidels and scoffers and jesters be reached to-night be the power of Thy Spirit. We know that human power cannot reach them. . . . but may the Spirit of God reach them.”³¹⁵ So great was his faith in the power of prayer, that during one revival in Fort Worth, Texas, Moody asked his gathered audience to pray for rain to help the city overcome a lingering drought, extending the power of the revival over the elements.³¹⁶

Prayer also allowed attendees of the revival to become participants in the service. At the end of one Moody meeting, the evangelist abruptly ended the sermon early and asked the audience “do you want to break with sin?” Rather than demand an immediate response, Moody insisted on waiting five minutes to let the audience pray and “think it over,” and then asked the question again. “Almost the whole crowd rose,” tears streaming down their cheeks, to declare their desire to have sin driven from their lives.³¹⁷ A sense of crowd agency, fictive or not, also punctuated Billy Sunday’s revivals, such as when he demanded during a sermon that his audience “step out and in the name of the Holy Spirit say to the forces of sin to come on. . . . get out and fight. Come on God’s representatives! Come on!”³¹⁸ During Stough’s 1915 revival in

³¹⁴ “Anecdotes of the Great Revival,” Moody Bible Institute archives, miscellaneous, 269.2, B979 1877.

³¹⁵ Dwight Moody, *To All People*, 252.

³¹⁶ *The Anaconda standard* (Anaconda, Montana), April 22, 1895, 1

³¹⁷ Dwight Moody, *Moody’s Latest Sermons*, 120.

³¹⁸ Text of the Three Sermons Preached Yesterday by Billy Sunday,” *Evening Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), January 4, 1915, 14

Altoona, he performed a similar ritual, but this time with a directly anti-commercial bent, asking the audience to throw their cigarettes and bags of smoking and chewing tobacco on the stage at the climax of the sermon, literally pelting the devil with his own sins.³¹⁹ Audiences in the revival, rather than merely being spectators to a service, were asked to be active participants in the religious world under construction in the revival. Their cooperation, whether weeping before the vices revivalists summoned in front of their eyes or rejoicing at the chance for salvation, served as a testament to the power of Christ in the city and the inevitable defeat of sin.

Embodying Salvation: Making Sacred Space in the City

I am not going to read anymore today. It is not necessary. If we get this into our hearts thoroughly it will be enough. The Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil.³²⁰

Regeneration, not reform, was the ultimate goal of the Moody revivals and their successors: regeneration of self, of place, and of the city. Original sin through Eve had tainted mankind, making moral turpitude, corruption, and death an inevitable accompaniment of the human condition. However, revivalists since long before the time of Charles Finney had preached the possibility of regeneration and human perfectibility in Christ. Eschewing the earlier Calvinist emphasis on innate depravity, evangelical Protestants in the Finney model saw sin as a corruptive force in the world that could be overcome through personal conversion and surrender to the Holy Spirit, with Christ's presence enveloping and eliminating the wilful self of the newly consecrated.³²¹

³¹⁹ Unidentified Newspaper [Altoona], January 25, 1915. Charles Stough Clippings, BGC Archives, CN 106, reel 1.

³²⁰ *Boston Globe*, Feb 3, 1877, 7.

³²¹ For Charles Finney's articulation of regeneration and its influence on Protestant evangelical theology in the nineteenth century, see Glenn A. Hewitt, *Regeneration and morality: a study of Charles Finney, Charles Hodge, John W. Nevin, and Horace Bushnell* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1991); Allen C. Guelzo, "An Heir or Rebel? Charles G. Finney and the New England Theology," *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring, 1997), 61-94.

But while Finney had worked regeneration in the fields and small towns of rural America, the revivals of the Gilded Age engaged in a different form of regeneration, the regeneration of the profane world of the city. Materializing sin was the first step in the process of working a revival, but it was only through the ritual of redemption and regeneration that sin could be beaten, cleansed, and redeemed. Salvation was not merely a metaphor to revivalists, but a testament to the power of Jesus Christ to transform America:

[They say] ‘We want a token. We want some evidence that the Bible is true.’ What greater evidence do you want? Look around you and see what Christ is doing. See how He is saving the oppressed. See how He is lifting up His arm to save the drunkard, the outcast and the unfortunate. Thank God for this day!³²²

Vanquishing sin through Christ was more than a piece of the revival, it was the heart of the entire revival process as it was understood and articulated in the period. Revivals were rituals whereby Protestants could experience not only the regeneration of their bodies to being born-again in Christ, but in which they could witness the regeneration of the spaces they lived in, living proof of the power of their religion in the modern world.

This process has a significant overlap with, but is not reducible, to the social reform movements that by the turn-of-the-century were attempting to redeem the city through charity and social work.³²³ While these campaigns shared revivalists’ concern with defining a Christian urban space, they differed dramatically in method. One of the hallmarks of mass-media revival culture was its abandonment of social reform, reflecting the shift from postmillennial theology’s emphasis on building the Kingdom of God on Earth to a premillennial belief that Christ’s return was imminent, negating the need for worldly activism. This shift has been labelled as “the great

³²² Dwight Moody, *To all People*, 369.

³²³ See Diane Winston, “The Cathedral of the Open Air,” in *Gods of the City*, 367-392; Mina Carson, *Settlement Folk: Social Thought and the American Settlement Movement, 1885–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

reversal” by some religious historians, marking the emergence of an economically conservative strain in evangelicalism that continued to hold power throughout much of the twentieth century.³²⁴ But this larger theological context can obscure the particular ritual purpose regeneration held in the Gilded Age and Progressive-era revival. Rather than being concerned with “saving” the city in the literal or social sense of reform, revivals sought to cleanse the city spiritually through the ritual performance of manifested sin defeated and Christians redeemed, demonstrating to the world that Christ was in the city.

Regeneration was a claim to space. At the conclusion of his first sermon in Boston, Moody declared from the pulpit “Let us go up and possess the land,” implying both a physical and imaginative colonisation of the city through the act of revival.³²⁵ Moody, Chapman, Sunday, Torrey, Biederwolf, Stough, and Smith all erected large, semi-permanent urban structures for their revivals, named tabernacles after the holy temple that had held God’s divine presence in ancient Jerusalem. These spaces, usually placed in the heart of downtowns, asserted the place of evangelical Protestant religion at the center of the urban landscape.³²⁶ In other cases, secular structures such as New York’s hippodrome were secured and converted into religious terrain.³²⁷ Sunday adorned the inside of his tabernacles with three-foot banners emblazoned with phrases such as “GET RIGHT WITH GOD” [image 8].³²⁸ So important was the physical presence of the tabernacle as a sanctified space that Moody personified it as embodying the revival:

Why [has] he erected this building[?] Did infidels do it? Did the enemies of Christ put it up? What does it mean in the heart of this great city? This very building ought to preach a

³²⁴ Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980) [originally published 1957]; George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 85-93

³²⁵ Dwight Moody, *To All People*, 23.

³²⁶ Bruce Evensen, *God’s Man for the Gilded Age*, 82-83.

³²⁷ James Findlay Jr., *Dwight L. Moody: American Evangelist*, 200.

³²⁸ Elijah P. Brown, *The Real Billy Sunday: the life and work of Rev. William Ashley Sunday, D. D., the baseball evangelist* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1914), 139.

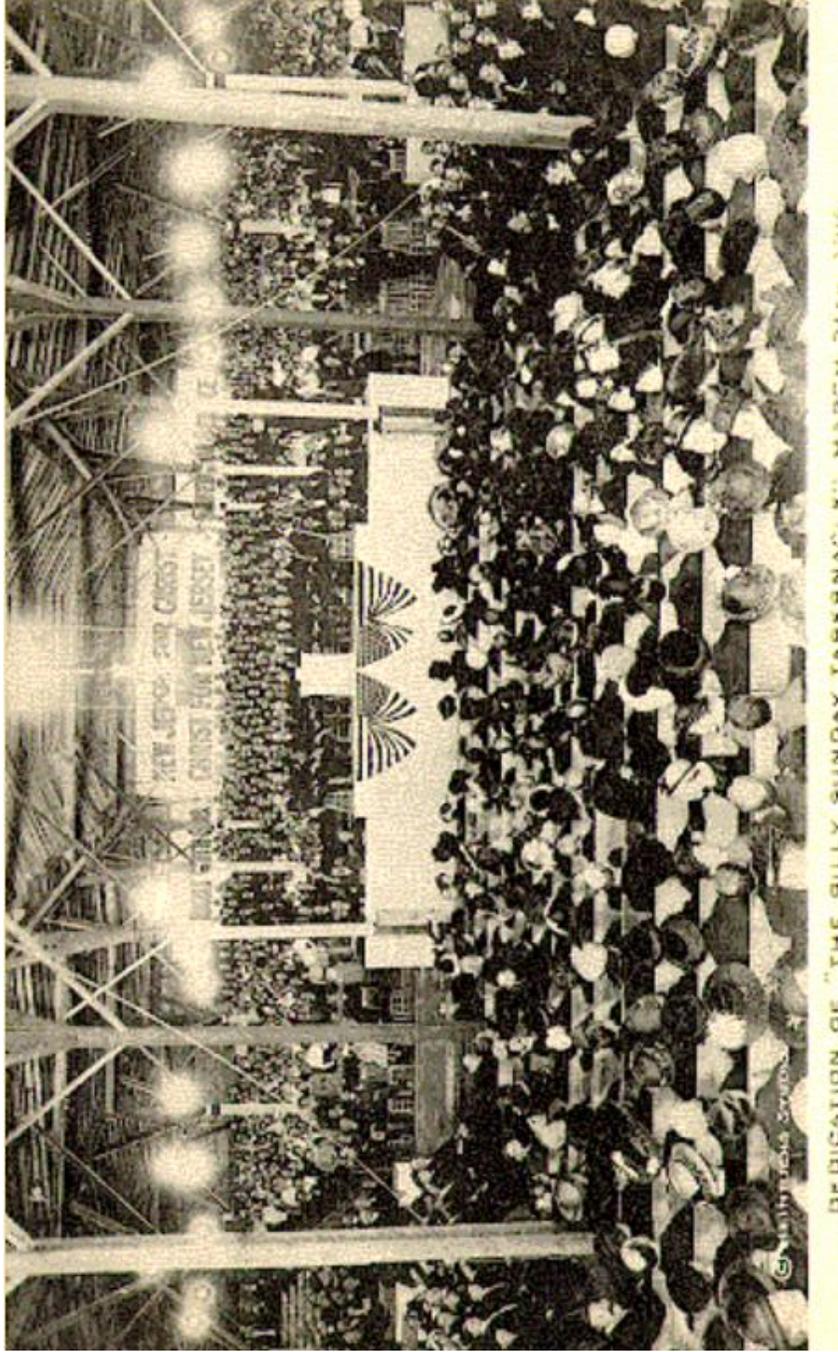


Image 8. Americans pack the Sunday tabernacle in Paterson, New Jersey in 1915. The banner behind the pulpit reads "New Jersey for Christ/ Christ for New Jersey." Source: Published online at Billy Graham Center Archives (Wheaton, Ill.). <http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/sunday/sunday25.html>

sermon more powerful than anything I can ever preach in Boston. It is the Son of God preaching for your lost soul. Every time your eye rests on this building you ought to say, "That is the Son of God seeking for me..."³²⁹

The scale of the tabernacle and its grandeur were particularly important in driving home Christ's stake in the city landscape. The Philadelphia tabernacle, with the support of department-store pioneer John Wannamaker, was advertised as having "10,008 seats," a number that was selected to be more impressive than a round 10,000 which might appear exaggerated to readers.³³⁰

Controlling space was not just an idea in the revival; regeneration extended into the urban technologies revivalists employed. While eighteenth-century evangelists had considered advertising religious campaigns to be profane, challenging God's singular power to work a revival, Moody's campaigns were painstakingly promoted. In the 1876 revival in Philadelphia, Moody contracted Thomas K. Cree to print 50,000 posters a week, papering the city with images of the tabernacle.³³¹ His "coordinating committee" further helped organize discount "excursion trains" from the country that allowed passengers to purchase tabernacle tickets in advance, assuring a steady flow of attendees from neighbouring towns.³³² Moody relied on legions of volunteers to hand out flyers, put up posters, and sell tickets, mimicking the advertising tactics of the contemporary theater.³³³ These volunteers were primarily young men and women, although the former was privileged in the aggressive public work of the street: "the young men distribute cards of invitation, visit the public-houses, beer-gardens ...one of the young men who stood on the street to invite and urge the heedless energy of the crowd ... stood bravely by his post, and

³²⁹ Dwight Moody, *To All People*, 34.

³³⁰ Bruce Evensen, *God's Man for the Gilded Age*, 82.

³³¹ Marion L. Bell, *Crusade in the City: Revivalism in Nineteenth-century Philadelphia* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1977), 216; James Findlay Jr., *Dwight L. Moody: American Evangelist*, 199.

³³² Bruce Evensen, *God's Man for the Gilded Age*, 86.

³³³ Marion L. Bell, *Crusade in the City*, 216-217.

gave all and sundry a hearty invitation to the meeting.”³³⁴ Reporters, who always had seats reserved for them in the front of the tabernacle, provided further free advertisement for the event, helping to generate continued interest.³³⁵

Thirty-some years later, Billy Sunday built the advertising techniques of Moody into a science. Before conducting a revival, Sunday would insist that the local churches agreed to forego Sunday services for the duration of the campaign, ensuring that crowds of the devout would attend his tabernacle meetings.³³⁶ Beginning weeks or months before the revival, Sunday would then divide the city into districts of a few blocks and assign a volunteer to organize a prayer meeting in each one, ideally in the home of an unconverted family. The combined work of professional and casual volunteers was credited with reaching far more people than the actual revival meetings, and by late 1910s were an integral piece of Sunday’s campaigns.³³⁷ In the month before Sunday’s Philadelphia campaign, volunteers organized 5,000 prayer meetings a night, advertising by large signs posted to the front doors of houses. Newspapers then publicized the numbers in attendance at the prayer meetings, demonstrating the fertile soil that awaited Sunday’s redemptive message and raising public interest in the upcoming religious spectacle.³³⁸ This work required massive numbers of volunteers and funds, both of which Sunday expected to be furnished by local churches in competition to win Sunday’s services. The 1917 New York campaign alone attracted almost 50,000 volunteers and raised enough finances to both pay off the campaign and grant Sunday a free-will offering of \$120,500 for his services.³³⁹ By using the

³³⁴ Henry Burns Hartzler, *Moody in Chicago; or, The World’s Fair in Chicago* (New York : Fleming H. Revell Co., 1894), 174.

³³⁵ There is some overlap here between the tactics of evangelists and the contemporary campaigns of the generally less-respectable Salvation Army, who also relied on street theatrics and public advertising to attract audiences. For a Canadian example, see Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 156-165.

³³⁶ William T. Eliis, *Billy Sunday — The Man and His Message*, 62.

³³⁷ "Abjuring the Sawdust Trail." *The Literary Digest* (New York), October 8 1927, 32-33.

³³⁸ Elijah P. Brown, *The Real Billy Sunday*, 63-64.

³³⁹ Lyle Dorsett, *Billy Sunday and the Redemption of Urban America*, 91.



Image 9. Crowds pack around Sunday's podium for an outdoor stump speech in New York City. Large, outdoor displays such as this demonstrated the power and popularity of revivals even in the most secular and worldly American cities. Note the diversity of the crowd and prevalence of women and young boys. Source: Bowery Boys New York Historical Archive.

logistics of the modern city to their advantage, evangelists adapted themselves to the urban spaces of the Gilded Age and Progressive era and demonstrated that evangelicals could dominate the cultural life of the city.

Regeneration sometimes extended beyond the space of the tabernacle. During the Chicago's World Fair, Moody rented Forepaugh's circus for two Sunday mornings, and beneath the raised trapeze wire, on the stage "where the performing lions do their turn," sung hymns that "left a visible sense of awe upon the multitude."³⁴⁰ In the words of one reporter, "the spirit of God was present."³⁴¹ The Sunday meetings were a big enough success that the circus manager attempted to convince Moody to join the circus fulltime, an offer he declined.³⁴² At times revivalists even led "raids" to reclaim profane spaces. The "Saloon Evangelist" Wes Asher and his wife would launch impromptu revivals of taverns in Philadelphia and other American cities. Rather than smashing the saloons or rebuking its inhabitants, Asher would set up a portable "baby organ" and, while his wife played, lead the gathered men in the singing of a few short hymns with the cooperation of the bartender, who withheld drinks for the duration of the service [image 10]. Afterwards, Asher would thank the men and drinks resumed.³⁴³ Moody himself endorsed such methods of evangelism, declaring that no work was more blessed.³⁴⁴ While personal conversion was an obvious goal of such demonstrations, their most important legacy was in displaying religion's ability to transform, albeit temporarily, even the most profane and secular localities. The power such a symbolic claim to space could have was testified to in the

³⁴⁰ *Chicago Tribune*, June 12, 1893, 1, quoted in James Gilbert, *Perfect Cities*, 189; William Moody, *Life of D.L. Moody*, 415-416.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 416.

³⁴³ "Barroom Evangelist Sings and Prays in Dasch Tavern, with Barkeepers Aiding," *The North American Philadelphia*, July 4, 1901.

³⁴⁴ Moody, *To All People*, 170; Dwight L. Moody, *Echoes from the Pulpit and Platform*, 245-246.

Barroom Evangelist Sings and Prays in Dasch Tavern, With Barkeepers Aiding

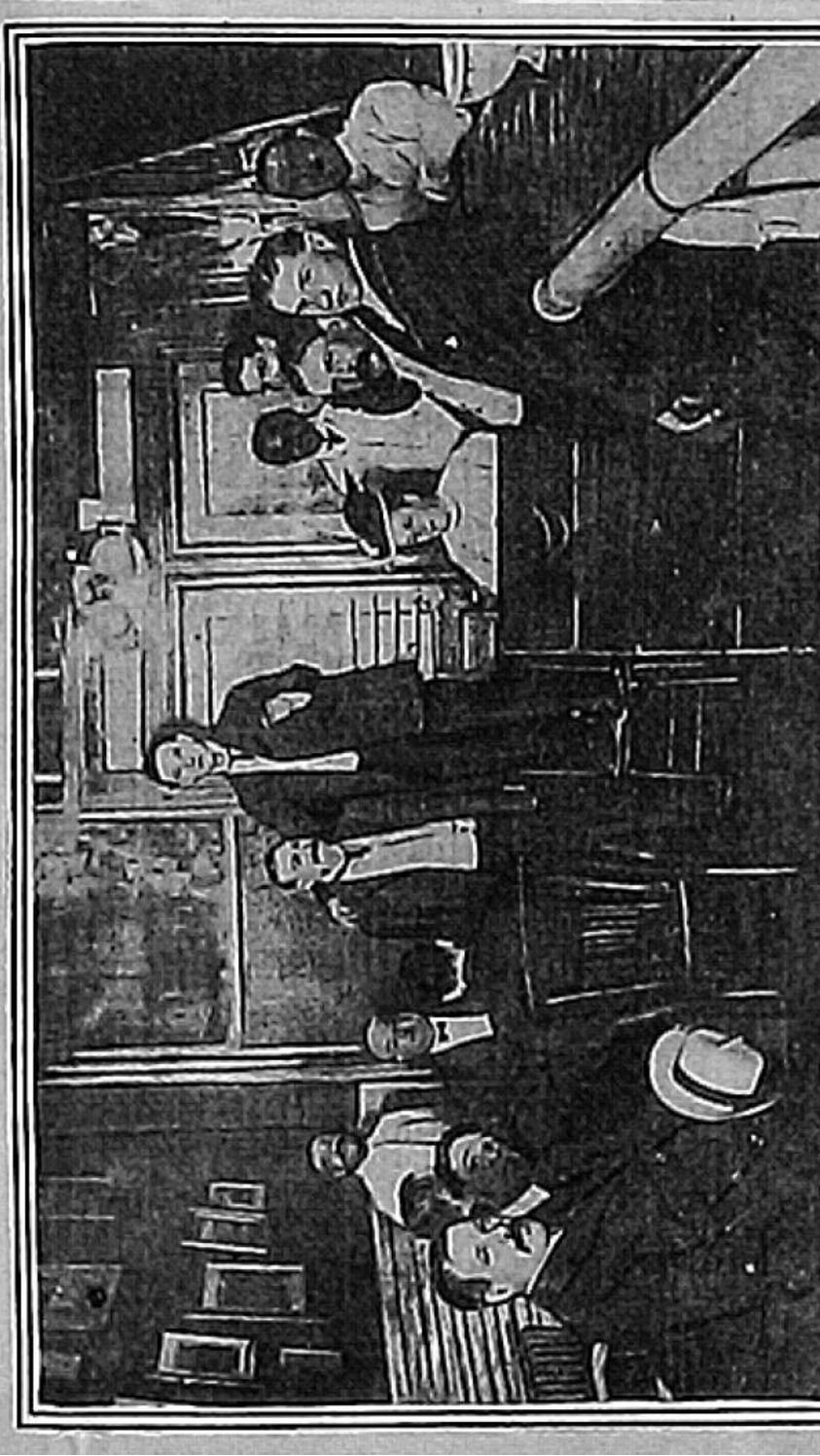


Image 10. William and Virginia Asher launch a saloon "raid" with the cooperation of bartender and customers, blurring the line between sacred and profane spaces in Philadelphia. Source: "Barroom Evangelist Sings and Prays in Dasch Tavern, with Barkeepers Aiding," *The North American Philadelphia*, July 4, 1901.

reaction of a U.S. mail car conductor who, according to the *Philadelphia American*, was stunned by the Asher revival:

The conductor stood stock still, as though stunned, his hand grasping the rope above his head and his mouth open. ...From behind the swinging doors ... of Dasch's tavern, blaring with light and glittering with gilt posters proclaiming ... the particular brand of beer it sells, came a blast of sacred music.³⁴⁵

Embellished or not, the mail car attendant's reaction demonstrated that the mixing of profane and sacred was more than a novelty for many urban Americans; instead, it laid a claim to the mythic soul of the city itself. Billy Sunday, after materializing sin in his revivals and bringing the audience to a sentimental climax of tears, would plead with God to intercede and save the, admittedly undeserving, urban world:

Help old Omaha, God, throw your arms around her, Lord, and help her. Go into the barber shops, Lord, into the court house and city hall, into hotels and stores, factories and saloons, Lord. Help the man in the street, the floater and drunkard. He's on the ropes, and groggy, Lord. The devil has him almost out; one more stiff uppercut would finish him. Help him, Lord, to square his shoulders, raise his dukes and cry: 'Come on, old devil, there's one more good punch in me yet.'³⁴⁶

"Old Omaha" could not and did not exist; in reality the diversifying city of Italian and Irish Catholics, industrial workers, and municipal elites had little hope of being united behind a Protestant message of evangelical regeneration and self-sacrifice. But as symbols, revival meetings, both inside and outside of the tabernacle, showed the continuing power of Christians to control the spaces in which they moved.

The stories evangelicals told themselves about the city and the rituals through which they made sacred spaces were crucial to the purpose of the revival. Revivals created a modern Protestant identity in the streets, vibrant and competitive enough to thrive in the heart of Babylon

³⁴⁵ "Barroom Evangelist Sings and Prays in Dasch Tavern, with Barkeepers Aiding," *The North American Philadelphia*, July 4, 1901.

³⁴⁶ *Omaha daily bee.*, October 10, 1915, 13

and spit in the face of sin. Just as rationality and the media proclaimed the modernity of evangelism, claims to space, symbolic or literal, marked out the boundaries of Christ's kingdom over the urban landscapes that epitomized the modern. Sin, redemption, and regeneration were rituals that bled into the streets, blurring the binaries between secular and religious even as evangelists sought to flatten and reify them through narratives of Christ driving the devil from the city.

Chapter 4: The Family Bound: Imagining Children and Mothers in the Gilded Age and Progressive-era Revival

When Wilbur Chapman revived Roanoke, New York in the fall of 1906, the local *Roanoke World News* declared that there was no meeting more interesting than the revival for children. Hosted by a Chapman-aide and physician named Dr. Schaeffer, the revival meeting “pleasantly began” when Schaeffer asked the gathered children to repeat his name. “‘Shaffer’ cried out a number of children. ‘I thought you were more polite’ he replied. ‘Mr. Schaeffer’ cried out some, while others said ‘Revered Schaeffer,’ and some Dr. Schaeffer.’” Having established his authority over the meeting, Schaeffer began to preach about sin and salvation through a curious series of metaphors. Schaeffer “asked the gathered children how many thought they saw him,” and when all replied that they did he again reprimanded them: “‘No ... you only see the house I live in; the house God has given me.’” Turning the metaphor around, Schaeffer went on to describe the house to the children in terms of their own bodies – their limbs were the parlor and the dining room, their mouths the front door, their eyes the windows, their head the roof, and their stomach the kitchen. Some houses were well-built and strong, while some were dilapidated and ruined by neglect. When the children sinned, they neglected their houses, allowing their windows to shatter and their roof to cave in, marking their bodies with the signs of sin.

To drive his point home, Schaeffer called up a young boy named John from the audience. Placing him on the stand, he began to wrap the boy in a string. “John tried cigarette smoking and after thinking it over decided to break it off” Schaeffer declared as he tied a knot. He then indicated that John should “break” the power of sin by ripping the twine. John promptly did, and broke free. Schaeffer then called another boy, Fred, from the audience and slowly wrapped a rope around him. When the rope was tied, he asked Fred to break the power of the devil by

freeing himself from the rope. Fred tried, but he “could not break away from bad habits” and therefore remained tied [image 11]. Such was sin, Schaeffer declared to the assembled sea of young faces: “it was easy for the young to break away from the first bad habits, but they grew worse and worse with the devil’s encouragement.” He then asked the children to tell him how large the devil was — “as big as the church, as all the churches, as the mountains.” This gigantic devil could snatch them away and drag them down to hell at any time, for “there was no hope except through the savior. Go to him and he will strike off your shackles and set you free.” Having concluded his sermon, Schaeffer asked the children to raise their hands if they were ready to break the power of sin and intemperate habits in their lives to avoid the bounds of the devil. More than a hundred responded, leading the *World News* reporter to regard the “most interesting” meeting a great success.³⁴⁷

Evangelicals invested a great degree of energy into forming their children into reflections of their own religious beliefs, using the revival as an opportunity to educate, discipline, and correct the young. They also in the process created the family as a metaphor for virtue and religion in the “modern” world. The family was a revival in microcosm. The narratives they told of virtuous mothers, innocent children, fallen sons, and drunken fathers symbolized the larger struggle between sin and redemption. By controlling and ordering childhood in their revivals, evangelists like Schaeffer demonstrated the vitality of the evangelical community and represented evangelicalism as a modern religion. Creating Christian children was a way of creating Christian modernity, using the family as a canvas on which to dramatize the health and vigour of the Christian Republic.

³⁴⁷ “Meetings of Evangelists,” *Roanoke World News*, October 6, 1906, Papers of John Wilbur Chapman. CN 77.



Image 11. Dr. Schaeffer demonstrates how sin and bad habits bind the bodies of children. Source: "Men, Women, and Children," *Roanoke World News*, October 8, 1906, Papers of John Wilbur Chapman. CN 77.



A CHILDREN'S MEETING IN BRISTOL, ENGLAND.

Image 12. Reuben Torrey and Charles Alexander's revival in Bristol also featured children's meetings. The banner "Get Right with God" admonishes children to remain free from bad habits, highlighting the anxiety over children's nature that continued to be a central concern of the Progressive-era revival. Source: *Institute Tie*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Sep., 1904, 24Ephemera of Reuben Archer Torrey Senior, CN 107.

But evangelists also invested childhood with a great degree of anxiety. While the innocence of youth might be sacralised, for evangelicals it also needed to be shaped to reflect and obey the world of its parents. Evangelicals experienced their own religion through the bodies of their children. They praised children as sacred redeemers whose lives brought their parents closer to divine love, but they also expressed fear over the potential for the young to transgress and destabilize the religious community. Gender was critical to this process; boys were invested with particular danger as sites of sin in need of redemption, while girls were more likely to be constructed as innocents whose primary moral danger lay in their exposure to young boys. Mothers, closely associated with children, were faced with the same dichotomy between purity and depravity, walking a tightrope between Godliness and blame. Through the pageant of family narratives and the drive to discipline young bodies into conformity, revivalists attempted to embody redemption in mother and child, leading to a discursive tension in which women and children were praised as metaphors of salvation and damned as harbingers of sin. Redeemers and reprobates, mothers and children occupied a liminal state in the revivals of the Gilded Age and the Progressive era that embodied the uncertain, anxious world of American modernity in the flesh.

The Family Pageantry of the Revival: Inventing Childhood in the Nineteenth Century

What is “modern” childhood? When Philippe Ariès used the term in 1960, he meant to delineate the division between a pre-modern culture with little idea of the “child” as a species and a post-Enlightenment world where children were separated and demarcated apart from adults. In the years that followed, numerous critics attacked Ariès for his assertion that “childhood” as a category was uniquely modern, revealing a rich world of medieval age categories and familial

relationships that undermined Ariès central periodization.³⁴⁸ Yet, for all its problems, the idea of “modern” childhood continues to hold value. More contemporary historians have shed Ariès universalism, but the process by which children were placed under the gaze of adults and submitted to a scientific, rationalized education in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries continues to support the general division between a “modern” childhood and what came before. In this sense, childhood continues to be one of the grounds on which historians have defined modernity as a substance.³⁴⁹

Between the American Revolution and the Civil War, American understandings of the family were significantly restructured. The influence of Enlightenment philosophy, particularly the work of Rousseau and his belief in the inherent morality of mankind, challenged older Calvinist claims to the innate depravity of the soul. Rather than believing children were inherently sinful, American educators and reformers began to present the young as essentially moral creatures who needed to be trained to become citizens through a spirit of permissive love. So fundamental was this transformation in the child’s nature that Bernard Wishy identified the last third of the nineteenth century as the age of the “child redeemer” in literature: a saintly, spiritual innocent whose inner moral compass was superior to that of adults and capable of providing moral guidance even to their parents.³⁵⁰ Other authors were less sanguine about the transformation of childhood in the antebellum period. Rachel Cleves has argued that the great

³⁴⁸ Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962); For important critiques of Ariès, focusing on his claim that medieval childhood did not exist, see S. Crawford, *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999); Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001).

³⁴⁹ This paragraph also draws on Foucault’s conception of modernity and the child, especially the silencing of discussion surrounding childhood sexuality which accompanied the institutionalization of education in the eighteenth century. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) [originally published 1978], 27-42.

³⁵⁰ See Bernard Wishy, *The Child and the Republic: the Dawn of Modern American Child Nurture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968); also see Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: a History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2004), 75-93.

shift in childhood education in the early nineteenth century was a move from physical discipline to “discipline of the heart.” Educators de-emphasized corporeal punishment and championed self-control as an antidote for the uncontrolled passions that were seen as a root cause of the social disorder and violence that had plagued Jacobin France.³⁵¹ While Wishy argued for a progressive narrative of child rearing as the triumph of Enlightenment ideals over the neo-orthodoxy of eighteenth-century Calvinism, other historians presented the rise of the “redeemable” child as a new and more sophisticated means of representing power relationships through the bodies of children.³⁵²

Representations of motherhood also changed significantly in the nineteenth century. The breach with Britain following the Revolution symbolically cut America off from the “father” figure of the King, while the need to develop new Republican institutions led to a great degree of anxiety over whether social order could be maintained in a democratic framework.³⁵³ “Republican motherhood” was one answer to this quandary. Women, whose role as educators to the young had long been seen as secondary to fathers and ministers, were now championed as having a civic duty to educate their children to be virtuous citizens. As a result, women’s education — long seen as unimportant — expanded rapidly to fit the new role of the Republican

³⁵¹ Rachel Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America*, 206-219; also see Richard Brodhead’s notion of “disciplined intimacy.” Richard Brodhead, “Sparing the Rod: Discipline and Fiction in Antebellum America,” *Representations* No. 21 (Winter, 1988), 67-96

³⁵² The influence of Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* should not be underestimated here. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, tr. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) [originally published 1977]. However, it is worth noting that Rachel Cleves explicitly took an anti-Foucault stance in her book, instead arguing that “discipline of the heart” represented an antidote to the physical violence of the Revolutionary generation. See Rachel Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America*, 217.

³⁵³ For the attack on the king as a “father figure” in Revolutionary rhetoric, see Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

mother, who was sacralised as controlling the fate of the nation even as she was more and more firmly associated with the home.³⁵⁴

Towards the end of the century, motherhood and childhood changed once again. The social transformation of the city in the late nineteenth century accompanied a new campaign to rationalize childcare away from the control of parents, leading to the emergence of the study of child psychology, the dominance of compulsory education, and a new reform movement to “save” urban working-class children from abuse and neglect: changes which together have inspired some historians to refer to the period after 1890 as the “century of the child.”³⁵⁵ Larger demographic trends contributed to the shift. Average family size fell from six to three between 1850 and the 1910s, which combined with the slow but gradual rise of white married women working outside the home (from 4.6% to 9% between 1880 and 1920) and the steady withdrawal of children from the labour force fed anxieties surrounding the importance of educating and protecting the young.³⁵⁶ Mothers were alternatively praised for their maternal influence and condemned for their tendency to “coddle” or emasculate their male children, foreshadowing attacks on “momism” in the 1940s and 50s.³⁵⁷ The medicalization of childcare continued to privilege the cult of motherhood while increasingly taking the authority of education away from

³⁵⁴ For a sampling of the significant literature on republican motherhood, see Linda K. Kerber, “The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment—An American Perspective,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2, (Summer, 1976), pp. 187–205; Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Jan Lewis, “The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 689-721; In the mid-nineteenth century, the image of Republican motherhood would help form the cult of domesticity, as women’s role as mothers continued to be revered with a spiritual awe while increasingly being seen as natural only within the domestic sphere of the home. See Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Women’s Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); For a historiographical overview of the separate spheres thesis, see Kim Warren, “Separate Spheres: Analytical Persistence in United States Women’s History,” *History Compass*, Vol.5, No. 1, (Jan., 2007), 262-277.

³⁵⁵ See Ann Hulbert, “The Century of the Child,” *Wilson Quarterly*, Volume 23, No. 1 (January, 1999), 14-29; Also see Ann Hulbert, *Raising America: Experts, Parents, and a Century of Advice About Children* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003); Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft*, 185-199.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 216; Dora L. Costa, “From Mill Town to Board Room: The Rise of Women’s Paid Labor,” *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 14, no. 4 (Autumn, 2000), 104-106.

³⁵⁷ For literature on “momism,” see Kyle A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

mothers, shifting power to state institutions and the “experts” who now placed children under the gaze of the scientist.

Revivals themselves have a long history of privileging youth and motherhood, forming what Mary Ryan has called a “family pageantry.” In her analysis, revivals began as a way to reinforce a sense of symbolic patriarchy and social order on the chaotic, fluid world of Oneida County, providing a family narrative that reconciled the contradiction between the covenanted families of the eighteenth century and the commercialized, urban cities that emerged in the wake of the Erie Canal. But Ryan further argued that the revivals themselves transformed the family, dealing the death blow to the doctrine of child depravity by forming “the relationships between mothers and children into the building blocks of evangelism.”³⁵⁸ Women expressed their religious involvement in the revival by converting their children and relatives, and in the process “domesticated” both religion and child nurture from stern, patriarchal modes towards “a more decidedly privatized and feminized form of religious and social reproduction...” marked by “maternal affection” and observation of the young.³⁵⁹ In some ways, Ryan matched neatly with William McLoughlin’s original thesis that revivals were a method of restoring and re-articulating order in moments of crisis and change — midwives to social transformations.³⁶⁰ But Ryan’s conclusion that the Oneida revivals helped usher in a “feminization” of American religion has since been critiqued as exaggerating women’s influence in mainstream Protestantism.³⁶¹

Gilded Age and Progressive-era revivals were not female worlds, nor were they in any sense “feminized.” Rather than women or a particular model of childhood gaining or losing

³⁵⁸ Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 91.

³⁵⁹ Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 104 and 102.

³⁶⁰ See William McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*.

³⁶¹ For recent work contesting the “feminization” thesis in nineteenth-century American Protestantism, see Karin Gedge, *Without benefit of clergy : women and the pastoral relationship in nineteenth-century American culture* (Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2003).

power through the revival, the revival dramatized the tension in how both mothers and children were represented. Robert Orsi's work on childhood is useful in explaining the incongruous world of the Gilded Age and Progressive-era revival. Orsi has argued for the symbolic and representative power of children in the construction of American-Catholic culture in the twentieth century: "children represent among other things the future of the faith standing there in front of oneself; at stake are the very existence, duration, and durability of a particular religious world."³⁶² Children's willingness to participate in religious rituals legitimated the religious community, while their refusal exposed its vulnerability. Children's bodies represented a media through which religion itself could be experienced: "Children's bodies, rationalities, imaginations, and desires have all been privileged media for giving substance to religious meaning, for making the sacred present and material, not only *for* children but *through* them too, for adults in relation to them."³⁶³ Orsi might have gone farther and included the way parents, especially mothers, were also represented as part of the ritual of the idealized family. Adults taught children to reflect their beliefs, and in that reflection saw proof of the vibrancy of their own religion and its potential to carry on into the future. But because children could not be relied upon to always act in accord with these representations, their religiosity could also engender anxiety. American-Catholic culture was awash with stories of drunken altar boys and disobedient children, who threatened "destruction and profanation" by their refusal to conform to their prescribed religious identities, revealing a complex ordering of children within Catholic religion.³⁶⁴

³⁶² Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 77.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

This anxiety explains the complex representations surrounding the family in mass-media Protestant revivalism at the end of the nineteenth century. Both children and mothers existed in a state of tension in the revival. They were at once symbols of Christ's redemptive power and the mark of a material, encroaching world — proof of the power and vibrancy of the Christian community and evidence of its vulnerability and corruption. The confused, varied forms evangelical used to represent both is evidence that within the revival family and childhood was a fluid, inchoate category, not easily made to conform to a single, normative model.³⁶⁵ Instead, evangelists represented families in multiple, sometimes incompatible, languages, seeking to flatten mothers and children into a narrative of the ideal family.³⁶⁶

The Child Redeemed and the Child Condemned

The conversion of children and adolescents was considered a sacred responsibility of the revival, and young people may have consisted of the lion share of converts in the Gilded Age and Progressive era.³⁶⁷ John Macpherson, summarizing the success of Moody's earlier revivals in England, claimed that "the immense number of the children of Christian parents and other young persons religiously trained who were converted was a striking feature of this revival. The majority of converts probably consisted of this class."³⁶⁸ William Biederwolf, reviewing his career, went so far as to claim "nine-tenths of all Christian people were converted before they were twenty ... Somewhere in the early adolescence is the normal age for coming into a healthy

³⁶⁵ This concurs with David McLeod's work on rival models of childhood in the progressive era. See David I. McLeod, *Age of the Child: Children in America, 1890-1920* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998).

³⁶⁶ It is worth mentioning Philip Greven's work on temperaments here. Greven hypothesized that antebellum America could be understood as a series of competing temperaments — evangelical, moderate, and progressive— a thesis which highlighted the complex representations surrounding children in the nineteenth century. See Philip J. Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: patterns of child-rearing, religious experience, and the self in early America* (New York : Knopf, 1977).

³⁶⁷ Nancy Cott came to a similar conclusion in her research. See Nancy Cott, "Young Women in the Second Great Awakening in New England," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1/2 (Autumn, 1975), 15-29.

³⁶⁸ John Macpherson, *Revival and revival-work*, 45.

religious consciousness...³⁶⁹ Children were everywhere remarked on as attendees to the revival, and their successful conversion attracted some of the greatest attention and praise from both evangelists and the press.

Billy Sunday argued that the salvation of America lay in reaching children: “Keep the devil out of the boys and girls and he will get out of the world. The old sinners will die off if we keep the young ones clean.”³⁷⁰ In another sermon, he declared that “if you want to solve the problem for the future get hold of the young men now... Save your boys and girls ... and you launch a life-boat.”³⁷¹ For Moody, the body of every child was a potential savior: “My friends, in that little boy with his tattered clothes and uncombed hair there may be a Martin Luther.”³⁷² Children’s spiritual health was symbolic of the spiritual community as a whole, inveighing children’s religiosity with intense symbolic meaning: “There is power in a word or act to blight a boy, and through him, curse a community. There is power enough in a word to tincture the life of that child so it will become a power to lift the world to Jesus Christ.”³⁷³ The bodies of children were metaphors for both sin and redemption and sites of the divine; every child saved brought the revival closer to God, while every child lost was a tragedy for the whole community.

The defense of youth was a primary rationale for damning urban vice in the revival, as childhood was made a site of fragile innocence, vulnerable to the encroaching power of modern sin. During one service, Moody pulled a lost child onto the stage and, working the child’s predicament into his sermon, began to cry “a lost child! A lost child!” until the child’s mother

³⁶⁹ William Biederwolf, *Evangelism*, 93.

³⁷⁰ Billy Sunday, “Motherhood Sermon,” 5, Papers of William Ashley "Billy" Sunday and Helen Amelia (Thompson) Sunday, CN 61, Box 9, Folder 66.

³⁷¹ William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday — The Man and his Message*, 325.

³⁷² Dwight Moody, *Glad Tidings*, 49.

³⁷³ Billy Sunday, *Motherhood*, 5.

was located, comparing the lot of that child to all Christians in search of Christ.³⁷⁴ The rhetoric of defending childhood was a primary language in the revival. In 1909, William Biederwolf expanded his evangelizing duties by founding the “Family Altar League.” The purpose of the League was to encourage parents to re-commit themselves to the domestic sphere by taking a pledge to devote a significant portion of their time to their children’s spiritual lives. In Biederwolf’s view, defending the family was akin to defending society as a whole, structuring his whole sermon rhetoric: “I tell you the curse of Almighty God is on the liquor traffic. You say to the saloon, ‘You can’t have my boy’ – very well, then go a bit farther and say, ‘You cannot have my neighbors boy.’”³⁷⁵ But it was Billy Sunday who was the greatest virtuoso of using children’s bodies to symbolize the war against sin:

If you knew that your boy with eyes so blue –
 With manly tread and heart so true,
 Should enter yonder bar-room bright
 And stain his soul in one wild night.
 What would you do then; what would you do?

If you knew that your girl with silken hair –
 With winsome way and face so fair,
 By felon drink at last were seen
 To follow the steps of Magdalene,
 What would you do then; what would you do?³⁷⁶

At the conclusion of his booze sermon, Billy Sunday would call four boys from the audience and clutch them around himself as he shouted the final lines of his sermon: “I would not give one boy for every dirty dollar you get from the hell-soaked liquor business or from every brewery and distillery this side of hell.”³⁷⁷ Biederwolf and Gipsy Smith also used young boys during their

³⁷⁴ W. Glyn Evans, *Profiles of Revival Leaders*, 70.

³⁷⁵ Ray Garrett, *William Edward Biederwolf: A Biography*, 42.

³⁷⁶ Billy Sunday, “Get on the Water Wagon,” reprinted in Dorsett, *Billy Sunday and the Redemption of Urban America*, 206.

³⁷⁷ Billy Sunday, “Get on the Water Wagon,” reprinted in Lyle Dorsett, *Billy Sunday and the Redemption of Urban America*, 205.

sermons on booze to materialize in the flesh the risks America faced. The bodies of children — especially boys — symbolized the potential virtuous American civilization that was under threat by the vices and materialism of the city, reducing youth to a passive role in the revival as a metaphor for goodliness and temptation.

Revivalists frequently recounted stories of boys and young men redeemed from the power of sin. Stories of drunken sons saved by praying mothers were ever present in the sermons and hymns of the revival, a longstanding narrative of American evangelicals that became even more omnipresent towards the end of the century.³⁷⁸ Robert Lowry, a volunteer in the Moody campaigns, wrote the hymn “Where is My Boy Tonight,” connecting sin to absent children and redemption to the restoration of the familial order: “O where is my boy tonight? ... Once he was pure as morning dew, As he knelt at his mother’s knee; No face was as bright, no heart more true, And none was so sweet as he.”³⁷⁹ Ira Sankey, Moody’s music leader, claimed in his autobiography that the hymn had a powerful effect on wayward sons attending the revivals, relating five anecdotes of boys who had been overcome with emotion by the song and converted on the spot.³⁸⁰

Regardless of the stories’ veracity, the popularity and continued use of the hymn spoke to the way in which redemption was structured through family metaphors. In the Sunday revivals, the sin of alcohol was often represented through the damage it wrought to the family unit:

³⁷⁸ This was an old association in American culture, dating back to the eighteenth century. For a recent work on the connection of drunkard narratives to children and the family before 1870, see Elaine F. Parsons, *Manhood Lost*.

³⁷⁹ Robert Lowry, in *The Fountain of Song*, 1877, published online at Cyberhymnal.org
<http://cyberhymnal.org/htm/w/i/m/wimbtont.htm>

Accessed April 3, 2013

³⁸⁰ Ira D. Sankey, *My Life and the Story of the Gospel Hymns* (New York and London: Harpers and Brothers Publishers, 1907), 303-305.

In a northwest city a preacher sat at his breakfast table one Sunday morning. The doorbell rang, he answered it, and there stood a little boy, twelve years of age. He was on crutches, right leg off at the knee, shivering, and he said ‘Please sir, will you come up to the jail and talk and pray with papa. He murdered mama. Papa was good and kind, but whiskey did it, and I have to support my three little sisters. . . . Will you come home and be with us when they bring him back? The governor says we can have his body after they hang him.’³⁸¹

The pain of sin could be best manifested to revival audiences through the pageantry of the corrupted family and the ruined bodies of children.³⁸²

The redemption of childhood was also a redemption of the racial and ethnic uncertainty that haunted many Anglo Americans in the Gilded Age. As numerous authors have noted, the 1880s and 90s saw the resurgence of nativism in the United States, leading to rise of “Anglo-Saxon Americans” as a term to differentiate new waves of Southern European and Irish immigrants from “native” stock.³⁸³ Religion offered a comforting narrative whereby the ethnic others filling America’s cities could be converted and cleansed into a new generation of Christian Americans. One aide of the Moody revival at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair described the following scene at a children’s meeting:

Sitting on the front seat is a fair, white-faced, flaxen-haired Swede, eyes as blue as the sky . . . with hands folded in her lap, all ready to listen. . . . Next to her is a dusky Italian ; she has on stockings, no shoes, dress all torn, face all aglow, with eyes full of pathos, face full of eager attention, love for Jesus shining through all . . . Next behind come flashing Irish eyes — a boy and girl of eleven and twelve — ready either for smiling or weeping, yet underneath all determined to be Christians. Then come a couple children from the sunny South, with skins darker than Italians, but with faces grown serious as they listened

³⁸¹ Billy Sunday, “Get on the Water Wagon,” reprinted in Lyle Dorsett, *Billy Sunday and the Redemption of Urban America*, 205.

³⁸² Such metaphors also had much wider salience in American culture until roughly the 1930s. See for example the popularity of *Ten Nights in a Barroom*, which, while written in 1854, remained popular at the turn-of-the-century, eventually being made into six silent films and one talkie in 1931.

³⁸³ For literature on nativism in the late nineteenth century, see Roger Daniels, “The Immigrant Experience in the Gilded Age,” in *The Gilded Age*, 92-94; for a British-American cross comparison of the emergence of Anglo-Saxon racial identity, see Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1981).

to the gospel. . . . [Some of the boys] are to be the future alderman of Chicago. If they are truly converted the city will be blessed.³⁸⁴

Of course, not all Americans were convinced that immigrants could be redeemed from their racial character. Billy Sunday was less overtly hopeful of the possibility of redeeming new immigrants, blaming America's crime on Italian and Irish immigrants released from their "kennels" in Europe, drawing on the popularity of eugenics theory by linking "blood" to a fixed racial identity:

I believe in blood; I believe in good blood, bad blood, honest blood, and thieving blood . . . Scotch blood stands for stubbornness. . . .English blood speaks of reverence for the English. . . .Danish blood tells of love of the sea. Welsh blood tells of religious fervor and zeal for God. Jewish blood tells of love of money, from the days of Abraham down until now.³⁸⁵

While children's racial character could sometimes be constructed as redeemable, Sunday's blood rhetoric once again highlighted the importance of the family as a marker of national identity.

Sunday's emphasis on aggressive, physical manliness also matched a larger concern with saving youth from the dangers of over-civilization. G. Stanley Hall, the leading child psychologist of the 1890s and 1900s, taught that adolescents literally passed through a "primitive savage" stage as children, mirroring Anglo-Saxon civilization's evolutionary development in their bodies. Young boys could be "inoculated" against becoming "milksops" through a cultivation of strenuous, primitive virtues.³⁸⁶ Sunday abandoned the savage language of Hall, but presented a vigorous image of the Christian soldier that combined civilized morality with a physically powerful body: "'Be strong!' 'Aim high!' Aim for Christian character.... If you would

³⁸⁴ Henry Burns Hartzler, *Moody in Chicago; or, The World's Fair in Chicago*, 146-147.

³⁸⁵ William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday – The Man and His Message*, 247; for the "kennels" quote, see "Billy Sunday's Patriotism," *The Labor Journal* (Everett, Washington), October 8, 1915.

³⁸⁶ Hall's theory was adapted directly from the French naturalist Lamarck. See Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 88-101; Julia Grant, "A 'Real Boy' Not a Sissy: Gender, Childhood, and Masculinity, 1890-1940," *Journal of Social History* Vol. 37, No. 4 (Summer, 2004), 829-851; John Pettegrew has contested the singular importance of Hall, arguing that his theories never achieved wide acceptance in the 1900s. See John Pettegrew, *Brutes in Suits* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2007), 391.

please God, be a man, not a mut or a mollycoddle or a milk sop [Image 13].³⁸⁷ Sunday's idealized Christian boy had the strength and vigor to overcome any opposition. Referencing Sampson's feat of tearing a lion apart with his bare hands, Sunday admonished young men to "Go straight on and break the lion's neck ... for the flavour of a dead lion in the honey beats that of clover and buckwheat. Be a man, therefore, by going straight on to breathe the air that has in it the smoke of battle."³⁸⁸ Mirroring the language of Teddy Roosevelt, Sunday emphasized the strenuous life as the antidote to immorality: "The true value of life lies in the preciousness of striving. No tears are ever shed for the chick that dies in the shell."³⁸⁹ Combining a notion of the strenuous life with a racialized emphasis on Anglo-Saxon masculinity, the Sunday revivals championed an Anglo-Saxon identity of a Christian gentleman with the strength to wage battle against sin and weakness in their own bodies.

The Christian gentleman was not an identity open to girls, whose nature was constructed as less wild and untamed. Schaeffer held "doll demonstrations" where young girls were encouraged to imagine their dolls as metaphors for their spiritual nature, mirroring the "house" metaphor he presented to children of both genders.³⁹⁰ But Schaeffer did not bind the bodies of girls on stage. In his "plain talk for girls," Billy Sunday focused on training young women to be able to discern good men from "some cigarette smoking, cursing, damnable libertine," rather than on developing their own moral character.³⁹¹ His reason for this was explicit: "women live on a higher plane, morally, than men. No woman was ever ruined that some brute of a man did

³⁸⁷ Billy Sunday, "Show Thyself a Man," 6.

³⁸⁸ William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday — The Man and His Message*, 141.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 141.

³⁹⁰ "Women Doff Hats and Men Applaud," *Syracuse Herald*, January 21, 1906, Papers of John Wilbur Chapman, CN 77.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 228.



**“I FEEL SORRY FOR THE LIT-
TLE LORD FAUNTLEROY BOYS
WITH LONG CURLY HAIR
AND WHITE STOCKINGS”**

Image 13. In this image, Sunday mocks effeminate boys who lack the physical or spiritual strength to avoid becoming “milk sops.” Lord Fauntleroy was a wildly popular literary character of the 1880s, whose innocent demeanour, spiritual purity, and positive impact on the adults in his life made him an archetypal example of the child redeemer in fiction. Sunday’s mocking of “Fauntleroy” boys shows that, rather than championing the child redeemer, a profound discursive anxiety surrounded the nature of children in the 1900s, as older notions of innate depravity mixed with newer ideas of the child as redeemable. Source: William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday — The Man and His Message*, 414.

not take the initiative.”³⁹² However, Sunday’s praise for girls also turned on a dichotomy: good girls avoided brutish men, while bad girls allowed themselves to be tempted by libertines and the pleasures of the city: ”some girls will walk the streets and pick up every Tom, Dick and Harry that will come across with the price of an Ice-cream soda or a joy ride.”³⁹³ Ultimately, it was only the unity of well-raised boys and girls which could assure the future of America as a Christian nation: “I believe there is a race yet to appear which will be as far superior in morals to us as we are superior to the morals in the days of Julius Caesar; but that race will never appear until God-fearing young men marry God-fearing girls and the offspring are God-fearing.”³⁹⁴ While girls were less rough than boys, they could also be corrupted by the temptations of the city and their relationships with young men, and therefore they did not stand outside of the contradiction between children as redeemers and children as profane.

While children were often situated as innocents in need of protection, they were also imbued with a sense of danger. When Moody was asked whether children should be allowed to speak at revival meetings, his response was clear:

There is danger in that. One great danger which is likely to beset children is spiritual pride. A great many people in the church, unfortunately, are foolish enough if a little boy speaks for Christ in a touching way to praise him ; and that makes him very proud. I should not like to have my child praised in this way. Children learn the sweetness of praise soon enough in the world. I should be a little afraid of having boys and girls encouraged to jump up in the large prayer-meetings.³⁹⁵

Instead, Moody held separate meetings for boys and girls, segregating his revivals by age as well as race and sex in order to preserve the decorum of the main event. Billy Sunday banned children under the age of four from his revival meetings altogether, providing daycare services at a nearby

³⁹²William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday – The Man and His Message*, 227.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 216.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 230.

³⁹⁵ Dwight Moody, *To All People*, 186.

building where babies and toddlers could be watched during services.³⁹⁶ While children needed protection, they were also at times resented by revivalists for their disruptive qualities. Gipsy Smith likewise forbade babies from his meetings and advertised a similar daycare service to parents: “Gipsy Smith is not a believer in the mother of a family staying home from meetings because she has a baby who wants to talk and sing in his own particular brand of gibberish any old and every old time.”³⁹⁷ When faced with real children, as opposed to the flattened representations used anecdotally in the revival, evangelists were frequently harsh and unsympathetic.

Such ordering of children seems to contradict the general image of the “child redeemer” in American and British literature at the end of the nineteenth century. The “redeemer” child was presented as an innocent whose internal moral compass was equal to or superior to adults, making children spiritual creatures who had the potential to convert and redeem their parents.³⁹⁸ Stories of spiritual children filled the sermons of revivalists in the Gilded Age. Moody was fond of describing children who, as they lay on their death bed, beckoned their parents around them and promised to carry their sins to God.³⁹⁹ But as common as these stories were, they concealed a contradictory expectation surrounding the bodies of children. While the end of the nineteenth century saw the peak of the child redeemer in fiction, it was also a time of renewed anxiety over the unruly potential of uncontrolled youth, especially male youth. Both fiction writers and Progressive-era reformers spoke of the “boy” problem from the 1880s onward.⁴⁰⁰ While the

³⁹⁶ Elijah P. Brown, *The Real Billy Sunday*, 141-142.

³⁹⁷ “Nursery for Small Tots During Gipsy Smith Meeting,” unidentified newspaper clipping, 1909, Billy Graham Center Archives, Gipsy Smith, Folder 16. Smith also advertised a “resting room” for women with a “predilection to fainting when in large crowds.”

³⁹⁸ See Bernard Wishy, *The Child and the Republic*, 81-181.

³⁹⁹ See for example, Dwight Moody, *Moody’s Latest Sermons*.

⁴⁰⁰ See Ken Parille, *Boys at Home: Discipline, Masculinity, and “The Boy Problem” in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee Press, 2009); Lorinda B. Cohoon, “Necessary Badness:

greatest concern was centered on working-class boys in the slums of America's rapidly growing cities, a similar sense of distrust for the young, especially young boys, governed the culture of the revival.⁴⁰¹

Revivalists sacralised children into agents of the divine, but they also preached that children's lives needed to be carefully regulated and controlled by their parents to keep them from straying. The very act of needing to convert young people bespoke the reality that many were seen as partially or fully outside of the spiritual community. During Stough's revival, one reporter described how young men "strolled" down the aisle when coming for conversion, until the grip of Stough's handshake brought upon them a "realization of the sacredness of the event."⁴⁰² The reporter went on to note that their "blatant school yells melt into [a] beautiful sermon," emphasizing Stough's ability to tame their unruly youthfulness.⁴⁰³ In Moody's sermons to young converts in New York, he warned children "to guard against self-confidence ; there is the danger. ... Your strength lies in Another, and not in yourself," reinforcing that children's innate will was dangerous when left uncontrolled.⁴⁰⁴

Not all of their fears were unjustified. Historians like Lynne Marks have also noted how young men, a liminal category between childhood and full adulthood, were associated with the "rough culture" of urban streets in late nineteenth-century small-town Ontario, less likely than

Reconstructing Post-Bellum Boyhood Citizenships in Our Young Folks and The Story Of A Bad Boy," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 5 – 31; Bernard Wishy, *The Child and the Republic*, 131-135; Kevin Murphy, *Political Manhood*, 86-87; Sidney Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 154-184.

⁴⁰¹ Compare with Lynne Marks' social history of small-town Ontario in the 1880s, where young men were similarly problematized until they achieved the respectability of marriage and church membership. See Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 81-106.

⁴⁰² "High School Students Drop Pennants to Hit the Trail," March 17, 1915, *Lancaster News Journal*, Charles Stough Press Clippings, Billy Graham Center, CN 106.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁴ Dwight Moody, "Address to Young Converts," *Glad Tidings*, 447.

any other class to attend church.⁴⁰⁵ Boys and young men occupied different age categories and were constructed somewhat differently in the family, but both were bound to the family pageantry of the revival. The urban “cigarette suckers” denounced by Moody and Sunday were the germination of sin in boys who had not been sufficiently disciplined by Christian families; their “bad habits” had sprouted into a worldly identity that placed them outside the evangelical community. The answer was to tame the nature of boys, and to a lesser extent girls, making their bodies a site of the battle between sin and redemption.

The Calvinist doctrine of innate sinfulness was an old tradition in evangelical culture, in decline by the middle of the nineteenth century.⁴⁰⁶ However, numerous historians have noted how the notion of the innately wild and depraved child lingered and mixed with Rousseau notions of inherent goodness in the 1840s and 50s.⁴⁰⁷ The revivals reveal the same degree of complexity. While children were often sacralised as virtual living saints, they also held a dual nature that could just as easily lead them to sin and damnation. “How many kinds of habits are there?” asked the children’s evangelist Dr. Schaeffer at the Chapman children’s revival. “Two, good and bad” replied the boys and girls. “There were more bad habits than good ones” Schaeffer continued, and “it was easier to be bad than be good. It is easier to go downhill than up. So it is easier to drift into sin.”⁴⁰⁸ Lingering ideas of children’s innate depravity continued to wield considerable influence in turn-of-the-century revivals: children could be good but were

⁴⁰⁵ Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 81-106; Lynne Marks, “‘A Fragment of Heaven on Earth’?: Religion, Gender and Family in Turn of the Century Canadian Church Periodicals”, *Journal of Family History*, vol. 26, no.2 (April, 2001), 257-258.

⁴⁰⁶ For the softening of Calvinism in raising children, see Brian Wishy, *Child and the Republic*.

⁴⁰⁷ Rachel Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America*, 204; also see H. Shelton Smith, *Changing Conceptions Of Original Sin A Study In American Theology Since 1750* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1955), 136-163. Smith made an interesting argument for the “revival” of original sin in American theology after the devastation of World War I, although his emphasis on Modernist theologians like Rausenchenbusch and Niebuhr lead him to underestimate how powerful the doctrine of original sin had always remained in the doctrine of evangelists. See *Ibid.*, 198-229.

⁴⁰⁸ “Meetings of Evangelists,” *Roanoke World News*, October 6, 1906, Papers of John Wilbur Chapman. CN 77.

more likely to be bad, and required the discipline of conversion and family life to preserve their innocence.⁴⁰⁹

At times, corporal punishment was praised as a way to preserve and maintain children on the path of Christ, a stance Moody endorsed:

My mother used to punish me. I honor her for that. . . . She used to send me out to get a stick. It would take a long time to get it, and then I used to get a dead stick if I could. She would try it and, if it would break easily, then I had to go and get another. She was not in a hurry and did not tell me to hurry, because she knew all the time that I was being punished. I would go out and be gone a long time. When I came in, she would tell me to take off my coat, and then she would put the birch on; and I remember once I said, ‘That doesn’t hurt.’ She put it on all the harder, and I never said that the second time.⁴¹⁰

Just as Moody had briefly defied his mother as a child, children had a willful spirit that needed to be tamed and domesticated with religion. Schaeffer demonstrated how to “sand paper” bad qualities out of boys on stage in order “to make them good,” and also playacted whipping boys with kite sticks to drive their bad habits out of them [image 14].⁴¹¹ Billy Sunday likewise endorsed the use of the “hickory stick” to discipline children into Christians: “Some homes need a hickory switch a good deal more than they do a piano.”⁴¹² Creating Christian children was a process that required both physical and emotional molding of children’s bodies, contrasting with the emphasis on moral and sentimental child-rearing found by authors like Bernard Wishy.⁴¹³

The contradictions between the child redeemer and the child reprobate were not lost on some evangelists. The reverend Amos A. Randall neatly summarized the place of boys in the

⁴⁰⁹ The combination of Rousseau philosophy with evangelical ideas of sin traces back to the eighteenth century and the revivals of Jonathan Edwards. See Joe Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition and American Culture*; George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*.

⁴¹⁰ J. Wilbur Chapman, *The Life and Work of Dwight Lyman Moody* (London : J. Nisbet, 1900), 71; on the decline of corporeal punishment in the nineteenth century, see Richard Brodhead, “Sparing the Rod.”

⁴¹¹ “Rev. Dr. C.T. Schaeffer, Children’s Evangelist,” *Syracuse Journal*, January 29, 1906, Papers of John Wilbur Chapman. CN 77.

⁴¹² William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday – The Man and His Message*, 74.

⁴¹³ See especially Bernard Wishy, *The Child and the Republic*, 94-104.



Image 14. Dr. Schaeffer performs a “doll demonstration” to an attentive young girl (left), playacts whipping a boy with a kite stick (center), and demonstrates how to “sand paper” the bad habits of boys to “make them good” (right).

Source: “Rev. Dr. C.T. Schaeffer, Children’s Evangelist,” *Syracuse Journal*, January 29, 1906, Papers of John Wilbur Chapman. CN 77.

revival: “Just a boy! a barefooted, whistling, shouting, marbling-playing, girl-teasing boy! the world’s chief joy! its perennial despair! its brightest hope! its most perplexing problem.”⁴¹⁴ The “perplexing problem” of youth lay precisely in the symbolic importance revivalists invested in the young: the bodies of children were a canvas on which the battle of sin and redemption could be represented and borne out, making the salvation of children the salvation of the Christian community as a whole, and their loss its damnation.

Redeeming the Child: Motherhood as a site of Revival

⁴¹⁴ Rev. Amos A. Randall, “The Ever-Present Boy,” *The Herald and Presbyter*, May 13, 1908, 7, Papers of William Edward Biederwolf, CN 195, Box 2, Folder 1.

Constructions of femininity in the revival were varied, complex, and contradictory. Motherhood exerted a powerful influence on the revival, shaping how women could be represented and constraining them to a narrow and maternal role at a time when women's economic and political profiles were expanding.⁴¹⁵ However, too close an emphasis on motherhood as a signifier that constrained women partially obscures the complex, sometimes contradictory, and exceptionally powerful role motherhood played in the semiotics of the revival. Motherhood was a metaphor of transformation through which young children – especially boys – could be transformed from sinners into members of the community of Christ. As Billy Sunday put it, “commanding an army is little more than sweeping a street or pounding an anvil compared with training of a boy or girl.”⁴¹⁶ Such language was nothing new in American culture – since the late-eighteenth century “Republican mothers” had been an important discourse in American notions of the family and state, imbuing middle-class women with control over the household while also justifying their exclusion from the public.⁴¹⁷ But while the religious dimensions of motherhood in the Victorian era have been thoroughly examined, motherhood's particular importance to evangelical revivals has been more generally neglected, especially in the Gilded Age and Progressive era.⁴¹⁸

Billy Sunday's sermon on motherhood praised a “woman's heart” for its natural maternal instinct, giving her “as brave a fight as any man ever made at the sound of cannon or the roar of musketry.”⁴¹⁹ “Most any old stick would do for a daddy,” while there was more power in the

⁴¹⁵ See Betty Deberg, *Ungodly Women*; Margaret Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*, 97-117; for work on motherhood and the private sphere, also see Barbara Welter, *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Ohio University Press, 1977).

⁴¹⁶ Billy Sunday, “Motherhood Sermon,” 5.

⁴¹⁷ See Linda K. Kerber, “The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment—An American Perspective,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2, (Summer, 1976), 187–205; Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

⁴¹⁸ Mary Ryan's work is an important exception. See Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 60-104.

⁴¹⁹ Billy Sunday, “Motherhood,” 4.

mother's hand than in the king's sceptre.⁴²⁰ Sunday even went so far as to dismiss fathers as often irrelevant to raising children, if not a detriment because of their thirst for sin: "many a boy would have turned out better if his old dad had died before the kid was born."⁴²¹ Moody prayed for motherless children who had "only Godless and Christless fathers" to watch over them, and frequently relied on anecdotes of mothers praying and suffering on behalf of children, especially children who had left their parents for the pleasures of the city.⁴²²

Motherhood was constructed as symbolically analogous to the revival. Women prayed for their sons, guided them to adulthood, and were ultimately responsible for their successful conversion or damnation. J. Wilbur Chapman dedicated his *Evangelistic Sermons* to his mother, reflecting the importance of motherhood to the church:

TO MY MOTHER
WHOSE PRAYERS GAVE HER BOY TO GOD⁴²³

Sometimes mothers were raised to a level above even the revival. Torrey, in attempting to find a metaphor that could adequately describe the infinite love of God for humanity, recounted the newspaper story of a "prematurely grey" mother who doted day and night on her invalid son, embracing her passive role as his long-suffering guardian. The mother's love "was but a faint image of the love of God," leading Torrey to compare the gathered audience to the invalid son, and Christ to the loving mother who suffered on their behalf.⁴²⁴ Sunday told gathered audiences that the work of motherhood was "the greatest in the world," "transcendentally above everything in the universe:" "If you want to find greatness don't go to the throne, go to the cradle; and the

⁴²⁰ Billy Sunday, "Motherhood," 9.

⁴²¹ Billy Sunday, "Motherhood," 6.

⁴²² Dwight Moody, *To All People*, 133-135.

⁴²³ Biederwolf, *The Growing Christian*, 5.

⁴²⁴ Reuben Torrey, *Revival Addresses*, 29.

nearer you get to the cradle the nearer you get to greatness.”⁴²⁵ Motherhood was not simply raised on a pedestal in the revival, it was sacralised into a metaphor for both God’s love and salvation – in a mother’s love Christians could experience and embody the divine, making women’s maternal bodies’ sites of the religious.⁴²⁶

Nor was the maternal role entirely passive and retiring. Sunday included the following hymn in his sermons on Mothers, figuring women as warriors and soldiers in the fight against sin:

The bravest battle that ever was fought ...
 Twas fought by the mothers of men
 Nay, not with cannon or battle shot
 ...not with eloquent word or thought
 From mouths of wonderful men
 But deep in a walled up woman’s heart
 – Of woman that would not yield.⁴²⁷

While such an image fit closely with the Victorian model of women who belonged in the domestic sphere, it revealed the potential power of motherhood as a metaphor. Both active and passive, mothers were inveighed with an almost singular importance as keepers of the nation, even denigrating the role of men: “if the womanhood of America had been no better off than its manhood, the devil would have had the country fenced in long ago.”⁴²⁸

But as with children, women could be rendered as both sacred and profane. While mothers were sacred crusaders, entrusted with creating the next generation of Christians, motherhood as a sacred category was also imbued with a degree of fear and judgment. Like all

⁴²⁵ William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday – The Man and His Message*, 237.

⁴²⁶ For literature on motherhood and evangelicalism in the nineteenth century, see Mary Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1982); also see Rima D. Apple and Janet Golden, eds. *Mothers and Motherhood: Readings in American History* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997); for a recent theoretical overview of recent literature, see Samira Kawash, “New Directions in Motherhood Studies,” *Signs*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Summer 2011), 969-1003.

⁴²⁷ Billy Sunday, “Motherhood Sermon,” 5.

⁴²⁸ William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday – The Man and His Message*, 230.

sacred categories, mothers were expected to conform closely to their symbolic identity. Women who refused a maternal identity corrupted the divine order by transferring the love that was meant for their husband and children to material things. Billy Sunday denounced the “society woman” who fretted over small dogs because they had chosen to “transfer the love God gave you to bestow on a little child to a Spitz dog or a brindle pup.” “All great women are satisfied with their common sphere and think it enough to fill the lot God gave them in this world as wife and mother.”⁴²⁹ The urban woman who participated in commercial entertainments was a “matinee-gadder” and “fudge-eater” who was “turning her homes into a gambling shop” and a “beer-and-champagne-drinking joint.”⁴³⁰

Even women who chose to be mothers were denounced as frequently as they were praised. While Moody raised up mothers into a virtual sacrosanct status, he also damned and condemned those women who failed to live up to the maternal ideal. In one story, Moody spoke of a mother whose daughter approached her with a bouquet of flowers she had picked for her. Because she was distracted by her conversation, the mother told her daughter to be quiet. When the child persisted, the mother pushed her away, and when she cried, she locked her in a closet, merely “for bringing a little bouquet to its mother!”⁴³¹ Another mother was equally condemned:

“A mother was baking one day, and her little child that was nearer her heart, probably, than anyone else in the world, came up to the table and took hold of the basin and tipped the dough on the floor. The mother struck the child, and said she was always in her way. Only a few weeks after the child sickened, and when she was delirious she said, ‘Mother, will I be in the way of the angels?’”⁴³²

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 229.

⁴³⁰ Ibid., 228.

⁴³¹ Dwight Moody, *Moody's Latest Sermons*, 88-89.

⁴³² Ibid., 88.

In another story, Billy Sunday described an absent-minded mother who during a visit to a zoo casually leaned over the bear pit, allowing her year-old baby to wriggle out of her arms and be torn to shreds by the animals below.⁴³³ Both evangelists frequently related these stories of mothers whose neglect or selfishness had led to the death and suffering of their children, rebuking women who had failed, even momentarily, to reflect the selfless, saintly model expected of all women.

The dichotomy between selfless and selfish mothers was not new, and traced back at least to the late-nineteenth century.⁴³⁴ But a close attention to the symbolic place of motherhood in the revival reveals the complex ways that the family pageant bound both mothers and children to a narrow discursive role. The criticism of mothers revealed how women, while seemingly empowered by the maternal, were also blamed and held responsible for the failures of their children. If motherhood was the primary site where sinners were saved for God, the continuing presence and growth of sin in the world was naturally linked to the failure of women. Billy Sunday explicitly made this argument during his sermon on motherhood: “If the mothers would live as they should, we preachers would have little to do.”⁴³⁵ In another sermon he claimed that “if every cradle was rocked by a good mother, this world would be full of good men, as sure as you breathe. If every boy and every girl today had a good mother, the saloons and disreputable houses would go out of business tomorrow.”⁴³⁶ He went on to ask “what is more to blame for the crowded prisons than mothers?”⁴³⁷ This sense of blame for the evils of society was connected to a generation of “busy mothers” who were more dedicated to reforming America than their

⁴³³ William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday – The Man and His Message*, 244.

⁴³⁴ For a Canadian example that analyzes the complex associations surrounding motherhood in the late-nineteenth century, see Lynne Marks, “‘A Fragment of Heaven on Earth’?,” 257.

⁴³⁵ Billy Sunday, “Motherhood Sermon,” 5.

⁴³⁶ William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday – The Man and His Message*, 238.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 244.

children. One anonymous author in *The Ladies' Home Journal* criticized women for the religious indifference of their sons:

What time has she to rock her baby to sleep with the Bible stories or hymns . . . She belongs to a generation of busy mothers who have taken the world in hand to set it in order. They are too troubled to see the Master sitting in their midst; hence they do not lead husband or child to him.⁴³⁸

De Witt Talmage mocked these “married coquettes of the modern drawing room” whose appearance was “a confused result of belladonna, bleached hair, antimony and mineral acids.”⁴³⁹

Sunday ironically termed these “busy” women “idle mothers,” who would rather play bridge than darn socks, and denounced them so vehemently that he claimed that when they died nobody would miss them, including their husbands.⁴⁴⁰

Motherhood, like childhood, was thus a metaphor that contained both active and passive components. But, again like youth, it was a category so sacralised and imbued with symbolic importance that mothers were viewed with a large degree of anxiety, and resented as much as they were loved. By making motherhood symbolically akin to the revival and the forge where Christians were made, revivalists made women to blame for many of the modern sins Americans found themselves mired in:

What paved the way for the downfall of the mightiest dynasties — proud and haughty Greece and imperial Rome? The downfall of their womanhood. The virtue of womanhood is the rampart wall of American civilization. Break that down and with the stones thereof you can pave your way to the hottest hell, and reeking vice and corruption.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁸ An American Mother, “Have Women Robbed Men of their Religion?,” *Ladies Home Journal* Vol. 17 (February, 1900), 17, quoted in Bernard Wishy, *Child and the Republic*, 127.

⁴³⁹ De Witt Talmage, *The Wedding Ring*, 89.

⁴⁴⁰ Billy Sunday, “Homes,” n.d., Billy Graham Center Archives (Wheaton, Ill.), Papers of William Ashley “Billy” Sunday and Helen Amelia (Thompson) Sunday, CN 61, Box 9, Folder 31.

⁴⁴¹ William T. Ellis, *Billy Sunday — The Man and His Message*, 230.

Making motherhood a site of revival ultimately constrained the role of women as much as it empowered, making women culpable for the sins of their children, and ultimately for the sins of modern America.⁴⁴²

Conclusion

In the early 1920s, the model mothers and children evangelists had long displayed as symbols of the religious future fast expanded beyond evangelists' control. The fourteen-year old Uldine Utley, nicknamed "Joan of Arc," began a campaign of public evangelism in California that attracted massive press attention and the close support of revivalists like Aimee Semple McPherson. Preaching the evils of makeup and dance, Utley was both criticized in the press for her youth and praised for her sweetness and innocence, associations that acquired a sexual tinge as Utley aged into a teenager.⁴⁴³ More surprisingly, she attracted the support of a wide variety of conservative and "fundamentalist" preachers, especially John Roach Straton. Straton initially dismissed Utley as a "freak" because of her youth and gender, but was so struck by her ability as a preacher that he immediately declared her "the most extraordinary person in America," although many of his evangelical allies disagreed.⁴⁴⁴ Utley would remain controversial in evangelical circles, a fact reflected in her autobiography's title *Why I am a Preacher: an Answer to an Oft-Repeated Question*. But the success and admiration she attracted to the increasingly public religiosity of children in the 1920s demonstrated how the relation of children to the family

⁴⁴² Academics have noted how the dichotomy between "good" mothers and "bad" mothers continued to be a structuring fiction in how families were imagined in the twentieth century. See Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky, *"Bad" Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Shari Thurer, *Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother* (New York: Penguin, 1995).

⁴⁴³ "Rouge and Dancing Taboo; Bible Code of Evangelist of 14," unidentified newspaper clipping (Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton, Ill.), Ephemera of Aimee Semple McPherson, CN 103, Reel 25, Box 0S23, Folder 3, 3; Also see Kristin Kobes Du Mez, "The Beauty of the Lilies: Femininity, Innocence, and the Sweet Gospel of Uldine Utley," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Summer, 2005), 209-243; Uldine Utley, *Why I am a Preacher: a Plain Answer to an Oft-Repeated Question* (London: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1931).

⁴⁴⁴ Kristin Kobes Du Mez, "The Beauty of the Lilies," 213.

and the public sphere was changing. As the decade advanced, hundreds of other child evangelists held local revivals around the country, many but not all Pentecostals, championing a model of the child redeemer that rested on the saintliness and Godliness of children.⁴⁴⁵

This kind of public agency for children was hardly imaginable ten years earlier, as metaphors of childhood were tightly policed within the family pageants of the revival. Religion and modernity in the Gilded Age and Progressive era was written on the bodies of children and their mothers, making their identities a metaphor for the place of evangelicalism in both contemporary society and the future. As such, evangelists exerted considerable effort reifying what it meant to be a Christian child and mother, binding both within a narrow discursive role in the revival. But as complex agents, women and children could not be easily made to conform to a linear ideal. The tension surrounding the family ideal mirrored the larger tension of the revival itself, playing out a story of its relevance in the modern world to overcome the anxiety that its place was shrinking before a tide of urban sin represented in the flesh of reprobate children and idle mothers.

⁴⁴⁵ See Thomas A. Robinson and Lanette D. Ruff, *Out of the Mouths of Babes*.

Conclusion: Mass-Media Revivals and “Fundamentalism” as an Interpretive Fiction, 1920-1930

In the introduction to his 1923 book *Christianity and Liberalism*, J. Gresham Machen asked the question: “What is the relation between Christianity and modern culture; may Christianity be maintained in a scientific age?”⁴⁴⁶ He was being largely rhetorical. By the early 1920s, Machen and a number of other evangelicals had already made up their mind that “science,” as defined by the secular, academic elite he loathed, had made itself incompatible with true Christianity. The generation that ten years earlier had populated the Sunday revivals now came to the conclusion that the modernists had seized control of the state and mainstream religion, and that true Christians had no choice but to withdraw into their own communities and institutions to weather the storm.⁴⁴⁷

In the history of American Protestantism, the 1920s has long been seen as a discursive break. It was the decade when the battleground between fundamentalists and liberals hardened to a point where a breach was inevitable, setting up the conflicts and “culture wars” that would carry down to the modern day. Theological “modernists” sought to reconcile Christianity with science and culture, abandoning Biblical literalism and original sin in favour of a contemporary religion that spoke to the needs of Americans. Conservatives like Machen refused to reconcile with modernity, and instead set about defining the “fundamentals” of the faith, drawing a line in the sand with secularists and liberal Protestants arrayed against “fundamentalist” Christians. The very terms used by religious historians to describe the decade reflect this narrative: “modern

⁴⁴⁶ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1923), 1.

⁴⁴⁷ For literature on Machen see especially Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1954).

schism,” “cultural crisis,” “the fundamentalist controversy.”⁴⁴⁸ Evangelical “fundamentalists” battled to overcome the “modernism” they found pervasive in schools, legislatures, and churches, while their secular opponents struggled to maintain the separation between church and state.

Drawing on Hayden White, historians have chosen to represent religion in the 1920s with a conflict trope, emphasizing the divisions and controversies of the decade. But the 1920s were also an ironic decade.⁴⁴⁹ Both evangelicals and “modernists” sought to define the decade as a moment of conflict with an intransigent and powerful Goliath. And each side saw themselves as gradually emerging as victorious against a force that was “unmodern,” proof of the enduring power and legitimacy of their own institutions and beliefs in the twentieth century. But the divisions of the era that later evangelicals and modernists used to construct their identities were greatly exaggerated; American evangelicals continued to operate in the public sphere in the 1920s, and to perpetuate the same claims to rationality that they had since the 1870s. The irony of the 1920s lay in how both sides flattened the complexities of the decade into a binary conflict that erased most of the legacy of mass-media revivals as an inconvenient fact: each preferred to construct the decade as a battle against the irrational and the absurd, rather than as a continuation of the same debates and public jockeying that had defined the religious landscape for half a century.

⁴⁴⁸ Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism; British and American millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 268; Martin Marty, *The Modern Schism: Three Paths to the Secular*.

⁴⁴⁹ The historian Martin Marty named his volume of “modern” American religion from 1893 to 1918 “the irony of it all.” Marty chose to cast his book in an ironic mode because of what he saw as the “historic irony” (as opposed to literary irony) of the period, or “a condition of affairs or events as if in mockery of the promise or fitness of things.” While Marty chose to represent the 1920s as a decade of conflict instead, I believe his use of the “ironic” mode is more fitting for the history of revivals in the period, and I have drawn on his earlier framework for inspiration. See Martin Marty, *Modern American Religion, Vol. 1: The Irony of it All*, 4-5; also see See Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), xii and 38.

Fundamentalism and its Others

No event was more central to defining the religious conflicts of the decade than the Scopes Trial of Dayton, Tennessee. In 1925, the legislature of Tennessee banned the teaching of evolution in schools, leading to a test case when the elementary school teacher John Scopes defied the law. William Jennings Bryan, the famous Democrat who had run for President three times, volunteered to act as state prosecutor, while the well-known New York lawyer and agnostic Clarence Darrow was hired by the defence. The choice of champions could hardly have been better. Bryan's political life fused religious and political activism, drawing on the techniques of contemporary revival media. His 1896 "Cross of Gold" speech mirrored the rhetoric of a revival campaign, with Bryan relying on common-sense appeals and religious imagery in his rendering of the "plain" message of silver Democrats against the gold-standard mercantile elites.⁴⁵⁰ Darrow was most famous for acting as a defense attorney for the notorious murderers Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, who in 1924 out of a desire to commit a "perfect crime" kidnapped and bludgeoned to death the 14 year-old son of Chicago millionaire Jacob Franks. Darrow successfully convinced the presiding Judge that psychological factors — namely Leopold's college reading of Nietzsche — were responsible for the crime, earning him a reputation as an ardent libertarian who rejected any notion of universal morality.⁴⁵¹ The 1925 Scopes trial, pitting the Democrat revivalist against the devil's attorney, dramatized the long-standing conflicts between sceptics and evangelicals in the public sphere, leading to intense media interest and scrutiny of the event.

⁴⁵⁰ No less a historian than Richard Hofstadter summarized Bryan's political campaign as "the democrat as revivalist." See Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition: And the Men Who Made it* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) [originally published 1948], 239-264.

⁴⁵¹ Simon Baatz, *For the thrill of it: Leopold, Loeb, and the murder that shocked Chicago* (New York : Harper Collins, 2008); also see Paula Fass' coverage of the trial in Paula Fass, *Kidnapped : Child Abduction in America* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 57-94.

The Scopes trial had all the elements of a farce. John Scopes — who was actually a physics, math, and football teacher who only substituted for biology — had been approached by the Dayton school commissioner and encouraged to challenge the law in the hopes it would bring publicity and revenue to the city.⁴⁵² Scopes was served the warrant for his arrest while drinking soda with the prosecuting attorney.⁴⁵³ After eight days of debate amid a carnival atmosphere where hawkers sold both Bibles and biology textbooks to crowds, the anti-evolutionist law was upheld in Tennessee, giving evangelicals a symbolic victory but settling little.

It was the press coverage of the “monkey trial” and not the event itself that revealed the hardening binaries between some secular and religious partisans in the 1920s. In his famous coverage of the revival campaigns in Dayton protesting the theory of evolution, H.L. Mencken wrote that Southern evangelists “denounced the reading of books,” “craved” divine power, and experienced religion through the “dreadful heavings and gurglings” of backwoods preachers, “yokels,” and “hillbillies.”⁴⁵⁴ It was not enough that they merely attended a revival, Mencken wrote, these “fundamentalists” thought revivals “must be embraced ecstatically and orgiastically, to the accompaniment of loud shouts ... and dancing with arms and legs.”⁴⁵⁵ The journalist-turned-historian Frederick Lewis Allen agreed with Mencken when he wrote his famous history of the 1920s *Only Yesterday*, arguing that Bryan and his allies were a pathological diversion from the modern world, doomed to failure and obscurity: “The tide of all rational thought in a

⁴⁵² Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 88-91.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴⁵⁴ H.L. Mencken, “Mencken Likens Trial to a Religious Orgy, with Defendant a Beelzebub,” *The Baltimore Evening Sun*, July 11, 1925; also see S.L. Harrison, “The Scopes ‘Monkey Trial’ Revisited: Mencken and the Editorial Art of Edmund Duffy.”

⁴⁵⁵ H.L. Mencken, “Mencken Likens Trial to a Religious Orgy, with Defendant a Beelzebub,” *The Baltimore Evening Sun*, July 11, 1925

rational age seemed to be running against them.”⁴⁵⁶ Describing the famous moment when Darrow called Bryan to the witness stand, Allen wrote that Bryan emerged

covered with humiliation. The sort of religious faith which he represented could not take the witness stand and face reason as a prosecutor. . . . Civilized opinion everywhere had regarded the Dayton trial with amazement and amusement, and the slow drift away from Fundamentalist certainty continued.⁴⁵⁷

An imaginary line was drawn across Protestant religion in the 1920s – a binary in which “modern” liberal religion was marked as rational and civilized against the irrational, rural, and backward religion of the revival. The common-sense gospel of Billy Sunday was increasingly pushed to the margins by observers like Mencken and Allen as an “unmodern” religion that was destined to perish from the Earth.

Evangelicals for their part were also increasingly suspicious of the “secular” newspaper and oriented themselves as outside the mainstream of American culture. Revivals had always been built on exclusions – whether of Christian Scientists, African Americans, or Free Thinkers. But by the 1920s and 30s, many evangelicals now saw the mainstream media as an obstinate foe of Christianity. One contributor to the *Moody Monthly* declared in 1934 that “just because the great broadcast chains do not carry our message and because popular periodicals give us no space, it need not be deduced that we are bound for destruction. [Many] Old Fashioned Christians . . . have not bowed to the modern Baal.”⁴⁵⁸ Evangelicals had stayed the same; it was the newspapers and secular elites that had corrupted the potential of modern America. Given the essential relationship between the newspaper and the revival, it is little surprise that in the 1930s Evangelical revivals faced a significant decline, although other forms of Pentecostal revivals

⁴⁵⁶ Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920's* [originally published 1931], *Project Gutenberg Australia, e-book collection* [accessed April 16, 2013], chapter VIII, section 4.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁸ Vance Havner, “Come and See – The Road to Certainty,” *Moody Bible Institute Monthly* 34 (January, 1934), 211, quoted in Joel Carpenter, *Revive us Again*, 16.

continued to prosper. The newspaper, which had once been seen as a trustworthy tool of revival, was now viewed as a weapon of the enemy.

As this thesis has shown, the jockeying between sceptics, liberals, and religious evangelists was nothing new. Since the 1870s, both revivalists and unbelievers had competed for space and legitimacy in the public sphere. But in the 1920s and 30s the battle lines hardened. Rather than now competing for recognition in the same public sphere, many secularists and evangelists were constructing their identities into cultures of opposition that derived their legitimacy from the unmodernity of the other. For anti-modern evangelicals, modernism came to represent a hostile, encroaching force of arrogant professors, materialistic journalists, and agnostics who despised and sought to destroy religion. For secularists, religious people were defined in synecdoche by the rural, pathologized image of the Tennessee “bible-thumpers.” Rather than fighting for a place in the White City, evangelicals and their opponents now saw themselves as the sole inhabitants of a legitimate modern America beset by an unmodern and menacing opponent.

The narrative evangelicals and their critics weaved for themselves would in the years that followed be readily accepted by many historians. In his 1931 *History of Fundamentalism*, Stewart G. Cole described fundamentalists as possessing a “passion for saintliness” and “exaggerated beliefs” that provoked a “near hysteria” and “psychopathic condition in the devotee.”⁴⁵⁹ His conclusion was that the fundamentalists had used “arbitrary” Scriptures and “Pythagorean superstition” to defend themselves against the “open-minded seekers for the truth”

⁴⁵⁹ Stewart G. Cole, *The History of Fundamentalism* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1931), 250; also see Adam Laats. Review of Mencken, H. L., *A Religious Orgy in Tennessee: A Reporter's Account of the Scopes Monkey Trial*. H-Net Education, H-Net Reviews. June, 2011.

that made up the Darrow camp.⁴⁶⁰ Twenty years later Norman Furniss reinforced an even dimmer view of fundamentalist culture and added an explicit class critique. The anti-evolution crusade emerged from “an ignorance then blanketing much of rural America ... people ... who had failed to keep pace with the intellectual progress of the nation after 1870,” an analysis that ignored the presence of major urban revivalists opposed to evolution like Billy Sunday, John Roach Straton, or Aimee Semple McPherson.⁴⁶¹ He went on to identify fundamentalists as possessing “overflowing” or “excessive” emotion, psychoanalyzing the movement for as egotistical, ignorant, and illiterate.⁴⁶² Sprague De Camp agreed in 1968, writing that Bryan, while eloquent, was “a preposterously wrong-headed man [who] represented an outlook and a credo doomed... to go the way of the dodo and the dinosaur.”⁴⁶³ Ray Ginger took another psychohistorical approach and attributed Bryan’s anti-evolutionism to an “authoritarian ethic” imbibed in his religious childhood that had “prevented him from ever growing up,” citing his heavy eating and love for verbosity as further evidence of mental immaturity.⁴⁶⁴ Sixty years after Ingersoll had denounced the “slave virtues” of Christianity, the same rational rhetoric, now coloured with Freud, continued to be employed by historians who labelled fundamentalism a backwards, unmodern movement. The next generation of historians would take “fundamentalism” more seriously as a movement, but would continue to view the Scopes trial as

⁴⁶⁰ Stewart G. Cole, *The History of Fundamentalism*, 251.

⁴⁶¹ Norman F. Furniss, *The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918-1931* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 29.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 37-41.

⁴⁶³ L. Sprague De Camp, *Great Monkey Trial* (New York: Double Day and Company, 1968), 443; both men would likely have been surprised that half a century after they dismissed the anti-evolution crusade as an anachronism, 46% of Americans would claim to be creationists according to a 2012 gallup poll.

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/155003/hold-creationist-view-human-origins.aspx>

⁴⁶⁴ Ray Ginger, *Six Days or Forever?*, 237-238.

a definitive turning point where fundamentalists were humiliated and defeated in public opinion.⁴⁶⁵

The self-proclaimed fundamentalists of a later generation constructed a similar history of Scopes. Jerry Falwell, writing in 1980, declared that Bryan had been embarrassed at Scopes before the cruel treatment of the Agnostic Darrow, unable because of his age and intellectual “flabbiness” to adequately defend the Bible against the rising tide of modernity sweeping the nation. Following Scopes, fundamentalism — chastened but not defeated — became an underground movement, mirroring early-modern Protestant dissenters like Wycliffe whom Falwell identified as fundamentalist predecessors. The failure of the Scopes trial was crucial to how Falwell defined his own fundamentalism as an oppositional movement, anointed by the Lord to withdraw from “modernist” America into a network of evangelical institutions that could remain pure from the taint of liberalism.⁴⁶⁶

Edward Larson has pointed out that — despite the conclusion of many historians that Scopes marked a moral and cultural defeat for fundamentalists — the press was actually extremely mixed in its interpretation of the Dayton verdict. Many papers wrote the event off as a farce while others tried to remain neutral, and when the “Great Commoner” Bryan died five days after the trial there were widespread memorials across the country.⁴⁶⁷ It was only in the years that followed that journalists and academics began to accept Mencken’s general narrative of orgiastic hillbillies exposed and defeated before the light of modern reason. The stories self-proclaimed

⁴⁶⁵ George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 185-188.

⁴⁶⁶ See Jerry Falwell, Ed Dobson, and Ed Hindson, *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon: The Resurgence of Conservative Christianity* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1981), 85-91.

⁴⁶⁷ Edward J. Larson. “Myth 20: That the Scopes Trial Ended in Defeat for the Anti-Evolutionists,” in *Galileo Goes to Jail and Other Myths about Science and Religion*, Ronald L. Numbers ed. (Cambridge, M.A. and London: Harvard University Press, 2009; also see Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods*, 225-246.

fundamentalists and historians would later tell of the trial were therefore far more than a recitation of events; both groups actively constructed Scopes as a turning point, reflecting their own beliefs of the relationship of unmodern religion to the contemporary American culture landscape.

A Messy Modernity: Blurring the Lines Between Revivalists and “Secular” America

What sceptics, fundamentalists, and historians generally neglected to note was that only a few years previously mass-media revivals had managed to cross over the liberal/fundamentalist divide and appeal to a wide swathe of Americans. Evangelists built sophisticated revival networks that could draw massive urban crowds and contest for legitimacy in the public sphere. And they continued to do so. Aimee Semple McPherson gave way to Billy Graham, whose series of successful revivals in the 1940s and 50s attracted a huge degree of press attention and audiences that dwarfed even Billy Sunday’s records, making Graham a household celebrity for millions of Americans until the end of the century. Moreover, Graham specifically denied he was a “fundamentalist” and refused to work with militants during his 1957 New York campaign, preferring to keep his revivals open to Catholics and liberal Protestants.⁴⁶⁸ Lacking a language to understand Graham’s movement apart from fundamentalism, Sandeen and Marsden labelled him a fundamentalist anyway.⁴⁶⁹ Radio and televangelism likewise opened huge new arenas for revival work, eventually growing into contemporary groups like the 700 club, which boasts millions of viewers worldwide, evidence that revivalism never ceased to operate in the public

⁴⁶⁸ William Martin, *A Prophet With Honor*, 217-24, 239-41; also see Ernest Pickering, *Should Fundamentalists Support the Billy Graham Crusades?*

⁴⁶⁹ Ernest Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, ix; Marsden also suggested Graham was at least a moderate fundamentalist who emerged out of the “self-critical” mood of the middle of the century. See George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 228.

sphere.⁴⁷⁰ A history of American evangelicalism that places revivals at the center of its study would find little reason to define the 1920s as a decade of fundamentalist controversies or a complete discursive break with the past.

The divisions between fundamentalists and modernists in the 1920s were also more fictive and fluid that historians of religion have sometimes realized. George Marsden and Ernest Sandeen have argued that “fundamentalism” was an intellectual movement that began in Northern, urban centers and seminaries and that spread outward to the South and Midwest.⁴⁷¹ Billy Sunday, who continued to be a popular evangelist through most of the 1920s, rarely used the label fundamentalist to describe himself or his beliefs, but he agreed with virtually every one of the defining markers of the early fundamentalist movement, leading Marsden to identify him as one.⁴⁷² He was staunchly opposed to modern preachers and evolution, and believed that those who taught the latter were “stinking skunks,” consigned to hell as “bastard evolutionists,” classed with “the infidels and atheists, the whoremongers and adulterers.”⁴⁷³ He also passionately defended the doctrines of original sin, hell, and the personal devil. But a deeper look at Sunday reveals a far more complex picture. A good deal of Sunday’s message reflected his rural populism, leading him to attack both urban elites and lower-class prostitutes and drunks. Sunday’s anti-evolutionism and his attack on modernism were shaped by a class dynamic that

⁴⁷⁰ For information on the 700 club and other forms of television evangelism, see Steve Bruce, *Pray TV: Televangelism in America* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990); for radio evangelism from the 1920s onward, see Tona J. Hangen, *Redeeming the Dial: Radio, Religion & Popular Culture in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

⁴⁷¹ George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 202-204; Ernest Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, ix-xix.

⁴⁷² George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 135-136.

⁴⁷³ Washington Gladden, “Samples of Modern Evangelism,” *Independent*, May 23, 1912, 1102, quoted in Roger Bruns, *Preacher*, 128; “If anyone wants to teach that God-forsaken, hell-born, bastard theory of evolution, then let him go out and let him be supported by men who believe that blasted theory and not expect the Christian people of this country to pay for the teaching of a rotten, stinking professor who gets up there and teaches our children to forsake God and makes our schools a clearing-house for their God-forsaken dirty politics,” Daniel L. Turner. *Standing Without Apology: The History of Bob Jones University* (Greenville, Bob Jones University Press, 1997) 19. Quoted in A. Cyrus Hayat, “Billy Sunday and the Masculinization of American Protestantism, 1896-1935,” 60.

led him to pit plain, common Americans against the sophistication and vices of the modern city, the “society women,” “matinee gadders,” “cigarette suckers,” and “stinking drunks” who personified modern sin. Sunday’s revivals may have turned on a binary, but it was not a binary reducible to the fundamentalist/modernist division as laid out by historians. Age, gender, class, ethnicity, and race structured the heroes and villains of the Sunday revival, championing a “plain” constituency that was far removed from the theological debates between Machen and liberal preachers. Rather than drawing on the rhetoric of a new “fundamentalist” movement, Sunday continued to preach much the same message that had made him a star to urban Americans in the 1900s and 1910s.

The fundamentalist/modernist controversy of the 1920s may be in part an interpretive fiction, similar to the so-called First and Second Great Awakenings critiqued by Jon Butler. Many evangelicals began to call themselves fundamentalists in the 1920s, but they shared no common definition of what “fundamentalism” meant and in no sense existed as a cohesive movement. Machen himself refused to use the term, and alienated many of his evangelical allies by declining to support Prohibition as part of his libertarian leanings.⁴⁷⁴ In an extremely interesting and important recent re-interpretation of the place of Dwight Moody and the “Moody movement,” historian Michael Hamilton has argued for a completely new language to imagine interwar Protestants who were both non-fundamentalist and non-liberal (or modernist). Hamilton settled on the term “interdenominational evangelicalism,” connecting the campaigns of Moody to a continuing evangelical tradition:

⁴⁷⁴ “Do you suppose that I do regret my being called by a term that I greatly dislike, a ‘Fundamentalist’? Most certainly I do. But in the presence of a great common foe, I have little time to be attacking my brethren who stand with me in defense of the Word of God.” See Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir*, 337; for Machen’s opposition to Prohibition, see *Ibid.*, 247.

The Moody movement was assigned the name “fundamentalist” by those outside the movement. But more often than not these so-called ‘fundamentalists’ declined to call themselves that, and with good reason. For what Moody midwifed into being was in fact a new form of *interdenominational evangelicalism* that has reshaped American religious life. Moody gave this movement a basic character and structure that, though affected by the fundamentalist-modernist controversies, remained fairly constant through the emergence of Billy Graham in the 1950s.⁴⁷⁵

Hamilton could go farther. The “fundamentalist” movement of the 1920s cannot be neatly divided from the evangelical — both groups were hopelessly blurred in practice and existed more in the minds of some participants and historians than they did in the reality of regionally dispersed, loosely connected campaigns and institutions. While fundamentalism should remain a useful interpretive map for understanding the anti-evolution crusades or liberal/orthodox church schisms of the 1920s, academics need to be able to imagine religion in the 1920s outside of the fundamentalist narrative to pick up on the complexities and braided realities of the decade.

Gilded Age and Progressive-era revivals complicate the narrative of the secular/modernist binary without necessarily overturning it. The revivals of the Gilded Age and Progressive era were places where modernity was made, demarcated and questioned: in the press, in the rhetoric of the public sphere, in the spaces of cities, and the bodies of children. In each case, “secular” America connected with the world of evangelicals in how both constructed the revival, whether through press narratives of redemption, public claims to rationality, the regeneration of the urban, or the redemption of the young. Rather than the 1920s marking a breaking point between the old world of interdenominational cooperation and the new world of secularists at war with anti-modernists, both sides continued to navigate modernity through the

⁴⁷⁵ Michael Hamilton, “The Interdenominational Evangelicalism of D. L. Moody and the Problem of Fundamentalism,” 6.

same debates and rhetorics. Fundamentalism was one story among many, but the messiness of the Gilded Age spilled forward into the decades that followed.

This was the irony of the 1920s. Evangelicals, the irreligious, and historians all wanted to see the decade as the story of how their opponents had attempted to seize control of the nation and been thwarted by the faithful. But the narrative was a parlor trick of ontology. For most Americans, religion and irreligion continued to compete in the public sphere through the same languages and in most of the same places that it had in the 1870s. Orientations of place are still played out in television evangelists referring to the “heartland” of Middle America from East-Coast TV studios, while anxiety surrounding the choices of the young continues to regularly surface in moral debates over violence in the media. Few of the issues which defined the culture of revivals in the Gilded Age or Progressive era are truly past. Instead of Gilded Age and Progressive-era revivals occupying a middle period between the transformations of the Second Great Awakening and the controversies of the 1920s, they were sites on which virtually every question of the relationship between religion and modernity in the twentieth century was marked out and debated.

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