

Evangelical vs. Liberal

*The Clash of Christian Cultures
in the Pacific Northwest*

JAMES K. WELLMAN JR.

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*For Constance and Georgia, my two bright
and shining morning stars*

I

The Shape of American Protestantism

The number of liberal Protestants has been in decline over the last generation. Indeed, Protestant denominations in general, which include liberals and moderates, have lost anywhere from 30 to 40 percent of their membership (Roof and McKinney 1987; Hadaway and Roozen 1995). What is less well known is that American Protestantism as a whole has lost its share of the American populace. In 1993, the percentage of Protestants in the U.S. population was a little more than 63 percent; in 2002 the percentage of Protestants was approximately 56 percent. And depending on one's calculations, demographers have suggested that soon Protestants will no longer be the majority religion in the United States (Smith and Kim 2004). The reasons for this change are in part due to the fact that more and more individuals are raised without a religion, increasing from 13 percent in 1973 to 29 percent in 1994 (Smith and Kim 2004, 8). Moreover, the number of Protestants who retain their faith has shrunk in the 1990s from 90 percent (between 1973 and 1993) to 83 percent in 2002. The decrease is particularly dramatic among young people (Smith and Kim 2004, 9), and is occurring as well among evangelical Protestants, though it is less pronounced (Smith and Denton 2005). The general trends show some signs of leveling off. Nevertheless, immigration accentuates the downward decline—while 10 percent of the adult population is immigrant, only 24 percent of immigrant adults come from a Protestant background. Thus, over the long term, the trends show at least the potential for a continuing, slow decline.¹

While the overall decline of mainline Protestantism is well documented, there are also increasingly diverse subcultures within the overall Protestant population. Robert Wuthnow's path-breaking work (1988) analyzed the "restructuring" of American Protestantism into categories of "liberal" and "conservative" over the second half of the twentieth century. The social and political issues of the 1960s and 1970s polarized Protestants. John Green (2004) has recently differentiated this polarization with empirical data, showing differences not only between mainline and evangelical Protestant groups but within them. He distinguishes mainline Protestants, evangelical Protestants, and Catholics by traditionalist, centrist, and modernist ideological categories, delineating political affiliations relative to them. Mainline Protestants, which compose 16 percent of the whole, are divided as traditionalists (4.3), centrists (7), and modernists (4.7). The political partisanship of these groups correlates to what I found in my study: modernist mainline Protestants (or "liberals" for this study) are affiliated with the Democratic Party by a margin of 2 to 1; and liberal Protestants share this same political affiliation with black Protestants, modernists Catholics, American Jews, atheists, and agnostics. This creates a politically like-minded group of approximately 23 percent of Americans. Green divides evangelical Protestants, who are 26.3 percent of the total American religious landscape, as traditionalists (12.6), centrists (10.8), and modernists (2.9). Evangelical traditionalists and centrists are affiliated with the Republican Party by similar proportions as liberal Protestants are to the Democratic Party. Evangelical traditionalists share the same partisan loyalties with the traditionalist Protestant mainline and traditionalist Catholics, creating a common political coalition of approximately 22 percent. The churches in my study can be situated along these same partisan lines; the evangelical churches are in the traditionalist and centrist evangelical tradition, mainly supporting the Republican Party, with the modernist or liberal Protestant churches showing a preference for the Democratic Party.

Labels are never perfect, but for convenience's sake, when I use the word *liberal* (liberal Christian or liberal religionist) from now on, I am referring to liberal Protestants, as I define them in the next paragraph (Wellman 2002). The meaning of this term for the most part is a theological perspective, but as will become clear, this group also tends to be loyal to the Democratic Party and to progressive politics generally. When I use the word *evangelical* (conservative Christian or conservative religionist), which I will define more thoroughly below, I mean evangelical Protestants. This is a theological identification but, again, it will become clear that this most often also refers to a political affiliation with the Republican Party. Further, the evangelicals in this study tend to be "entrepreneurial" evangelicals (Wellman 2004). Entrepreneurial evangeli-

cals reflect the theological mentality of evangelicals generally but tend to be more aggressive in evangelism and church growth specifically. I am aware that there can be evangelicals in liberal congregations and liberals in evangelical churches, as well as both in Catholic parishes, but in this study I focus on Protestant congregations. Moreover, in my data, I found few if any evangelicals or liberals in churches that did not reflect their theological perspectives.

For this study, the liberal Protestant congregations are defined by a distinct set of ideological characteristics. They most often propose that Jesus is a model of radical inclusiveness—fashioning an ethic that emphasizes hospitality to those marginalized in society—justify themselves in their faith tradition as much by reason as by tradition or scripture, and leave decision making about faith or personal morality in the responsible hands of the individual. The moral worldview of these churches reflects a liberal theology that advocates for the concerns and rights of homosexuals; and supports justice causes such as peace, ending homelessness, and ecological stewardship. Even as the liberal moral worldview tends toward libertarianism in personal morality, it proffers stands on social justice and broader support for the "common good" (Wellman 1999a, 2002; Ammerman 1997, 2005).

Nonetheless, listing the characteristics of liberal Protestants tends to miss the complexity of this religious identity. My interviews with nearly 450 liberals and evangelicals from 34 vital churches in the PNW illustrate the complexity with which evangelicals and liberals negotiate their religious identities. In particular, remarks by liberal respondents disclose the nuance and personal struggle that often marked many of their comments. Liberal Protestant laypeople, even when they came from churches that were vital and that they loved, consistently struggled with how to define themselves, as an Oregon layperson shared while discussing his congregational church:

I struggle sometimes with the noncreedal aspects of our church; I'm like a little bit of a box with loose edges on it, more than perhaps some of the people here. And I think that from this question, as well as some of the other ones, that one of the difficulties in not having that box is it does become very difficult to describe who we are. It makes it very difficult to take stands on things. Because I would think in some ways people might say "We'll take the more liberal, the more progressive stand," but I think we often avoid taking stands on things because we really have a "y'all come with all your opinions and bring it into the melting pot" [attitude]. But when I'm outside the church trying to describe who we are, or to defend who we are, depending on what that is, it becomes very difficult to articulate that.

I also think that not having a creed or a set of beliefs, that other people are telling us, not that it has to be creedal, I think there are ways that that can happen and it does happen at other churches that many of us have left, is that if we say you can believe anything, we also can say you can believe nothing and there's some danger in that.

Indeed, liberals are often known more for what they are not—not fundamentalists; *not* homophobic; *not* patriarchal—than for their positive characteristics. And, as the Congregationalist layperson explains, this liberal tendency to accept difference, combined with the fear of creating an offense, undercuts liberals' ability to take stands on some issues such as the Iraq War and on issues of economic justice. Nonetheless, as I detail in this volume, each of the liberal churches in this study has taken definitive stands as church organizations on the support of gay and lesbian people. This relative diffidence is, in part, a refusal to form a false consensus; liberals seek to avoid conformism and will leave individuals with the task of making up their own minds. The unintended consequence of this liberal reticence, as many lay liberals make clear, weakens their ability to mobilize for principles close to their faith. Tellingly, the comments of the layperson above came from a church whose pastor I found to be articulate on theological principles and on issues of social justice. Thus, the ability of liberal churches to negotiate ambiguity and refuse simple answers is institutionally both its strength and its ongoing weakness.

The natural question, in light of the decline of liberal Protestants and mainline Protestants in general, is what about the growth of American evangelicalism? Many have suggested explanations, including moral and theological strictness (Iannaccone 1994), engagement with the larger culture (Smith 1998), superior forms of religious rewards, as well as the intense push for evangelization and church development (Finke and Stark 1992). There is also, however, striking quantitative data that invites further elaboration. Evangelical families had higher rates of fertility than mainline denominational families during the first half of the twentieth century, as well as higher retention rates of their young people in their churches (Hoge et al. 1993, 1994). To some extent this advantage leveled off with the baby boom generation of the midcentury, but then continued after the peak of the baby boom. This evangelical boom in fertility and in the retention of their children and youth in their churches has created a formidable advantage for American evangelicals that continues into the twenty-first century (Hout, Greeley, and Wilde 2001, 497; Greeley and Hout 2006).

In fact, Hout, Greeley, and Wilde make the claim that ideology or engagement with culture has nothing to do with the growth of evangelicals in the

twentieth century. Evangelical advantage is purely "demographic." But as this volume shows, the growth of evangelical churches is at least due in part to the intense ideological focus on the family. Organizationally, evangelical ministries encourage fertility and lionize the nuclear family, and spend enormous resources on buildings and facilities for families. So, yes, demographics are an important factor. But is human reproduction unaffected by ideology? Forty-three percent of evangelical respondents in my study came from non-evangelical backgrounds, meaning they were invited or evangelized into these evangelical churches. Evangelicals in this study preach, practice, and promote the production of children and the reproduction of faith in children and youth. I found a high priority placed on children and family ministries in all twenty-four evangelical churches that I studied. In one urban Oregon church, the emphasis and focus on children for newly married women was a constant drumbeat. One new member described how she is asked at every church gathering of women whether she is planning on having children. For her, this was not an offense, but a sign that becoming a mother is a high priority:

And also kind of the feeling of just maybe motherhood is this elevated calling—kind of like you're better because you're a mom, or what not. To me it's like a little bit of the church's reaction to our culture, which for the past thirty years or so has said that you're better if you work outside the home and to me it feels like our church's response to that is like a little bit to the other extreme and maybe a little more balance might . . . and I really appreciated when [our pastor] spoke about this topic. I think he was speaking about the roles of women and he said a lot of women come to him and say is it wrong for a woman to work outside the home and he said the question isn't Is it wrong for a woman to do that? the question is Why is she doing that? Is she doing that because the husband is lazy and won't provide, well then, yeah, it is wrong because he should be doing it. But if she's doing it because that's what fits for her family and she's able to and it's the best fit for them and what God wants them to do, then there's nothing wrong with that. And I think for me that was really freeing, especially I feel like I'm one of the few married-without-kids women at our church. So it was just really freeing to hear that from the pulpit, that now that I'm married my role isn't solely to have kids and be at home. I'm just not in a place where I'm ready for that.

In response to queries about children, this young woman sought out the pastor for guidance. But the response was just as interesting as the question.

The young pastor conditioned his response by first wondering why she would not have children—perhaps because her husband could not provide for the family adequately. Of course, if the woman felt it was her call to work outside the home, then that was okay. The implication is that it is better to have mothers stay at home and that this should be made possible by the earning power of the husband. The young woman celebrates this trend; the strong focus on family is a countercultural message that emphasizes the importance of motherhood in an urban setting, which ordinarily caters to young, single, professional men and women. Motherhood, in her mind, was something that was “elevated” in status by the church. Indeed, in another part of the interview of this urban, Oregon focus group, a young woman proudly asserted that church focus on bearing children bucks cultural stereotypes: “It’s not the typical Gen X, wait until you’re forty to have your first kid.” So demographics make a difference, but an ideology of reproduction, whether in terms of evangelization or in bearing young children, also permeates evangelical culture.

Evangelicals have a symbolic and socialization reproduction advantage as well; studies examining the retention rates of evangelicals versus liberals make this clear (Hout, Greeley, and Wilde 2001; Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens 1994). Socialization is about ideology; it is a symbolic system (a worldview that I develop in this study) that is internalized and becomes the engine of reproduction, facilitating fertility and nurturing specific cultural and moral values and actions. Thus, American evangelical Christians both produce more kids and maintain their children within their churches. Furthermore, ideologically, evangelicals no longer appeal primarily to the lower-middle class. In educational and in socioeconomic terms, evangelicals have made recent gains in these areas and are nearly equal to the Protestant mainline and the Roman Catholic churches (Smith 2000; Greeley and Hout 2006). As I will show in this study, nearly a third of the fastest growing congregations in Washington and Oregon are Pentecostal and charismatic churches—congregations that have traditionally attracted the American lower-middle class. However, I found that these congregations are now appealing to middle- and upper-middle-class individuals and families. Indeed, it is the Pentecostal churches in the study that stood most firmly in the “prosperity gospel” tradition.² As I have said, I use *evangelical* in this study as the overarching term for conservative Protestant church-goers, to include Pentecostal and charismatic Christians as well as Christians in the American fundamentalist tradition. I will explain shortly the history and relations of these various evangelical groups to one another.

The changes in the overall makeup of Protestantism have had significant effects on mainline Protestant churches. The rate of transfer from evangelical churches to mainline churches has dropped to its lowest level in the last decade,

falling from 21 percent to only 9 percent, with no signs of any significant reversal. What makes this trend even more important is that demographers have found that “the trend toward staying in conservative denominations is strongest among the rising numbers of upwardly mobile conservatives” (Hout, Greeley, and Wilde 2001, 498). Thus, the stereotype of evangelicals being less educated or coming from the lower classes hits an inverse relation. In fact, evangelical churches are becoming attractive to those who affiliate with them precisely because of the churches’ socioeconomic advantages, as my study reflects and as new research has shown; evangelicals have now entered the elite levels of American society in business, government, education, and even in Hollywood (Lindsay 2007). It is an ironic twist on H. Richard Niebuhr’s early twentieth century complaint in his classic *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (1975), which condemned mainline Protestants for catering to the wealthy. In the twenty-first century, as the mainline Protestant denominational churches have lost some of their class distinctions, evangelical churches are now becoming beacons of middle- and upper-middle-class status. Niebuhr’s archcondemnation of class-structured denominationalism is striking:

Denominationalism in the Christian Church is such an unacknowledged hypocrisy . . . It represents the accommodation of Christianity to the caste-system of human society. It carries over into the organization of the Christian principle of brotherhood the prejudices and abasements, the injustices and inequalities of that specious order of high and low wherein men find the satisfaction of the craving for vainglory. The division of the churches closely follows the division of men into the castes of national, racial, and economic groups. It draws the color line in the church of God; it fosters the misunderstandings, the self-exaltations, the hatreds of jingoistic nationalism by continuing in the body of Christ the spurious differences of provincial loyalties; it seats the rich and poor apart at the table of the Lord, where the fortunate may enjoy the bounty they have provided while the others feed upon the crusts their poverty affords. (6)

Niebuhr, along with many commentators at that time, assumed that American fundamentalism had lost the denominational battle. He grieved and denounced the fact that mainline Protestants simply catered to class interests. Indeed, scholarship has traditionally observed that fundamentalists appealed to the poor and uneducated. This was often a critique as much as an observation (Berger 1961; Winter 1961). It is ironic then, for multiple reasons, that the revenge of the evangelical success is its new class status. It is worth exploring,

therefore, which I do at the end of this book, how American evangelicals, as a significant American subculture, are challenging mainline Protestantism as the center of the Protestant orb in American culture. To what degree are evangelical churches seeking to become what the Protestant mainline establishment church was in the 1950s? As this study makes clear, they have become a significant subculture with numbers, growth, and the desire to shape moral norms and to impact American political culture.

The decline of liberal Protestantism is real, demographic, and, I would argue, ideologically shaped. It is well known that American culture has moved in a conservative direction (at least ideologically) over the last decade (Lakoff 1996; Fogel 2000). Despite countervailing examples (Wellman 1999a; Armerman 2005), liberal Protestantism is struggling to maintain and reproduce itself. Its message deemphasizes the supernatural aspects of religious experience and emphasizes inclusion and justice for sexual minorities and women. While it is responding to a niche in the American religious marketplace, its ability to reproduce itself appears limited biologically, organizationally, and symbolically. Whether this limitation is an intentional process or an unintended consequence of its theology and demographic realities is a part of the question of this study.

2

The Origins of the American Evangelical Subculture

Estimates of the numbers of evangelicals in America vary dramatically, from fifteen to twenty-five million adults by evangelical demographers and scholars, to 100 million by various contemporary commentators (Noll 2001; Baylor Religion Survey 2006).¹ Data that comes from the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) show that when adult Americans are asked to self-identify, 25 percent claim to be evangelical.² I follow ARIS estimates of evangelical self-identification in part because its figures are relatively conservative. Even so, the ARIS numbers translate into a substantial American evangelical subculture of approximately fifty million American adults.

When I use the term *evangelical* I am aware that evangelicals exist outside of Protestant churches and affiliate with diverse political parties. This is to say, evangelicals attend nondenominational churches, traditional evangelical denominations, Pentecostal and charismatic churches, and sometimes mainline Protestant and Catholic congregations. But again, for this study I focus on evangelical Protestants who present a relatively homogenous political orientation. In defining the term *evangelical* I follow Bebbington (1989) and Noll (2001) in using *evangelical* as the umbrella term for conservative Christians in American culture. Evangelicals are generally those who emphasize *conversion* (the need for a personal decision to follow Jesus Christ), *missionary activity* (the obligation to share with others this need for conversion), *biblicism* (seeing the Scriptures as the sole authority for belief and action), and *crucicentrism* (the belief in

Christ's sacrifice on the cross as atonement for human sin). As I explain further below, the river of this evangelical subculture has multiple tributaries: early twentieth-century American fundamentalism; the growth and development of Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement; and the rise of neo-evangelicalism at mid-century, and the subsequent growth of nondenominational churches and parachurch organizations. All of these contribute to the recent surge of the entrepreneurial evangelical congregations; churches that are much less sectarian than their predecessors and much more engaged in transforming American culture and influencing American political culture with a form of civil religion, which I define below as a "civic gospel." I outline the three main tributaries of present-day evangelicalism as fundamentalism, Pentecostalism, and neo-evangelicalism. I then define the civic gospel evangelicals tend to embody.

1. Fundamentalists

Under this broad category of evangelicalism, I place American fundamentalists. Fundamentalism is an early twentieth-century movement in American Christianity. From the position of American mainline Protestants, the fundamentalists "lost" the battle over the Bible with the Scopes Trial in 1926 (Marsden 1982). Fundamentalists separated from mainline American Protestantism and went "underground" to build their own social, educational, and religious infrastructure. As scholars have shown, from the 1920s to the 1950s fundamentalists were, in fact, far from defeated, but established their own growing subculture even as the mainline began its slow decline. Classically, fundamentalists have been labeled as "antimodernists" and even "belligerents" against modern life (Riesebrodt 1993; Lawrence 1995). Fundamentalists, partially in response to rejection by mainstream society, adopted a sectarian strategy creating their own plausibility structures and moral worldviews. However, Joel Carpenter, in *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (1997) avoids the reification of American fundamentalist groups by showing their development and diversity within American Protestant subcultures. Fundamentalism has always been a dynamic and fragmented collection of groups with diverse responses to modernity. Thus, the lines of religion, culture, and modernity are much more porous and fluid than portrayed by scholars attempting to generalize about the field.

In this study, fundamentalists are represented by traditional evangelical denominations, and independent and nondenominational churches. None of the churches that I studied could be labeled as particularly belligerent or an-

timorernist. They do not reject modern culture *per se*; indeed, they criticize and condemn parts of the values of modern life, but they often use the fruits of modernism (technology and media, for example) to promote their messages. Indeed, they use modern technology with greater aplomb than their liberal Protestant cohorts. Moreover, if modernism is defined as the differentiation of social spheres, the rationalization of social processes and structures, and the development of market capitalism, so-called fundamentalists have accommodated to this movement quite effectively. They lionize a market mentality economically and religiously—seeking to expand their economic resources and at the same time taking advantage of open religious markets—particularly in the unchurched region of the PNW. Moreover, the fundamentalist concentration on personal agency as the vehicle of salvation accommodates the individualism and compartmentalization of the modern mentality. If anything, these churches show an affinity for the structures and processes of modernity.

Thus, the early sectarian nature of fundamentalism was more a necessary reaction to the rejection by mainline American culture. What is seen in the history of these churches is that they are quite willing to use the products of modernity to facilitate their movement. And with greater demographic success, they become less sectarian and much more willing to accommodate the wider culture and engage this culture with their message. In this sense, modernity is, in fact, not a barrier but indeed an instrument and facilitator of their development.

2. Pentecostals and Charismatics

The second grouping under the wider American evangelical movement are Pentecostal and charismatic churches. These churches have their origins in the early parts of the twentieth century, coming out of emotionally charged revivals such as the Azusa Street Revival in 1906, and spreading from California across the nation and the globe by entrepreneurial men and women preachers (Carpenter 1997; Wacker 2001; Jenkins 2003). These churches emphasized a democratization of the spirit, cooperating with nineteenth-century American populism and extending access to the "spirit" to include all ethnic groups, men and women, and every socioeconomic class (Hatch 1989). The movement showed that all could be called by the Spirit to exercise their gifts for ministry, healing, and evangelism. This early charismatic social movement took on denominational form relatively quickly. The Assemblies of God was formed in 1914; the predominantly white Pentecostal Church of God in 1919; and in the

same period the Black Pentecostal denomination, the Church of God in Christ, was created. The racial integration of early Pentecostalism lasted into the early 1920s, but was largely undermined by the implementation of Jim Crow laws in the South. This "triumph of the spirit" embodied many of the same characteristics of early fundamentalist churches, emphasizing the Bible as the infallible word of God, the necessity of conversion to Christ, and the need for believers to evangelize, but adding to these factors the subjective and affective experiences of spiritual experience. The story is long and complex, but the "charisma of the spirit" did not end with Protestant Pentecostals but spread to the Roman Catholic churches in the 1960s and to the broader Protestant churches at the end of the century. In a recent Pew Forum Survey, 18 percent of all American Christians claim some form of "charismatic experience," more than the 3 percent of Americans who affiliate with a Pentecostal denomination.³ In this sense, labels come to be less meaningful in defining Christian experience at the end of the twentieth century.⁴

A third of the evangelical churches in my study came out of the broad charismatic movement. In these churches I saw both the greatest integration of ethnic groups and the clearest signs of rising class markers and an emphasis on the "prosperity" gospel. Ethnic integration and prosperity (spiritual and material) are taken as signs of God's blessing. The best illustration of this trend was the Pentecostal college group on my own university campus. It was one of the most ethnically diverse groups on campus, and had been intentional about being a multicultural leadership group. One lay leader said, "The faces of the leaders must represent the world." This young woman is African American; the six focus group members included one other African American, a young Hispanic man, and three Anglo Americans. It was by far the most ethnically diverse group among the twenty-four evangelical churches that I studied. The group was articulate and relatively progressive on issues of race and gender—speaking up for racial integration and women in ministerial leadership, supporting the Iraq War, and touting sexual Puritanism and other strong conservative Christian beliefs. These young people were ambitious about their faith and about their lives. One wanted to be a doctor so that she could take her skills into mission fieldwork, and several others wanted to go into public service. The pre-med student was a clear proponent of the "prosperity" gospel. For her, it was self-evident that "God, like any good father, would bless his children with material prosperity." For her there was no contradiction whatsoever between spiritual and material blessings—one led naturally to the other. Related to this was the fact that the respondents from the charismatic churches in my study expressed much less tension with the broader culture. The entrepreneurial nature of the PNW, a wide open market both economically and religiously,

creates a natural affinity for these Christians with broad ambitions for evangelism and material wealth. Indeed, the charismatic churches appeal to northwesterners precisely because of the churches' emphasis on diversity, wealth creation, and individual initiative interwoven with a worship style that engages the body as well as the mind.

The University of Washington charismatic college group meets midweek, and the worship services include contemporary rock music that can similarly be heard in all the evangelical congregations in the study. But this group also includes the traditional Pentecostal practice of speaking in tongues, or glossolalia, whereby young men and women voice semantically random syllables that are believed to be God speaking to the church, and that traditionally call for interpretation by those with the gift of discernment. The group's services also call for spontaneous healing and expectations for miracles. In 2006 this fellowship of college-aged young people had nearly one thousand students in attendance. The young, charismatic preacher wore expensive casual shirts, he drove an expensive automobile, and flaunted his spouse (baby in tow), who was also young, attractive, and dressed in impressive but casual clothing. The Pentecostal preacher's message, recapitulating many of the themes among the clergy in my study, focused on the Scriptures, emphasized social conservatism (abstinence from premarital sex; against homosexuality), celebrated a market mentality (emphasizing growth economically and evangelism for the church), and was laced by a strong support of the Iraq War (though, as he said, this was an "aside"). In fact, he mocked groups that he saw marching for peace. He said, "If we don't fight the terrorists over there, they will be coming to get us over here. And the first people they will shoot are those peace activists." This drew an approving shout from the crowd of young students.

The overall message of this Pentecostal college service in content and in style communicated that the good news of the gospel blessed one eternally, and also showered one with blessings in this life—sanctioning a conservative and politically powerful American state. This movement from fundamentalist, sectarian, and Pentecostal roots to a generic charismatic, entrepreneurial, evangelistic, and sometimes prosperity-based evangelicalism catches the broader dynamics of the entrepreneurial evangelical churches in my study. The evangelical churches in the PNW are enthused by an open religious market that coincides with a region that is entrepreneurial and unchurched. Nonetheless, many evangelical churches are in tension with the libertarian spirit of the region. The evangelical moral worldview grates against a region that authorizes the power of the individual to make up his or her own mind on moral values, actions, and projects. The moral message of personal purity chafes against what evangelicals interpret as a morally "permissive" spirit.⁵

3. Neo-Evangelicalism

The broader contemporary American evangelical culture of conservative Christianity has multiple sources in the American Protestant religious landscape. This range includes the early fundamentalists and the Bible-based and nondenominational churches that flow from that stream; Pentecostal and charismatic variants that echo in the Calvary chapels and Vineyard "spirit"-led movements coming from California (Miller 1997); and less powerful though important sources that arise from the Holiness movements coming out of the Wesleyan stream of piety and sanctification. And finally, though less central to my study, this group includes the Christian Reformed movement, which is theologically and socially less conservative compared with the evangelical churches in my study. I intentionally left out the African American Christian movement. It is evangelical and conservative in theology but quite progressive on economic and some social issues. In particular, African American Christians have come out overwhelmingly against the Iraq War (Baylor Study 2006), thus making them distinct from white evangelicals (on political issues) and liberal Protestants (for theological reasons) in this study (Greeley and Hout 2006).

The etiology of the contemporary white evangelical movement comes out of the 1950s in response to the sectarian and isolationist nature of early fundamentalism and Pentecostalism. Moderate neo-evangelicals like Harold J. Ockenga, pastor of Park Street Church in Boston and first president of the National Association of Evangelicals (1942), sought not only to nurture deep evangelical piety but to evangelize American secular society and to go out in mission to the world. In this sense "engagement" became the linchpin that activated the movement to transform and evangelize "secular society" at mid-century (Carpenter 1997; Smith 1998; Hunter 1987). The most visible figure in the movement was Billy Graham. Graham was raised a fundamentalist. Early in his ministry he encountered conflict with fundamentalist leaders precisely because of his willingness to work with mainline Protestant congregations and to engage the wider American public. This broader neo-evangelical movement was symbolized and nurtured by such magazines as *Christianity Today* (1956) and schools such as Fuller Theological Seminary (1947). They each maintained a distinctive set of evangelical beliefs—the infallibility of scripture, the need for conversion, the blood atonement of Christ, and the call for world evangelism. However, they were intentionally *not* sectarian—seeking in the classical biblical framework to be "in the world but not of it." In part, this shift signaled a movement away from a premillennialist pessimism about the condition of the

present world situation toward a renewal of the postmillennial hope for world evangelism. The quintessential example of this evangelical movement was the parachurch organizations, exemplified by Graham's leadership of Youth for Christ (1944), as well as other groups such as Young Life (1941) and World Vision (1950). These organizations concentrated on youth ministry, world missions, and service to those in need around the world. They embodied the willingness to move outside traditional denominational and institutional restraints, to use popular culture for the sake of "reaching" and serving a lost generation of young people. The disdain of, and perhaps more aptly, indifference to denominational structures percolates across the evangelical churches in my study. Most of these congregations are either unwilling or uninterested to name a denominational connection and are frequently loosely networked with broader evangelical movements. Contemporary exemplars of this movement include Rick Warren's Saddleback Church and his Purpose Driven Church Conferences, and Bill Hybels's Willow Creek Community Church and the Willow Creek Association that trains church leaders from across the globe (Sargeant 2000). In both cases, denominational affiliations are downplayed (Warren comes from a Southern Baptist background), and evangelical commonalities are emphasized.

4. Evangelicalism and the Civic Gospel

The political activism of the broader evangelical movement at the end of the twentieth century has been a surprise to many. The rise of American fundamentalism in the 1910s rejected the social reform movement of the social gospel as a liberal accommodation (Marsden 1982; Evans 2004). Fundamentalism built a strong grassroots network that was led initially by northerners, but blossomed in southern soil. The southernization of the national evangelical movement was accomplished by immigration. By 1970 more than 75 million southerners had gone north and west to establish evangelical enclaves outside the South (Dochuk 2005; Harvey 2005). Tellingly, the majority of the evangelical senior ministers from my PNW study trained at midwestern Bible colleges and seminaries, and many of these schools have southern roots (Carpenter 1997). In the aftermath of the civil rights movement, white southerners turned to the Republican Party, forming the grassroots of the Christian Right (Wilcox 2000). This movement sought not only salvation of souls but it also expanded its early moral conservatism and anticommunism to a broader social, economic, and political platform, aligning a conversionist impulse with a free enterprise culture to expand the domain of Christ and commerce

(Carpenter 1997; Marsden 1982). Finally, the prominence of southerners in the military knitted together evangelicalism with the American military, producing what we now note as the strong support of evangelicals for America's military goals and the vision of the United States as a "beacon" of democracy and freedom in foreign policy (Loveland 1996; Martin 1999; Marsden 2006; Wellman 2007).

In the 1970s, following the loss of Bible reading and prayer from schools in the 1960s, and with the passage of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, the public muscle of the evangelical grassroots movement awakened. Its public power was exemplified in the presidential elections of 2000 and 2004 (Green 2004). Moreover, evangelicals have come to believe that engagement in public debate is part of what it means to be a faithful Christian. In surveys, American evangelicals believe their faith informs their politics by a nearly two to one margin relative to mainline Protestants, and they are by similar proportions more committed to "transforming" society than are mainline Protestants. Furthermore, more than 90 percent of evangelicals believe that religious people should "fight evil." The old notion of "separation from the world" has given way to intense engagement with the world. And self-identified fundamentalists and evangelicals are no longer sectarian; they believe that the world must be engaged, transformed, and converted (Green 2003, 15, 18; Smith 1998).

The most common critique of evangelicals in the 1960s from the liberal Protestant establishment was the failure of conservative Christians to make a public witness (Hadden 1969). While liberal Protestant denominational leaders joined the antiwar movement and marched for civil rights in the 1960s, conservative evangelicals were a part of Nixon's "silent majority," supporting the status quo and backing the Vietnam War. Today, with Republican George W. Bush in the White House, the strength, frequency, and volume of evangelicals in the public square has increased dramatically (Domke 2004; Domke and Coe 2007).

Consequently, evangelicals are no longer interested in silence or separation; they want to engage the wider culture. But what does this mean? What kind of civil religion are they advocating? Recent research has shown that there are sets of common evangelical cultural characteristics that have been called a "civic gospel." These characteristics include the belief that evangelical conversion will address and solve social problems; the government should protect America's religious heritage; the United States was founded as a Christian nation; it is hard to be a political liberal and a Christian; the promotion of democracy around the world should be encouraged; and evangelicals should advocate for economic, religious, and political liberty, and, by extension of these last two, support the war in Iraq (Kellstedt et al. 2003, 553; Wellman 2007). All

of these characteristics are mirrored by the evangelical respondents I interviewed in the PNW. In 2007, mirroring the rest of the country, white evangelical support for George W. Bush and the Iraq War has declined; I will explore this more fully in the chapter 11 on Religion and Politics.

Thus, I argue that this civic gospel is part and parcel of the evangelical moral worldview that I address throughout this volume. But it also marks one of the ironies that this study reveals: the reversal of roles between evangelicals and liberal Protestants. The public voice of liberals is now relatively mute, less sure and focused than it was in the 1960s and 1970s; the evangelical voice is now what many take as the public voice of American Christianity (Domke and Coe 2007). This book opens a window on the complex changes and transitions in the moral worldviews of evangelical and liberal Christians, showing the conditions and consequences of these views on PNW culture in particular, and on the broader American culture more generally.

The evangelical community is no longer sectarian in the classic sense of isolating itself from the broader culture; it now seeks to engage culture, to change and transform it into its own image. And while liberal Protestants may no longer be one of the dominant voices in American public life, they remain an important voice in the American Protestant subculture. However, while the easy labeling of American Protestantism as a "two-party" system (evangelicals vs. liberals) is a popular model for some, I argue that it hides the complexity of the Protestant moral terrain. It is to this complexity I now turn (Williams 1997; Jacobsen and Trolinger 1998).

suspicious of the "free-market" mantra and are less eager about a "strong military." Yet liberals too want a strong and secure nation and open communication across cultures, not so much to evangelize but to understand new cultures and serve others in need. In most ways these dreams are not diametrically opposed; they share many convictions and this is the point. Both of these moral worldviews are based on truth claims: evangelicals tend to hold theirs with greater certainty; liberals think their claims are true, though they are more at home with uncertainty, change, and new information. But each makes claims, and this book has sought to make clear what these claims are, how these groups understand and misunderstand each other, how each adapts to the region, and finally, what these moral claims mean culturally and politically. These are each vital religious subcultures, distinct forms of Protestant Christianity, though not ultimately foreign to each other. They are not the only religious subcultures in the region or nation, but they are two that are important, that make claims on the ambiguous middle of our cultural and political center. It should be clear that neither will finally "win" this center, but they will continue to influence it. One would hope that each comes to understand and recognize the truth claims of the other in order not to agree or fight, but to finally respect the differences—and, perhaps, to learn from each other.

This study for the author was an attempt to come to terms with these moral worldviews. I began by sharing some of the biases of liberals toward evangelicals. But through my own research I have come not to agree with evangelicals but to respect the power of their convictions and the perseverance by which they serve one another, their communities, and the world. Evangelicals, in this study, put their feet and their resources where their mouth is; they follow through on helping one another, their communities, and the world. They may not always do it in ways I or other liberals find "acceptable," but they do serve others. On the other hand, being a liberal Christian myself, perhaps because of my familiarity I found myself critical of liberals and their reticence and caution in making both theological truth claims and in their relative lack of political advocacy. But in time, I have come to understand their circumspection and deep commitment to process and negotiation. I do not always agree with their pace or their timidity in offending others (including the people in their pews), but I understand their reluctance. Both of these groups act in good faith, with good intentions. It is then for the reader to decide and reflect on what these moral visions mean for them. In this sense, this study is a moral project, mirroring and comparing moral worlds for readers to both see themselves more clearly and judge their own moral worldviews in the relative light of these worlds.

Notes

PROLOGUE

1. I elaborated on this question in "Is War Normal for American Evangelicals?" (Wellman 2007).
2. The Pacific Northwest was defined in a recent study of the areas' religion as Washington, Oregon, and Alaska (Killen and Silk 2004); for this study, I include Washington and Oregon only.
3. In 2004, based on two dozen interviews with evangelical clergy and lay leaders, I wrote a preliminary essay to make sense of evangelicals in the region: "The Churching of the Pacific Northwest: The Rise of Sectarian Entrepreneurs," in *The None Zone: Religion and Public Culture in the Pacific Northwest*, ed. Patricia O'Connell Killen and Mark Silk. Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira, 2004.

CHAPTER 1

1. John Green's survey (2004) confirms these trends in Protestantism. The recent Baylor Religion Survey—"American Piety in the Twenty-First Century: The New Insights to the Depth and Complexity of Religion in the U.S."—disputes these numbers, arguing that its survey shows that Protestant affiliation remains above the 60 percent mark, a figure arrived at in part because the Baylor study argues that 10 percent of religious "nones" in its survey name churches where they attend <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/33304.pdf>.
2. Traditionally, the Assemblies of God have not emphasized this aspect of theology. Nonetheless, scholars are noticing this trend toward the

prosperity gospel in the United States and in the expansion of Pentecostalism in the Global South. See "Spirit and Power: A Ten-Country Survey of Pentecostals." The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (October 2006); <http://pewforum.org/surveys/pentecostal/>.

CHAPTER 2

1. George Barna found in 2006 that 45 percent of Americans in a random survey could be defined as "born-again Christians." They did not self-identify as such, but for Barna this means they are committed to Jesus Christ as Lord and that they believe that because they have repented of their sin, when they die they will go to heaven. Demographically, Barna estimates there are nearly 90 million born-again Americans, a higher percentage than the 31 percent in 1983. See <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=231>. Baylor's recent estimate of 100 million born-again Americans adds legitimacy to Barna's numbers.

2. Information was drawn from the American Religious Identification Survey 2001 (Kosmin, Mayer, and Keysar 2001).

3. See "Spirit and Power: A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals." The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, October 2006; <http://pewforum.org/surveys/pentecostal/>.

4. In a recent survey, most conservative Christians abjure such labels as evangelical, Pentecostal, or fundamentalist, settling most consistently on the "born-again" tag (Baylor Survey 2006).

5. Another important niche of evangelicalism, less well-known and the least represented in this study, are evangelicals who hold conservative social values but are political pacifists (Kniss 1997). They tend to reject culture, in particular governmental entanglements, but as Fred Kniss has shown, these generalizations are less accurate as these congregations have moved into the mainstream evangelical subculture.

CHAPTER 3

1. Information is taken from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (<http://www.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/globalChristianity/>) and the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College (<http://bgc.gospelcom.net/bgcadmin/aboutus.html>).

2. The 2006 Baylor Survey of American religion asked respondents about their consumption of religious media. Nearly 20 percent of Americans surveyed had read Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life* (2002), and many evangelicals in my study also knew Warren's work. Jim Wallis's *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (2006) was read by only 1.2 percent of Americans in the Baylor survey. And despite the fact that Wallis has tried to reach out to evangelicals, only one or two evangelicals in my study knew his work. A fifth of the liberals in my study had read Wallis, reflecting the limited reach of Wallis's work to a wider evangelical audience.

CHAPTER 4

1. I use *superempirical* rather than *supernatural* because the latter implies that the spiritual or "unseen world" is distinct from the physical world; *superempirical* includes both divine powers and/or forces that are immanent and infused in the physical world and/or transcend the empirical realm (Smith, 2003, 98).

2. Exemplary of this is that the evangelical pollster George Barna has developed a restrictive sevenfold definition of "evangelical," in which there are no criteria relating to the organized church. This definition shares seven core beliefs: that faith is very important; one should share one's faith with non-Christians; Satan is real; salvation comes by grace not works; Jesus lived a sinless life; the Bible is accurate in all ways; God, who created the world and rules it today, is all-knowing and all-perfect. For Barna, this evangelical group is a subset of "born-again Christians" and tallies only 20 million American adults. See <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Topic&TopicID=17>.

3. Philip Zimbardo, the well-known social psychologist, has argued: "Most of us have a tendency both to overestimate the importance of dispositional qualities and to underestimate the importance of situational qualities when trying to understand the causes of other people's behavior" (2007, 8).

4. By conflict I mean disagreement with others, short of emotional or physical injury. Violence is thought of as relational and collective action that creates injury to others, either emotionally or physically, using words and/or actions (Bromley and Melton 2002).

5. The question of individual innovation is interesting, but it does not lessen the importance of recognizing the communal context. New religions always combine the old in new ways, perhaps adding a new twist, though commensurability between religions is always present. This is disputed philosophically, but I concur with Donald Davidson's assertion that all human knowledge has a "natural history" and therefore there is no private knowledge *per se*; language always has a social causation, and thus religions are natural and public phenomena, and in the end knowable (Davidson 1999).

6. In my essay with Kyoko Tokuno, "Is Religious Violence Inevitable" (2004), we show that none of the mainstream academic definitions in the twentieth century have accounted for conflict or violence as a critical aspect of religion. Hector Avalos in *Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence* (2005) has taken this point further by arguing that religion by its nature as an "invented scarce resource" is inherently violent.

CHAPTER 5

1. The Southern Crossroads is made up of the region that includes Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, and Oklahoma; see Lindsey and Silk 2005.

CHAPTER 6

1. The significance tests are descriptive and exploratory, rather than for inferential purposes.