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Harold Arthur Brower IV

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**THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORITY IN CONSERVATIVE EVANGELICAL
CHRISTIANITY: A CRITIQUE OF AMERICAN AND SOUTH KOREAN
EXPRESSIONS**

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts, Religious Studies

By

Harold Arthur Brower IV

July, 2016

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Religious Studies

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores and compares the ways in which the Bible is read, interpreted, and held as an authority by conservative Evangelicals in the United States and South Korea. By examining the history, literary practices, and social systems in each country, I reveal authorities other than the Bible that emerge from Evangelical culture. Discourse theory, reader-response theory, and rhetorical criticism provide the theoretical lenses through which each expression is viewed. My research strategies included: (1) a six month ethnographic project held in two Korean Evangelical communities; and (2) a survey of Korean laity. Data were collected from direct observations, Evangelical media, sermon notes, and the survey conducted in Korea. This study also critiques arguments that position biblical literalism and perspicuity as broad Evangelical identifiers. This critique reinforces the need for non-Western based studies on Evangelicalism. By revealing the range of historical, social and ideological influences that affect conservative Evangelical power structures, the claim of ultimate biblical authority is shown to be a mask for the diverse forms of authority that actually exist in the American and Korean expressions of conservative Evangelicalism.

KEYWORDS: Evangelical, Christianity, conservative, authority, power, social, Bible, American, South Korean, international, critique

This abstract is approved as to form and content

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Chairperson, Advisory Committee
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Dr. John Schmalzbauer

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INTRODUCTION

“Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ Philip asked. ‘How can I,’ he said, ‘unless someone explains it to me?’” Acts 8:30-31 (NIV)

Preface

In any search for truth, life has taught me that transparency is of great value. As a scholar attempting to offer analysis on a topic with which I have many personal connections, it would be imprudent to portray myself as the modern, detached scholar. Such a rhetorical positioning would also be of little practical benefit. I say we show our cards, open the conversation, and receive whatever criticisms may come with respect. I hope that my “being reflexive,”¹ will illuminate this critique of conservative Evangelical Christian authority, and give perspective to arguments that might otherwise be lacking if my personal background remained hidden behind a veil of academic impartiality. I write as someone whose self-understood identity is that of a student of religious studies, applying critical observations, analysis, and argument to social and religious data, but also, and more so, as someone whose self-identity is found in being a follower of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. To hide either of these self-perceptions would be to deny a part of myself that is actively at work within this study. This is an argument against the masking of power in Evangelical culture, and so hiding any part of me would also be hypocritical. Therefore, it is my goal to harmoniously combine these perspectives, honestly and adequately communicating my findings and arguments, for the furtherance

¹ James S. Bielo, *Words Upon the Word* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 22-23.

of scholarship, the benefit of my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, and to the glory of God.

Background

Every semester a common scene plays out within secular university “Introduction to Bible” classes across America. Evangelical freshman of various stripes enter these classrooms excited to learn about their faith and the Bible within a context theretofore denied them, the public education system. Confident from all the Sunday school lessons and Bible quizzes they have participated in, they walk in with a triumphant air, ready to “contend for the faith” and show their professors just how much they know. The initial stress sets in at the mention of historical “quests” for biblical persons, the JEDP hypothesis,² or early Hebrew henotheism.³ Such trepidations are easily overcome however as they do not concern the more foundational Evangelical beliefs and doctrines. But then more comes. The Passion accounts found in the Synoptic Gospels and John are problematized,⁴ and Pauline authorship of nearly half the letters traditionally attributed to him is questioned, with a few being outright rejected. Biblical criticism slowly chips away at the assumptions that many of these budding minds have held to for most of their lives. The questions begin to take shape in abundance. How does one trust the Pastorals if Paul did not write them? Why is John’s account of the Passion so different if he was the “beloved disciple” who stayed to watch everything till then end? How can Isaiah be

² The JEDP Hypothesis is an understanding of the Pentateuch which separates certain sections and verses into four different categories, Jahwist, Elohist, Priestly and Deuteronomical. It emerged from scholarly work in source criticism, and is often associated with the German scholar Julius Wellhausen.

³ Henotheism is a form of Monotheism wherein believers worship one god primarily, but do not rule out the possibility of other gods.

⁴ The Synoptic Problem, as it is often called, references the discrepancies that biblical scholars find between the three synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The Gospel of John is often set apart as a uniquely problematic text when compared to the Synoptic Gospels due to the highly variant account of Jesus’s life and ministry it contains.

prophecy if it was written by two or three different people at different times? Their pastor always said the Bible was the perfect Word of God, that it should be read using plain common sense, so how can this professor fill an entire semester with examples of discrepancies, interpretational problems, and cultural understandings that are so complex? There is of course no lack of commentary on this situation, in both academic and popular writing. Having gone through this process myself I am not without an understanding of the arguments and ideological camps involved. The present study however will not attempt to add yet another voice to the conversation between “secular” and “confessional” biblical studies.⁵ Instead, the Evangelical problems with biblical criticism and hermeneutics will be viewed as parts of a larger issue, that of authority within conservative Evangelical Christianity.

The problem of authority, or power, is a multi-faceted issue. Power is both a process and a product. It is not bound by location, and yet often cultivated locally. It takes years, decades, even centuries to firmly establish, and yet it can be lost in moments. Authority is held by people, institutions, and governments, but most importantly, it is found in ideas. It is the right to leadership. It is the acquisition of voice, and the right to be heard. It is situated at the podium, but also in the audience chair. It is the systematic, seen, and unseen process by which worldviews, epistemologies, and axioms are mandated and accepted as true. Within conservative Evangelical Christianity, the Bible is invariably claimed as the final authority. The text is considered the very “Word of God,”⁶ the voice of the Deity, with all the authoritative power such a concept can muster. Where it is placed commands attention, turning both altars inside churches and living room

⁵ Such a dichotomy seems to dissolve when the criticisms of postmodernism are carried to their conclusions. No approach to biblical hermeneutics is made without “confessing” some worldview.

⁶ Mark A Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism* (Vancouver: Regent College Pub., 2004), 6.

coffee tables into sacred spaces. Anyone who visibly carries it is immediately identified with it, connected to it, and partakes materially in the Bible's authoritative function.

However, this biblical production of authority does not happen in a contextual vacuum. Pastors speak from stages in churches, using the established doctrines of denominations, which exist inside layers of culture, found in nations, which have long and intricate histories. Hearers, readers, publishers and all who consider themselves "doers" of the Word are situated in this web of influences, regardless of (though assuredly further affected by) their place within hierarchies or institutions of conservative Evangelicalism. In every reading event, from the Bible, or a commentary, or a popular Christian work; at every Christian rock concert or Christmas hymn recital; in fourth grade Sunday Schools and at prestigious seminaries; in pastoral counseling sessions, or with "accountability" partners; on mission abroad and in their home churches; conservative Evangelicals are consciously and subconsciously expressing the same question that the Ethiopian did to Phillip in Acts 8:30-31, "How can I [understand the Bible], unless someone explains it to me?" How are they to understand this "Word of God?" Whose explanations and interpretations are to be trusted, and why? They *believe* in the authority of the text, but the text itself doesn't *speak*, and sadly there are no Apostles around any longer to be questioned.

In the despondency of these questions, the problem of authority within conservative Evangelicalism begins to take form. Efforts to understand it adequately however require answering a number of preliminary questions before truly beginning to unravel the web. It is important to give a clearer definition of "conservative Evangelicals," and what they believe at the core. I do not presume to be able to answer the perennial

question, “Who are the Evangelicals?” in a finished sense. That question has been tackled now for decades. More humbly, I hope to offer a working definition for this study, particularly appropriate to its international lens. The international approach also requires explanation, and will be discussed after the identification of conservative Evangelicals.

In the humanities, with fields such as politics, religion, or philosophy, it is possible to study the trees in great detail but miss the forest. Studies of Evangelicalism in particular countries necessarily stay centered on how it is practiced in those nations. Of special note, South Korean studies is becoming a field of much depth within religious scholarship and I am indebted to those who have exerted great amounts of effort in this regard. Yet, there is much to question about Evangelical Christianity as a larger global phenomenon. Our academic desire to be precise in the fine details, to get at “Korean Christianity” or “American Christianity,” is laudable, and I will do much of that here. At the same time however, we must be wary not to stop there, because we might be missing threads that run through the whole world-wide tapestry of Evangelicalism. Yet more worrisome, when Western scholarship focuses on itself, it all too often tends to reinscribe colonialist notions of Western primacy. By looking at two expressions in this study, Korean and American, I hope to understand authority within conservative Evangelicalism on a grander scale, with culture and nation as lenses and not limitations to my analysis.

The last preliminary step will be to discuss how to should identify authority or power when observing differing expressions of Christianity. To this end I will take guidance from previous scholarship. Kathleen C. Boone, near the beginning of her work, *The Bible Tells Them So*, a study on Protestant Fundamentalist discourse, retells the view

of the respected historian of Christianity, Martin Marty. There she says, “In Marty’s portrait, fundamentalists seem motivated less by religious belief as such than by psychological disposition, social forces and historical circumstance.”⁷ I agree with Boone and Marty that more is going on in most forms of conservative Evangelicalism than just what religious doctrine can produce. These religious worldviews are continually constructed from within a social, historical, and cultural context. This hypothesis will guide my study. Cultural and literary theorists such as Michel Foucault and Stanley Fish will provide the bedrock upon which I formulate questions of social and literary authority. Authority in Evangelicalism is found at the crossroads of society and text, and an approach that brings these together is needed. In conjunction, discourse theory and reader-response theory offer that approach. Both theories represent a more nuanced turn towards the collaborative production of meaning, and the right or ability to produce meaning is a vital aspect of authority. Finally, my method of understanding Bible-use needs an organizational framework. James Bielo, an anthropologist of Christianity and particularly Evangelicalism, has named a set of themes useful in analyzing Bible activity and understanding. In, *The Social Life of Scriptures: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Biblicalism*, Bielo marks out “biblical ideology,” “biblical hermeneutic,” “biblical rhetoric,” and “Bible as artifact” as four themes found in previous scholarship on Bible use. I will discuss each of these themes in more detail in the first chapter, and then apply them as I discuss the way the Bible is used in each country.

This is the start of my discussion on the problems of authority within conservative Evangelical Christianity. This study will examine the recent history, culture heritage, and the discourse of textual and social power within American and Korean expressions. My

⁷ Kathleen C Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989), 6.

intention is to criticize the assertion that the Bible is the final authority in conservative Evangelicalism. I posit that this is not the case. Instead, there is a rhetorical and cultural mask covering the real production of authority. At the same time, this mask is so well constructed, and exists at such a subconscious level of language, inter-personal relationship, and cultural axioms that it has been difficult for those caught in the web to see outside it. Furthermore, this is not a uniquely American phenomenon; a similar situation can be found in South Korea, a country with a vastly different culture and history. Korean conservative Evangelical culture tends to empower singular leaders, and takes pride in Protestant traditions and intellectualism, whereas their American counterparts tend to empower the popular will, reject the existence of tradition, and are commonly seen as anti-intellectual. As such, whatever is producing the discourse of biblical authority within conservative Evangelicalism is not something that can be linked to any one country or culture. It must be bigger than that. It will become more visible by looking to the forest, and not just one tree. In searching out this issue there is a benefit to conservative Evangelicals that should not be overlooked. Mark Noll states the advantage well when he says:

Evangelicals suffer from having paid scant attention to what might be called a theology of criticism, or a self-conscious perspective on academic method. . . . the resources for such a theology are latent in the evangelical tradition and that if these resources were developed more self-consciously, it would be possible to engage in a biblical scholarship at once more open to the contributions of criticism and more faithful to the Bible's divine character.⁸

I too believe that the Evangelical tradition can do more to encounter and make use of scholarly criticism in a productive way, but that it also has the ability to break free from

⁸ Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 9-10.

an arguably destructive discourse of power that has taken root in both South Korea and America.

My primary desire is to contribute to the global discussion on Evangelicalism. In this thesis, I will question how conservative Evangelical authority is produced both socially and from the text of the Bible. As someone who practices the faith being studied, I hope to reveal the need for self-critique in our most basic philosophical and hermeneutical positions; for it is these positions that perpetuate power structures and narratives by which we live our faith. It is our understanding of authority, or rather the lack thereof, which produced the rampant fracturing and division within Evangelical communities most visible in the diminishing of denominational churches over the past thirty years. It is a major factor in the cultural “othering” that conservative Evangelicals have experienced in both America and Korea in the last century. Ultimately, it is obstructive to the Gospel. Whether Evangelical power structures and narratives become life-giving or disparaging is up to us. No amount of academic or popular critique from without can bring about the needed realizations. It must be a work from within. Instead of trouncing around in the mud and muck of culture wars, or castigating perceived ideological opponents, the intellectual might of the conservative Evangelical tradition should be awakened again to its highest calling, to be salt and light in a world hungering for flavor in the mundane, and illumination in the difficulties of life. If the fight is against “principalities and powers,” then the power most urgently in need of challenge is the one reigning over the divisive authoritative discourse in conservative Evangelical Christianity.

CRITIQUING EVANGELICAL AUTHORITY: FRAMING AND METHODS

Who are the “Conservative Evangelicals?”

Before studying the history and practices of conservative Evangelicals, I must first define that term. This question has been a consistently difficult one for scholars of religion. Who is an Evangelical? What beliefs do Evangelical Christians hold that other Christians do not? Should the term be self-identified? Should it be applied to groups of Christians when they exhibit traits scholars deem common among Evangelicals? Even if the people described do not claim the label? These questions do not even begin to touch on the difficulty of this project. What about connected groups who sometimes bear the title Evangelical but other times do not? Can Fundamentalists, who are often described as sharing many doctrinal and theological beliefs with Evangelicals, be called by both names? Or are Evangelicals sometimes Fundamentalists and sometimes not? Are there progressive and traditional varieties of Evangelicalism? What do we mean if we use terms like progressive or traditional in regards to Evangelicals? Do these words signify a political spectrum? An ethical one? The definitions begin to pile on one after another in layers of meaning and perspective if we try to come to some all-encompassing description. This is the very problem of labels. They all come from some particular point of view, and each is built upon previously labeled concepts. It could become an infinite regress of subjective labeling.

Two scholars, Susan Harding and Kathleen Boone found this act of defining troublesome in their own work. Harding devotes two pages at the very beginning of, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, before the introduction even, to discussing the various ways in

which “Fundamentalism” and “Fundamentalist” can be perceived. She notes that these words are often used in different ways by different groups of people. Particularly different are the ways in which self-professed Fundamentalist Christians use the terms and how scholars, coming from a more “modern” worldview use the terms. Sometimes the title is connected more to “bible-belief,” and supernaturalism, while at other times it is used to describe anti-modernism. Harding describes the concept of “bible-belief” as acceptance of the supernatural claims of the Bible (though “believing the Bible” can be far more complex), standing in contrast to a modern view, which sees the Bible through the lens of higher criticism, it being merely a product of human history and human effort with supernatural ideas or stories read through different methods such as allegory or moral teaching.⁹

Boone also grapples with these problems of clarity, and touches on the issue of changing self-description in a way that will be helpful. Her study too is mainly focused on “fundamentalism” but she notes that the term has gradually moved into disfavor with conservative Protestants. Many who used to self-identify this way have rejected the appellation over time and have begun to use “Evangelical” instead. Fundamentalism seems to be reserved for extremist expressions of conservative Protestantism.

Interestingly, Boone quotes from a self-avowed fundamentalist work, *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*, written by Ed Dobson and Ed Hindson, and edited by Jerry Falwell, to make the point clear that the labels “Evangelical” and “Fundamentalist” have some key commonalities. In this work, Dobson and Hindson argue that there is one belief that binds these groups together. They say, “The one unifying factor in all these movements [conservative Protestant groups], without a doubt, is their common adherence

⁹ Susan Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), xv.

to the basic authority of Scripture as the only dependable guide for faith and practice.”¹⁰

I am in agreement with their conclusion and with Boone for including their statement.

For all the other factors that might be used to make divisions between this Evangelical group and that Fundamentalist group, the most internally important belief, and most constructive of group identity is the assertion that the Bible is the source of theological, institutional, practical, and cultural authority.

This situation is well expressed in the 1980s movement that Jerry Falwell played a major hand in instigating, the Moral Majority, or the New Christian Right. I will deal in more detail with this movement later while discussing the history of American conservative Evangelicalism, but for now, it is offered as an example to illustrate the collaboration between Christians who might term themselves Fundamentalist or Evangelical. The cultural shift that happened at this time in America was decisive for the marrying of conservative leaning Evangelicals, and those Protestants who had held on to the Fundamentalist label. Dissolving much of what divided them, various groups and denominations of pro-(traditional) family values, anti-modern, anti-establishment, populist, Protestant Christians started using terms such as, “bible-believing,” or “born-again,” as their self-identification of choice.

In his book, *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, George Marsden gives what I believe to be one of the best summations of the group:

Since mid-century there have been something like “card-carrying” evangelicals. These people, like their nineteenth-century forebears, have some sense of belonging to a complicated fellowship and infrastructure of transdenominational evangelical organizations for evangelism, missions, social services, publications and education. Typically, those who have the strongest sense of being “evangelicals” are persons with directly fundamentalist background, although persons from other traditions –

¹⁰ Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 7-9.

Pentecostal, holiness, Reformed, Anabaptist, and others – often are deeply involved as well. Sometimes the people, groups and organizations that make up “evangelicalism” in this are rivals; but even in rivalry they manifest the connectedness of a family grouping that is quite concerned about its immediate relatives.¹¹

It is this bible-believing “family” of conservative, Evangelical, Protestant Christians, of mostly fundamentalist descent, that are the focus of this study, and for ease of use I will simply refer to them as conservative Evangelicals. This family of religious groups has as their main binding attribute the belief in an all-authoritative text, the Bible. How systems of power emerge from activities, ideologies, and histories surrounding that text in this multi-denominational, multi-national, multi-cultural movement are what I intend to question. This family absolutely extends beyond the borders of America, and a very similar situation of identity formation and kinship can be found in South Korea. As in America, Korean Evangelicalism is mostly of the conservative variety. Of course there are also inter-Christian divisions in Korea, they just come from a different historical and cultural milieu. Because of this, the hue of conservative Evangelical, whether chartreuse, forest, or hunter does not matter as much for this study as that they are green. In both scholarly opinion and from self-declaration, “Bible as final authority” is the identifying shade of conservative Evangelicalism.

A Tale of Two Christianities

This study is a continuation and relocation of the work done by many scholars on Evangelical Christianity in America and its forms of authority. I will begin by reviewing relevant arguments from that project, and then apply similar analysis to the Korean

¹¹ George M. Marsden, *Evangelicalism and Modern America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1984), xiv.

conservative Evangelical problem of authority. The reasons for taking this approach are three fold. First and foremost, as Christianity is a religion found all over the world, it is my intention to capture its global character. Many studies focus on particular national or cultural expressions of Christian belief, and this is of course beneficial, but there is something to be uncovered about Evangelicalism by analyzing two instances of conservative Evangelical Christianity in tandem. Second, as conservative Evangelicalism is a global phenomenon, so too then are the biblical ideologies and systems of authority commonly at work within it. This presents an opportunity for conservative Evangelicals. It can be very difficult for persons within a system to see its flaws or defects; this is true for many systems, whether political, ideological or religious. By viewing a similar system as it is employed by a group of people different enough to allow for some amount of disassociation, one is more comfortably able to entertain a critique of “their” system without entertaining a direct self-critique. Of course that is the end goal, but this framing allows for a softer approach towards ideological reflexivity. Third and finally, analyzing conservative Evangelical culture and Bible use within two different national expressions allows room to further question the methodologies and conclusions of scholarship on Evangelicalism. For example, I will be able to ask whether biblical literalism, or political populism, two commonly asserted conservative Evangelical ideologies (among many that will be discussed), are similarly displayed among Evangelicals outside America, or if those traits could more accurately represent a uniquely American character. If the latter, then some current perspectives of Evangelicalism as a globally consistent movement are called into question, and new opportunities for scholarship will reveal themselves.

Significant for this study, much will be shown to be different between the American and Korean versions, yet decidedly comparable problems of textual and social authority exist. Recalling the allegory of a forest, American and Korean Evangelical Christianity might be akin to a maple and a pine, both trees, but very different in form. If both trees are diseased, you cannot say that it is the shape of the leaves or the thickness of the bark that is causing the ailment, for those parts are not the same. You must look to the system that feeds the plants; you must find the root of the problem. If this means that the unquestioned assertions concerning authority within conservative Evangelical culture need to be scrutinized, then that should be an option on the table. It is my contention that conservative Evangelical histories, current social situations, textual ideologies, and textual practices in both America and South Korea provide ample evidence that their understandings of authority are broken, and masked by an elusive discourse of power that has rarely, if ever, been internally recognized. Intentional or not, the denial of these problems has led to the mental, emotional, and relational suffering of many who currently do or at one time called themselves “Evangelical.”

Allow me to dwell a moment on the impact of this problem. Church and denomination splits, often caused by matters of biblical interpretation or application, end up splitting far more than just organizations. Friendships die in these conflicts. Family members stop talking to one another over ethical, moral, and doctrinal issues that stem from how this or that pastor interprets the Bible. Long time church members are painfully shunned or even kicked out of their spiritual homes for siding with the “wrong” group of people. Accusations of great weight are thrown around without much thought, and even less sensitivity, let alone love. People are branded as “backsliding,” “struggling,” “lost,”

or “not really a Christian,” when they simply hold a difference of opinion on some obscure verse. It seems obvious that if the Bible, which conservative Evangelicals profess is the sole and final authority of God, was easy to read, plain in its sense, only literal in its writing, perspicuous to all, perfect in its accounting of history and cosmology, and without error of any kind, then this situation would not be. There would be one worldwide, whole Church, and one worldwide, consistent understanding of the Gospel and Christian morality. This is obviously not the case. In a project organized by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC) at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary 41,000 Christian denominations were estimated to exist based on data collected worldwide.¹² The data was collected mainly from the figures reported by Christian denominations and groups around the world. This means that the total number is most likely larger, as there is almost no way to accurately count the number of smaller groups or local churches that break away from their parent denominations. Because a text holds the place of authority in conservative Evangelicalism it is more susceptible to this problem. Any pastor, elder, or evangelist who decides to think differently or read differently than his or her denomination can justifiably found a new group by simply arguing that they have a truer, purer, more accurate reading of the Bible. The fact that there should be no “truer,” or “more accurate” reading of the Bible if it was completely inerrant, perspicuous, and literal, seems to get lost in the chaos of theological debate and chest beating. More accurately put, any authority the Bible does have in conservative Evangelicalism is made to serve unacknowledged sources of power. This understanding cannot be allowed for most conservative Evangelicals though because it calls into

¹² Pew Forum, “Global Christianity,” last modified 2015, accessed September 24, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2011/12/ChristianityAppendixB.pdf>.

question the cornerstone of common Evangelical theology: the Bible as final authority. To question it would be to question their very identity, which is understandably a difficult thing to do. However, when the harmful divisiveness of the status quo is observed such questions become beneficial, maybe even morally necessary. One does not get clean by sitting in the mud, nor does one become less dirty by pointing out the dirtiness of other mud sitters. At some point, a few must stand up and question whether mud sitting is a fruitful practice for cleanliness.

The present study then will attempt to take such a stand by evaluating the discourse of authority within two expressions of conservative Evangelicalism. Other scholars have critiqued the scriptural practices of Evangelicals, and this study will follow suit with questions like, “How do people – as complex and conflicted individuals, as inheritors of institutional and cultural resources, as practitioners of distinct expressions of Christianity – interact with the Bible?”¹³ Moving beyond observation and categorization though, my goal is to ascertain how these various cultural, social, and textual practices lead to similarly destructive practices of authority, and to show that the lack of internal criticism has been disadvantageous to Evangelicalism. By analyzing two national versions of conservative Evangelicalism at the same time, I will be able to find constants between the two that highlight common philosophical threads which sustain the problematic discourse. A valuable side benefit of this process will be to see the beautiful variety within conservative Evangelicalism. Though critique is at the forefront of my mind in this process, I would be remiss to pass by the mosaic of human culture and human progress found in global Evangelicalism without at least noting it at times. This salt has not yet lost its saltiness.

¹³ James S. Bielo, *The Social Life of Scriptures* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 1.

Unmasking Authority

Discursive authority within conservative Evangelicalism is decidedly rooted in texts and language. Positing the Bible to be *the* written form of the voice of God, all teaching from it, all pronouncements on it, and all public and private reading of it carry this same pride of place. The issue at hand is that these acts are rarely questioned as separate happenings. In a conservative Evangelical church, the pastor's sermon could be described as the "Word of God" almost as much as the Bible is, because he or she speaks with verbiage filled with quotes from the text, and stories that replicate its rhythm and cadence. Harding summarizes this well:

Preachers "stand in the gap" between the language of the Christian Bible and the language of everyday life. . . . Preachers convert the ancient recorded speech of the Bible once again into spoken language, translating it into local theological and cultural idioms and placing present events inside the sequence of biblical stories. Church people, in their turn, borrow, customize, and reproduce the Bible-based speech of their preachers and other leaders in their daily lives. Preachers appropriate each other's sermons piecemeal and wholesale, while church people assimilate their preachers' language at the level of grammar, semantics, and style.¹⁴

Truly anyone who has grown up in a conservative Evangelical church can attest to this strange occurrence. Having gained a certain local dialect and Christian slang from one's own church, when visiting a friend's church you can be surprised or confused by the different verbal style or slang terms used by that group of people. Listening to the pastor's sermon, you come to understand where the new and strange vocabulary comes from. The pastor says that following Jesus is a "heart thing," or that his "armor-bearer" was a real blessing to him, or that she has "a real *agape* love for her *koinonia*;" all versions of what many conservative Evangelicals have lovingly termed, "Christianese." While topics like this get discussed commonly in conservative Evangelical circles or

¹⁴ Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 12.

media, there has as of yet been very little effort expended by academics within conservative Evangelicalism to illuminate the discursive or systematic production of this phenomenon and its positive or negative effects. It is named, joked about, and then the subject is dropped. This is but one small example of the almost paradoxical acknowledgement/denial that happens within conservative Evangelicalism for matters of authority production or social and cultural power outside of biblically authoritative matters. If a topic of conversation might highlight aspects of politics, culture, local society, or literature that carry authoritative weight within conservative Evangelicalism it is quickly subsumed under the over-arching authority of the Bible. Some questions never get asked, some are purposefully censored. The authoritative discourse is simply lived, sometimes lightly discussed, but rarely questioned.

There are two methodological theories which will help me to analyze the social and textual processes within conservative Evangelicalism, the first of which is discourse theory. Unlike the common-sense view that worldviews and ideas are born at particular moments, discourse theory says that human societies, movements, ideologies, etc., emerge from the ever-flowing project of human relationships and communication. Ideas then are not products, but processes; they are not nouns, they are verbs. Somewhat ironically, this theory is often credited to one man, Michel Foucault.¹⁵ In the interview, “Space, Knowledge, and Power,” he says, “Nothing is fundamental. That is what is interesting in the analysis of society ... There are only reciprocal relations and the perpetual gaps between intentions in relation to one another.”¹⁶ Though I disagree in part,

¹⁵ Discourse theory would of course not allow for Foucault to be a sole originator. That would be an internal contradiction. Foucault’s comments on discourse theory should be seen as an example of the very process it seeks to explain.

¹⁶ Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.), 247.

I find Foucault's assertion beneficial. There may be room for ontological arguments that fundamentals exist in various fields of human understanding, but Foucault shows that at least the *apprehension* of reality is based in a communicative, inter-personal, relational, and on-going process. Put another way, I recognize a differentiation between the possibility of fundamental truth, whether in questions of morality, theology, mathematics, or sociology, and our human capability to understand, interpret, or gather data on such subjects.

This is to me the crux of the postmodern turn in history and literature. Human knowledge production has a perplexing and frustrating contextuality to it. For some time, scholarship has been wrestling with this paradigm and conservative Evangelicals are playing catch-up to this epistemological shift. Instead of participating in the project of postmodern literary studies, conservative Evangelicals have been caught in a discursive web that restricts and blinds them. They are blinded because the power of the discourse is both right in front of their face and yet anonymous; effectively, a mask that works both ways. Boone quotes Foucault on this point saying that the "rules" of a discourse, the system by which it functions, work "according to a sort of uniform anonymity, on all individuals who undertake to speak in this discursive field."¹⁷ This is the reason I argue for needed self-criticism within conservative Evangelicalism. The rules of the discourse are ephemeral things, they do not come into being and linger within one powerful preacher, or denomination board, or a new trend of "Christianese," or any other single point of authority. Instead, they exist in the ever changing interplay between these locations of meaning production. As such, someone studying this phenomenon cannot

¹⁷ Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 14.

look to one example and say, “there it is.” Instead, it is in the constant roll of history and the perpetual process of culture-making that the discourse asserts its power.

Assuredly, some individuals have more influence on the discourse than others.

The meaning makers and language producers, pastors, scholars, editors, seminary professors, authors, and popular speakers lead the process. Yet, they too are beholden to the discourse. Boone puts it eloquently,

The role of the subject, whether leader or follower, is transcribed by the larger discourse in which he participates. No single individual is smart enough or powerful enough to manipulate fundamentalist [or conservative Evangelical] discourse fully, and in certain ways, the discourse manipulates him. To enjoy credibility, one must ensure that one’s own discourse is following the explicit and implicit rules of the general discourse. No single individual can master a discourse, and thus no single individual can achieve mastery *over* a discourse. . . . The personal power of the preacher pales in comparison with the impersonal power of fundamentalist discourse.¹⁸

Because of this I do not work only to point out specific persons, organizations, or locations of authority in this study as if just noting who has power at any moment would make everything clear. Moving forward, my discussions on history, ideologies and practices within conservative Evangelicalism will be focused on finding threads; places where various “rules” of the discourse intersect with themselves or outside thoughts, forming patterns. It is in viewing the whole tapestry that logical inconsistencies (and possible harmful effects) of conservative Evangelical authority discourse are most clearly visible. In this way, the frays and tears within the cloth are made apparent. The most prominent of these cases and arguably the most highly contributive to the discourse as a whole is biblical interpretation. To begin my discussion on biblical literature and

¹⁸ Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 15.

hermeneutics I turn to reader-response theory, and Stanley Fish's "interpretive communities."

Historical, genre, narrative, and other textual "criticisms" have been put to use by Christian and non-confessional scholarship for a very long time. These approaches to biblical literature focus on the text itself, questioning where it comes from, the social or cultural context of the author(s), or how the narrative develops. Reader-response theory is different though. It does not question the text directly; it questions the act of reading. This theory posits the reader as playing a formative role in the construction of meaning coming from the text. If the perspectives of reader-response theory are accepted, then the text and the reader together create meaning, and thus a fusion of the biblical text and the reader's mind are what you get when you listen to a preacher, speaker, or commentator. This helps to understand the emergence of authority within Evangelical communities, but it raises a philosophical problem as well.

The problem is something like this: is the meaning of a text singular, definitive, inherently existent within the letters/symbols, and perfectly ascertainable in a completely equal fashion by all who read it? Or, is the meaning of a text personal, derivative, various, and constructed in the moment by the interplay between reader and text? Reader-response theory affirms the second option. Personally, I am probably somewhere in the middle, in a "both-and" space. I understand readers to be "co-workers" with texts in the production of meaning without positing that a definitive meaning is non-existent. Symbols are not naturally occurring, they are created, and thus they have some original meaning from their creator, but from the very next moment and forever after they are interpreted by those who look upon them. Language at the core is a symbol system, and so something

similar must hold true here. Original meaning probably exists, but it is an elusive quarry; the practical, daily used meaning is a communal construct made between persons and texts in an on-going, procedural way. As such, Stanley Fish's concept of "interpretive communities" is valuable for this analysis.

Both Bielo and Boone have dwelt upon Fish's "interpretive communities" at length and produced understandable summations of the concept. Bielo puts it like this:

Readers read the way they do because of their participation in defined communities of practice. Such communities operate on common procedures for engaging texts, sharing hermeneutic assumptions, interpretive strategies, and performative styles. It is from this collective reading context that meaning ensues, not from the individual reader, and not from the text itself. As a result, we see reading and interpretation as fundamentally cultural acts, and we open a space to view the multiplicity of social meanings that arise from the reader-text interaction.¹⁹

This critique of literary meaning production can be agreeably received by conservative Evangelicals by seeing it as a very practical check on our social reading habits and systems, instead of an attack on inspiration, which it is not. Most Evangelicals have had experiences in church or bible study that confirm this situation. For example, when attending a particular church, one will hear certain Bible verses read in certain ways, and while attending another church's bible study or Sunday service one might hear a familiar verse discussed in a totally new light. This other group uses new communal stories to describe the meaning of the verse, or they focus on particular words within the passage that the first group rarely highlights. Such an instance is the very practical, daily process of being part of an interpretive community. Sometimes such situations are pleasant, offering the churchgoer a new way of viewing a beloved passage that they accept. Other times, the different interpretation is seen as problematic. Maybe this new interpretation is

¹⁹ Bielo, *Words Upon the Word*, 13.

not compatible with one's prior understanding; maybe it directly contradicts it. These kinds of interpretive conflicts are the product of conservative Evangelicals belonging to widely varying interpretive communities. Boone quotes Fish discussing moments of conflict between interpretive communities, "The assumption in each community will be that the other is not correctly perceiving the 'true text,' but the truth will be that each perceives the text (or texts) its interpretive strategies demand and call into being."²⁰

I would not go as far as Fish in saying that the conflicting communities actually "call into being" totally different texts. I take that as hyperbole to make a point. The point is well received though, such that each church community ends up being nearly blind to the view of the other because they are using drastically different assumptions about the text. This is where different Christian communities begin to talk past each other. Church unity is disrupted and individuals walk away injured knowing not how the conflict began. All the leaders argue that they have the "true text," the "proper" reading of scripture, the "purer" understanding, yet they will not allow for the problem of interpretation on a larger scale. To do so would be to problematize the Bible's authority. Here again, both laity and church leaders are held captive by a destructive discourse of authority that they feel they must uphold lest beliefs core to their personal and group identity be made vulnerable. I hope to show that a little vulnerability is exactly what is needed here. There needs to be an organized, internal critique of the conservative Evangelical movement's philosophy of social and textual authority. Evangelicals need to take the mask off, undo the bandages that have built up over a century (or more) of cultural and theological conflict, and let the wounds breathe. Only then can we work toward a healthier and intellectually robust understanding of authority.

²⁰ Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 21.

An International Methodology

Since I will be applying the theoretical understanding discussed above to two very different groups of Evangelicals, with nationality being the main differentiating factor, a methodology that is applicable to both expressions is required. How can we question and categorize the aspects of power or authority in each country as to make the results comparable? While examining the history, culture, and textual practices of both countries, some questions need to be kept in mind. Who are the leaders, and over what areas do they exert influence? Are there checks on leadership? Why are some given the right of public speech and not others? How is individual and institutional power gained? Scholars need more than questions though; we need rubrics to organize and understand the data we gather. Previous scholarship is again my guide.

Mark Noll's study of American Evangelical biblical scholarship touches on a key point for the present study, "ownership" of interpretation, or who has the right to make pronouncements for scriptural texts and why. Let me reiterate why this is so important. Within conservative Evangelicalism the Bible is an object and a subject, a material location and an abstract idea, and even at times is spoken of as an agent; i.e., "the Bible says," "the Bible forbids," "the Bible encourages us to." It is positioned as the pinnacle of authority within both American and Korean Evangelical communities. So, the question of who gets to speak for or from the Bible is of monumental importance in deconstructing the conservative Evangelical discourse of authority. For Noll, this issue was valuable in discussing the relationship American Evangelicals have had with biblical criticism, and with intellectualism more broadly, a love-hate relationship to be sure. For this study the often discussed anti-intellectualism of American Evangelicals will be one factor, but

Noll's approach is valuable for more than just this. He offers a four part delineation of the "ownership" of interpretation which is a good place to begin when observing the relations different peoples have toward the text and toward each other. He puts it thusly:

All religious communities exhibit distinct patterns in interpreting sacred texts, but at least four elements are almost always present: (1) religious authority exercised by leaders; (2) technical wisdom from experts specially trained to study the holy writings; (3) popular acceptance or approval of interpretations; and (4) the interweaving of these various strands into a group's distinctive tradition of interpretation.²¹

The first category would include pastors, bishops, superintendents, missionaries, Sunday school teachers, youth pastors, and all others who hold some kind of official religious leadership position within the organizational framework of a particular group. The second category is mainly made up of people who have obtained high levels of theological or biblical education, such as commentary authors, seminary or bible school professors, or other academic professionals who have focused their careers on biblical interpretation. It does contain some overlap with the first group, as pastors, missionaries, and other church workers often obtain a BA or MA degree in a bible-connected field. The third category mainly identifies the laity, the churchgoers, and their collective voice. Their acceptance or rejection of the views espoused by people from the two previous categories is the major factor in the endurance and spread of those views. A pastor can give an eloquent and bible-verse laden sermon, but if it does not catch in the minds of the laity, then her views will become nothing more than that. The fourth and final category is a composite of the previous three as they play out over time. As the conversation between religious leaders, Bible experts, and the general conservative Evangelical populace has progressed through time, and through the rising, falling, and adapting of churches and other cultural

²¹ Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 150.

institutions, a unique tradition has formed. Though they often reject the word “tradition” as a negative element, Evangelicals carry their own tradition(s) into all their religious projects and practices. This category contains concepts like social and textual assumptions, common philosophies, common language usages (“Christianese” as discussed above), regularized Sunday service or bible study practices, common music and worship habits, etc.

Together these four categories will help me examine in a controlled way both Korean and American conservative Evangelical groups. This schema is particularly advantageous when observing how social hierarchies or social groupings work together. I have found that although Korean and American conservative Evangelicalism both end up at the same place, they get there by very different roads. While the American expression tends to emphasize the third category (the populace/laity) throughout its history, and seems desirous to hide the fourth (tradition), the Korean expression gives much more power to the first (religious leaders) and second categories (scripture experts), and is still happy to publicly display the fourth. I will discuss all of that in depth in the chapters to come, but for now let me set down one final methodology I will use when observing Bible use.

Using the above would provide a good analysis of the social factors that sustain the authorial discourse, but it is not just a social problem. Conservative Evangelicalism’s discourse of power is found at the interplay between social practices and textual understanding. It is not possible to say which came first, the social forces that position the Bible, or the biblical understanding that gives support to the accepted social systems. Because of this, a way of analyzing the explicit/spoken and implicit/unspoken biblical

philosophies of the movements will be helpful. Toward this end, James Bielo again offers guidance with the scholarly concept he calls Biblicism, and four attending themes that help to grasp how a group uses the Bible. He too argues that this kind of study need be more than just comparing differences between nationalized versions of Christianity, that it is more theoretically constructive than that. He describes the study of Biblicism as such:

Biblicism is pressed to ask why particular belief formations, why specific forms of practice, and why certain tensions emerge at all. And, ultimately, are there identifiable principles and processes – social, cognitive, linguistic, and otherwise – that structure the interactions that occur between the Bible and its many and varied interlocutors.²²

These questions will help push this study beyond just observing differences and similarities between the history, language, or current traditions of Bible use in American and Korean conservative Evangelicalism. They will also help hypothesize why those differences or similarities exist, and more importantly how as a narrative they produce a theology-stifling and ecclesiology-breaking discourse of authority in both cases. To form a practical lens for the questions of Biblicism, Bielo offers four constructive themes. They are 1) biblical ideology; 2) biblical hermeneutic; 3) biblical rhetoric; and 4) Bible as artifact.²³

“Biblical ideology” gives a name to the presuppositions, axioms, unquestioned-assertions, and culturally mandated beliefs that a particular group of Christians hold about the Bible. From this theme scholars can draw questions about how a group of believers understands the nature of the Bible, how they believe it came into being (both practically and theologically), the forms of content it holds, and the purpose of its being. We can ask why a certain view of the text is emphasized over others, and why alternative

²² Bielo, *The Social Life of Scriptures*, 2.

²³ *Ibid.*, 5-7.

views are marginalized. We can question the ways in which a particular church, institution, or leader replicates their view within the group. From these questions I will be able to construct an understanding of the root ideas and histories that informed an ideology, and more importantly, see how that ideology then influences the daily Bible practices of a particular group. Bielo's work provides solid evidence that Christian groups which begin with the same or similar ideologies can end up with very different biblical hermeneutics and practices, a situation that occurs between the groups studied here, and so further categorization is of use.

"Biblical hermeneutics" describes the literary strategies and institutional systems that Christian groups use to interpret the Bible. Interpretations are highly influenced by the national, cultural, economic, racial, and philosophical background of the readers. This can be well observed throughout Evangelical history. Former popular interpretations from one time grow disfavored as new, more contextually informed opinions begin to gain presence. A change in denominational affiliation, identification with a different racial or cultural group, or a shift in economic standing can all affect a change in interpretational strategies. Some Christian groups have a well-developed ecclesiology (i.e., official catalogues of doctrine, church boards, decisions made by representatives at sanctioned meetings, etc.) to provide justification for particular interpretations, while others legitimize hermeneutic strategies less directly, preferring popularity or acceptance by the majority to validate a reading. Both can be found within conservative Evangelicalism though the latter is far more powerful and far more elusive for its transient and shifting nature. At times, different interpretations are even at odds within one group, at which point factors like education level, church standing, or ideological

loyalty play deciding roles. Few factors lead to more inter-Evangelical authoritative conflict than biblical hermeneutics, and so it will be a capstone within my analysis. I will ask what role personal, small group, or public reading of the Bible holds for a group; analyze the ways a group's hermeneutics tie back to their biblical ideologies; and I will attempt to identify the hermeneutic strategies that conservative Evangelicals in each country empower, as well as the readings they actively work to delegitimize. Finally, I will highlight connections between shifts in interpretation and shifts in the general cultural or social milieu, and how these changes play out in the biblical practices of the group.

“Biblical rhetoric” deals with how the Bible is used in performative and creative ways. I find it helpful to also think of this theme in the form of, “Bible as Subject.” The common pastoral phrase, “the Bible says,” captures the thrust of this understanding well. The Bible is used as a subject, an agent, of communal narrative and identity formation. When biblical stories, characters, images, or sayings are used to support, refute, or argue for a particular point of view, that is biblical rhetoric. When a pastor, author, singer, or other Christian leader identifies herself with a biblical personage she is applying a biblical rhetoric to give her audience a collectively understood image. When an Evangelical pastor preaches that he will stand up to secular culture like David did to Goliath in 1 Samuel 17, or when a Christian author says that she was in prayer over some personal grief, pouring out her heart to God like David did before his son died in 2 Samuel 12, or a worship leader calls the congregation to dance unashamed before the Lord like David in 2 Samuel 6, they are all employing biblical rhetoric concerning the character of David that they hold in common with their audience. Susan Harding offered

a deeply explored example of biblical rhetoric when she examined Pastor Jerry Falwell's use of the Israelite siege of Jericho narrative found in Joshua 5:13-6:27.²⁴ Pastor Falwell made a rhetorical connection between the desire for Thomas Road Baptist Church to acquire the mountain upon which they wanted to build what would become Liberty University, and the Israelites' desire to acquire the Promised Land. In the first case, the fundraising effort was the obstacle, in the latter, the city of Jericho. Harding relates how Falwell performed or enacted the biblical text by driving around the mountain once each day for six days, and then seven times on the seventh day. In doing so, Falwell was using the text of the Bible to inform his actions, and make a performed argument for procuring the mountain. The rhetorical use of the Bible changes it slightly though. In this example the Israelites had very real enemies in the text, the current inhabitants of Jericho, whereas Falwell had no enemy up on the mountain. The rhetoric was not aimed at opponents; instead, it was used to create an emotional and common literary understanding of the situation with his followers. He lived into, and enabled his congregation and other donors to live into the text of the Bible. The power of biblical rhetoric is to create life narratives by which people then function and see the world. These collective rhetorics offer more than just emotional ties between people who share them. They inform the way those stories are read, and will be read in the future, and thereby help to influence and even alter the previous two themes over time. A shift in performance of a biblical narrative can create shifts in personal and communal hermeneutic understanding, and ultimately even affect the way the Bible is perceived ideologically.

"Bible as artifact" is the final theme that Bielo highlights. This concept could also be thought of as biblical materiality, or "Bible as object." The Bible is a real material

²⁴ Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 106-108.

item. It is used to signify spaces or people, and people do things to it for beautification or demonstration. It can sit on tables in offices or living rooms, it can be carried tightly by one's side, or it can be held up for all to see. In all the places it physically exists it exerts an influence. It can turn that living room coffee table into a family altar. It is the material symbol of authority on the pastor's desk. In underground churches around the world, the physical arrival of a box of Bibles is met with tears of joy and shouts of thankfulness. On streets in large Western cities, the man handing out Bibles and yelling at passersby is met with sneers and heckling. In some Evangelical churches, it is no problem for the pastor to preach from a low rise stage, seated on a bar stool, with the only scripture found on his handheld tablet. In other Evangelical churches the pastor would never think to preach without a Bible visibly present near him for the entire congregation to see, and so he can read directly from it. The Bible's physical presence or absence can be a great factor in conservative Evangelicals' viewing a room, a building, or a person as holy/sacred/special or not. In the same way, stories, characters or symbols from the Bible can be made material and used to mark spaces or people. Scenes from many famous Bible stories have been turned into amazing works of art over the course of human history, but less professional (yet no less meaningful) works also give life, color, and significance to second grade Sunday school rooms, hospitals, jail cells, and business offices. The Bible has been used as a material object in many and varied ways. This study will question where the Bible is located, who carries it, how it is given prominence of space, and how the text is brought into new material forms in different kinds of physical media.

Towards a Healthier Understanding of Authority

It is my goal to offer an academic exploration of conservative Evangelical authority as it exists in America and South Korea, to reveal how various locations of authority are masked by the obscuring veil of biblical authority, and show what social, historical, and cultural influences have supported this discourse in each country. This project is of course not new. Secular scholars and Evangelicals have struggled with this topic for quite some time. Wesleyan Evangelicals have their quadrilateral,²⁵ Pentecostal Evangelicals give more power to spiritual experience as a balance to textual interpretation, and secular scholars of history and literature have written for decades on how Fundamentalism or Evangelicalism works. The problem of religious authority is an enthralling topic for many because it has left such a mark on human history. It is not reducible to a problematic doctrine, a certain demographic, political affiliation, or anything so finite. I will argue that the problematic discourse of authority in conservative Evangelicalism is more a human issue than a particularly religious one. It has to do with the comfort of certainty, the human desire to find the true narrative of our existence, and the opportunity that supplying these things to a community presents those who are attracted to power (even if for benevolent reasons).

My personal experiences as a resident of both America and South Korea, observations from time spent dwelling in Korean church communities, along with the research of scholars from both countries will inform this project. I do not presume to be able to offer an “answer” here, a way for Evangelicals to perfectly re-envision church

²⁵ Though not coined by John Wesley himself, the Wesleyan Quadrilateral is a term denoting a four-part approach to Christian religion often discussed in denominations sprouting from the Anglican, Methodist, or other Wesleyan roots. The four parts include: 1) Scripture; 2) Tradition; 3) Reason; and 4) Experience. A fuller explanation can be found on the United Methodist Church’s official website, <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/wesleyan-quadrilateral>.

authority. The first step is all I can see for now, and that is to stop ignoring and masking discursive influences on our enculturated systems of power. I see this project as a way for me to shine a light on aspects of Evangelicalism that believers rarely observe. It is my hope that the following discussions will lead others to open dialogue about how conservative Evangelicals have related to one another and the greater world. I hope Evangelicals begin to think deeply about *how* the Bible has been an authority in their lives and communities, about *why* they have allowed certain people to take leadership roles, and about *what* really has influenced the construction of their worldview. It has not been the Bible alone.

THE AMERICAN STORY: MAJOR INFLUENCES FROM HISTORY

“Thus religious zeal is perpetually warmed in the United States by the fires of patriotism. These men do not act exclusively from a consideration of a future life; eternity is only one motive of their devotion to the cause. If you converse with these missionaries of Christian civilization, you will be surprised to hear them speak so often of the goods of this world, and to meet a politician where you expected to find a priest.” – Alexis de Tocqueville²⁶

One major theme that stands out when reading Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, is the large influence he believed religion had on American politics in 1835. Nearly every other chapter seems to hold some insight about how religious leaders, institutions, or the religious sentiment of Americans upholds their republic. Tocqueville’s keen observations also saw how the new nation’s political systems had affected a change in the religious mind of the American populace. The above quote is found in a chapter where he discusses the effort that the established states made to send Christian missionaries and workers to the new states just entering the union, like the untamed wilderness known as Illinois. His intent in describing the missionaries as “politicians” does not seem at all to denigrate them. He is pointing out the deep connection between American socio-political ideologies and their religious ideologies. As he says, they were as focused on this world as they were the next, something that seemed uniquely American to him. As Tocqueville did, I will walk through the American story in this chapter, led by previous scholarship. By doing so, I will be able to highlight some of the particular cultural traits of American conservative Evangelicalism and discuss in the following chapter how those traits helped to create a unique tradition and discourse.

²⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve (University of Adelaide: Ebooks@Adelaide, 2015), book 1, chapter 17, accessed September 24, 2015, <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/t/tocqueville/alexis/democracy/complete.html#book1.17>.

Early America and Evangelicalism

In, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, Nathan Hatch argues that American Christianity (particularly Evangelicalism) has been thoroughly saturated by the populist and democratic mentality of the American political mind.²⁷ There are five main aspects of American Christianity that stand out most during this early phase, that last of which I will argue is a product of the previous four. They are the religious “free market,” revivalism, sectarianism, the rise of theological Biblicism, and from these four, the cyclical production of charismatic religious leaders who separate from their forbears to found “new”²⁸ religious groups.

The early republic was a time of wild social change. It saw the rejection of much that exemplified the “old world,” not just monarchical government, but most forms of classism, such as the divide of nobility and peasantry. Egalitarian sentiment was the spirit of the age and it seeped into nearly every facet of American culture.²⁹ Christianity was of course not excluded from this process. Protestantism had rejected the grand magisterium of the Catholic Church a few centuries prior, but in Europe it had been replaced with a few denominationally confined replicas. As an Americanized Protestantism grew in the early republic it went beyond what had grown up in Europe. It was a religion organized

²⁷ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 3-5.

²⁸ I hesitate to use this word, because it is my express intention to show that very little about each successive group is new. Each wave takes up the rallying call of their elders early years, but they do not change it much. American Evangelicalism has become a cycling loop, where elders achieve stability in their religious group over their lifetimes only to have the ideological young desire a “purer” or “more biblical” Christianity. They then found a new denomination or church that fits their vision, only to grow old, settle, and have the next generation repeat the story. There is little change because there is very little challenge to the process, only a challenge to the product.

²⁹ The lack of racial or gender egalitarianism, which would have to wait nearly two centuries to bloom, are great failings of this otherwise socially progressive time.

by the common people. It was a “free market” of religious ideas, groups, and leaders.

Hatch explains:

America’s nonrestrictive environment [i.e. free market] permitted an unexpected and often explosive conjunction of evangelical fervor and popular sovereignty. . . . This expansion of evangelical Christianity did not proceed primarily from the nimble response of religious elites. . . . Rather, Christianity was effectively reshaped by common people who molded it in their own image. . . . Increasingly assertive common people wanted their leaders unpretentious, their doctrines self-evident and down-to-earth, their music lively and sing-able, and their churches in local hands. It was this upsurge of democratic hope that characterized so many religious cultures in the early republic. . . .³⁰

The anti-classism of American Evangelicalism is a topic to be discussed later, but for now it serves as the instigator of the religious freedom that led to an open market for new leaders and new ideas. If the Reformation traded the power of one Pope for the authority of a handful of leaders, the early American Evangelicals traded nearly all institutional authority for the authority of the populace. This is readily visible in the history of revivalism.

Much work has been done on the history of revivalism because of its great influence on the growth of Christianity in America. Here I am not as concerned with the religious outcome of revivals, but with the way in which they represent the American Evangelical mind. With the rejection of formal institutions (or the lack of any in close proximity), many nineteenth century American Evangelicals turned to personal spiritual experience as the most common expression of Christian faith. Though revivals would be held by Baptists, the Stone-Campbell movement, and many other groups, it was the Methodists who made the earliest and largest use. Their circuit riders and preachers would hold camp meetings where they would make, “overt attempts to have the power of

³⁰ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 9.

God ‘strike fire’ over a mass audience; they encouraged uncensored testimonials ... the public sharing of ecstasy; overt physical display and emotional release; loud and spontaneous response to preaching; and the use of folks music”³¹ Revivalism, or emotional Christianity, is a landmark of American conservative Evangelical culture, and has been for a very long time. This is because it expresses the very deeply held religious and political worldviews of many American Evangelicals. Revivals are communal meetings, but at the same time American revivals have always emphasized the individual as much as is possible. One by one people come up to give their personal testimony, one leader preaches for hours on end, each attendee finds a spot to pray alone or in a small group, the audience is asked to seek Jesus “for themselves,” to ask Him to forgive them personally, to have a one to one relationship with God. American Evangelicalism and its revivals are marked by a penchant for individualism. This makes sense in a culture that is founded on equality, independence and personal freedom. In such a society, the basic social currency becomes the individual.³² If the individual is favored over the communal, the door is further opened to each and every unique religious perspective. This leads to the next aspect of American Evangelicalism to take root in the early republic, sectarianism.

In a field where official social hierarchies are undone, where anti-intellectualism and anti-classism are strong, and where the personal religious experiences of each individual holds more sway than traditional theology, historical orthodoxy, or the arguments of scriptural experts, the soil is well tilled for new religious movements to sprout. That is exactly what nineteenth century American history shows. Hatch highlights

³¹ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 50.

³² As opposed to a society that seems to hold social harmony, professionalism, and hierarchy as primary ideals. I will show how that unfolds in the analysis of Korean Evangelicalism.

a few cultural aspects of the early republic that highly encouraged sectarianism within Christianity at the time, and one is particularly relevant for this study. The lack of a concrete, shared, American nationalism, or a singular cultural stream from which all citizens drank, had pervasive effects on American Evangelicalism.³³ They had no common ethnicity; no common language (and the language they had most in common, English, was not theirs); they had different traditions of family, food, and festivity; and from the start a plurality of religions and Christian denominations had called America home. This cultural diversity opened many opportunities for new religious leaders to create more religious diversity. Where cultural power vacuums existed, or where there was public discord, persons of particularly powerful and persuasive religious conviction could step into leadership roles within their communities. In such situations, the existing religious authority is often branded corrupt or impotent to attend to the populace's problems, and the new religious leader would disassociate from the status quo and found something new. In this way, a cornucopia of new Christian denominations and movements found culturally accepted justification.

In response to the lack of centralized authority, and the rampant sectarianism that grew, a web of relationships stepped in to sustain American Evangelical Christianity. Hatch says that any commonality rested in, "The array of denominations, mission boards, reform agencies, newspapers, journals, revivalists, and colleges ..." but that these were, "at best an amorphous collectivity, an organizational smorgasbord. Power, influence, and authority were radically dispersed, and the most successful came by way of popular appeal." That last statement is the most telling. Though America has had plenty of Christian schools, denominations, and other forms of organized Christianity, a large

³³ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 64.

portion of the power has been held by the populace. Dispersal of power at this point did have some benefits, and the early Americans did not want to go back to the hegemony of kings and popes. Still, Evangelical minds have not adequately examined the negative impact that populism has had on the American Evangelical conception of authority. In response to the growing sectarianism, and the dissolving of old institutional authorities, the “amorphous collectivity” of early American Christian groups positioned the Bible as the only authoritative foundation left.

Theological Biblicism³⁴ can be connected in part back to the Reformation and to the concept of *sola scriptura*, but it came to dominate the American Protestant mind in a more totalizing way than it ever had in Europe. For the most part, old world denominations had retained organized church structures, creedal affirmations, and traditions that together with the Bible were seen as authoritative. Denominations moving to the new world or those that would sprout up there were much less inclined toward recognizing organized human authority and old traditions, preferring to say that the Bible was the only or main source of authority far above all others. The historical rise of theological Biblicism as a formative hermeneutic, and the attendant rise of Fundamentalism within American Protestant Christianity have been discussed by many scholars including Nathan Hatch, George Marsden, and Mark Noll who are consulted in this project, as well as Martin Marty, D.G. Hart, and many others not referenced directly here. With no need to reinvent the wheel, I recommend the works of these scholars as

³⁴ Theological Biblicism as I use it should not be confused with Bielo’s Biblicism. Bielo’s term is used to identify the scholarly project of studying Bible use among various contemporary Christians. Theological Biblicism as it will be used here is in reference to the collection of philosophical/theological ideas held by conservative American Evangelicals about the Bible, particularly inerrancy, perspicuity, literalism, and the presupposition of verbal plenary inspiration. This distinction will become clearer as I discuss each of these concepts later.

sufficient evidence for the modern emergence of beliefs that support theological Biblicism (i.e., biblical inerrancy, literalism, etc.), and instead would like to focus on how this biblical ideology has never been truly implemented, even up to modern times. The rise and decline of the Christian Movement³⁵ is a particularly evocative example of the problems of theological Biblicism.

The Christian Movement was organized mainly by four leaders, Elias Smith, James O'Kelly, Barton Stone, and Alexander Campbell, all of whom came to their ideas from a radical dissent of their perception of clerical authority. These four men overtly tied their religious arguments to the political arguments that were popular in their time. In 1809, Elias Smith, having resigned his position as a respected Baptist minister said, "Let us be republicans indeed. Many are republicans as to government, and yet are but half republicans, being in matters of religion still bound to a catechism, creed, covenant or a superstitious priest. Venture to be as independent in things of religion, as those which respect the government in which you live."³⁶ In the 1830s, Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone would add their followers to the movement and by 1860 the Christian Movement would boast around two hundred thousand followers. The movement was the epitome of the Biblicist, individualist, and populist discourse for its time.

The ideals of political equality morphed into a Christian ideology. It held that all believers, using nothing but common sense, should read the Bible for themselves and come to their own conclusions, regardless of historical theology or orthodoxy, and that there should be no divide between laity and clergy. They believed that this form of Christian practice would bring about a restoration of Christianity from the corruption of

³⁵ The Disciples of Christ and the Church of Christ are contemporary children of this movement.

³⁶ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 69.

former ecclesiology, and that Christian unity would be the result. These champions for Christian equality and unity were prolific writers, and founded some of the first Christian newspapers in the early republic, through which they lambasted, libeled, and ridiculed ministers of their former denominations.³⁷ Speaking to what would be their movement's form of governance, Campbell said, "We have no system of our own, or of others, to substitute in lieu of the reigning systems. We only aim at substituting the New Testament."³⁸ So at the beginning of this populist movement, the leaders made it very clear that they believed the Bible, read equally and individually, would be enough to bring about Christian unity and a fair organization. The final question then is simply, were they right? Did their biblical and social ideologies pay out the way they had argued they would? The historical fact is they did the very opposite. Smith and O'Kelly's groups faded into non-existence, and Stone and Campbell's Christian Churches over time implemented the very institutionalizing that they said was unnecessary. Hatch sums up their situation as such:

Instead of calming sectarian strife and restoring edenic harmony, the Christians engendered controversy at every step and had to put up with chronic factionalism within their own ranks. Instead of offering a new foundation of certainty, the Christian [Movement's] approach to knowledge, which made no man the judge of another's conscience, had little holding power and sent many early advocates scrambling for surer footing. Instead of erecting a primitive church free from theological tradition and authoritarian control, the Christians came to advocate their own sectarian theology and to *defer to the influence and persuasion of a dominant few*.³⁹

What was held up as "Bible government" really became the government of those who yelled their interpretations the loudest, who could use print media the best, or who could

³⁷ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 75-76.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 80, Italics mine.

garner the largest popular following. The Bible actually loses most of its authority when these ideologies gain prominence; it is masked by the discourse of popularity and politicizing. The historical pay out of unchecked individualism, misinterpreted egalitarianism and an unquestioned Biblicist ideology was theological and relational turmoil, as well as consistent dissolving of foundations for any kind of real authority. In 1841, even Campbell showed a change of heart, saying, “A book is not sufficient to govern the church.”⁴⁰

In not challenging this process, conservative Evangelicals have created a cyclical story, which is the fifth aspect that started in the early republic. Each generation is brought up to think that if it can just find the “true” Gospel, or if it can read the Bible more accurately than the previous generation (or better than that other church across the street), it will finally achieve mastery over the individualist, populist, Biblicist discourse. With that, conservative Protestants would come to a consensus as to “what the Bible says.” But this is an impossible dream because the discourse does not allow for mastery. The moment one generation or one group attains cultural superiority its progeny grow up and find something wrong with those old revivals or that old way of reading the Bible and the cycle just repeats. As time went on American Evangelicals did construct new and innovative organizational structures, but because they have held the presupposition that a text is the only or final authority, the discourse has never changed. Having marked out revivalism, individualism, populism, and theological Biblicism as foundational ideologies of American conservative Evangelical culture, I continue to the next phase of the American story, the transition to a geographically spread textual community.

⁴⁰ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 206.

American Mobility and the Rise of Textual Community

The influence of the political furnace of early America was great, but in a very practical way America's massive geographical expanse and the growing ease of travel also influenced the formation of social, theological, and especially textual ideologies in the American conservative Evangelical worldview. From the time of westward expansion, to the great migrations between rural and urban life, geographical mobility has played a silent but formative role on American Christian culture. One of American mobility's largest contributions was the creation of textually based faith communities that would grow to oppose the authority of the more static and locally defined traditional church structure. Candy Gunther Brown has deeply analyzed this aspect of American Christian history in her *The Word in the World*, and there she summarizes this situation:

Disoriented by ceaseless mobility, frustrated by religious controversies, and weary of the intermittent nature of revivals, scattered individuals and congregations longed for a sense of connection with a timeless, placeless, unified church. Evangelicals used texts to envision themselves as belonging to the church universal, which included Christians from all time periods, countries, and denominations.⁴¹

In response to this longing, American Christians would found a massive publishing industry focused on the production of literature that supported their spiritual and communal desires. Commentaries, books on Christian history or autobiographies of famous believers, weekly or monthly periodicals, Bible study lessons, Sunday school libraries, and more were in high demand as American Christians had less contact with official outlets of spiritual teaching (i.e., pastors and priests). Long distances from local churches and the availability of these new spiritually focused texts mixed to create a situation where American Christians of many stripes, but Evangelicals in particular,

⁴¹ Candy Gunther Brown, *The Word in The World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 12.

moved away from traditional sacred spaces and re-categorized the hearth and home as sacred space. This fits quite well with the growing trends of individualized faith practice as well as the decline in institutional authority that American conservative Evangelicals had been experiencing for generations.⁴² The changes in conservative Evangelicalism brought about by social and geographical mobility were a major factor in this shift.

These cultural shifts directly impacted the way American conservative Evangelicals viewed religious authority. The previous generations' attempts at establishing a theology of authority had not endured. Their revivals would kindle a spiritual fire in a local populace, but just as quickly as it ignited, it would fade. Young preachers who championed the common people and each person's right to read the Bible for themselves would grow into institutionalized sovereigns over their respective movements. Sowing for unity, they reaped greater amounts of discord. Christian print media would be the next evolution in the search for a lasting system of authority. Christian newspapers held an authorial advantage in that they shared in the air of professionalism ascribed to publicly disseminated texts. The publishers and editors of Christian media were not unaware of this; they knew they were taking on a role of religious authority. Thomas Coke, the leader of the Methodist Book Concern, one of the earliest Christian publishing houses, wrote in his journal in 1789, "We have now settled our printing business ... the people will thereby be amply supplied with books of pure divinity for their reading, which is of the next importance to preaching."⁴³ As time went on more and more Evangelical publishers would place themselves beside pastors and preachers as leaders within Evangelical culture and they knew they had a special

⁴² Brown, *The Word in The World*, 13-19.

⁴³ Ibid., 46.

influence over group ideology formation. Which books would be printed and which would not, the themes that their organization would focus on, and the cultural and political issues they would allow within their published works, began to have a larger impact on Evangelical culture as print media gained presence. Religious publishing houses do have to stay in business though, and so market trends, popularity, and other non-religious factors were at play in these decisions. It is clear that group ideology construction, theology, and even leadership were beholden to popular sentiment in this new system of Evangelical authority production. What was “true,” what “the Bible said,” or what was held up as correct theology was often simply the current beliefs of the majority.

It is true that Christian publishing gave many benefits to Evangelicals in America as they worked to build up their national culture. Believers of various denominations were starting to read the same or similar Bible studies, they were using similar materials for Sunday school, and they were able to access spiritual teaching even if they were far removed from a local church. However, just as the previous generations had been burdened with disagreements between their leaders, sectarianism found a new and powerful outlet in print as well. Many denominations founded their own periodicals, and called upon their congregations to subscribe. The *Methodist Quarterly Review* pushed in 1846 for further support of the Methodist Book Concern, saying, “If our books are not procured and read by our people, others will be.”⁴⁴ If a local church or even individuals read the works published by competing denominations it was viewed as a damaging disloyalty to their own.

⁴⁴ Brown, *The Word in The World*, 58.

Even within denominations there was strife. Speaking to the debate between New School and Old School Presbyterianism, the Presbyterian Publication Committee, and Old School organ, fretted over the direction of their denomination's printing. The committee warned in 1863, "With every other religious body in the land publishing its books and tracts, and sending them all over the West, in order to influence and control the minds of the people, it becomes a question of life or death for us, whether we, as a denomination, sustain this cause and publish our history, our polity, our doctrine."⁴⁵ Identity formation and solidification was a primary work of the denominational publishers; equally so was the refutation of doctrines with which they disagreed. In a religious culture where every act of reading is ascribed equality, where the only acknowledged hermeneutic is "common sense," and where the Bible is claimed inerrant, the only response to an "incorrect" biblical interpretation is to offer "what the Bible really says." With the rise of Christian publishing, the discourse of authority within conservative Evangelicalism in America grew to encompass a larger number of believers. It did not however move any closer to a philosophically rigorous expression because it did not change any of the underlying assumptions. The cycle of infighting and exegetical one-upmanship continued.

The Decline of American Christendom

Religious publishing was at its prime when for many Americans reading was first and foremost a tool to understand the Bible. As the nineteenth century came to a close and the twentieth began, many Americans became more interested in other fields of human knowledge. European continental philosophy, non-Capitalist ideas, the

⁴⁵ Brown, *The Word in The World*, 58-59.

burgeoning theory of evolution, and various forms of biblical criticism would take their toll on the American conservative Evangelical worldview. These intellectual advances questioned certain assumptions held by most conservative Evangelicals, but most of the challenges would have been manageable for the Evangelical scholars of the time who were fairly skilled in their professions and powerful in their rhetoric. It was not a lack of rational thought, philosophical depth, or cultural appeal that led to the fall of Evangelical cultural superiority in this period. It was the way they chose to react to the intellectual shifting within American culture, their unwillingness to critically examine their own presumptions, and most of all, their enshrining theological Biblicism as the exclusionary rule of the community that weakened it. In this section I will discuss two examples of Evangelicalism entrenching itself against the changing patterns of American society, and analyze how these affected both the perception of Evangelicalism by society at large, and the way American conservative Evangelicals approached the Bible.

A good example of the American Evangelical reaction toward the questions of biblical criticism can be found in the internal struggle of the Presbyterian Church in the late nineteenth century. In the 1880s, A.A. Hodge and Charles A. Briggs were the editors of the denominational publication, the *Presbyterian Review*, which was founded as a way for Presbyterians of varying theology to work together in common cause. Both men agreed that the biblical criticism coming out of Europe needed to be properly discussed for the benefit of the denomination. Briggs and his cohorts represented an Evangelical acceptance of higher criticism and believed it would benefit the Church if appropriately received. They argued that, “A careful appropriation of the new criticism would result in a clearer understanding of ‘the incarnation of the divine revelation in human forms and

thoughts,’ and a greater appreciation for the ‘sublime harmony’ of the Bible.”⁴⁶ In their intellectual use of biblical criticism they did not find a need to suspend their belief in the scripture’s overall historicity, nor its inspiration. Not only were the new criticisms theologically compatible in their understanding, they also saw it as a matter of proper scientific induction to allow these new questions. These intellectual Evangelicals were able to mix their theology, rational thought, and the new data coming from the scholarly centers of the world in a convincing way. Briggs said of the shift in biblical studies at the time, “It is significant that the great majority of professional biblical scholars in the various universities and theological halls of the world, embracing those of the greatest learning, industry, and piety, demand a revision of traditional theories of the Bible on account of a large induction of new facts from the Bible and history.”⁴⁷

The other editor of the *Presbyterian Review*, A.A. Hodge led the Evangelical rejection of higher criticism. Their rejection rested upon two primary contentions. First, they held to the very American understanding of biblical authority, that the Bible was utterly inerrant in every minute detail and that if it were not, Christianity would crumble. Second, they argued that there was a corrupting flaw in the new higher criticism; the materialist presuppositions of the Bible scholars of Europe forced conclusions that were not warranted when the presuppositions were changed. It is important to recognize that these Evangelicals did not reject the methodology of the new biblical criticism. In fact Willis J. Beecher wrote of this situation, “It is conceivable that a man may find his critical results to be better founded than his dogmatic opinions concerning inspiration,

⁴⁶ Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 16-17.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

and may be compelled to give up the latter in favor of the former.”⁴⁸ In Beecher’s mind then it was at least possible to change Christian doctrines when new evidence presented itself, but history shows that no evidence ever proved strong enough for him to actually do so. This is most likely because of the second reason for their rejection. Forthrightly, they said their own presuppositions concerning the nature of the Bible made it difficult for them to trust arguments coming from different assumptions. For them, the argument was not about new evidence in languages, or archaeology (though there were of course differences there as well). It was a deeper issue of vying worldviews. They did not agree with what they called the, “naturalistic postulates,”⁴⁹ of the continental biblical critics. Hodge and others like him did not agree with the developmental theory of religion, and social progressivism, both of which were part of the zeitgeist of their time.⁵⁰ These theories held that human systems, religious or social, always moved from primitive to complex, and rarely, if ever, the other way. These philosophical assumptions are what the more conservative Evangelicals rejected. It was a matter of interpretive framework for them, not data.

Both sides of the Presbyterian debate though would have likely agreed on rejecting naturalism as a mandatory assumption, as the former group clearly articulated their continued belief in miracles and divine interventions in history. What divided was the way they chose to react to the major changes in intellectual society. The former group accepted the new criticism as another perspective, even learning how to apply it themselves, and saw it as supportive to their theology. The latter group fixated so much on what they saw as problems in the worldview of the source of the new evidence, that

⁴⁸ Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 19.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 20.

⁵⁰ These ideologies were influenced by the contemporary success of biological evolutionary theory.

they did not realize where they too were being overconfidently presumptive. While decrying the developmentalism and naturalism of their opponents, they were unable to see how their own inductive theory of science or literalistic reading methods were equally assumptions of their age. Theologically, they held so tightly to one particular belief (inerrant biblical authority) that they were willing to bend all others just to make it fit. This single-mindedness blinded many conservative Evangelicals to the changes going on in American society. Focused so intently on one field of battle, they were unaware that the war was turning against them.

The American populace began drifting towards more secularized centers of education and was in more constant communication with its European cultural siblings as the twentieth century moved on. In 1925, another major public clash would push most conservative Evangelicals into cultural exile. The Scopes trial was a direct contest between the strongly conservative Evangelical position espoused by Hodge some thirty years prior and the growing secular or naturalist worldview. The trial was a true turning point for the perception of conservative Protestant religion. Prior to the trial, conservative Evangelicals were not easily grouped under one label, neither by themselves nor by secular voices. The variety that existed (and continued to exist, though hidden by prevailing secular rhetoric) among conservative Evangelicals was for the most part disregarded after the trial for the much easier option of group labeling. What had been different denominations and churches were all gathered into the new pejorative, “Fundamentalists.” This word though had lost its original meaning of someone concerned with fundamentals of the Christian faith. In its new popular use it stood for social backwardness, scientific ignorance, a lack of education (or the “right” education),

inappropriate spirituality, and the display of religion in the public sphere (seen as unbecoming by the new secular propriety).

In the end, the great champion of conservative Evangelicalism, William Jennings Bryan, capitulated in such a way as to lose both the war of words with Clarence Darrow and his standing among Evangelicals. The main knockout occurred as Darrow and Bryan were discussing how to read the Genesis account of creation. Darrow's masterful tactic was not that he used some scientific analysis or non-theistic argument to directly counter Bryan; instead, he applied the popular conservative Evangelical hermeneutic, literalism, to the text and forced Bryan to admit he did not agree with its conclusion. While literalism was the calling card of the average conservative Evangelical of the time, some Evangelicals considered the six "days" of creation to be metaphors for "ages"⁵¹ and this was seen as a proper "literal" reading. The hypocrisy of this interpretative framework is what Darrow drove home, and Bryan was trapped because Darrow had proved himself to offer a more literal reading than Bryan. Darrow had effectively used conservative Evangelicalism's own weapons, in fact its primary hermeneutical identifier, against Bryan.⁵²

By denying complete biblical literalism Bryan had forfeited the main tenet of the faith, and thus the whole hermeneutical system, the Bible itself as inspired, and God's perfect knowledge. Since there was no acknowledged system of authority left to conservative American Evangelicals other than a presumed inerrant Bible, to deny it meant denying all the doctrines to which it was connected. With Bryan's surrendering of literalism and his tragic subsequent death occurring ominously a few days after the trial,

⁵¹ The interpretation of "days" as "ages" was often used to accommodate evolutionary theory which was new and part of popular discourse at this time, even among many Christian groups.

⁵² Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 72-73.

conservative Evangelicals could not read the cultural narrative any differently than their secular opponents. They had lost, and the tide of American culture had turned against them. Self-imposed exile from the public sphere was the result.

After this paradigm shift, many expected the continual decline of supernatural religious sentiment, and that secularization in some form would march on unabated. With the benefit of hindsight, scholars have realized that this point of view was also created by the discourse of American public culture. Harding summarizes the situation well:

The modern point of view in America emerged in part from its caricature of conservative Protestants as Fundamentalists. They were the “them” who enabled the modern “us.” You cannot reason with them. They actually believe the Bible is literally true. They are clinging to traditions. They are reacting against rapid social change. They cannot survive in a modern world. Such attitudes, clichés, images, and plots not only licensed the de facto disenfranchisement of conservative Protestants, they also chartered the public dominance of secular and theologically liberal and moderate voices in mid-twentieth century America.⁵³

Throughout the middle of the previous century conservative Evangelicalism in America became more and more culturally “othered.” As Harding says, it was the ambiguous “them” that allowed publically accepted moderates and secularly minded people to conclude they were the normative “us.” This cultural othering created a ripple effect throughout the discourse of American identity. Evangelical institutions of higher education began fading, and Evangelical scholars were labeled by the larger cultural shift, their religious identity critiqued more than the arguments they were making. In response, these scholars were forced to find new social connections which would support their research and listen to their positions. It was in the early-mid twentieth century that Evangelical scholars, who before had been comparatively moderate, began to associate with the extremely conservative branches of Evangelicalism, and found themselves in

⁵³ Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 62.

league against the rising secularized zeitgeist.⁵⁴ This realigning of allegiances helped to promote one of the most influential hermeneutical systems in America, Dispensationalism, and it is a paradoxical example of the intellectual anti-intellectualism of American conservative Evangelical discourse.

Originally a clergyman for the Church of Ireland, John Nelson Darby, was the popularizer of a way of reading the Bible now known as Dispensationalism. In his work, Darby stressed that the Bible's historical chronology should be divided into separate eras wherein God dealt with humanity in different ways. These eras were called dispensations. Darby's reading would not gain wide Evangelical acceptance until it was used in the 1909 Oxford University Press's Scofield Bible. The Scofield Bible, still used by many conservative Evangelicals today, made abundant use of dispensational interpretive strategies. Dispensationalism's literalistic reading and its philosophical assumptions offered it almost ready-made for twentieth century Evangelical consumption. The legitimacy of dispensational hermeneutics and theology was not what made it a powerful position for mid-century Evangelicals. It was as a counter-intellectualism that it found preference.⁵⁵

Noll points out three ways in which Dispensationalism affected the reading of the Bible by American conservative Evangelicals going forward. First, it was a simple enough theory that regular, untrained Evangelicals could make sense of it with a modicum of serious study, while it was complex enough to give the "exhilaration" of attaining special knowledge. It gave the common believer a rebuttal to all those "ivory tower" seminary pastors and professors. Second, Dispensationalism returned to the Bible

⁵⁴ Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 32-56.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

a supernatural character that predominant university scholarship had rejected in favor of a naturalistic historical criticism. This supported the common Evangelical doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration of the Bible, the idea that the entire Bible was directly spoken by God, but it was also a double edged sword. The great advances in historical, language, and literary studies of the Bible that generations of Evangelicals had produced in the past were pushed to the background in preference for easier schemas. This led to biblical practices such as “word studies” with massive concordances removed from historical and literary contexts, or an assumed unified textuality that allows selectively cropped sentences from various biblical books to be tied together in a modern argument. Third and finally, Noll argues that Dispensationalism took deepest root in Evangelical groups that already had a high distrust of professional scholarship.⁵⁶ I would argue this distrust was partially fueled by the egalitarianism of the American mind. Just like the Biblicist leaders of the previous generations, dispensational leaders wanted a way to say that their interpretations were just as valid or warranted as their counterparts in the academy.

Most of the major advocates for the theory were not academically trained, nor denominationally certified students of scripture. Scofield was a lawyer who became an annotator. Lewis Sperry Chafer, who wrote a theological *summa* for Dispensationalism, attended college for only three years before beginning his work as a pastor. Actually, for many Dispensationalists it was an advantage not to have been trained theologically. Chafer said, “The very fact that I did not study a prescribed course in theology made it possible for me to approach the subject with *an unprejudiced mind to be concerned only with what the Bible actually teaches.*”⁵⁷ The claim to objectivity and interpretive

⁵⁶ Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 58-59.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 60-61. Italics mine.

authority is pronounced. The fact that this new hermeneutic was a reactionary, incredibly modern, philosophically assumptive, human production was covered over or ignored. Yet again, the adherents of a new way to read the Bible were claiming that they had the “pure gospel truth,” they finally found the key; they rightly understood the inerrant, perspicuous book better than anyone. In their own eyes, they were totally objective and held no prejudices toward the text. Such is the blinding power of an unchecked authoritative discourse.

The victory of biblical literalism over other traditional Protestant interpretive methods, the spread of Dispensationalism, the now engrained anti-intellectualism and anti-classism of American Evangelical culture, and the communal solidarity that comes with being marginalized created for American conservative Evangelicals a very different situation than they had known up to that point. The Dispensationalists believed they had truly understood the Bible, something all other Christians over the past 1900 years had failed to do. They had found a “literal” reading that wafted on an air of intellectual rigor. Through all this the discourse of authority went largely unquestioned from within. Conservative Evangelicals were not self-reflective enough to analyze their own story, their leaders’ methods, or their need for complete certainty when it came to interpreting the scriptures. The cycle of the “better” interpretation continued; the mask of textual primacy held fast. Effectively, conservative Evangelicals had bought the secular story as much as everyone else. They were the “other” of the American cultural landscape. Their existence required apologetics and explanation in the modern world, while secular culture

experienced: “An apotheosis of the modern gaze, its authorial point of view, its knowing voice, its teleological privilege, its right to exist without explanation.”⁵⁸

Resurgence and Reform

The American conservative Evangelical story has shown that while human meaning production and the practice of religion in particular is a discursive, procedural phenomenon, there are major threads that can be further analyzed. In viewing some of the more influential events, persons, and times in American conservative Evangelical history I have been able to focus on instances of identity and meaning production. There is one final era of conservative Evangelical history I would like to review as it highly informs present day discourse. The mid-late twentieth century came as a surprise to many who had pre-maturely relegated more conservative forms of Christianity to the annals of American history. By re-entering the intellectual world on new terms, founding new alliances, and re-appropriating national narratives, conservative Evangelicals showed that they were not fading. In reality, they had only retreated from the public sphere for a time and would re-assert themselves as the majority, a self-described moral one.

The intellectual climate for Evangelicals began changing with the archaeological discoveries of W.F. Albright, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Nag Hammadi, and with British advances in biblical studies. The rise of neo-orthodoxy in Europe, and the popularity of Christian theologians like Barth, Brunner, and Niebuhr, gave some much needed professionalism and energy to confessing academic work. These discoveries and the resurgence of Protestant intellectuals called into question some assumptions and

⁵⁸ Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 74.

stereotypes of the American intelligentsia.⁵⁹ No longer could the predominant secular historical views of the New Testament (that it was mostly a Hellenistic work, or that it held very few accurate social or geographical descriptions) be assumed without hard evidence, and no longer could believing scholars be dismissed as anti-modern ignoramuses. It had also become abundantly clear that ideology and assumptions on both sides had censored the intellectual questions of some, while giving favor to others.

Evangelical scholars were also aware of the popular discourse, and that they needed to speak to it. In 1965, Carl Henry, wrote in *Christianity Today*:

The element missing in much evangelical theological writing is an air of exciting relevance. The problem is not that biblical theology is outdated; it is rather that some of its expositors seem out of touch with the frontiers of doubt in our day. . . . Unless we speak to our generation in a compelling idiom, meshing the great theological concerns with the current modes of thought and critical problems of the day, we shall speak only to ourselves.⁶⁰

Conservative Evangelicals worked to re-capture the public mind and what they might have called the *heart* of the nation. Billy Graham might be the most well-known, but other men (also famous, or perhaps infamous), such as Jimmy Swaggart, Pat Robertson, Oral Roberts, and Jerry Falwell, were actively engaging mainstream American culture. The advent of televangelism and mega-churches proved that conservative Evangelicals still made up a large portion of the population. They had finally rejected their self-imposed exile, and would be heard again in the national discourse.

What then caused a change in the way conservative Evangelicals engaged the public conversation? Where the previous generation had accepted the secular narrative, believing they were “outsiders” in the “worldly” culture of America, their progeny

⁵⁹ Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 91-93

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 119-20.

rejected this narrative. Instead, they claimed that America was a “Judeo-Christian” nation and that its conservative Christian citizens should lead the direction of the country. Their rhetoric is highly debatable, but their stance was not without support. Hatch cites a number of polls and studies that confirm this conservative Evangelical resurgence.⁶¹ Religion in America had consistently been supported by a deeply seeded populism, a distrust of the established intelligentsia, and a folk understanding of theology. Secularism as a worldview had not penetrated far beyond the academic, the governmental, and the economic elite. Even in those categories, a plethora of religious worldviews could be found.

Externally conservative Evangelicals seemed to be gaining ground, but internally there were still many divisions. New alliances between fundamentalists and more moderate Evangelicals created new opportunities to bridge factional separations. Through the 1970s and 1980s, a new Christian label was coming into use, the “born-again” believer. Christians from Pentecostal, Fundamentalist, Charismatic, Holiness, and moderate Evangelical groups were using this new title. The term encompassed Evangelicals of nearly every stripe, and was the rallying cry of those who desired an active voice in national conversations. Charles Colson’s conversion and President Jimmy Carter’s profession of faith as a born-again Christian were evocative of the political power this new term held.⁶² The emergence of a label that put the fundamentalist and the moderate Evangelical into the same socio-political group was a powerful change. Harding gives an enlightening summation of the Evangelical and fundamentalist camps in the late twentieth century, focused on the life of Jerry Falwell, which informed these

⁶¹ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 210-211.

⁶² Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 80.

changes. They produced a post-fundamentalist, born-again, politically engaged Evangelicalism, and its children fill American churches today.⁶³

There are still multiple tensions at play within American conservative Evangelicalism. Contemporary issues such as how to apply the Bible to homosexuality, debates about cosmology and creation, confrontations between the freedoms of speech and religious practice, as well as the proper response to increasing globalism, all pertain to what it means to be an American Evangelical. The rise of politicized Evangelicalism and the postmodern Evangelical voices that now criticize it are a testament to the internal struggle playing itself out. The discourse of biblical authority is the primary location for these tensions within American Evangelicalism. Yet, as I have shown, the Bible has never been the sole authority nor can it be. Other factors will inevitably exert influence, but these other powers, these masked authorities (social, political, philosophical, and literary), are internally denied because of the overwhelming support for theological Biblicism. Because of their unique history, many conservative Evangelicals in America have come to believe that the Bible must be completely inerrant, perspicuous, literal (except for where they say it is not), and eternally relevant. If these doctrines are abandoned or altered, their understanding of biblical inspiration and church authority would supposedly wither, along with the cultural cohesiveness they bring. However, this view is called into question when the American conservative Evangelical story is studied.

⁶³ Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 130.

AMERICAN CONSERVATIVE EVANGELICAL CULTURE AND BIBLICAL PRACTICES

“The liberty of the sect consists at last, in thinking its particular notions, shouting its shibboleths and passwords, dancing its religious hornpipes, and reading the Bible only through its theological goggles. These restrictions, at the same time, are so many wires, that lead back at last into the hands of a few leading spirits, enabling them to wield a true hierarchical despotism over all who are thus brought within their power.”
– John W. Nevin⁶⁴

John W. Nevin and Phillip Schaff were two German theologians who had come to America to teach at the small German Reformed Church’s seminary in Pennsylvania in the 1840s and 1850s. As European continentals, they were keenly aware of the difference between their home country’s socio-religious consciousness and that of the new world. It is important when analyzing the American conservative Evangelical movement that scholars do so admitting fully that there were counter voices, such as Nevin and Schaff, all along. Their primary argument rested on the role that American populism and the subsequent lack of real authority created. Of American church authority they said: “The most dangerous foe with which we are called to contend, is again not the Church of Rome but the sect plague in our own midst; not the single pope of the city of seven hills, but the numberless popes ... who would fain enslave Protestants once more to human authority, not as embodied in the church indeed, but as holding in the form of mere private judgment and private will.”⁶⁵

⁶⁴ John W. Nevin, “The Sect System,” *Catholic and Reformed*, 144, in Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 289.

⁶⁵ Nevin, “The Sect System,” *Catholic and Reformed*, 165, in Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 289.

They argue that the social discourse of authority which had developed in the American conservative Evangelical church was not in line with the authority “embodied in the church.” Any religious leader who was charming enough and garnered enough of a following became a pope of their own new church. This was, and still is a large indictment against the form of leadership practiced by American Evangelicals. In this section I will argue that their accusations still hold weight.

Cultural Influences on Authority: Populism, Equality, and Restoration

The previous analysis of American conservative Evangelical history revealed three key areas that highly informed the understanding of authority expressed by these believers: the way they viewed human nature and value, how they viewed knowledge production and acquisition, and finally, how they understood their place in history. Although like any cultural or religious group they have changed over time, populist sentiment, the equality of individuals (expressed by anti-intellectualism and anti-classism), and a form of restorationism which put them at the center of history were constant influences. Let me discuss each of these in turn, beginning with the effects of populism. Two secondary concepts are central to the American form of populism, egalitarianism and individualism, both of which need description to understand how populism has helped to construct discursive authority in American Evangelicalism.

Egalitarianism is an undying American political passion, and from the founding of the nation this has influenced the way Americans have practiced religion as well. Near the beginning of the American Declaration of Independence one finds the words: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. . .” and though this

statement was written in resistance of a political sovereign, the meaning permeated the American understanding of personhood. Nathan Hatch argues that this affected the American practice of Christianity in three main ways: First, through the empowerment of lay leadership and theology and the decline of clericalism, second, through the increase in revivalism and the acceptance of individual spiritual experience as equal to historical doctrines or educated biblical argument, and third, through the establishment of new sectarian Christian groups founded by untrained, yet highly charismatic leaders.⁶⁶ These leaders were filled with new ideas, new methods of ministry, ecstatic spiritual experiences, and new readings of the Bible, all of which they used to declare their superiority over the older Christian practices, which they often maligned as having become corrupt.

A strong individualism also played a part, and expressed its power through various media, as Brown adequately demonstrated. Early Christian publishers saw their work as an equally holy calling to that of ministers.⁶⁷ The “hearth” religion on the prairies, revivals, home based Bible studies, and the increase of denominationally unaffiliated Christian practice encouraged American Evangelical laity to take control of their own religious learning and growth. Christian publishing is still a massive industry. Drive through any medium sized American town and you will find businesses such as Lifeway, Family Christian Stores, Mardel, and local variations. Under the books department of their website, Amazon, the massive online retailer, has a subsection entitled, “Christian books and Bibles,” with 692,759 items, whereas the more general subheading, “Religion

⁶⁶ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 9-10.

⁶⁷ Brown, *The Word in the World*, 65.

and Spirituality,” has a little over 1.3 million items.⁶⁸ Christian works make up at least one third of their religious literature selection. Other forms of media have allowed individuals to assert their influence on the national culture in massive ways, especially in the past fifty years. The rise of televangelists in the 1970s and 1980s is a prime example. They created new social and religious narratives that supported their ministries, and they often disassociated with their former denominations so as to have more private control over their productions.⁶⁹

In recent years, the internet has expanded the conservative Evangelical cultural community in massive ways. Online videos, the blog-sphere, internet based Bible “institutes,” and all forms of social media are employed for internal communication, teaching, and as outreach tools. The capabilities of the internet have only exacerbated the problematic discourse of authority. Any individual is now able to write, make videos, or record speeches that millions upon millions of fellow believers will see. The Christian publishers of the 1900s, and the televangelists of only 30 years ago, could never have dreamed of this kind of mass communication. Every individual aspiring to religious leadership has been empowered by the increase in communicative power offered by technology, and the decline of organized church structures that in the past critiqued or supported new theological ideas. In one final scathing critique of American populism, Philip Schaff said in 1844: “Every theological vagabond and peddler may drive here his bungling trade, without passport or license, and sell his false ware at pleasure. What is to come of such confusion is not now to be seen.”⁷⁰ When there are so few agreed upon

⁶⁸ Amazon.com, “Amazon.Com: Books,” last modified 2015, accessed January 30, 2014, http://www.amazon.com/books-used-books-textbooks/b/ref=nav_shopall_bo?ie=UTF8&node=283155.

⁶⁹ Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 85-87.

⁷⁰ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 9-10.

standards for religious authority or scriptural interpretation, and every individual's private understanding is accorded an inherent equality regardless of actual merit, true authority is non-existent.

If populism is as central to the American conservative Evangelical mind as has been argued, then Evangelical anti-intellectualism and anti-clericalism become more understandable as expressions anti-classism. This is a better description because as I have shown, conservative Evangelicals did not reject intellectual pursuits, nor did they dismiss all their pastors. Conservative Evangelicals reject any intellectualism or clerical structure that would, at least overtly, make a hierarchy of persons. The problem is that their own cultural discourse has covertly created a class of leaders, and a system of leadership, that indirectly acquire more power than most official clergy previously could have held. When analyzing the textual ideologies and practices of American Evangelicals it is good to remember how deep this anti-classist understanding of self and community runs. It will be particularly relevant for my examination of textual community. Cultural distrust of human authority coming from anti-classism has mixed with the social discourse surrounding biblical inerrancy and extremely egalitarian interpretive practices to create a uniquely American problem of Evangelical biblical authority.

I will dissect that problem soon, but there is one last cultural characteristic that requires attention. Conservative Evangelicals in America had effectively jettisoned most of the sources of authority that had, prior to the American experiment, guided and directed the Church. The clerical structures were no longer to be trusted. Centers of theological education and biblical studies were perceived as too secularized, in the main, to lead. Popular opinion has been the barometer of Evangelical theology for quite some

time, but it has been guided by some general principles. Cautionary rules, such as using “common sense” interpretations, or letting the “Bible speak for itself,” have been mainstays of conservative Evangelical textual rhetoric, even if these truisms have nearly always lacked clear definition in practice. But what has stood as the goal to which their hermeneutical practices point? I contend the answer to that can be found in restoration theology.⁷¹ This is the belief that modern Christian practice is far removed from some idealized form, and is rather common among conservative Evangelicals throughout American history. Groups who exhibit this theology often frame the current cultural expression of Christian belief and practice as beyond salvaging. In response to this, they have often claimed to hold some special reading of scripture, or special understanding of the Holy Spirit, or special understanding of history that differentiates them from the “majority,” and which empowers them to be the restorers of the “true” Church or “real” Christianity. Restoration movements often exhibit a strong Old Testament remnant theology, and exaltation of leaders who are perceived to be endowed by God with special understanding or knowledge they are to use in reconstructing the Church. Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witness Churches, and Seventh Day Adventism are fully bloomed expressions of American restoration theology, but the ideas and arguments can be found in numerous American Evangelical denominations.

Bielo’s, *Words Upon the Word*, offers a very clear portrait of restoration theology in the group he labeled the “Iconoclasts.” They consistently created dissonance between what they posited as “real” Christianity and the way they perceived it being practiced by the majority of American Christians today. The guiding principle of this group was

⁷¹ Not to be confused with the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement. Various forms of restoration theology have been used by many denominations and new religious movements originating in Christianity.

expressed by their leader in his question: “Are we practicing Christianity the same way Jesus and His followers did in the Bible?”⁷² Disregarding for the moment the historical issues with claiming Jesus practiced Christianity, the question reveals where and when this group of people believe Christianity to have been most properly practiced, namely, the first century church. Enshrining the first century church as a type of golden-age is a regular assumption within restoration theology. The point is to “get back” to what the group perceives as the social forms and practices of the first church. However, just as biblical interpretations are produced from within a socio-cultural discourse, so too are historical re-constructions of the first century church. These re-constructions are primarily crafted by reading the text of the New Testament (along with whatever archaeological “findings” and “word studies” each group believes favors their particular conception), so the interpretive problems compound over and over. Thus, the problem of conservative Evangelical authority is exacerbated when the early church is idealized over the whole historical life of the church. Conservative Evangelicals in early America mainly saw the flaws in clericalism, high doctrine, and high liturgy, and disposed of them as much as they disposed of monarchical government.⁷³ By rejecting much of the historical heritage of the church between the first and twenty-first centuries, declaring that which came between as irrelevant, Evangelicals were forced to find a new ideal at which to aim. Over time, a rosy-colored re-construction of the first century church has become a commonly unquestioned assumption within American Evangelical cultural discourse.

⁷² Bielo, *Words Upon the Word*, 97-104.

⁷³ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 167-169.

Populism, anti-classism, restoration theology, and their derivatives are by no means the only socio-cultural philosophies one could attribute to American conservative Evangelicals, but for the purpose of creating authority or power, they are very influential. American conservative Evangelicals refashioned their Christianity into a uniquely nationalized version, endowed with the zeal and perspectives that filled their revolutionary hearts. In summarizing one of his concluding arguments, Nathan Hatch eloquently offers a description of the early Christian American mind, and also hints at the problems it has created for textual authority:

No less than Tom Paine or Thomas Jefferson, populist Christians of the early republic sought to start the world over again. By raising the standard “no creed but the Bible,” Christians in America were the foremost proponents of individualism even as they expected the open Bible to replace an age of sectarian rivalry with one of primitive harmony. Like the egalitarian credo of the early republic, this vision has taken a powerful hold on the American imagination despite the disparity between the quest for unity and the actual religious fragmentation and authoritarianism.⁷⁴

The religious fragmentation and authoritarianism that Hatch mentions are symptoms of the philosophies I have discussed, but they are equally encouraged by textual practices.

Biblical Practices

For American conservative Evangelicals, biblical practice begins with textual ideology and specifically the question, “What is the Bible?” Biblical ontology is the cornerstone of Evangelical hermeneutics. In the historic, American, conservative Evangelical mind, the Bible is the verbally inspired, inerrant, literal, plainly read, self-interpreting, sufficient and final authority of God. Of course there are small variations between conservative Evangelicals about how each of these words might be applied, or

⁷⁴ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 213.

which are the *most* important, but this will stand as a working description of their common conception of the Bible. The authority of the biblical text is primarily justified by the assertion of verbal plenary inspiration, but that theological stance is supported by arguments for the Bible's complete inerrancy, literal meaning, plain readability, and capacity to self-interpret. As such, I will need to analyze each of these arguments in turn.

If there is anything that nearly everyone agrees on about the Bible, it is that it is a text, a book, a product of written language. So then, the question "what is the Bible?" necessitates more fundamental questions, "What is a text?" Or, "What is language?" I discussed this question slightly in chapter one but I would like to explain a little further here. Language, in all its forms, is a method for transmitting information and meaning from one mind to another. It is a symbol system, where those symbols can be constructed from either visual or auditory elements. This much I believe is agreeable to most people. The problems with language generally reveal themselves at two points, creation and reception. For the purpose of my arguments, language creation can be left alone. I do not critique theologies of biblical inspiration directly, and as a Christian, I believe that the Bible is an inspired document. Instead, my critique is toward language reception, particularly the act of reading. Concerning language reception in reading, there are two pertinent points of view, determinate meaning, and community-interpretive meaning.⁷⁵ I discussed Stanley Fish's explanation of community-interpretive meaning in chapter one, but a quick overview of determinate meaning will reveal why most scholars prefer the former.

⁷⁵ These two points of view are described in more detail by Boone, and I have relied on her background in literary theory to help inform my own critique.

Determinate meaning is the view that words and phrases have specific meanings determined when they are created, and this view has been promoted by E.D. Hirsch. Hirsch qualifies this by separating notions of meaning from notions of “significance.” In his view, the meaning is static and determined, but the “significance” for each reader might be different based on their own background and worldview. This theory has not been well received by the majority of literary scholars for a number of reasons. First, the difficulty of actually coming to an agreed upon static meaning of any set of symbols is itself an argument against this theory. The moment you shift from one community of understanding to another you often find new “static” meanings. Second, the quantifiable difference between “meaning” and “significance” has not been sufficiently established by Hirsch. If meaning is static, but each reader can hold a different “significance” which alters the reception of the meaning, you then effectively have different meanings. The two terms are simply too equitable for their separation to be of descriptive or logical value.⁷⁶ Because of these flaws, Hirsch’s idea is the weaker theory for describing the way meaning is produced between reader and text.

This critique of reading has large implications in the analysis of conservative Evangelical textual practice. When a community holds a text to be its source of religious and moral authority, it will inevitably run into interpretive problems. The primary response to this problem within American conservative Evangelical practice has been to deny the reader as co-agent in meaning creation when it is beneficial, and accuse opponents of co-creating with the text when a disagreement in meaning is perceived. When preaching, Evangelical pastors can often be heard to use phrases such as, “These aren’t my words, I’m just allowing the Word to speak!” or they might pray before their

⁷⁶ Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 19-21.

sermon asking, “God, allow your spirit to fill me and speak through me.” Rhetoric such as this creates a mask of origin and authority for the language that follows. The preacher effectively takes on the authority of God in this way. When attacking a fellow preacher, a common accusation will be that they are letting their personal opinions interfere with the message of scripture, a hermeneutical blunder often called “eisegesis.” The selective acceptance and denial of interpretation’s role in acts of reading is one root of the problems of textual authority in conservative American Evangelicalism. Furthermore, the masking of real textual authority, that which emerges from the community, is a major culprit in the advancement of Nevin’s despotic “leading spirits.” I will show how the most common assumptions of American conservative Evangelical hermeneutics add to this troublesome discourse.

An overview of Bible ontology will help to show how American conservative Evangelicals came to hold verbal plenary inspiration as their normative doctrine over other historically orthodox options. Many contemporary Evangelicals will connect the Bible to the multivalent concept of the “Word of God.”⁷⁷ Through Christian history this phrase has meant a number of things. Up to the early Reformation, there was a division between the inspired text of the Bible, and the divine “Word of God.” From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries the understanding of biblical inspiration went through large revolutions. The early Reformers still held that words of the Bible and the Living Word were different, and that the Holy Spirit spoke through the biblical writers, but that it would also illuminate the text through the mind of readers. Concepts like verbal plenary

⁷⁷ The Gospel of John opens referencing the Word of God, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the Beginning with God. . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory...” (John 1:1-2, 14, NASB). These verses speak of Jesus being the “Word of God,” the Divine Logos of Christian theology.

transmission of the text from the mind of God to the mind of the writers and the connected doctrine of complete inerrancy did not see real consistent use until the nineteenth century, when they were used to counter European higher criticism and American romanticism.⁷⁸

The historical skepticism of the European Bible scholars and the symbolic readings of American romantics were understood to be questioning the divine nature of the biblical text, and, in some ways, they were. In response, the early nineteenth century conservative Christians failed to argue from the long history of Christian orthodoxy, which carried a number of rigorous theologies of inspiration and instead, they entrenched themselves in an utterly errorless, verbal, word for word, almost mechanistic biblical inspiration. In 1881, the disciples of Charles Hodge wrote in the *Presbyterian Review* a description of their view of inspiration that mentions both the former understanding (the Bible contains the words of God), and their adaptation of it (the Bible is the word of God): “The Scriptures not only contain, but ARE THE WORD OF GOD, and hence that all their elements and all their affirmations are absolutely errorless, and binding the faith and obedience of men.”⁷⁹ The Bible was no longer an inspired text, authored by people who had experienced the push of the Holy Spirit, and who had witnessed miraculous events and written about them; it had been equated with the very mind of God. Since it now holds such a lofty position for conservative Evangelicals, it is easy to see why qualities such as inerrancy and internal self-explication are afforded it. It has the same authority as God within this understanding, thus if God is unable to err or speak falsely, then, the Bible is unable to err or be false. This necessitates a discussion on biblical inerrancy.

⁷⁸ Brown, *The Word in the World*, 4.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 4-5.

As Bible ontology is the cornerstone of conservative Evangelical hermeneutics, the doctrine of inerrancy is the cornerstone of Bible ontology. Inerrantist conservative Evangelicals have expressed for some time that a Bible with errors of any kind is a Bible not worthy of trust. They effectively claim that there are only two epistemological options, complete certainty or total nihilism. In *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*, James Hunter quotes evangelical college students in 1987 who say things such as: “If the Bible isn’t true, everything in my life would be so tentative. I think there would be no rock to go back to. Why hold so tightly to my faith if it is not even stable?” and “If we can’t believe the Bible is our authority, then we really don’t have much besides an emotional experience or some kind of abstract feeling.”⁸⁰ Hunter himself explains the reasoning behind biblical inerrancy: “When it is allowed ... to interpret the Bible [subjectively] and to see portions of the Scripture as symbolic or nonbinding, the Scriptures are divested of their authority to compel obedience.”⁸¹ Since the late twentieth century to the present day, the issue of whether or not conservative Evangelicals *must* believe the Bible to be inerrant has stayed controversial.

The authoritative problems produced by doctrine of inerrancy have received attention from some conservative Evangelicals, and so it would be remiss of me to not point out that certain organizations have adapted their former views on inerrancy. Some Evangelical denominations in America have made it a point to declare on their respective homepages whether or not they hold the Bible to be inerrant, or if they believe more nuance is needed. Groups such as the Southern Baptist Convention (see Sbc.net, “Basic Beliefs”), the Presbyterian Church of America (Pcanet.org, “What We Believe”) the

⁸⁰ James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 30, in Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 23.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

Orthodox Presbyterian Church (Opc.org, “Orthodox Presbyterian Church”), Ken Ham’s well known ministry, Answers in Genesis (Answersingenesis.org, “Why Should We Believe in the Inerrancy of Scripture?”), and the college ministry now named Cru (Cru.org, “Statement of Faith”), all claim the Bible to be “inerrant” on their respective official websites, though Cru claims it only for the “original manuscripts” (an indirect way to allow for error in modern Bibles).⁸² Other groups, such as the Assemblies of God (Ag.org, “Fundamental Truths (Full Statement)”), the Church of the Nazarene (Nazarene.org, “Articles of Faith”), the Church of God in Christ (Cogic.org, “What We Believe”), and another campus ministry, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (InterVarsity.org, “Loving God’s Word”), do not use the word “inerrant” in their statements of faith concerning the Bible.⁸³ For all these groups, the Bible holds a place of divine authority, the latter set still affirming plenary and verbal inspiration in the main, but the degree and way in which it carries that authority varies. Contemporary debates over inerrancy show that it is a timely topic, but I believe that many conservative Evangelical discussions have missed half of the problem. Nearly every discussion focuses on the big theological question of whether or not the Bible is inerrant, and ignores the act of *reading* as formative for the production of meaning.

⁸² Sbc.net, “Southern Baptist Convention > Basic Beliefs,” last modified 2015, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/basicbeliefs.asp>, Pcanet.org, “What We Believe | Presbyterian Church in America,” last modified 2015, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.pcanet.org/beliefs>. Opc.org, “Orthodox Presbyterian Church,” last modified 2015, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.opc.org/historian.html>, Answers in Genesis, “Why Should We Believe in the Inerrancy of Scripture?” last modified 2015, accessed February 10, 2015, <https://answersingenesis.org/is-the-bible-true/why-should-we-believe-in-the-inerrancy-of-scripture/>, Cru.org, “Statement of Faith,” last modified 2015, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.cru.org/about/statement-of-faith.html>.

⁸³ Ag.org, “Fundamental Truths (Full Statement),” last modified 2015, accessed February 10, 2015, http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Statement_of_Fundamental_Truths/sft_full.cfm#1, Nazarene.org, “Articles of Faith | Church of the Nazarene,” last modified 2015, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://nazarene.org/articles-faith>, Cogic.org, “What We Believe | Church of God in Christ,” last modified 2015, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.cogic.org/our-foundation/what-we-believe/>, InterVarsity.org, “Loving God’s Word - News - InterVarsity.Org,” last modified 2015, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.intervarsity.org/news/loving-gods-word>.

One of the last strongly conservative Princeton theologians, J. Gresham Machen, summarized what he thought was the primary difference between those who trusted the inerrant Bible and those who allowed for the criticisms of historical and literary studies to be applied. He said: “Christianity is founded upon the Bible, [Christian] Liberalism on the other hand is founded upon the shifting emotions of sinful men.”⁸⁴ Counter to this, I would argue that any reading of a text, particularly one as powerful as the Bible, is affected by the “shifting emotions of sinful men.” Even if it were granted that the Bible is inerrant, it is still a text, and still requires a reader, who in the act of reading cannot but mix her own background, emotional state, worldview, reading style, communal narratives, etc., into the production of *meaning*. Hence, even among denominations or groups that hold to inerrancy, one witnesses a cacophony of interpretive arguments and vibrant theological accusations.

As I have argued, when two inerrantist Evangelical leaders encounter a difference of opinion on the meaning of a biblical text, the only way left for them to determine who has the “better” reading is their respective hermeneutical methodologies. The problem is both will claim they alone allow the Bible to “speak,” and that their opponent is putting his own personal opinions into the text. The truth is they are both doing so, but the mask of biblical authority must be maintained for each to stay safely within the discourse of conservative Evangelicalism. If they were to drift out of the discursive stream, their own religious authority would be destabilized. During the process of interpretive dueling, both sides will employ various hermeneutical strategies to show that their opinion is closer to the literal, plain, pure, biblical truth. Another critic of inerrantist Bible interpretation, James Barr, said: “Inerrancy is maintained only by constantly altering the mode of

⁸⁴ Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 23.

interpretation, and in particular by abandoning the literal sense as soon as it would be an embarrassment to the view of inerrancy held.”⁸⁵ Barr is correct to point out that inerrancy is a concept highly tied to a “literal” hermeneutical stance.

Literalism is the idea that the Bible is to be read in the most “literal” fashion possible, which throughout American history has found synonyms in “plain” and “common-sensed.” I recounted in my overview of American Evangelical history a number of cases where the common person’s ability to plainly read the Bible was pitted against the vilified, clerical elites who valued things like a theological education and biblical languages. It is a methodology that anyone can justifiably claim and apply. While that has been its greatest selling point, it is also its greatest flaw. It looks at first as if it is the egalitarian hermeneutic, promoting one “literal” meaning for all to share. As Boone says: “Literalism is an attempt...to guard against the vagaries of those perverse interpreters who would persist in making the text mean ‘a hundred other things.’”⁸⁶ It appears to bring down bickering ivory towers, but it only replaces them with innumerable castles of lesser quality. A literalist hermeneutic actually opens up the possibility for the text to mean almost anything. Literalism denies that interpretation even happens, and so every reader can claim their reading is the most “literal.” It allows those with power to punish dissent by branding any disagreement to their textual position as not “literal” enough. Thus, literalism in practice empowers whatever interpretation is currently the status quo for a particular group, which can then be controlled by a particularly Americanized form of religious elite.

⁸⁵ Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 45.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

The elites of modern conservative Evangelicalism in America are rarely the denominational leaders with theological education or years serving in clerical orders. Instead, those who garner the largest popular following, and who can normalize their readings within the American textual community become the authorities. I would reiterate here though that no discourse can be mastered by any one person or one group. The leaders who normalize their Bible interpretations are still beholden to the discourse of power. The pulpit and the pew are equally captive to each other, and both to the discourse. The selectivity with which American conservative Evangelical religious leaders apply “literal” readings of the Bible is an example of this. When it fits their aims, the Bible will be forcibly explicated in a wooden, literal fashion, but when they wish to use other common (but often unacknowledged) forms of interpretation, such as allegory, typology, or symbolism, they will do so.

An example from Pastor Falwell’s career is descriptive of this hypocritical selectivity. In his sermons he made numerous allegorical connections between his church, their travails, and the struggles of the Israelites, but when other ministers did the same, he chastised them. In Falwell’s sermon, “Ministers and Marchers,” given in 1965, he preached against the Civil Rights Movement, against ministers getting involved in politics, and especially against the symbolic use of the Exodus narrative applied to the protection of African Americans from racism. He said this was not an acceptable interpretation because Christians had, according to his reading, already crossed over the Jordan into the Promised Land.⁸⁷ The text of his sermon so adequately makes the point, that I believe it beneficial to quote at length here:

⁸⁷ A rather non-literal, symbolic reading. I know few Christians who have been to Israel and physically crossed the Jordan River.

The 400 years of Egyptian bondage is a type of the sinner's experience before he is converted. . . . When the Jews came out of Egypt, they immediately came into forty years of wilderness wandering. This is a parallel of our infant and carnal Christian life as we struggle before learning the lessons of faith and rest in God. If Church leaders are going to use Moses and the Jews in Egypt as a justification for what they are doing today with the negro in the South, they should also go on and tell the Jews that they are going to lead them in forty years of wandering in which every one of them will die. That is exactly what happened to the all of the Jews. Only Caleb and Joshua lived through the experience. Then a new generation went into the Promised Land. The Promised Land is a parallel to the victorious Christian life on the earthly level, and our eventual Heaven on the eternal plain. *To try to force any other meaning than this is simply making the Bible say what you want it to say.*⁸⁸

This is a clear example of rhetorical hermeneutical selectivity. When allegorical or typological readings benefitted Falwell, he made no qualms of applying them liberally. When other religious leaders applied an allegorical reading he disagreed with, he accused them of error on two counts. First, that they needed to be more "literal," and tell the African Americans (represented typologically by the Jews) that they would now have to wander for forty years because that is what happened to the Jews. Second, he accused them of an improper typology, because the Exodus narrative applied to all Christians, and that typology is fulfilled when a sinner becomes saved. Falwell's final statement fits my description of inter-Evangelical polemic almost perfectly. When truly wanting to disparage their reading of the Bible, Falwell accused the pastors involved in the Civil Rights Movement of "making the Bible say what you want it to say." Of course, he could not acknowledge that he does the very same thing. Inconsistencies in textual practice such as this highlight the problems of authority in conservative Evangelicalism.

Highly connected to literalism is the assertion that the Bible is a "plain" book. "Plainness" is often understood to mean that the Bible is easy to read, and not an arcane

⁸⁸ Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 112-113. Italics mine.

tome requiring advanced education. This concept is also often called “biblical perspicuity,” and is a major component of the Protestant theological argument for a “priesthood of all believers.” Counter to the Catholic hierarchical magisterium, Protestants have long asserted that every believer is a “priest,” and so every believer has the right and responsibility to read the scriptures for themselves. I have discussed at length how this historical process led to the Bible being held as the sole religious authority for American conservative Evangelicals, but it is by no means a uniquely American phenomenon.⁸⁹ Throughout much of conservative Evangelical history, biblical perspicuity has been a necessary tenet. Boone explains: “If the Bible is the sole authority for [conservative Evangelicals], it must be accessible to every reader. If there is to be no institutional authority in interpretation, it follows that no such authority can be considered necessary.”⁹⁰

I would argue that an institutional authority, or any authoritative location other than the Bible, is not only unnecessary, but is necessarily denied from within American Evangelical discourse. The results such a convoluted understanding of text and authority has produced are readily observable, and have been for a very long time. Richard Baxter, a non-conformist minister in seventeenth century England, urged preachers to use a “plain” style, so as to make the Bible accessible to the lesser educated masses. Primarily to counter the arguments of other ministers who he thought had incorrectly interpreted the “plain” Bible, Baxter wrote over 130 books.⁹¹ A stark thread can be traced from the efforts of Baxter over 300 years ago, through the massive growth of denominational

⁸⁹ That said, in the Korean expression, a form of conservative Evangelicalism that largely rejects biblical perspicuity will be examined.

⁹⁰ Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 17.

⁹¹ Brown, *The Word in the World*, 3.

publishing in America, to the contemporary explosion of Evangelical blogs, podcasts, and popular writing. For hundreds of years, what has been held to be the literal, plain, and commonsensical “Word of God” by conservative Evangelicals has strangely required a consistent, prolific, and often polemical explanatory effort.

By placing literalism and perspicuity on cultural pedestals, American conservative Evangelicals traded a system of biblical authority based on extensive education and historic orthodoxy, for a system of authority based on popularity, or the will of the majority. In Noll’s words: “Evangelicals . . . regularly speak of ‘the church’ in its entirety as the magisterium. The most popular and influential leaders among evangelicals are those who have mastered the ability to sway the masses . . . The root of this evangelical bent toward democratic interpretation is the Reformation teaching on the priesthood of all believers.”⁹² This is not to say that many conservative Evangelical pastors and leaders are unintelligent. They can be quite intelligent and are often well versed in their denomination’s hermeneutics and biblical studies in particular. What I am arguing is that in the end, their biblical education matters far less than playing into the social discourse which drives what is accepted and rejected as “biblical truth.” It is not a lack of intelligence or education that has created the problems of biblical authority in American conservative Evangelicalism; it is a lack of self-criticism, and denial of the social construction of power. Conservative Evangelicals have suffered from rarely analyzing the process of *meaning-making* within their communities.

No analysis of biblical authority would be sufficient without attending to issues of canon. How conservative Evangelicals understand the origin of the biblical books, and how they understand each book of the Protestant canon to work *together* is critically

⁹² Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 151.

important. When reading different books of the Bible, conservative Evangelicals in America work from an understanding Bielo calls “unified textuality.” Describing unified textuality Bielo says:

Evangelicals do not understand the Bible as a group of disparate texts or as a single book lacking a unifying theme. Rather, it is understood as a collection of texts that tells a cohesive story about the nature of God and humanity, the purpose of history, and the unfolding of time. It is the story of fallenness and trials, faith in spite of hardship, the difference between human and divine wisdom, and, ultimately, redemption through Jesus. Biblical texts are read within the context of this unifying narrative, providing an interpretive frame to situate any verse, chapter, or story.⁹³

The unity of the text is predicated upon the idea that the Bible, though it has many human authors, has one *mind* behind it. This understanding allows conservative Evangelicals to apply variant verses from Isaiah, Proverbs, the Gospel of John, Romans, and Timothy to a modern problem in Kentucky. Social, historical, cultural, and other contexts are washed away in the assumption of a singular voice, God’s, behind each book of the Bible.

It is fair to say that in many forms of Christianity the intertextuality of biblical texts is posited to some degree, and it does make sense if one holds to even the loosest ideas of inspiration. The concept of inspiration suggests that the texts of the Bible are more than just mere human creations, and that they hold some kind of special relationship that uninspired texts do not. I have no argument with the basic postulate that the Bible is inspired. However, the problem with unified textuality is that, like many conservative Evangelical practices, it masks human interpretive authority. The active work of a human mind is required to link verses or stories from different biblical texts into a common message. Constructing meta-narratives or moral lessons out of linkages between various

⁹³ Bielo, *Words Upon the Word*, 64.

Hebrew Bible and New Testament passages is a common practice in conservative Evangelical preaching and Bible study, and it needs to be recognized for what it is.

In one Bible study group that Bielo observed, the leader, Pastor Dave, encouraged the members to, “take the whole council of God,” by which he meant that they should connect many verses and stories so as to have a larger textual picture. An excellent example of this intertextual interpretive process was when the pastor asked his group to “mull over” Proverbs 29:25, which reads: “Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe” (NIV). He then asked the members if they knew of another “Bible-something” that reminded them of the verse or that would “support” it. In encouraging textual linkages, Pastor Dave posited unified textuality as a proper interpretive technique. The group took very little time to respond. One member said, “[The] Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,” another, “Rely not on your own understanding, but trust in the Lord,” after which Pastor Dave asked for biblical events, to which members replied, “David and Goliath,” “Daniel in the Lion’s Den,” “Paul in Prison,” and “Peter walking on the water,” just to list a few.⁹⁴ It is interesting that this chain of linkages did not have to exhibit any “literal” connecting point other than an undefined sense of “fear.” Proverbs 29:25 mentions “fear of man,” but does not speak to fear of giants, or lions, or drowning in a “literal” way. The point is unified textuality does not have much to do with supporting other interpretive practices used by conservative Evangelicals. It supports the conservative Evangelical canonical ontology, or as Bielo puts it: “This practice of establishing intertextual linkages is especially interesting because it was often done as an end in itself. Groups did not assemble these (sometimes

⁹⁴ Bielo, *Words Upon the Word*, 64-65.

lengthy) textual chains in pursuit of a particular study question; they did so for the sake of the chain itself, a concrete demonstration of the Bible's unified textuality.”⁹⁵

The practice of biblical intertextuality is used more as a form of what I would call *inreach* as opposed to evangelistic *outreach*. By studying the text together and declaring to one another the Bible's self-interpreting power, conservative Evangelicals are encouraged to keep to the cultural discourse on biblical authority. This is accomplished by denying the active interpretational role played by each member offering up their own linkages. It would be impolite or improper to tell a fellow Bible study member that their link between two verses is historical rubbish or contextually inaccurate. To question another Evangelical's practice of biblical intertextuality is either questioning the Bible as a unified document (and thus to question that it has one true author), or asserting that they put their thoughts and feelings into the text to make their connections. Since the first option is discursively unacceptable, skepticism by one member toward another would most likely be seen as a personal attack. In common practice, most linkages are accepted without critique, since doing so supports the textual practice, but tensions do arise, as I have shown multiple times. To understand how tensions are abated, and “proper” textual practice is solidified within a textual community as big as the American conservative Evangelical community, I need to discuss how that community functions on a social level. Though the official biblical canon is closed, the social canon, the discursive collection of popular ideas, jargon, books, sermons, blogs, podcasts, etc., which are accepted as being “biblical,” is left wide open to mask the problems of power in a system which ascribes all authority to a text.

⁹⁵ Bielo, *Words Upon the Word*, 64-65.

Communal Practices

Assessing the 1986 Summit of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, the evangelical theologian J.I. Packer said: “The three hundred of us who met at the Summit believe that anyone who allows Scripture to deliver *its own message* on these matters will end up approximately where we stand ourselves.”⁹⁶ In statements such as this, the ultimate authority ascribed to the Bible is rhetorically positioned so to be only what a particular group of readers deem it to be. What is the corollary of Packer’s assertion? If another reader does not end up where Packer and the 299 other members of the summit do, then they have not allowed “scripture to deliver its own message.” Packer asserts that to disagree with him and his cohorts is to disagree with the Bible, and thus, to disagree with God. Every time a pastor stands before a congregation and claims that they are not interpreting, but simply letting the Bible speak, another claim to godly power is made and the necessary act of interpretation is denied.

To understand how certain readings come to be “what the Bible says” for particular conservative Evangelical communities, I need to discuss more than just literary issues, and deal with human social authority. If there truly were no human authority at play, then every single individual would have unlimited authority to read the literal, perspicuous, plain Bible and any conclusions they came to would be justifiable. Packer himself recognized this inherent trap within inerrant, literalistic hermeneutics. In the article, “In Quest of Canonical Interpretation,” he said: “Because anyone who voices certainties as a Christian in directly personal terms runs the risk of being misheard, as if to be saying: ‘Believe this, or do that, because it is what I believe and do, and my own experience has proven that it is right;’ in other words, ‘take it from me, as if I were your

⁹⁶ Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 70. Italics mine.

God and authority.”⁹⁷ Saying that such a summation is “being misheard” though is a rhetorical dodge, for to claim that the Bible’s “own message” is synonymous with one’s personal stance, can be nothing other than to claim the authority of God. Now, I will examine a few ways the problem of human authority is masked in American conservative Evangelical communities.

The first thing that must be recognized to understand this community is its sheer size, geographically, ideologically, and chronologically. The American conservative Evangelical community is spread throughout one of the largest national land masses in the world, and contains a dizzying amount of cultural and ideological diversity due to America’s unique political and social history (a point that will stand in stark contrast when I examine the Korean expression, which is both smaller and has more consistent cultural ideologies). As has been shown from the works of experts in American Christian history, conservative Evangelicalism is an identifiable community, but it is one peppered with ideological divides. The community is made up not just of religious professionals and the laity they serve, but also Christian authors, editors of Evangelical periodicals, Christian radio personalities, televangelists, College ministries, Evangelical political activists, Christian university administrators, musicians, and Evangelical power-bloggers. These people and the texts, broadcasts, sermons, songs, and discussions they create function as the social “canon” of the conservative Evangelical community, and they exert a mighty influence on what becomes the “proper” reading of the biblical text.

Going back to the beginnings of the Evangelical textual community in America, Brown summarized the way texts gained entrance to the social canon:

⁹⁷ Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 70.

Texts that expressed controversial doctrines, adopted suspect fictional devices, or otherwise dissatisfied portions of the reading community usually occupied a more tenuous place in the canon. . . . New publications gained entrance to the canon if they shared certain marks of membership, in other words, if they reinforced the same values as texts previously recognized as canonical. *Usefulness, rather than genre or form, was the primary characteristic that marked texts as evangelical.*⁹⁸

As conservative Evangelicals in America continuously construct their social canon, they discursively create the meanings, readings, and hermeneutical verbiage they come to hold as “proper.” James Carey, a scholar of journalism, calls this a ritual view of communication, which is summarized by Brown as: “the ongoing representation of shared beliefs in order to sustain an interpretive community over time. Rather than providing novel information, communication networks so employed regularly portray and confirm a particular vision of the world already assumed by its participants.”⁹⁹ Within this ritual view of communication, members of a particular social group often discuss matters without intent to actually come to conclusions or discover new information; instead, the goal is to feel the satisfaction of restating a mutually held worldview. Through this process, the social canon of a textual community and the worldview it espouses is solidified. Boundaries of inquiry and thought, what can and cannot be questioned, or what is and is not “proper,” are emergent properties of the social discourse. These rituals do not necessarily exclude the possibility of Evangelicals using more accurate interpretive practices, but they emphasize the large impact that the social discourse has on the interpretations that individuals and communities take as normative.

To analyze the emergence of “proper” interpretations I will attend to three formative questions. First, what are the most commonly suggested attributes of a proper

⁹⁸ Brown, *The Word in the World*, 7. Italics mine.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 169.

interpretation within the conservative Evangelical social canon in America? Second, how does a text, or a person, gain acceptance into the community? And finally, what is the personal and communal benefit of being accepted into the community? If I can answer, or at least begin to answer these questions, they will provide a better understanding of the process that constructs socially accepted interpretations and meanings from the biblical text for a particular community. To begin, I will turn again to Bielo's study of American Evangelical Bible study groups for an understanding of the most common Evangelical interpretive attributes.

From his attendance at numerous Bible study groups within multiple denominational and non-denominational traditions, Bielo has argued that the most common attribute behind American Evangelical interpretive practice was "relevance," best understood as the application of the text to the individual and communal life of those present. In his own words: "The most widespread form of interpretive activity that American Evangelicals perform is an ongoing attempt to apply biblical texts to their everyday lives."¹⁰⁰ In order to justify applying a two thousand and more year old text to the lives of believers in the present day requires some attendant textual ideologies. The primary textual ideology is that the Bible is divinely inspired and authoritative, but for this ancient, divinely inspired text to be directly applicable by believers today it must also be eternally relevant. Bielo explains that: "Evangelicals understand the Bible's message to be eternal, just as true tomorrow as it is today, as it always has been. . . . In turn, there is a certainty that the Bible has the unique capacity to be always relevant and appropriate and do so in ways that keep pace with the uncertainty of life. Evangelicals expect the

¹⁰⁰ Bielo, *Words Upon the Word*, 59.

experience of reading the Bible and the consequences of doing so never to be the same as the previous reading.”¹⁰¹

The combined textual ideologies of divine authority (understood by conservative Evangelicals through the doctrine of inerrancy) and eternal relevancy create a textual interpretive practice that is always focused on the “now,” and is always for “us.” The normative American Evangelical social canon accepts that any reader can get something out of the Bible for her life, today, now. This has caused the most common textual practices to become rather individualistic, about the reader’s own current life problems, theological issues, or social situation. Brown’s study of the American Christian publishing industry gives more than enough evidence to see that this cultural interpretive trend has been longstanding. She summarized the power of the Evangelical textual community by saying it pushed “readers forward along the pilgrimage from the present world toward that which is to come. *Usefulness* in this pursuit, rather than formal qualities, constituted the essential mark of membership in the evangelical canon.”¹⁰² To be included in the social canon of American conservative Evangelicalism, a text, or a speaker, must be seen as relevant, with a useful message that reinforces the vision of life and religious practice already held as normative.

Then how does inclusion actually play out? How does a text come to be included in the social canon, and similarly, how does a person come to be a member of the American conservative Evangelical discursive community? There is no official process legitimized by some authoritative institution, because there is no such institution. Instead, legitimacy in a diverse and geographically dispersed textual community comes from what

¹⁰¹ Bielo, *Words Upon the Word*, 59.

¹⁰² Brown, *The Word in the World*, 80. Italics mine.

Stanley Fish calls the “nod.”¹⁰³ Like an old boys’ country club, you can only get in if enough of the established members nod at you through the door. More than just a comical imaginary scene, the idea of the communal “nod” is firmly rooted in discourse theory. In the midst of a populist, equalizing, textually based community, legitimacy for each member is drawn from mutual affirmation, and initiates are only affirmed once they display characteristics similar to the community’s status quo.

One example of the “nod” is available to all members of the conservative Evangelical community, and I discussed it previously. A common way to join a textual community is to use the same voice, or jargon, as those already inside the community. Boone acknowledges this phenomenon in her study of American Fundamentalists, citing Daniel Stevick in *Beyond Fundamentalism*:

A way of talking, a way of acting, a body of predictable responses, have grown up within Fundamentalism, and conformity with these is the criterion of acceptance. . . . A quite specific group of catchphrases mark a Fundamentalist. Some of them, such as “infallible Word,” “second coming,” “Jesus saves,” “accepting Christ,” and “personal savior,” are not strictly biblical. Yet these shibboleths are made the basis for inclusion and exclusion by a group which claims sole and supreme loyalty to the Bible.¹⁰⁴

Stevick published his book in 1965, and its age serves to show that the presence of a uniquely conservative Evangelical jargon in America is not just a contemporary phenomenon. One of the most powerful identity confirming “shibboleths” within conservative Evangelical culture in America today is “literalism.” Affirming that one reads the Bible “literally,” whether this is practically true or not, is akin to affixing a conservative Evangelical badge to one’s shirt. Having established how texts and persons

¹⁰³ Brown, *The Word in the World*, 40.

¹⁰⁴ Daniel B. Stevick, *Beyond Fundamentalism* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964), 56, in Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 83.

enter the community, I need to discuss how members and ideas move from the audience to the pulpit.

Leadership positions in the conservative Evangelical community in America require more than just the proper identity markers. They require potential leaders to establish themselves in a number of ways. This process is akin to other institutional or communal systems of authority. Boone quotes Edward Said discussing a similar situation in the community of academic literary criticism: “You have to pass through certain rules of accreditation, you must learn the rules, you must speak the language, you must master the idioms, and you must accept the authorities of the field – determined in many of the same ways – to which you want to contribute.”¹⁰⁵ What are the “rules of accreditation” then for leadership in American conservative Evangelicalism? Potential leaders must adhere to the dominant hermeneutics (most commonly “literalism”), and gain the official approval of their direct superiors in the church structure. Often they will need to establish intellectual credentials, commonly from a seminary or ordination education program. Finally, once they have passed these tests, they must garner the approval of the laity as a whole. Working within one church community can establish the rapport needed over time, or the near instant celebrity that comes with creating a popular text, blog, or video can also build the perception needed for leadership.

The most interesting part of the process comes once a potential leader has become an authority in her community. As I have discussed, the only accepted authority in the conservative Evangelical community in America is the Bible. As such, human leaders in these communities must effectively deny the entire social, intellectual, and cultural

¹⁰⁵ Edward W. Said, “Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community,” *Critical Inquiry* 9, no. 1 (1982): 8, in Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 79.

process that brought them to their position of authority. Boone comments eloquently on this process, saying:

By denying that authority arises in community ... the door may well be open for tyranny of interpretation, in which authoritative interpreters are able to exercise power over their subjects by effacing the distinction between text and interpretation, an effacement especially apparent in literalistic reading when it is claimed that the interpreter does nothing more than expound the “plain sense” of the text.¹⁰⁶

Conservative Evangelical leaders must craft a situation where they are seen as nothing more than a microphone for the divine voice to speak through. Before preaching they will often ask God to “speak through them,” or to take “their” words from them and give them God’s words. By doing so, their speech takes on the very authority of God. In this way, conservative Evangelical leaders mask their interpretive choices and the impact that their worldviews have on their preaching.

During a sermon or a public message, conservative Evangelical leaders will often use phrases such as, “God here says,” “Jesus is telling us,” “the Bible says,” or “God’s Word says.” These phrases attempt to remove the human interpreter from the practice of Bible exposition. If the leader is able to effectively establish this situation, it will be very difficult for conservative Evangelical laity to challenge his or her statements, for those statements have taken on the very authority of God. This is also why the primary means of challenge between conservative Evangelical leaders is to accuse one another of eisegesis. If the text is perfect, perspicuous, and plain, then the only possible problem is with the person preaching. That this calls into question the entire discourse of textual authority within conservative Evangelicalism is often brushed aside, and the

¹⁰⁶ Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 78-79.

congregations caught in the midst of wars between theological elites have no recourse but to wait for the dust to settle or to choose a side.

Leaving America

If the discourse of biblical authority found in American conservative Evangelicalism is a façade,¹⁰⁷ and has historically been the root cause for so much internal strife, why is it denied and protected? Why has this situation continued? I believe the answer to these questions can be found in one great benefit that the discourse provides as a grand life narrative and worldview. That benefit, I call *certainty*. By living into the narrative and worldview of conservative Evangelicalism, American believers are able to craft a comfortable epistemological shelter from the inherent problems of meaning production and apprehension that go along with positing a text as the final authority.

I have reviewed a number of major historical turning points in the American conservative Evangelical timeline, and shown how these moments revolve around the way people lived within the discourse of authority, and mostly defended the status quo from apparent challenges by cultural, scientific, or political realms. I have revealed how the major philosophies of cultural and social authority within conservative Evangelicalism work to mask institutional and human power, and incorporate it under an overarching umbrella of asserted, but unquestioned, biblical authority. Some might find purposeful malice behind the leadership of conservative Evangelicalism in America (that

¹⁰⁷ Such a strong statement may be offensive to some of my fellow Evangelicals, and as such I believe it important to reiterate my own theological perspective. I am not claiming that biblical authority itself is untenable; I identify as an Evangelical Christian, and I believe in the authority of the Bible. My project is to critique the human systems that prop up a problematic discourse that manipulates the Bible, and in my view, actually robs it of real authority.

they have supported the status quo for their personal benefit) but I would disagree with that summation for the vast majority of leaders.

The discourse is a mask, and often a harmful one, but I also believe it to be a product of the humility that conservative Evangelicals feel before God. Their theological positions require a respect for God's authority in the community that no other entity is allowed to claim. The Bible for them is the greatest representation of this authority, and the doctrines that flow from this come from their community's unique historical story. Thus, it is mostly out of deference for God that conservative American Evangelicals and their leaders hide the other sources of cultural and social authority. I respect that deference, but there is more we as American Evangelicals could do to illuminate the places where fallible human authority exerts an influence over our communities and our cultural identity. I will return to these topics, and question what can be done to improve awareness of the discourse of authority within conservative Evangelicalism after I have examined the South Korean expression.

Due to their shared history, Korean and American conservative Evangelical movements are closely tied to one another theologically and socially, and share a significant amount of overlap, particularly in areas such as theological and textual ideology. The Bible is still held to be the final authority, with its status intimately connected to the assertion of divine authorship, but unique systems of social authority emerge from the discourse surrounding this core doctrinal assertion, and that is again where my observations and questions will focus. There are significant differences between the two expressions and the primary work of the critique to follow will be in highlighting the ways in which Korea's national history, cultural influences, and literary

practices have created a discourse of biblical authority that arrives at many of the same conclusions, but is ultimately different from the American version.

THE KOREAN STORY: MAJOR INFLUENCES FROM HISTORY

“Our standard will be their standards. Our actions will be their actions. We are their Bible.” – *Korean Mission Field*, March 1908¹⁰⁸

“Day and night, with tears, we are waiting for you. You promised us, we are waiting for you Jesus. Come right now!” – Attested lament song of Korean Christians under Japanese colonial rule¹⁰⁹

The twentieth century was indescribably hard on the Korean people, and as I attempt to retell their story through an academic lens, I will fail to do justice to the story of their hardships. The last 100 years of Korean history touches on such deeply emotional topics as colonialism, national identity, and religious identity. As such, it is my goal to offer a critique of authority in Korean Evangelicalism, but with as much humility as possible. With careful regard for my own social and religious position, I hope to add to the ever growing scholarly picture of South Korean religion. As someone who has had the opportunity to reside in South Korea for over five years, and is intimately connected to Korean Evangelical culture in both my scholarly and personal life, I hope that this analysis might be of some benefit to the Evangelical communities in South Korea.

To understand the Korean conservative Evangelical communities of today, a basic understanding of Korea’s religious history must be cultivated. Though modern South Korea, or more properly the Republic of Korea, has only existed for 68 years, the culture which it inherits has existed on the Korean peninsula for over 3,000 years. National titles have changed many times, but the culture has rolled on like a steady stream. The Korean peninsula has also been the home of various religious establishments throughout history,

¹⁰⁸ Dae Young Ryu, “The Origin and Characteristics of Evangelical Protestantism in Korea at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” *Church History* 77, no. 02 (2008), 374.

¹⁰⁹ Brower observation notes, Galilee Methodist Church, Sunday service, 5/14/2014.

from the primal Shamanism of early tribes, to Buddhist and Confucian based kingdoms lasting for centuries. In comparison, Christianity is still a newcomer to Korea, having become a major cultural force in only the last century. Therefore, it is absolutely essential to understand how deeply the spiritual traditions of these other religions continue to affect the Korean people.

The religious history of Korea not only provides a wealth of information for understanding the social and cultural values of modern Koreans, but it also forces a question on anyone wanting to study Korean Christianity: Why did Christian missions succeed so dramatically in Korea? How did Christianity become a thoroughly indigenized religion in South Korea, when it failed to do so in almost every other part of Asia? In particular, the massive growth of Protestant Christianity in South Korea simply compels scholarly inquiry, as a comparable situation is hard to find. In 1920 there were 3,279 Protestant churches in South Korea, and by 1996 there were 33,897 churches, with a sizable number of churches being described as mega-churches for holding an adult attendance over 20,000.¹¹⁰ Few Protestant communities around the world can boast of a thousand percent increase throughout the twentieth century. Scholars have proposed economic, political, cultural and missional arguments for the success of Christianity in South Korea, a good number of which I will discuss. Another part of the puzzle that requires more attention is the growth of Christianity as a colonial and post-colonial phenomenon. The Korean colonial situation of the early twentieth century stands at odds with a common framing in Western colonial studies, specifically, that Western powers take the role of colonizer. Assuredly, in many situations across the globe that indeed was

¹¹⁰ Hong Young Gi, "The Backgrounds and Characteristics of the Charismatic Mega-Churches in Korea," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 3, no. 1 (2000): 99-101.

the case. Western powers often exerted their military and economic power over Asian, African, or South American cultures, but this is not the only form of colonization that took place. For Korea, the American Protestant missionaries that arrived from the 1890s through the 1930s were not connected to the colonizing power,¹¹¹ the Empire of Japan, and were frequently opposed to it. Considering all this, it must be said that no single factor can adequately explain the acceptance of Christianity in South Korea, even less so the way in which it has become enculturated or “Koreanized.” This is again a time when scholars need to pan back from examining trees, and look at how the forest has formed.

In this chapter I will provide an overview of the various cultural and religious ideas, events, and persons that helped the Korean people to accept Evangelical Protestantism, nurture its growth, and solidify its place in modern Korean life. This section will be divided into four parts. First, I will touch on the history of the other major religions found in Korea, focusing mainly on Shamanism and Confucianism, and discuss how they continue to affect Korean culture today. Second, the significant impact that the colonial period had on the development of Christianity in Korea will be examined. Third, I will discuss why post-colonial South Korea saw a massive explosion of a Korean-led Christianity and how this new cultural force related outwardly to a dictatorial government, and inwardly to different factions. Fourth, the struggles and decline of the modern conservative Evangelical Korean church will be analyzed, particularly how it has moved away from its progressive, revolutionary beginnings, and embraced a very strict, traditionalist, social position. In the following chapter, I will apply this informed understanding to forms of social and textual authority in the contemporary Korean church.

¹¹¹ Kirsteen Kim, “Ethereal Christianity: Reading Korean Mega-Church Websites,” *Studies in World Christianity* 13, no. 3 (2007): 216.

Finally, I will expound on the data that I collected and insights I came to over several months while participating in two church communities here in Cheonan.

The ideologies connected to the authority of the Bible, as well as the people empowered to speak for or from it, are deeply engrained in both American and Korean conservative Evangelical Christianity. The discourse of authority surrounding the Bible is not just problematic. It is a mask used to cover up the more powerful web of authority that actually exists in conservative Evangelical Christianity. This will continue to be argued throughout the discussion on South Korean conservative Evangelicalism. I will show that these historically linked expressions of Christianity have grown quite differently over the past century, but that this has not changed the core problems of authority in either expression. That these remain consistent, regardless of many other aspects changing, is a testament to their ubiquity. I will pick up this argument again later, but for now, I turn to South Korean religious history, and begin the Korean story.

Before Religion: Shamans, Monks, and Priests

The story of conservative Evangelical Protestantism in South Korea actually begins centuries before the arrival of Christian missionaries. To understand why the Christian Gospel found such success in Korea the religio-cultural context into which it advanced must be explored first. Much like the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13, where the different types of soil each received seeds in different ways, peoples and cultures can have varying degrees of acceptance or rejection when encountering new religions, because of their unique background and history. Political, social, economic, and cultural context creates the “soil” into which the missionaries sow their seeds. As such, I

will begin my overview of Korean Christian history in the era prior to the arrival of Christianity.

Before the encounter with Western powers, “religion,” as a singular concept did not exist in Korea as we use it today. In Korea, different religious ideas and practices co-existed with varying degrees of cooperation depending on which systems of belief were most acceptable to the ruling powers. Throughout history, Shamanism, Buddhism, and Confucianism have all influenced the cultures of the Korean peninsula. Though we give these religious systems names today, separating and categorizing the beliefs and doctrines found in each, this was not the case in ancient Korea. For much of Korea’s history, these three religious systems governed different aspects of human life and functioned socially in an overlapping fashion.¹¹² Shamanism was the hearth religion, and the religion of the family. It was the primary organizing system over things like birth, sickness, personal and familial fortune or misfortune, etc. Buddhism has historically been the more exclusive of the three, but also adapted to the Korean context. It offered a separated life, a spiritual alternative from the day to day world. Buddhism governed discussions of philosophical and theological issues such as death, life after death, morality, justice, and the like. If Shamanism informed the religious practices of the home, Buddhism balanced this as the guiding religious practice of the public space.

Confucianism reigned over Korea as the primary religious system of its kings and leaders for the largest amount of time, and did so most recently in relation to the arrival of Christianity, and its influence is connected to these facts. Confucianism was (and still is in many ways) the religious and social philosophy of the government, of social

¹¹² Jin Kyu Park, “‘Are You Christian? I’m the Other’: The Demarcation of Christianity and the Other in Popular Korean Television,” *Studies in World Christianity* 11, no. 1 (2005): 109.

structure, of business, and of inter-personal relations. Confucian understandings of social hierarchy, of gender roles, of filial piety and respect are woven into the fabric of Korean society. This is readily apparent in the Korean language and the rituals performed on the most important national holidays. Because of this background, it is crucial to understand that Christianity entered a culture that was already religiously pluralistic. Christianity has had to adapt to this religious milieu and this situation is recognized by modern Christian Korean scholars. Lee Yi Hyung, a Christian Korean scholar said: “God’s will has certainly been central, but the Korean people’s characteristic tendencies towards religion have also contributed towards growth. Before the spread of Christianity, Confucianism and Buddhism had long been the spiritual pillars of the Korean people. Equally important, the old religious tradition of shamanism and animism had been deeply rooted in the Korean mindset.”¹¹³

Another Korean scholar, Hong Young Gi, (also an ordained pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church), has recognized the huge impact that Korea’s religious culture has had on the reception and formation of Christianity in Korea. He argues that the religions existing in Korea prior to the arrival of Christianity all held connections to Christian ideas: Buddhism had an understanding of heaven and hell, Confucianism had social roles and family doctrines, and Shamanism emphasized the common people, religious experiences, female spiritual leadership, and spiritual healing.¹¹⁴ I will take a close look at Shamanism and Confucianism in particular, to see how they shaped the Korean social discourse on religious authority, and how they might continue to influence conservative Evangelical Christians in Korea.

¹¹³ Lee Yi Hyung, “A Brief Research on Changes in the Korean Church Service Format,” *International Congregational Journal* 4, no. 2 (2005): 89.

¹¹⁴ Hong, “The Backgrounds and Characteristics of the Charismatic Mega-Churches in Korea,” 107-108.

Few scholars have studied Korean religious history more than James H. Grayson, professor emeritus in the school of East Asian studies at the University of Sheffield, and this could be said even more so for the study of ancient Korean religious practices. His book, *Korea – A Religious History*, is a seminal work for understanding the ways in which Korean religions have evolved over the centuries. I will begin then with early Korean Shamanism, or what Grayson calls, Korean primal religion.

At the beginning of the fourth century CE, the peoples living on the Korean peninsula as well as much of eastern and southern Manchuria had fully developed a unique religious system. The Korean primal religion descended from ancient Siberian shamanism, but it also shows changes that emerged as it came to be expressed in the more settled and agriculture based societies of the Korean peninsula. One of the main beliefs that bound this system together was the belief in a supreme heavenly spirit named *Hanulnim*, and a group of lesser spirits that serve him. This high god is mentioned in a number of Korean foundation myths, including the most influential myth concerning *Tan'gun* from ancient *Choson*. In these ancient stories, the ruling families of tribes or the royal families of the earliest Korean monarchies would claim their right to rule by direct descent from the Lord of Heaven, *Hanulnim*, but in doing so they also claimed the duty to intercede with him for the benefit of the people. The earliest political leaders of Korea held a dual role as Shaman-Kings, and this has been supported by archaeological evidence from ancient burial and ritual sites. Korean primal religion seems to have been as pervasive among the common people as it was among the elite, and the same symbols buried with royalty are found in common burials sites. Many animal symbols have been found in ancient Korean burials, but a very common one is bird feathers, which were

symbolic of the belief in the upward flight of the soul after death. Beyond a belief in the afterlife, the two most consistent religious concerns for the tribal age Koreans were the offering of prayers for prosperity, particularly of the land, and the curing of diseases. All of these religious acts were performed by shamans, and continue to this day in rituals which retain their emphasis on prosperity, health, and the sending of the soul to the next life.¹¹⁵

These ancient beliefs have continued to shape the Korean approach to religion. As just one example, Oak Sung Deuk, a scholar who has studied the encounter between modern Korean Christianity and Shamanistic healing practices, has observed in certain Korean Christian communities a type of “Fulfillment Theology.”¹¹⁶ These groups argue that *Hanulnim* was actually the Judeo-Christian God as revealed to the ancient Koreans, and that the comparatively younger Buddhism and Confucianism which came from outside Korea corrupted this early belief system. Thus, the coming of Christianity to Korea was, for those that hold this theology, the “fulfillment” of their ancient ancestral religious beliefs, and not something new, or Western, or “other.” There are many more examples to be explored, but for now I shall continue with the overview.

The first major religion to missionize to the Korean peninsula was Buddhism, and it did so in the latter part of the fourth century CE. At this time the Korean peninsula and a large portion of Manchuria was divided into three separate Korean monarchies, Koguryo, Silla, and Paekche. Buddhism was officially accepted in 372 in Koguryo, and in 384 in Paekche. In both cases, the acceptance of this foreign religion seems to have come hand in hand with the growing relationship that each kingdom had with the Chinese

¹¹⁵ James Huntley Grayson, *Korea* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 19-21.

¹¹⁶ Sung Deuk Oak, “Healing and Exorcism: Christian Encounters with Shamanism in Early Modern Korea,” *Asian Ethnology* 69, no. 1 (2010): 109-110.

Empire of that age. The political and cultural prestige of China, which throughout history has extended its sphere of influence over Korea, gave great support to the Buddhist missionaries it sent to the peninsula.¹¹⁷ All three Korean kingdoms were known for sending their own monks abroad to both China and India to study in many of the greatest temples of their day.¹¹⁸ The desire to learn and to share religious experiences with others has been a consistent Korean religious aspiration, and one can see how this continues today in modern Korean Buddhism and Christianity.

Not only does Korea's Buddhist history reveal the long history of missionizing by the Korean people, but it is also a great example of the way in which the culture has overlapped various religious practices. In 558 CE, King Chinhung began building a new palace, but the project was stopped when it was said that a yellow dragon lived in a pond on the build site. Instead of a palace, Chinhung decided to build a Buddhist temple, named *Hwangnyong-sa*, or Temple of the Yellow Dragon. This was an early instance of Korean primal religion and Buddhism mixing. Prior to the arrival of Buddhism, such temples would have been dedicated to the spirit for which they were built, but at this point, a Buddhist temple would be built in response to the shamanistic spirit's presence.¹¹⁹ Such overlapping has been common throughout Korea's religious history.

Confucianism, like Buddhism, came to Korea through the diffusion of Chinese culture across Northeast Asia. Korea was particularly receptive to the expansion of Confucian thought because the primal religion of Korea had some tenets which were rather similar, especially regarding the way society was structured. Another Korean scholar, Yi Urho, has argued that the folk social philosophies of the early Korean tribal

¹¹⁷ Grayson, *Korea*, 24-26.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 30-35.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 35.

states held strong similarities to classical Confucianism. This early folk social system he called *Han Sasang* (Concept of Unity), and took the early foundation myths, such as the story of *Tan'gun*, as evidence for the connections. The story is focused on three relationship pairs: *Hwanin*, the Lord of Heaven, and his son *Hwanung*; *Hwanung* and his subordinates; and *Hwanung* and the Bear Woman who becomes his wife. These relationships represent three of the five primary relations within the Confucian social system. Yi argues that Koreans accepted these relationships as formative for their society, even before the coming of classical Confucianism.¹²⁰ Later, I will reveal how these very organized, vertical social structures, as well as gendered social categories, play a large role in the formation of Evangelicalism in South Korean culture.

Throughout most of Korean history, Confucianism has mainly been a cultural, political, and social philosophy, and as such worked in tandem with the more public Buddhist spirituality, as well as the shamanistic folk religion. Beginning in the fourth century CE, the Korean states of Koguryo and Paekche began officially adopting more Sinitic culture and Confucian thought. The primary effect of this cultural adoption was of a secular and practical nature. Confucian philosophies altered ancient Korea in three main ways. First, Confucianism influenced the way in which the arts, letters, education and philosophy functioned. Korea adopted the Chinese writing system, the study of canonical Confucian texts, the promotion of Confucian philosophical concepts, and established a formalized system of education in the Confucian style. Second, Korea adopted a more Confucian system of government, with a regularized state bureaucracy, diverse political ministers with specified positions and duties, as well as systemized checks on the various parts of the government. Third, Confucianism formalized the social and gender roles I

¹²⁰ Yi Urho, *Han'guk Kaesin Yuhak-sa Siron* (Seoul, Pagyong-sa, 1980), 11-29, in Grayson, *Korea*, 48.

spoke of earlier, and facilitated the spread of these relational values from the upper classes to the majority of Koreans. This final process took a long time though, and would not fully bloom till the time of the Choson Dynasty.¹²¹

These areas of influence highlight two ways in which Korea's Confucian history is connected to the growth of Evangelical Christianity. First, the emphasis of Confucian philosophy on education and particularly book learning is significant in understanding the acceptance of Protestant Christianity in contemporary South Korea. Early Confucianism gave great importance to literacy, the keeping of historical records, and the flourishing of scholarship. To this day, these are highly valued endeavors within Korean culture. Second, the social relations practiced in South Korea are still primarily derived from Confucian philosophy, even and possibly more so, within conservative Korean Evangelicalism. Koreans practice a vertical, title based system of relationships, primarily based on age, but also gender and organizational position. Korean and Western scholars have been studying this social phenomenon more and more, especially with the rising importance of gender studies. An example of this can be found in Pyong Gap Min's study of female church leadership within Korean immigrant communities in the United States. One of Min's primary considerations within her study is the relationship between traditional Confucian Korean culture and the gender hierarchies found in Korean-American churches. Min cites a number of social scientists who highlight particular Confucian patriarchal traditions, such as "*Namjon Yobi* (men should be respected; women should be lowered)," and "*Samjong Chidock* (the virtue of women obeying three persons in their life cycles: father, husband, and son)," as strong influences on women's roles in

¹²¹ Grayson, *Korea*, 49.

these communities.¹²² I would add that these social ideologies are still present in Korean churches, even if they are rarely discussed.

There are two more historical situations that occurred closer to the arrival of Protestant Christian missionaries in Korea, and they were fundamental in opening the Korean cultural mind to Protestant missionizing. The first is the arrival of Catholicism in Korea roughly one hundred years before Protestantism. Catholicism entered Korea much earlier than Protestantism in part because it was not brought by Western missionaries, but by native, educated, Koreans. During this time, and on into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Korea was known as the “Hermit Kingdom,” for holding intense isolationist political tendencies. From the 1500s to the mid-1700s there is some evidence of Korean scholars being aware of Catholic religious ideas, but nothing conclusive, and nothing beyond what seems to have been of practical or scholarly interest.

One of the earliest known instances of Koreans intent on learning about Catholic teachings was a group of scholars who met in a Buddhist temple in 1777 to study the religious tracts distributed by Jesuits in China. The leaders of the group convinced Yi Sunghun, the son of a political minister, to make contact with Catholic priests in China when he travelled to Beijing with his father. While there, Yi Sunghun was baptized, and when he returned, he and Yi Pyok, one of the leaders, began evangelizing in their local area. The Korean Catholic Church is considered to be a self-evangelized church because of this early history. During this early phase, Catholicism in Korea was accepted as *So-hak* (Western Learning), and was seen as a school of thought within the Confucian

¹²² Pyong Gap Min, “Severe Underrepresentation of Women in Church Leadership in the Korean Immigrant Community in the United States,” *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion* 47, no. 2 (2008): 225.

education system.¹²³ Another prominent school, *Sil-Hak* (Practical Learning), adopted many Catholic ideas, because they found them to be in accord with their own progressive teachings. The *Sil-hak* school was known to be anti-slavery, anti-caste, and was also known to support the advancement of women and the poor.¹²⁴ Due to its emphasis on equality of persons, and the uplift of the poor, Catholicism grew rapidly among the middle and lower classes, all while becoming more intolerable to the aristocracy and government. The first persecution of 1791 began a series of events that led to the Great Persecution of 1866-1871, during which half of the Korean Catholics (over 8,000 people) suffered martyrdom. More than its teachings, Catholicism's connection to foreign powers made the isolationist, Confucian monarchy deal aggressively with Korean Catholics. One example of foreign connection occurred in 1801, when Korean leaders intercepted a letter written to church officials in Beijing requesting the help of a Western navy and army to protect the growing Catholic believers in Korea.¹²⁵ For many Koreans, especially the elite, this solidified the association of Catholicism with foreign powers. However, the trials of these early Korean Catholics also produced a connection between Christianity and the common people that would favor the arrival of Protestantism.

The final historical factor which prepared Korea to accept Protestant Christianity was the twilight policies of the kingdom of Choson. This was the last kingdom of Korea, which existed up until the time of Japanese colonization. The official monarch was King Kojong, but his father, Prince Regent Yi Ha Ung, held the true power of government. The prince regent continued the isolationist policies of his predecessors, and this left Korea

¹²³ Grayson, *Korea*, 126-145.

¹²⁴ Timothy S. Lee, *Born Again* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), 3-4.

¹²⁵ Danielle Kane and Jung Mee Park, "The Puzzle of Korean Christianity: Geopolitical Networks and Religious Conversion in Early Twentieth-Century East Asia," *American Journal of Sociology* 115, no. 2 (2009): 391.

unprepared to deal with a quickly changing international political situation. Beginning in the 1830s, Western trade vessels and naval ships were appearing more and more often off the coast of Korea requesting diplomatic relations. The isolationist policies also took their toll domestically, with the nineteenth century seeing numerous popular uprisings, as well as a crumbling class structure that had become far too top heavy. All of this gave support to foreign ideas (like Catholicism) which were causing Koreans to question the traditional Confucian set of social values.¹²⁶

The prince regent's primary response to the declining political situation was to empower the throne even more against other influences which might have weakened the central government. His main opponents were the provincial, private Confucian academies, called *Sowon*, which were the main educational institutions for the elite, as well as centers for regional politics. Not only were the *Sowon* intellectually and politically powerful, but they also had an enormous amount of economic power. They owned large numbers of slaves, vast areas of agriculturally valuable land, and they were exempt from taxes and corvée labor under Korean law. Between 1864, the year the prince regent came to power, and 1871, he worked to demolish the power of the *Sowon*. In 1871, as a final measure, the prince regent closed all but forty-seven of the hundreds of Confucian schools that had existed previously. This act symbolized the end of official Confucian influence in Korean society.¹²⁷ The decline of the powerful Confucian systems of education, government, and culture which had been the basis of Korean society for centuries was like an open door to new ideas. It was during this tumultuous time of rapid social and cultural change that Western Protestant missionaries first entered Korea.

¹²⁶ Grayson, *Korea*, 128.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 136.

As the nineteenth century became the twentieth, and the hegemony of Confucian power waned in Korea, Protestantism and other alternative religions found fertile soil.¹²⁸ The Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries who arrived early on in Korean Protestant history brought with them social ideas to which Koreans had not been greatly exposed. In comparison to the traditional worldviews of Korean Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shamanism, the social, gender, and religious ideas expressed by the missionaries were seen as quite liberating.¹²⁹ The activities of Protestant missionaries also primarily occurred during Korea's colonial subjugation under the Empire of Japan. Many of the perspectives, stereotypes, and discourses of Evangelical Christianity in Korea come from this time.

Western Missions, Colonialism, and the Birth of Korean Christianity

As I have noted, the transmission of Protestant Christianity to South Korea was complex. The expansion of religions to new cultures should never be simplified or boiled down to just one aspect of human civilization. It is always a multi-faceted process. In this case, religious climate, colonialism, international politics, and economics all played significant roles. Beyond these large brush strokes though, particularly influential individuals and institutions also helped to shape the events of the colonial time period in Korea. In the section that follows, I will first discuss the religious climate into which Protestantism arrived, and the beliefs and practices of the missionaries and early Korean Christians. Second, I will describe the colonial situation and the way in which it fused the budding Christian community with nationalist hopes for freedom and independence.

¹²⁸ Lee, *Born Again*, xii.

¹²⁹ Kirsteen Kim, "Christianity's Role in the Modernization and Revitalization of Korean Society in the Twentieth-Century," *International Journal of Public Theology* 4, no. 2 (2010): 213, 217.

Finally, I will introduce a number of notable missionaries and Korean converts who impacted the growth of Protestantism in Korea. This section will show why Protestantism in Korea evolved from a missionary-led, theologically cooperative context, to a Korean-led, conservative Evangelical context.

Initial Religious Connecting Points. Here I would like to delve a little deeper into the socio-religious connections between Korea's primal religion (Shamanism), Confucianism, and the conservative Protestantism that arrived at the end of the nineteenth century. These connections are recognized by a number of Korean scholars, and Andrew E. Kim, professor of sociology at Korea University, one of the country's most prestigious national universities, has written extensively on this subject. At the beginning of his article, "Korean Religious Culture and its Affinity to Christianity: The Rise of Protestant Christianity in South Korea," he says that:

Christian conversion in South Korea did not involve an exclusivistic change of religious affiliation, meaning that it did not require the repudiation of traditionally held beliefs. Instead, millions of South Koreans eagerly embraced Christianity precisely because the new faith was advanced as an extension or continuation of Korean religious tradition.¹³⁰

Kim goes on to say that he finds five categories of convergence between Korea's religious traditions and conservative Protestantism: 1) a focus on this-worldly life; 2) the concept of *Hananim*; 3) the image of God as savior; 4) an emphasis on faith-healing; and 5) the importance of ethics and family values in Korean society.¹³¹

Let me touch on one of the most apparent examples, the linguistic connection between *Hanulnim* and *Hananim*. In Korean primal religion, the high god is *Hanulnim*,

¹³⁰ Andrew E. Kim, "Korean Religious Culture and its Affinity to Christianity: The Rise of Protestant Christianity in South Korea," *Sociology of Religion* 61, no. 2 (2000): 117.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

sometimes called *Hanunim*, and the earliest Western protestant missionaries displayed awareness of this. Though scholars differ on exactly what popularized *Hananim*,¹³² I believe Grayson provides the most plausible narrative. Grayson has traced the use of *Hananim* back to the very first copy of the New Testament translated into Korean by an early missionary, the Rev. Dr. John Ross (1842-1915). Ross was part of the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland's mission to Manchuria, and one of his interests while there was the development of a mission to Korea, which he had been turned onto by a fellow missionary, Andrew Williamson (1829-1890). Williamson's interest in turn seems to have been sparked by a failed attempt to enter Korea by another missionary, Robert Jermain Thomas (1839-1866), a young man whom Williamson had advised to ride along with the American merchant vessel, the General Sherman, in 1866.¹³³

As I discussed, the prince regent's rule was a time of great isolationism, and so the Korean response to the General Sherman was swift and destructive. All on board were killed, including the young Thomas. Williamson made attempts to learn about the situation, but was always turned away at the customs barrier into Korea, known as the Corean Gate. Because of these events, Ross and Williamson were impassioned to reach out to Korea. In 1877, Ross produced the first primer on Korean for a European language and then translated the New Testament into Korean. This translation is incredibly significant for two main reasons. First, it was used by Ross's Korean converts to establish Protestant communities in northwestern Korea. Like Catholicism, Protestantism was partly an internally-evangelized religion, and having a religious text was a large factor in that process. Second, the translation by Ross introduced key theological terms still used

¹³² Oak, "Healing and Exorcism," 107, Grayson, *Korea*, 155-156, and Kim, "Korean Religious Culture and its Affinity to Christianity," 122-123.

¹³³ Grayson, *Korea*, 155.

by Korean Protestants, most notably, the name for God, *Hananim*. It is also significant that Ross chose to write *Hananim* in a pure Korean-language form.¹³⁴ There are many terms for deities in Sinitic-Korean, called *Hanja* today, and the uniquely Korean name made it more attractive to the Korean people. The etymological connection, as well as the theological connection of a singular deity who is the lord of heaven, made the use of *Hananim* a great boon to the evangelistic efforts of conservative Protestant missionaries in Korea.

I will return to Kim's other points of convergence when I discuss the colonial and missional periods in Korean history, but for now I would like to offer two other connections that have been influential on the development of power structures within the conservative Evangelical Korean church. The first is that traditional religious leaders, and more importantly, traditional ideologies and practices that confer spiritual authority, found new habitats within Korean Protestantism. The leaders of the Korean primal religion were women called *mudang*. If Korean primal religion is called Shamanism, these were the shamans. Oak offers a good summation of the religious worldview of the *mudang*:

According to the traditional shamanistic world view, diseases, and disasters were caused by a breakdown in the cosmological harmony between spirits, human beings, and nature. A female mediator, a *mudang*, would perform *kut* ceremonies to repel disasters and call for blessings. For example, a healing ritual, *uhwan kut*, attempted to release the anger of household gods or malevolent spirits of ancestors by appeasing them with sacred dancing and singing, and offering sacrificial food on behalf of the patients and their family members.¹³⁵

The primary responsibilities of the *mudang* were healing the sick, exorcising malevolent spirits, and bestowing blessings. The latter practice was primarily focused on blessings of

¹³⁴ Grayson, *Korea*, 156.

¹³⁵ Oak, "Healing and Exorcism," 97.

the home, business, farm and family. As Christianity began to spread in Korea, many of the *mudang* converted to the new religion. Many continued to be spiritual leaders in their communities as “Bible women.” Oak says that Bible women were often hired by bible societies and mission groups to distribute Christian literature and give instruction on the Bible to other Koreans under the supervision of female missionaries.¹³⁶ Some of the most common jobs for Bible women continued to be exorcism, religious teaching, and the blessing of fellow believers. In this way, their role in the community, and these spiritual practices, found continuity through the religious conversion.

Iconoclasm, an example of exorcising non-Christian religious items, was a common practice of Koreans converting to Christianity, and this was often led by missionaries and Bible women. One missionary wrote: “When the Koreans become Christians they destroy the ‘devil house’ on the mountain sides and the booth for the evil spirits by their door-yard.”¹³⁷ Often these household religious trinkets would be burned to show the converts commitment. Oak shares examples of such practices from the 1906 *Annual Report of the Bible Committee of Korea*, which contain the experiences of a Methodist missionary, Ella A. Lewis, in 1905. Lewis visited a number of Korean homes with a Bible woman where they burned a number of “fetishes” and she wrote of meeting three people possessed by demons. Ella’s report also mentions that at one location, women who had destroyed shamanistic items began to sing Christian hymns that had been translated into Korean, believing that these songs had power over evil spirits.¹³⁸

These early relationships show that at the beginning stages of Protestant missionizing in Korea, the ideologies and practices that established an individual’s

¹³⁶ Oak, “Healing and Exorcism,” 122.

¹³⁷ Lee, *Born Again*, 30.

¹³⁸ Oak, “Healing and Exorcism,” 100.

spiritual authority in a community (exorcism, bestowal of blessings, power of/over spirits, etc.) did not change greatly, and that the people with such authority often kept it. This continues within modern Korean conservative Evangelicalism. Scholars who have studied the practices of contemporary Evangelical pastors in South Korea find that those religious leaders who are able to manifest shamanic acts of exorcism or healing find more success in Korean society. A root shamanic conception of religion, and the practices that attend it, continues in South Korean Evangelicalism. Kim summarizes this situation well:

By performing the healing rites during Sunday Services and revival meetings, Korean pastors turned the two occasions into, in essence, shamanic rituals that typically featured disease-curing exorcism. In parallel with the popular conceptualization of the role of shamans in South Korea ... gifted pastors were expected to have the capacity to communicate with the spiritual world and to possess a mysterious power to exorcise diseases. Such emphasis on healing led to the wide popularity of revivalists who specialized in healing and of churches that were ministered by pastors who supposedly had healing capacities.¹³⁹

Another example of the influential overlap between Korea's primal religion, and the practices of early twentieth century Protestantism is the great Pyongyang Revival of 1907. This was one of the main events that would set the tone for Protestant Christianity in Korea. The most influential missionaries in the early colonial period had themselves been brought up in Anglo-American revival movements. Koreans took quickly to the ideals and practices of revivalism, and interpreted the Pyongyang revival as a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit on their people. This is another way in which conservative Evangelical Protestantism appealed to the Korean people, who had been rooted in experiential, shamanic, hearth religion for so long.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Kim, "Korean Religious Culture and its Affinity to Christianity," 127.

¹⁴⁰ Kim, "Christianity's Role in the Modernization and Revitalization of Korean Society in the Twentieth-Century," 218.

The revival itself did not happen spontaneously in 1907, but was more the culmination of growing spiritual and political unrest caused by both the Russo-Japanese War and the increasing political pressure exercised by the Empire of Japan over the Korean peninsula. Many Koreans saw the growing Christian community as a platform from which to express their political views. Western missionaries however saw the politicization of the fledgling Korean church as a stumbling block to their goals of evangelism. If the church became a camp for revolution against the Empire of Japan at this early time, the missionaries were worried about the possible repercussions. An article in the *Korea Mission Field*, a missionary publication from Seoul that as produced from 1905 to 1941, read:

At the meeting of the General Council in September a resolution, providing for a simultaneous revival movement in the church throughout Korea, was passed ... Perhaps, as never before in the history of the church in Korea, there is need for a manifestation of the power of God ... A crisis has been reached. The political situation brings the entire people to a state of unrest. The hope of the nation and the individuals that compose it lies not in agitation and discussion, but in God. The way to combat the unrest in the Church is to stress the hope that the Gospel offers.¹⁴¹

To counteract the growing political fervency of the Korean converts, the missionaries planned a series of revivals all over the country throughout 1906 and 1907. These revivals were orchestrated primarily by the Presbyterian and Methodist missions working together. The Presbyterian missionaries began praying for and planning a revival to take place in Pyongyang at the Presbyterian Central Church, which was the largest and oldest church in the city, able to hold up to 1500 people. They made it a point to include a number of Korean Christian leaders in the planning and performance of the revival. The meetings and Bible classes carried on without anything notable occurring till the January

¹⁴¹ Lee, *Born Again*, 17.

6th prayer meeting, where a number of Koreans began to publicly offer confessions and weep in prayer. This sparked a number of days of revivals focused on public prayer and confession. The climax of the event came on January 14th, which William N. Blair and Graham Lee, two of the missionaries in attendance, wrote of saying:

After a short sermon, Dr. Lee took charge of the meeting and called for prayers. So many began praying that Dr. Lee said, “If you want to pray like that, all pray,” and the whole audience began to pray out loud, all together. The effect was indescribable. Not confusion, but a vast harmony of sound and spirit, mingling together of souls moved by an irresistible impulse to prayer. . . . As the prayer continued a spirit of heaviness and sorrow came down upon the audience. Over on one side someone began to weep and in a moment the whole congregation was weeping.¹⁴²

This quote gives a picture of the unique Korean corporate prayer style, called *tongsong kido*, which is still widely used today. This is a practice wherein entire congregations will begin praying out loud in a fervent and passionate way, often accompanied with crying, yelling, and shouting *Joonim*, or “Lord.” By June of 1907, the revival seemed to have touched every single mission group in the country. In 1909, 8,000 of the 50,000 citizens of Pyongyang (now the capital of North Korea) had professed to be Christians, and the city had come to be known as the, “Jerusalem of Korea.”¹⁴³

The 1907 revival was the start of many uniquely Korean Evangelical spiritual practices, not just *tongsong kido*. Kil Sonju, one of the Korean leaders of the 1907 revival, is held to have originated some of these unique practices, specifically dawn prayer, *saebiyok kido*, and a focus on repetitious Bible reading. Kirsteen Kim, professor of theology and world Christianity at Leeds Trinity University, says that Kil Sonju drew on the Confucian spiritual background of Korea in forming these practices. This was expressed through his conservative theology, fundamentalist approach to the Bible, and

¹⁴² Lee, *Born Again*, 20.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 23.

the legalistic moral code he promoted for Christian living. There were many similarities between the Confucian moral background of the Koreans during the colonial period, and the American Puritanism of the missionaries.¹⁴⁴ The early missionaries required that prospective converts practice a very strict ethical code. This has had a lasting effect on South Korean Evangelicals. One Korean scholar, Ryu Dae Young, has written that:

[The] Missionaries' endeavors to maintain an ethically demanding church effectively taught Korean adherents what Christianity was about. It strengthened Korean Christians' tendency to understand Christianity fundamentally in terms of a code of ethics rather than as a personal relationship with God, and idea alien to the Korean mind in a Confucian world. Therefore, ethical conservatism became one of the hallmarks of Korean Christians.¹⁴⁵

Similarly, there were intellectual connections between the Confucian worldview in which Korean converts were steeped, and the missionaries' own intellectual approach. Many of the early missionaries were college educated Presbyterians and Methodists, and a good number had grown up within the American Student Volunteer Movement.¹⁴⁶ Both cultures emphasized literacy, and religious scholarship. Koreans appreciated the focus on Bible classes that the missionaries offered, and the reverence with which they approached the scripture.¹⁴⁷

This early period also pushed Korean Protestantism toward Evangelicalism in that it solidified two very important doctrines within the Protestant community at the time. First, a doctrine of conversion was established, where Koreans came to believe that to be saved, a person must have a felt experience of rebirth. This event is normally

¹⁴⁴ Kim, "Ethereal Christianity," 217.

¹⁴⁵ Ryu, "The Origin and Characteristics of Evangelical Protestantism in Korea at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," 389.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 390.

¹⁴⁷ Kim, "Christianity's Role in the Modernization and Revitalization of Korean Society in the Twentieth-Century," 218, and Ryu, "The Origin and Characteristics of Evangelical Protestantism in Korea at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," 392.

accompanied by public repentance of sins, and a prayer where they accept Jesus as their personal savior. Second, the belief that real salvation is proven by behavioral changes was strengthened. Korean believers held that strict attendance at services, and prayer meetings, as well as tithing and a passion for evangelism all prove an individual's true Christian belief. Then and now, certain restrictions such as complete abstinence from alcohol and smoking are believed to be necessary for a Christian in Korea¹⁴⁸ (though strict adherence to these moral doctrines may be changing with younger generations). By understanding the personal and communal spiritual practices that began during the early stages of Korean Evangelicalism, a framework for the discourse of authority in Korean Evangelicalism can be constructed.

The early revival period sparked massive growth for the Protestant church in Korea, but the establishment of Evangelical practices and ideologies that followed in its wake was a double edged sword for the missionaries. They hoped that emphasizing spiritual matters would curb the rising political aspirations of their Korean disciples, and it did for a short time. However, it also further solidified aspects of what it meant to be a *Korean* Evangelical, and it empowered Koreans to step forward as leaders. These leaders were fully committed individuals, whose lives showed a radical change from mainstream Korean culture. They did not smoke, drink, or gamble. They attended or led Church services multiple times a week, were emotional in prayer, and passionate in their evangelism. They would cast demons out of shamanic religious materials, and sing hymns to ward off evil spirits. They believed that Jesus was the greatest spirit who could heal and save, not just the body, but the soul, and not just of people, but of their nation. In the following section, I will look at the early colonial history of Korean Evangelicalism.

¹⁴⁸ Lee, *Born Again*, 26.

It will be shown how conservative Evangelical Christianity was a partner in developing the Korean nation, how it was a force for secular progress, and how the cultural memory of this period continues to affect the discourse of authority in conservative Evangelical Korean churches today.

Protestant Progress in the Colonial Period. When scholars look to comparable situations in other Asian nations, where foreign missionaries attempted to spread their religion, it is difficult to find an example like Korea. In both the Japan and China, the results were much different. Western missionaries were able to enter both of these countries earlier than Korea, and in both cases saw a fair amount of missional success. There were thousands of converts, churches were built, and many missionaries had high hopes. However, both of these missionary projects began to decline for similar reasons. In both countries, the missionaries would eventually be connected with the political goals of their parent nations (whether actually, or in public perception), and the native governments would begin to view the missionaries as agents of Westernization. Once labeled as such, there was little the missionaries could do to stem the decline.¹⁴⁹

Connections between the missional desires of religious workers and the colonial desires of their home countries are common topics in colonial studies. There are so many examples where missionaries were part of the colonial vanguard of European nations as they expanded their empires, that a joint goal is often accepted as a truism. I do not deny that Western missionaries have often acted as cultural colonizers, alongside their economic and military cohorts. I think that these observations fit most accurately when analyzing colonialism in the seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries, when European

¹⁴⁹ Kane and Park, "The Puzzle of Korean Christianity," discussion on Japan, 376-379, discussion on China, 383-390.

powers were exploring the world and establishing port colonies across the globe. During the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries though, we need to allow for new rubrics of analysis, and see that new relational patterns emerge in colonial situations. As the world grew more accessible, and as international trade increased, colonial situations became less one-to-one ordeals (they may never have been, but increased contact between nations has at least made this more apparent). Instead of having a colonized nation, and a colonizing nation, instances of colonialism in the twentieth century can have multiple colonizers, or third parties involved who are neither colonized nor colonizer. Korea is a prime example of this sort of situation.

The time of Japanese colonization in Korea effectively begins at the end of the decline I discussed previously. The prince regent had consolidated power within the central government, and continued his isolationist foreign policy, but this strategy was doomed to fail with the amount of pressure coming from foreign nations, and growing unrest domestically. The first Western-style trade treaty, the Treaty of Kangwha, was forced on Korea by the Empire of Japan in 1876, which was followed by treaties with the United States in 1882, and the United Kingdom and the German Empire in 1883. These treaties opened Korea to merchant settlements, with Western powers concentrated in Incheon and Japanese trade located primarily in Busan. The merchant settlements also functioned as entry points for Protestant missionaries from Western countries who began to arrive in the mid-1880s. Though the European powers were present, none of them were as concerned with political goals as they were with trade. In contrast, Japan having gained a foothold in Korea saw it as an opportunity to contest the other regional powers, China and Russia.

Internal unrest produced peasant revolts in 1894 and 1895, led by the *Tonghak* religious sect (which was a radical school within the Confucian system). When China came to aid the Korean monarchy against the rebels, Japan saw an opportunity to assert dominance which led to the Sino-Japanese war. A decisive Japanese victory ended the age old Korean vassalage to the Chinese Empire, and led to further exertions of Japanese regional power. Japan forced governmental reforms upon a weakened Korea, and following the assassination of his wife, King Kojong took refuge with the Russian legation in Korea.¹⁵⁰ This led to a decade of Russian and Japanese jousting for power on the Korean peninsula, which culminated in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. Japan's victory against its last regional contender allowed for even more colonial control in Asia. Following the war, Korea was declared a Japanese Residency in 1905, then a Protectorate in 1907, and was formally annexed in 1910. Following annexation, Japan began multiple projects of "Japanization." Land was forcefully confiscated from Koreans, business laws were purposefully crafted to disenfranchise Koreans, and all education was to be in Japanese. The last vestige of the ancient Kingdom of Choson, its final king, Kojong, died in 1919.¹⁵¹ That year should be remembered, for it will be revealed as a major turning point in the Korean Evangelical story.

During the initial stages of colonization, from 1890 to 1910, many Christians supported the Japanese colonial government, or at least they did not promote active resistance directly. The Japanese leaders during that time were fairly lenient toward to the missionaries, and allowed them to minister to the Korean people somewhat freely. In the minds of most of the missionaries, this was all that could be asked, and it was their

¹⁵⁰ Grayson, *Korea*, 149.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

primary goal in the end. Unlike other instances of colonialism, these Western Protestant missionaries were not in any way affiliated with the Empire of Japan, the primary colonial power, and so they did not mix colonial goals with their religious work.¹⁵² But if the missionaries did not (initially) help the Koreans against their colonizers, why was there not a rejection of Christianity just as in the history of missions in Japan and China? I believe an answer is best reached by looking at the situation from both the geo-political, macro level, and the interpersonal, relational, micro-level. Macro-level factors like economics, national relationships, and colonialism create the arena for missionary work and conversion, but it is the micro-level human relationships and actions of influential persons that can make conversion networks expand or decline.¹⁵³ I have established the macro-level arena in my overview of the colonial situation and the relations between religions present in Korea during the colonial period. It is now time to zoom in a bit, to see how the Western missionaries and Evangelical Korean leaders lived during this time. This is doubly beneficial in that many of the Evangelical practices which began during this time not only led to Evangelical Protestantism's acceptance by the Korean people, but were also the building blocks of the discourse of authority that has persisted in the conservative Evangelical Korean church till today.

Ryu Dae Young, an associate professor of history and religion at Handong University, has collected data on the number of missionaries who entered Korea from 1884-1910, and their sending organizations. His research shows that over two-thirds of the missionaries who arrived during this time were American, and that the vast majority of these Americans, 95 percent, were from conservative leaning denominations.

¹⁵² Kane and Park, "The Puzzle of Korean Christianity," 394.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 366-368.

Specifically, missionaries from the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church U.S., and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, made up over 77 percent of all missionaries who came to Korea during this period. This helps to explain the predominance of Koreanized Presbyterianism and Methodism in South Korea today.¹⁵⁴ These missionaries worked closely together across denomination lines, a situation reflected in the theology of the first Korean creeds, their mutual use of the same Bible translation and hymnal, and the organization of a pan-denominational missions council. The early Korean creeds reveal their origin in the theological stances of conservative leaning American Protestantism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They affirmed the absolute truth and authority of the Bible, Christ's virgin birth, redemption through his death, and a bodily resurrection. This makes sense considering the education of the missionaries themselves, who had grown up during the final generations before the decline of conservative Protestantism in 1920s America (a situation discussed previously). Though they were conservative in theology, they had a progressive approach to missions and denominational relations. Again, this can be attributed to their having been raised within the cultural hegemony of a Protestant America that had not yet dramatically factionalized into fundamentalists, progressives, and secularists.¹⁵⁵

For example, in 1908, nearly all Protestant missionaries in Korea agreed on a comity arrangement which mapped out spheres of interest for each missionary group so as to advance the missionizing of the peninsula and avoid competition. They also established a single translation of the Bible to be used by all missionaries, as well as a

¹⁵⁴ Ryu, "The Origin and Characteristics of Evangelical Protestantism in Korea at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," 373.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 375-376.

common hymnal.¹⁵⁶ Interestingly, many churches today in Korea still use the same hymnal, the *Chansongga*, and the same Bible translation, the *Gaeyeokgaejeong*. The missionaries of the colonial period also found themselves working within a highly developed social system which afforded them a respected position from the start, and which lent itself to their brand of Christianity.

From within their neo-Confucian worldview, Koreans viewed the missionaries as *gyosa*, or “teacher.” Koreans held, and still hold, a deep respect for persons in scholarly or educational professions. As such, the missionaries were seen as scholars of a new system of thought,¹⁵⁷ and the fact that they had a large printed text, only confirmed this perception for Koreans. At the same time, Korean neo-Confucianism of the late nineteenth century was a thought system that highly valued precedent and tradition. So when a Korean convert took up the Christian faith, the predominantly American, conservative, early Evangelical tradition taught by the missionaries became for them *the* tradition. Any other theology that would come later would be treated as alternative or unorthodox, and such things in a very Confucian worldview were to be rejected.¹⁵⁸ This is yet another factor which helps to explain the constancy of conservative Evangelical theology in the Korean church.

Examples of strict conservative theology are ubiquitous. Missionaries and converts forbade or at least highly restricted the ancient Confucian ancestor rites.¹⁵⁹ They adhered to a form of “Sabbath” (a Christianized version where Korean converts would

¹⁵⁶ Grayson, *Korea*, 158.

¹⁵⁷ Protestantism was treated similarly to Catholicism, which was first understood by Koreans to be *So Hak*, or “Western learning.”

¹⁵⁸ Ryu, “The Origin and Characteristics of Evangelical Protestantism in Korea at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” 384-385.

¹⁵⁹ Lee, “A Brief Research on Changes in the Korean Church Service Format,” 91.

not work on Sundays). There were behavioral rules prohibiting smoking or drinking for converts.¹⁶⁰ Early church services were in a gender separated Confucian style.¹⁶¹ In my own experience, I have found most of the behavioral limitations are still present in Korean Evangelicalism, though Sabbath keeping (in the form of non-work) and gender-divided services have changed. These doctrines and rules for Christian living reveal the conservative ideology of the missionaries and the Christian communities they helped to develop, but this label cannot be applied to everything that the Western missionaries accomplished in colonial Korea. Historically, their legacy in non-religious matters is progressive. A number of Western missionaries, who came to Korea during the time of Japanese colonial oppression, as well as their Korean students, are honored as cultural heroes both within the Christian community and by the general populace. The effect this had on Evangelical Protestantism's ability to grow rapidly during the mid-twentieth century cannot be over-exaggerated. When a disproportionately large number of the national heroes of independence came from what was an incredibly small religious community at the time, it inevitably had an effect on the way that religion was perceived.

Missionaries actively worked throughout the colonial period to modernize Korea in a number of ways, which may seem counter to a common assumption about modernization. Kirsteen Kim, citing Scott M. Thomas's *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations*, speaks against the predominant secularization theory of modern development, arguing: "Development is only lasting if it is authentic; that is, if it is rooted in the aspirations of those undergoing development and this means it must be related to the culture and religions of the people

¹⁶⁰ Ryu, "The Origin and Characteristics of Evangelical Protestantism in Korea at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," 379, 385.

¹⁶¹ Lee, "A Brief Research on Changes in the Korean Church Service Format," 91.

themselves.”¹⁶² Speaking specifically to Korea and Christianity she says: “The public theology of Korean Christianity provided visions of a new society, and motivation to achieve them, which helped to inspire the modernization and revitalization of Korean society in the twentieth century.”¹⁶³

The linkage between conservative Protestantism and the modernization of South Korea is strong in the minds of many South Koreans even today.¹⁶⁴ This highlights where the Korean and American stories of conservative Evangelical Christianity diverge. In the early twentieth century, conservative Protestant Christianity in America was on the decline, and was being characterized as backward, anti-modern, and fundamentalist, while in Korea it was growing into a modernizing, progressive, nationalist movement. Given the benefit of hindsight, some might argue with the truth of either of these characterizations, but in the moment, popular perception plays a strong role in the development of national narratives. These perceptions, of cultural decline and isolation, or of progress and heroism, have had lasting effects Evangelical authority in both countries. In South Korea, the view that conservative Evangelical Protestants were actively working for the benefit of the nation and toward social progress directly affected the political and cultural landscape after the end of Japanese colonialism and during the post-Korean War era. This history is essential in understanding the worldview of contemporary conservative Evangelical Koreans.

The names of some of the early Protestant missionaries to come to Korea are well known today because of their extensive impact on Korean modernization. Horace N.

¹⁶² Kim, “Christianity’s Role in the Modernization and Revitalization of Korean Society in the Twentieth-Century,” 213.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Park, “Are You Christian? I’m the Other,” 108.

Allen and Mary Scranton are two of the most commonly referenced persons in scholarship on the Korean colonial period.¹⁶⁵ Allen, a medical missionary sent by the Northern Presbyterian Church in 1884, was notably the very first Western resident missionary in Korea.¹⁶⁶ He was formally allowed entrance as a medical doctor, and stationed at the U.S. Legate office. In the year of his arrival there was a failed coup d'état on the Confucian government, during which the queen's nephew was injured. Because of this, Allen was asked by the royal family to treat the injured boy. He successfully brought the queen's nephew back to health and gained favor with the royal family. Allen had not only demonstrated the effectiveness of Western medical science and technology, but he had also opened a door to missionizing. He requested that King Kojong allow him to open a Western style hospital and medical school, which the king allowed in 1885.¹⁶⁷

The hospital was initially named the *Kwanghye-won*, and has grown into what modern Koreans know as Seoul Severance Hospital, which is part of the Yonsei University system. Yonsei University began as a small medical school within the *Kwanghye-won* in 1899, but has grown into one of the most highly respected institutions of higher education in the country.¹⁶⁸ Another university, Ewha Woman's University, shares a similar story. Mary Scranton was a missionary of the Methodist Episcopal Church who advocated for the formal education of girls in Korea, something which the

¹⁶⁵ I recently learned that some of the early missionaries, Allen in particular, are mentioned in the Korean college entrance exam, the *Seuneung*, which is akin to the SAT or ACT in the United States. Though it is anecdotal, this is another example of how deeply enculturated the efforts of the American missionaries in the early 20th century have become. It is part of the standardized college entrance test for all Korean students.

¹⁶⁶ Grayson, *Korea*, 156.

¹⁶⁷ D. M. Davies, "The Impact of Christianity Upon Korea, 1884-1910: Six Key American and Korean Figures," *Journal of Church and State* 36, no. 4 (1994): 795-820, and Lee, *Born Again*, 9.

¹⁶⁸ Yuhs.or.kr, "History < Yonsei University Health System," last modified 2015, accessed June 17, 2015, http://www.yuhs.or.kr/en/hospitals/severance/Sev_Intro/history/, and Yonsei University, "Chronicle," last modified 2015, accessed June 17, 2015, <http://www.yonsei.ac.kr/eng/about/history/chronicle/>.

country had never accepted under its Confucian social system. In 1886 Scranton received approval from King Kojong to formally open a girl's school. In 1887 the royal family named the school *Ewha Hakdong*, which means "pear blossom" school. This school grew and split into multiple educational systems, such as Ewha High School,¹⁶⁹ and Ewha Woman's University.¹⁷⁰ Both of these schools are prestigious educational institutions in South Korea today.¹⁷¹ Within Korean conservative Evangelical discourse, these institutions and the missionaries who founded them are sources of cultural pride, all the more so due to their connection with revolutionary events such as the March 1st Independence Movement, and the Shinto-Shrine issue.

The March 1st Movement of 1919, is by far the most remembered event from the colonial period in Korean cultural discourse today. The event is also associated with the cultural heroine, Ryu Gwan Soon, who could be likened to a Korean Joan of Arc. Many Korean Christians participated in this anti-colonialist effort against the Japanese, and nearly half of the signatories on the independence document drawn up before the march were Christian.¹⁷²

The push for independence was initially expressed outside mainland Korea by the Korean Diaspora in Europe and Hawaii. A representative of this effort, Rhee Sung Man, who would later become South Korea's first president, wanted to attend a conference at Versailles and plead the case of Korean independence but was unable to get a passport

¹⁶⁹ Seoul, "Ewha Hakdang School," last modified 2015, accessed June 17, 2015, <http://english.seoul.go.kr/25-ewha-hakdang-school/>.

¹⁷⁰ Jung kyoung, "Ewha Woman's University," *Ewha.Ac.Kr*, last modified 2015, accessed June 17, 2015, http://www.ewha.ac.kr/mbs/ewhaen/subview.jsp?id=ewhaen_010300000000.

¹⁷¹ Davies, "The Impact of Christianity upon Korea, 1884-1910," 795-820.

¹⁷² Julius Bautista and Francis Khok Gee Lim, *Christianity and the State in Asia* (London: Routledge, 2009), 4.

from Hawaii, where he was studying, to Paris.¹⁷³ Korean students attending college in Japan also found impetus for political action during this time. They drafted the original document declaring independence for Korea, and sent it along with representatives to independence workers in Korea. The Japanese colonial government had been growing stricter with each passing year. In 1915, it announced regulations which enforced the use of Japanese as the national language. Had their plans been fully realized, they would have also forbidden religious instruction and worship in private schools.¹⁷⁴ This was a targeted effort to restrict the efforts of the Western missionaries, and the growth of a native Korean Christian church, which was seen by the colonial government as conspiratorial and revolutionary.

By far though the largest catalyst for the March 1st Movement was the death of King Kojong on January 21st, 1919. His funeral was scheduled for March 3rd, and representatives of various Korean nationalist organizations gathered together before that date to issue a version of the declaration of independence that the Korean students in Japan had drafted. This document had Korean officials and intellectuals as signatories, thirty-three in total, of which sixteen were Christian,¹⁷⁵ fifteen were *Cheondogyo* (a uniquely Korean modern religious movement with roots in the *Tonghak* Confucian school), and two were Buddhist. Considering just forty years earlier there were very few Christians within the entire population of Korea, the representation on this document is suggestive of the political influence the missionaries and Korean Christians had acquired. The event, a peaceful demonstration, happened on the 1st of March, and spawned

¹⁷³ Seth, *A History of Korea*, 268.

¹⁷⁴ Grayson, *Korea*, 160.

¹⁷⁵ Grayson, *Korea*, 160, says fifteen were Christians, Seth, *A History of Korea*, 269, counts sixteen, but most sources have the number at near half or more of the total number of signatories.

countless others across the country. It is estimated that anywhere between 500,000 to 1 million people were involved. Altogether, there were 667 peaceful marches originating from this initial event. The movement, though led by the upper class, included women, peasants, and non-elite urban populations. Due to the culturally and economically sweeping nature of this event, the March 1st Movement is seen as a turning point for Korean independence, and the birth moment of modern Korean nationalism.¹⁷⁶

The Japanese colonial government did not sit by and watch Korean resistance snowball unabated. The Japanese police targeted church leaders for arrest, beat or shot their followers, and in one recorded instance, they locked the members of a church inside their building and set it on fire, killing everyone in the congregation. During the March 1st Movement, Korean Christians suffered heavy losses, but in many ways this only spurred on resistance efforts.¹⁷⁷ The Japanese police created inspirational martyrs, not victims, and the most well-known example is Ryu Gwan Soon. She was a young Christian girl who began attending Ewha high school, the missionary school founded by Mary Scranton, in 1916.¹⁷⁸ She led a number of freedom demonstrations, but was eventually arrested. She was sentenced to three years in prison, but was tortured so severely that she died there.¹⁷⁹ Today there is a memorial to her in Cheonan, where a statue of her stands with arms raised holding a Korean flag. Another statue of her was placed on the grounds of her high school.¹⁸⁰ She is fondly remembered by all Koreans as

¹⁷⁶ Seth, *A History of Korea*, 269.

¹⁷⁷ Clark, *Christianity in Modern Korea*, 10.

¹⁷⁸ Arirang.co.kr, "18 Year Old Martyr, Yu Gwan-Sun," last modified 2015, accessed May 7, 2013, http://www.arirang.co.kr/News/News_View.asp?nseq=113166&code=Ne2&category=2.

¹⁷⁹ Mary Connor, "Famous Koreans: Six Portraits," *Asian-Studies.org*, last modified 2015, accessed May 7, 2013, <http://www.asian-studies.org/ea/connor.htm>.

¹⁸⁰ I have lived in Cheonan, South Korea, for over 5 years at the time of this writing. I have visited Ewha high school and seen the statue of her there. A cartoon version of Ryu Gwan Soon can also be seen all over

a *yolsa* (patriot), and when they speak of her they often use the respectful title, *noona* (older sister), even though she died at such a young age.¹⁸¹ For modern Evangelical Koreans, her actions as a freedom activist are directly and intimately tied to her faith and religious education.

The Shinto shrine issue also sheds light on how the colonial period helped form the conservative Evangelical corporate identity in Korea. The Shinto shrine issue produced the first real divide in Korean Christianity. This phase of the colonial period lasted from 1925 with the creation of the primary Japanese Imperial Shinto Shrine in Korea, until the end of World War II. With the military takeover of the Japanese government in the 1930s, the enforcement of Japanese Shinto rites on the Korean populace grew stronger. For Korean Christians this was a two pronged issue. First, performing the rites was an affront to their Korean nationalism. Second, this was also seen as religious idolatry. While most of the Korean populace complied with the Shinto rites, many Korean churches, and especially the more conservative Presbyterians, resisted.¹⁸²

Over the following years, the colonial government made further restrictions on Christian expression. They forced Korean Christian organizations to sever ties with their international founders. They edited Bibles, sermons, and other printed materials to not include teachings on the second coming of Christ, Jesus as the “king of kings” (as this represented an affront to the Japanese emperor), or a final judgment. They censored the entire books of Daniel and Revelation, and they abolished all Christian holidays. Finally,

Cheonan, most commonly on public buildings and vehicles used by the city transportation system. This cartoon version is one of the official symbols of the city.

¹⁸¹ Lee, *Born Again*, 44.

¹⁸² Grayson, *Korea*, 161.

they forced every church worship service to open with a Shinto ritual, which included singing the Japanese anthem, pledging allegiance to Japan, bowing to the emperor's palace, and praying to the sun goddess. Every church was forced to have a space set aside for a Shinto shrine.¹⁸³ This emphasizes just how strongly the Japanese colonial government viewed the Korean Christians and the Western missionaries as adversarial to their colonial regime. As discussed, the Korean people, both Christian and not, shared a desire for freedom and early Korean Christians are remembered as the largest force for national independence and anti-colonial activity in the Korean cultural narrative.

Though it solidified the connection between Christianity and nationalism, the Shinto shrine issue also created a massive divide in the Korean Christian community following the country's liberation in 1945. Those Korean Christian leaders who refused to submit to Japanese colonial power viewed the compliant leaders as failures; they had given in to the enemy and had not stood strong for Christ. On the other hand, the compliant Christian leadership believed they had only submitted to a political act, or only complied so as to keep their churches open in a time of great spiritual need.¹⁸⁴ Both sides accused each other of making the situation worse, or failing their duties, and with the expulsion of most of the Western missionaries during World War II, there was no mediating group large enough to quell this divisive argument. The missionaries who had stayed throughout this period began to lose their positions of power, as the Korean populace turned to their own leaders more and more. As the colonial period drew to a close, the fledgling Korean Church had established itself as the cultural champion for national and spiritual freedom, but it had done so at great cost. The next forty years or so,

¹⁸³ Lee, *Born Again*, 54-60.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

from the 1950s to the 1990s, was a time of consolidation, of native leadership, identity building, and a steady drift toward a conservative, authoritative discourse.

Evangelicalism Koreanized: An Evangelical Establishment in South Korea

While under the yoke of colonial oppression, Koreans had warmly accepted the presence of Western missionaries, especially once they had proven that they could be of help to the struggling people. The missionaries had brought Western medicine, education, uplift for women and the poor, social and religious hope, and had acted on the side of Korean nationalism. The relationship between the growing Korean church and the Western missionaries was not without its problems however, and some of the more divisive issues came to a head following national liberation at the end of World War II. From the missionaries' perspective, a recurring problem in their evangelistic efforts had been the sincerity of potential converts, who had been attracted to Christianity for reasons other than religious belief. Ryu Dae Young again offers a beneficial description of the reasons for this situation:

The missionaries came among the Koreans as people in possession of power. Their wealth, extraterritorial rights, and role as teachers put them in a position of superiority. They lived in "an oasis in the desert" surrounded by comfort and refinements of cultivated life, while their Korean neighbors were, to their eyes, sunk in poverty and ignorance ... and they would be tempted to regard the strangeness and underdevelopment of Koreans as racial inferiority. . . . [The] missionaries were subject to the subtle temptation that came from the possession of power – the temptation of paternalistic minds.¹⁸⁵

The religion of the Christian missionaries, as viewed by a large portion of the colonial-era Korean people, was one of money, privilege, and power. Of course such things were

¹⁸⁵ Ryu, "The Origin and Characteristics of Evangelical Protestantism in Korea at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," 377-378.

attractive to a people who had been subjugated, who had their money, their property, their language, and other forms of personal and national identity violently taken from them. Many Koreans had come to the church for basic needs, and common questions heard by the missionaries were, “Is there lots to eat in the Way?” and, “How much do you pay me for believing in Jesus?”¹⁸⁶ In response to what they viewed as a lack of sincere faith, the missionaries implemented the strict ethical codes I described earlier. Throughout the colonial period there were Korean ministers and leaders who contended with the authority of the missionaries, but they were the exception to the rule. Generally, instances of division were treated by the Western missionaries as heresy, a reaction that seems mostly to have been an effort to keep their place of authority.

A professor of theology at Yonsei University, Suh Jeong Min, has recognized four main reasons for the creation of Korean-led, separated church organizations during the colonial period. First, many Koreans simply wanted independence from the authority of foreign missionaries, based on the perceived paternalism I have been discussing. Second, smaller faith movements began to reveal themselves as Koreans had their own religious experiences, began interpreting the Bible in new ways, and desired to define the faith from within their own context. Third, early Korean theologians who had gone abroad to study were returning with theologies outside the controlling denominational context (Conservative Presbyterian and Methodist). Finally, the various forms of social confusion (e.g. the Shinto shrine issue) that the colonial period spawned created division within the churches.¹⁸⁷ After the colonial period, a mixture of resentment for the strict control of

¹⁸⁶ James S. Gale, *The Vanguard* (New York: F.H. Revell, 1904), 86, 127, in Ryu, “The Origin and Characteristics of Evangelical Protestantism in Korea at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” 388.

¹⁸⁷ Jeong-Min Suh, “An Understanding of Orthodoxy and Heresy in Korean Church History,” *The Ecumenical Review* 57, no. 4 (2005): 451-452.

foreign missionaries, the problems caused by political factionalism, and the growing plurality of theologies led to a time of division, but also identity building. Each Korean denomination has its own story to tell, but in this section I would like to focus on the predominant religio-cultural discourse that took hold of South Korean Evangelical Protestantism. Three attributes of the discourse highly influenced the emergence of the main conservative Korean Evangelical identity during this time: political leanings, theological trends, and forms of personal and communal religious practice. These attributes will help me to describe more accurately contemporary Evangelicals in South Korea, and move from a view of history to a developed understanding of the discourse of authority in conservative Korean Evangelicalism.

The process of Koreanization for Protestant denominations in the country has been an intense practice in identity formation, primarily through defining the self by the “other.” Of course this is a common practice in many social groups, but the Korean situation is particularly vivid. The size and ubiquity of Presbyterianism in South Korea makes it the best example to use when trying to understand the emergence and internal struggles of a decidedly Korean version of Evangelical Christianity. The various Presbyterian denominations that exist in Korea today contain not only the vast majority of Evangelical Christians but the majority of all Protestants in the country, and their cultural influence on the populace and the Christian religion in South Korea exemplifies this fact. Before the separation of Korea into North and South, there was one Presbyterian denomination in the country, which had been primarily administered by American Presbyterians (though missionaries from Europe had also been involved). Following the removal of many of the foreign missionaries in the last days of the colonial period, and

the end of the Korean civil war, the tensions between those leaders who had compromised with enforced Japanese Shintoism, and those who had resisted, came to a head. The resisters and compromisers failed to find resolution, and so a group of resisters founded a new denomination, the *Koryo* Presbyterian Church, on September 1, 1952.

This is the parent denomination for the three major branches of Evangelical Korean Presbyterianism today, which are the *Tonghap*, *Hapdong*, and *Gijang* denominations.¹⁸⁸ Of these, the *Tonghap* and *Hapdong* are by far the largest, and both adhere to an Evangelical, conservative theology and worldview. These two denominations differ very little from one another theologically; their schism in 1959 came instead from a difference in desire to affiliate with international ecumenical associations like the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches (American). The *Tonghap* group chose to stay affiliated ecumenically, while the *Hapdong* group chose to become a less affiliated, uniquely Koreanized expression of traditional Presbyterianism. The first group to official break from the Presbyterian Church in South Korea was the *Goshin* group, who were against the acceptance of Shinto compromisers who repented of their submission to the Japanese religious requirements.¹⁸⁹ The *Goshin* denomination separated itself from the unified Presbyterian denomination in 1951, prior to the establishment of the *Koryo* denomination, and represents the most conservative, (often labeled “fundamentalist” even by other conservative Korean Christians) branch of Presbyterianism in South Korea, but they have not seen nearly as much growth over the past forty years and so do not hold much

¹⁸⁸ Grayson, *Korea*, 163, and Lee, *Born Again*, 59.

¹⁸⁹ Pck.or.kr, “The Presbyterian Church of Korea,” last modified 2015, accessed June 8, 2015, <http://www.pck.or.kr/Eng/History/MajorH.asp>.

cultural or political influence comparatively. The shame and anger over the Shinto shrine issue has proven to be long lasting in South Korea.

The next major division strikes more at the heart of Evangelical Protestantism's shift towards conservatism in South Korea. In 1953, a debate began at the Chosun Theological Seminary, the primary Presbyterian seminary in South Korea at the time. The argument was over how accepting the denomination was going to be of new theologies and new forms of biblical interpretation. The seminary began teaching subjects like biblical historical criticism, and the denomination was split as to whether this was appropriate or not. Those who were accepting of new hermeneutics would eventually form what is now the *Gijang* denomination, or in its English name, the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK). They represent a more ecumenical, moderate, Evangelical worldview among the Korean denominations. The denomination's self-understanding is well described on the World Council of Churches website, as well as its point of view on the seminary controversy:

It developed into a conflict between two groups, those who were influenced by the conservative, fundamentalist theology propounded by the missionaries, including the leadership of the church, and those who stood for the freedom of learning theology and methods of historical critical interpretation of the Bible. The seminary upheld the theological tradition of Calvin and the Reformation and the faculty were deeply committed to developing higher theological education and articulating Christian theology from a Korean perspective. The conservative and fundamentalist faction would not accept this theology and the difference between the two groups became irreconcilable.¹⁹⁰

Because of the arguments over theological education and the acceptance of new forms of biblical studies the PROK broke from the *Koryo* denomination in 1953.

¹⁹⁰ Oikoumene.org, "Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea — World Council of Churches," last modified 2015, accessed June 8, 2015, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/presbyterian-church-in-the-republic-of-korea>.

The PROK is also important because of its protestation against the dictatorial governments that existed in South Korea in the latter half of the twentieth century. The first Korean republic set up under Rhee Sung Man lasted from 1948-1960, and though Rhee had been a patriot during the colonial period, his leadership as Korea's first President was a manipulative and forceful one. His rule ended with a student led uprising that exiled him to Hawaii on April 19, 1960. Rhee was followed by a very short lived democratic government which was taken over in 1961 by General Park Chung Hee, in a military coup d'état. South Koreans would live under the oppression of military dictators from 1960 to 1988.¹⁹¹ During this time, the PROK actively resisted the military governments, and decried their human rights violations. In 1973, liberal Christians attempted to craft a petition for the repeal of the *Yusin* constitution which had allowed Park Chung Hee to extend his term as president indefinitely. Many of those who openly resisted Park's rule were arrested, imprisoned, and tortured for their political opinions.¹⁹² Their political suffering did not have the same cultural effect that the Christian martyrdom of the colonial period had though, and the PROK has not seen the growth that the more conservative denominations have experienced since the 1950s. I will explain why this is the case as I examine the more conservative Evangelical response to the autocratic governments.

The differences between the Korean Christians who protested against the military regimes and those who went along with the government's plans will feel familiar to Americans studying the Korean Evangelical story. Both groups desired a prosperous and healthy Korea, in both practical and spiritual matters, but they differed on how to reach

¹⁹¹ Thayer Watkins, "The Park Chung Hee Regime in South Korea," *Sjsu.Edu*, last modified 2015, accessed August 6, 2015, <http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/watkins/park.htm>, and Lee, *Born Again*, 87.

¹⁹² Grayson, *Korea*, 167.

those goals. Many Christians, often more liberal in worldview, protested the government policies that flew in the face of human rights as they believed that Korea should not value economy and industry above the basic rights of individuals. Their conservative counterparts believed the primary goal was to win souls and resist the irreligious communists who had taken the North. Because of these values, the more conservative Evangelicals worked with the autocratic government, so that they would be allowed to evangelize and keep their religious freedoms. While they recognized that Park Chung Hee's programs were not the best, they also recognized that his plans were working. South Korea was becoming stronger economically under his rule.¹⁹³ Like most Koreans of the time, conservative Evangelicals valued this progress enough to put up with the social problems. In this way, they were more in step with the national consciousness than liberal Christians. Looking back from today, this seems to have been in their favor. The focus on evangelism, particularly in the context of revivals, and their strong ideological stance against communism are the traits this era gave to modern conservative Evangelical Christians in South Korea. I will discuss some examples.

The conservative Evangelical emphasis on revivalism has a long history in Korea as has been discussed, but it really blossomed from the 1950s to the 1970s. Though the Korean War was still raging, in December of 1952, Billy Graham held his first large revival in Korea, and he would come back many times. Another famous American preacher, Bob Pierce, the founder of World Vision, held multiple revivals in the country, first in 1949 and then continuing to hold more after the war in 1954.¹⁹⁴ The 1960s were marked politically by the take-over of the Park regime, but for Evangelicals they were

¹⁹³ South Korea's staggering economic growth in the 1960s is popularly known as the "Miracle on the Han river," and the benefit of this time period to the country is a cultural narrative accepted by most Koreans.

¹⁹⁴ Lee, *Born Again*, 91.

marked by the largest revival campaign Korea had ever seen. This multi-denominational campaign was called Thirty Million to Christ, and events connected to the campaign were held throughout 1965. The climax of the program was the arrival of Timothy S.K. Chao, a Hongkongese revivalist who had garnered international attention having worked with Billy Graham and led revivals orchestrated in West Germany.¹⁹⁵ Korean conservative Evangelicals were setting down revivalist roots that became a deep part of their communal identity. Large scale revivals continued for the next two decades, and many churches today still hold local revivals annually.

During the 1970s, three sizeable revivals were held in South Korea, all with large success and large controversy. The Korea '73 Billy Graham Crusade was so massive that it turned Yoido Park into the most densely populated space in the city. The crusade promoters worked with the Park regime to acquire access to public grounds, and the government offered further support to the event, rescheduling buses away from the area and sending in the army construction corps to build facilities for a 6,000-person choir. While most Evangelicals were elated at the success of Graham's preaching, many liberal Christians bemoaned that he ignored the human rights violations perpetrated by Park, and even some conservatives began to question why the leaders at these revivals were often foreigners, instead of Koreans. These same issues continued in the Explo '74 revival sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ. Many liberal Christians again questioned the sponsor's cooperation with an openly abusive government. At Explo '74, one of the prayer topics was the well-being of President Park, which showed how intertwined the government and the conservative Evangelical movement in South Korea had become.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Lee, *Born Again*, 93.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 94-99.

Famous pastors of the growing mega-churches, such as Cho Yong Gi (of Yoido Full Gospel Church) supported the policies of the Park regime, and encouraged their congregants to do so. They believed that development, particularly economic development, was pivotal for South Korean independence, and that it bolstered the country's ability to resist Communism.¹⁹⁷ Further revival based programs throughout the 1970s and 1980s only reinforced this symbiotic relationship between an autocratic government that needed a compliant populace, and a growing conservative Evangelical movement that desired freedom to establish itself and lead the country spiritually.

Timothy Lee offers sound reasoning for this connection:

That the conservative leaders condoned authoritarianism in government, for example, was scarcely due to any coercion applied against them by the government. Having been grafted onto a culture that lacked a democratic tradition – on top of the inclination of charisma-oriented religion like evangelicalism toward the authoritarian – Korean evangelicalism itself was hardly democratic. Thus an author who had studied eleven rapidly growing protestant churches in Korea observed, “A common characteristic of the successful churches is that almost none of them are so-called democratized churches.”¹⁹⁸

Strict and strong leadership runs deep in Korean culture. Confucianism and Shamanism had both expressed this prior to the arrival of Christianity in the country. Having no tradition of egalitarianism, and a concept of spiritual authority based in uniqueness (e.g. the shaman is *different* than everyone else), conservative Evangelicals in Korea felt at home in a Christianity led by unquestioned, strong, and special leaders. Though not truly comfortable with the military governments, they were willing to abide them so long as they could practice their religion openly. This relationship continued, not primarily for what the autocratic government and conservative Evangelicalism had in

¹⁹⁷ Kim, “Ethereal Christianity,” 215.

¹⁹⁸ Lee, *Born Again*, 99.

common, but because of a shared enemy. Christians in the North had fled because of the massive persecution they had experienced under the Communist government. Anti-communist sentiment was ubiquitous among South Korean conservative Christians. It was so strong that it came to be one of the main chastisements leveled against their more liberal brethren. Even moderate Evangelicals were fervently anti-communist. Han Kyongjik, one of the more moderate Evangelical leaders of the time said: “[P]eaceful unification would be impossible under Communism as the ideology of South and North Korea is quite different. We want North Korea to be a nation like ours. If we want peaceful unification, we must evangelize our fellow North Koreans.”¹⁹⁹ Later, when I discuss the cultural climate and discourse of contemporary conservative Evangelical Christianity in South Korea, I will demonstrate that anti-communist sentiment is still strong, and that un-criticized, strong leadership is still a pronounced feature of church practice.

Conservative Evangelical Christians in Korea experienced trials of the twentieth century along with their fellow country men and women, and these struggles left enduring marks upon their cultural and religious discourse, but there are internal religious struggles that need to be understood in order to finish the picture of Korean Evangelical history. In this section I will discuss the main theological and societal issues that further developed the Korean Evangelical identity.

Theologically, the issues that arose in South Korea were quite similar to those that were coming to the forefront of church debate in America at the same time. Three topics in particular were important to the growth of Evangelicalism in Korea: women’s involvement in leadership, denominational stances on biblical criticism, and the growth

¹⁹⁹ Lee, *Born Again*, 100.

of “heretical” religious groups from within mainstream Protestant denominations.

Different views on the ordination of women have existed in South Korea from the very beginning of Christian mission work in the country, but it became a Korean issue only as Korean leadership started taking more control. The Methodist church in Korea has long taken a more open stance, officially ordaining female pastors from its founding, though the ordination of women is not common. A thing can be allowed, yet rarely practiced. The Presbyterian denominations in Korea, for most of their history, have not allowed the ordination of women, though there have been counter-voices to this stance. In 1934, some of the Presbyterian churches in the *Ham-gyung* church province raised the issue of women’s ordination with the General Assembly. The *Ham-nam* church women’s representatives as well as their pastor, Kim Chun Be, crafted the petition. The General Assembly continued to hold this conversation over women’s ordination for 35 years, during which time Pastor Kim eventually withdrew his arguments. He said this was to not “damage the authority of the Bible,” and “the integrity of the church.”²⁰⁰ His reasoning makes sense considering three things: 1) the deep influence that Confucianism has had on Korean Christianity; 2) connected struggles in Korean politics about women’s equality and basic rights; and 3) the rising assertions of critical biblical studies.

From the 1970s to the 1990s there were large social clashes over the rights of women, particularly in relation to men in family matters such as marriage and inheritance. These were mainly between Christian laywomen’s organizations on the one hand, and the *Yudo-Hoe*, a conservative Confucian association, on the other. The leader of the fight for women’s rights was a Methodist woman named Yi Tae Yong, who had founded a group named the Korean Legal Aid Center for Family Relations. In 1979, the family law in

²⁰⁰ Suh, “An Understanding of Orthodoxy and Heresy in Korean Church History,” 457-458.

South Korea was revised to ensure that a wife would inherit a share of the family estate at least equal to the eldest son, and in the late 1990s the section of family law forbidding intra-clan marriage was abolished.²⁰¹ With such major changes taking place in their society, some of the more conservative Evangelical leaders may have been impassioned to keep certain traditional views in place. So, individuals like Kim Chun Be felt pressure to curb their progressive stances and tow the party line. Interestingly, Korean-American churches tend to express more traditional views of gender hierarchy than churches in South Korea, because many Korean-American churches were established by immigrants decades ago, and thus hold older social customs.²⁰² This is yet another example of the way in which location, culture, discourse, and practices develop a church's particular identity.

Another major theological issue of the twentieth century concerns biblical criticism. A good example of South Korean Evangelicals' approach to new forms of biblical interpretation is the "Abingdon Bible Commentary Case." In 1934, a Methodist pastor, Ryu Hyung Gi, was one of the editors for the *Abingdon Bible Commentary*, but translators for the Korean version came from both the Methodists and Presbyterians. The issue with this new commentary was that it included biblical interpretations relying on methods such as form and redaction criticism. The Methodists in Korea were mostly accepting of these methods, but the Presbyterians, who kept to more conservative hermeneutics, rejected the commentary. They even attempted to remove the translators from their ministerial posts. In 1935, the 24th Presbyterian General Assembly officially

²⁰¹ Grayson, *Korea*, 167.

²⁰² Min, "Severe Underrepresentation of Women in Church Leadership in the Korean Immigrant Community in the United States," 225-231. Dr. Min offers many more details as to the probable causes of these differences, as well as in-depth analysis on immigrant churches as unique examples of theological and cultural identity formation.

stated: “We don’t accept the commentary because it does not fit in with our creeds. Local churches to which translators belong will have the power to decide whether they be appointed.”²⁰³ Disputes over biblical interpretation have been as abundant in Korea as they have been in America, with comparable impact. The Presbyterian Church in Korea is now represented by more than ninety-five different associations. Its conservative exclusivist bent, and the relative ease of establishing a new synod have contributed to this breakdown. Sociologist Pyong Gap Min, discussed this issue with Korean Presbyterian leaders based in New York, and in their opinion the “struggle for power and status among Presbyterian leaders, rather than differences in theological position, is the main reason for the division.”²⁰⁴ This holds true for many churches, and I will discuss this in the following chapter. Problems of authority are visible from church to church even when they are officially part of the same denomination. Korean culture’s strong-handed leadership, strict traditional ideologies, and the pressure to differentiate one’s particular group from the “other” have all contributed to the fracturing of Korean Evangelicalism.

These factors have created a church culture wherein Korean Evangelicals are prone to create new religious movements, as well as ostracize them quickly. Professor Suh Jeong Min of Yonsei University has written extensively on the history of Korean Christianity from a Protestant perspective, and he has analyzed the rise of what he calls “heretical” sects within Korean Christianity. He argues that the division of the country during the Korean War caused many churches to split, and that after the end of the conflict the South Korean church faced many issues that continued to divide it, primarily issues of religious piety, theology, and ideology (I have discussed examples of each).

²⁰³ Suh, “An Understanding of Orthodoxy and Heresy in Korean Church History,” 358-359.

²⁰⁴ Min, “Severe Underrepresentation of Women in Church Leadership in the Korean Immigrant Community in the United States,” 229.

Through all this, Protestant Christianity grew dramatically during the middle of the twentieth century, and Suh believes that Christianity, and the groups that separated from it, were fulfilling a demand for religion created by the anxiety of the times. He says:

It may be natural that a lot of heretic sects in Christianity appeared with this paradigm of confusion and growth in the Korean church. . . . Because mainstream churches didn't satisfy the public's religious desires, Christian sects blossomed. Delusions of mystical religious faith, absolute idolization of a certain figure, emphasis on eschatology, healing and worldly blessings were the distinctive aspects of heretic sects of this period.²⁰⁵

While scholars might want to part company with some of Suh's language concerning "heretics" to adapt his theories to a more critical study of religion, his summation of conservative Protestantism during the twentieth century echoes the majority of scholarship. These new religious movements were emboldened by the same context that encouraged the growth of orthodox conservative Protestantism. Koreans had a long history of mystical and experiential religious practices in Shamanic and Buddhist rituals. They had long idolized particular individuals as being religiously powerful (i.e., the spirit favored shamans, the separated and specialized Buddhist priesthood, or the noble class of Confucian scholars), and they had set these individuals upon authoritative pedestals. Their national suffering had instilled an apocalyptic feeling in the truest sense of the term. Korean Christians were drawn to the eschatological, or to those religious leaders who claimed some kind of special, secret, or "true" spiritual knowledge, or who proclaimed that only they held the correct interpretation of the Bible. Finally, the characteristic most consistently observed by scholars is that Korean Evangelicals have highly emphasized healing practices and this-worldly blessing. As I have shown, these different branches of the Korean Evangelical discourse find their roots in Korean primal

²⁰⁵ Suh, "An Understanding of Orthodoxy and Heresy in Korean Church History," 460.

religion and the religious practices that they had come to know over thousands of years, as well as the political and economic stresses they were forced to endure. The openness with which Koreans have adopted new religions, the plurality of religious belief in which they live, the quickness of group submission to professed spiritual authority, and the discomfort that most Koreans feel toward questioning or criticizing superiors, are all contributing factors to the current authoritative discourse in the Korean Evangelical church. Modern mainstream Korean Evangelicalism has formed its identity and praxis from within this unique religious ecosystem.

Contemporary Evangelicalism in South Korea: Rise and Decline

The latter years of the twentieth century show more similarity between the American and Korean Evangelical stories than has been seen up to this point. From the 1960s until the end of the century the Korean Evangelical church saw massive numerical growth, primarily due to the country's rapid urbanization and an emphasis on expansion. This concept, "Church Growth," in Korean, *Kyohae Songjang*, became more than a general hope for Korean Evangelicals as they spread the Gospel. It was the primary goal. Social and evangelistic programs expanded greatly, expressed in new forms of ministry devoted to lower-class laborers and prostitutes, foreign missions, and the creation of a nation-wide Christian radio network. The number of Protestants doubled in the 1960s, from three to six percent of the national population, and it continued to grow at an advanced rate until the end of the century, when Protestants made up over 25 percent of the country.²⁰⁶ During this same period, Korea experienced rampant urbanization and the Evangelical church followed suit. The urban population grew from 28 percent in 1960, to

²⁰⁶ Grayson, *Korea*, 164.

over 65 percent by the 1980s. Nearly all of the urban immigration was to a few select cities, most notably Seoul and Busan.²⁰⁷ Consequently, most of Korea's larger Evangelical churches and nearly all of the mega-churches are located in these two cities. Hong Yong Gi, the pastor and scholar affiliated with Yoido Full Gospel Church, has described the conflation of urbanization and Evangelical church growth, saying:

The Korean Protestant church has an urban character, and especially the charismatic mega-churches. As a result of rapid industrialization and urbanization, a comparative sense of deprivation and loss of identity prevailed among the people. . . . Many people migrating from rural areas to cities usually had animistic religious patterns, and affectionate human relations, but experienced the new cold social structures and milieu with culture shock. . . . The Charismatic mega-churches could give many low class or unstable people not only the sense of belonging and unity but also the meaning and value of equality with their message, rituals, and fellowship activities.²⁰⁸

This is important to recognize and remember when studying the culture and practices of the contemporary Evangelical church in Korea. Mega-churches, and their urban emphasis, have had a great impact on church growth methodologies and outreach ministries of Korean Evangelicalism. Modern Korea has a highly communal culture more generally, and the mega-churches are prime examples of this tendency.

Right into the 1990s, the Evangelical church was advancing numerically and by way of this, socially. Though it is difficult to ascertain an exact number, Timothy Lee has estimated the number of Evangelicals in Korea using an extrapolation from surveys of religious belief. Using data from Gallup Korea,²⁰⁹ he estimated that near the end of 1990s,

²⁰⁷ Hong, "The Backgrounds and Characteristics of the Charismatic Mega-Churches in Korea," 106.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 106.

²⁰⁹ Gallup Korea has conducted five surveys of religion in South Korea, starting in 1984, then 1989, 1997, 2004, and 2014. The main Gallup Korea (English) website no longer links to any information from the 1997 survey, but the data from each survey can be found in a compilation report. A description can be found here:

http://www.wingia.com/web/files/richeditor/filemanager/Gallup_Korea_Religion_Survey_2015_English_Intro.pdf.

at least 75 percent of Protestants were “solidly Evangelical.”²¹⁰ Applying a similar method, he has also estimated the number of Protestant churches in Korea which fit the Evangelical label. He names three non-evangelical Protestant denominations, the Episcopal Church, the Lutheran Church, and one openly liberal Presbyterian denomination (*Gijang*). Having studied the matter, he argues it is safe to assume that all other Protestant denominations squarely fit the Evangelical label. Using the 1991 *Christian Yearbook of Korea*, he found that 1,359 congregations belonged to one of the non-evangelical denominations. This figure represented only 4 percent of the total number of churches in the country at that time. Even with a little give or take, this would mean that Evangelical churches made up over 90 percent of all Protestant churches in the country in the early 1990s.²¹¹ Altogether, I can say with some firmness that the Evangelical church in the 1990s was the major group of Protestants in South Korea. This can also be seen by the social impact that Evangelicals made in comparison to other religious organizations. During the 1990s, Evangelicals operated the majority of faith-based social welfare agencies, and had created institutions and publications far exceeding what their social demographic would suggest. Lee also argues that the Evangelical vote played a major role in both the 1992 and 1997 presidential elections, being decisive in the first, and highly sought after because of that in the second (a situation strikingly similar to the political climate of the late 1990s and 2000s in the USA).²¹² It is clear that Evangelicalism had become one of the largest religious demographic groups in the country by the end of the twentieth century, and had come to exhibit a large cultural influence.

²¹⁰ Lee, *Born Again*, 141.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid., 143-144.

It seems that this was the climax, at least numerically, of conservative Evangelicalism in South Korea. A national census that came out in 2005 found that from 1995-2005 the number of Protestants in the country had declined by 1.6 percent. This was the first era of decline ever for the Protestant church in South Korea, and was met with considerable worry by Evangelical leaders. I believe that this downward turn can be traced to the authoritative practices, and biblical approach of the conservative Korean Evangelical church. To show that though, I should describe how the public perception of Protestantism is changing in South Korea, and that this was not an overnight shift, nor was it a temporary dip due to lack of evangelistic passion. Religious consciousness is evolving in South Korea. This is particularly discernable between the generations. What worked in the past is just not as effective today. The Korean Evangelical church's response to modernization, which was quite successful in growing churches and establishing bases of cultural power, is not capturing the hearts and minds of people the way it did before.

In his article, "Encounter with Modernity: The 'McDonaldization' and 'Charismatization' of Korean Mega-Churches," Hong Yong Gi offers an informative analysis of the way Korean Evangelicalism responded to modernity and secularization throughout the late twentieth century, as represented by their flagship institutions, the mega-churches of South Korea. He argues that South Korean modernization is a primary case against secularization theories that posit modernization coincides with a decline in religiousness. He says that in South Korea, religion played a front role in developing and modernizing the country. To show this he discusses two key terms, *McDonaldization*, and *charismatization*. McDonaldization is of course a reference to the fast-food chain of

restaurants, but for Hong, it represents a: “Symbolic word for the modern rationalizing social process in our contemporary world.”²¹³ To describe this “rationalizing social process” in more detail, Hong turns to sociologist George Ritzer’s²¹⁴ delineation of the idea into four characteristics, namely, calculability, predictability, efficiency, and control. These four characteristics of rationalized social processes are aimed at the somewhat nebulous concept of “progress,” which Hong calls the “overarching moral rationale and imperative” of modernity.²¹⁵ The result of McDonaldization in the Korean Evangelical church has been that church structure, leadership styles, and other processes have become nearly indistinguishable from the business practices of large corporations. Every new project or service is calculated and analyzed for the highest levels of efficiency, church plans and budgets are organized and approved by a board of leaders, and theological reading materials and sermons are tightly controlled so as to ensure quality, but also conformity.

McDonaldization represents the way in which Korean Evangelicalism has brought aspects of the modern world into itself and adopted some of its strategies for social organization and “progress.” Hong argues that this response to modernization represents a connection point between American and Korean culture. He says:

Korean mega-churches have been greatly influenced by the trend of the North American enterprise culture, both in socio-economic development and church theology. Rapid modernization, along with the priority of the government for economic development, have influenced the preference for what is big, and encouraged local “churchism” in Korea, by which churches had to compete against one another to achieve a larger slice of the religious market share in an uncertain society.²¹⁶

²¹³ Young Gi Hong, “Encounter with Modernity: The ‘McDonaldization’ and ‘Charismatization’ of Korean Mega-Churches,” *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 365 (2003): 242.

²¹⁴ George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Pine Forge Press, 1996).

²¹⁵ Hong, “Encounter with Modernity,” 242.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 242-243.

This statement is an information dense summation of the current authoritative problems facing Korean Evangelicalism, particularly “churchism.” Kirsteen Kim concurs with Hong on the influence of business culture within the Korean Evangelical church. She has found that influential churches in South Korea portray Christianity as crucial for national modernization, as well as for personal financial prosperity. She cites the common creation of church yellow pages for business owning members, and church hierarchies copying the Korean business structure as examples.²¹⁷ To that I would add that churches often copy business culture in form, as well as interpersonal conduct. Lead pastors are effectively the CEOs of their churches, but more evocative of the hybridization with secular culture is that they expect to be treated as such.

I will discuss this more shortly, but first I need to examine how Korean Evangelical leaders kept the sacred present within religious practices that were shifting to accommodate modernity. Hong is right to emphasize that the relationship between religion and modernization is a two way street. He turns to the concept of *charismatization* to describe the way in which Korean Evangelicals, and in particular their trend setting leaders within mega-churches, have integrated the sacred into modernized ecclesial systems. He defines charismatization as a method or process whereby charismatic religious figures motivate people to long for transcendence, though he does not further define what this transcendence might be. He gives a more detailed description of charismatization when he links it to the authority of church leaders and pastors. He says: “The dynamism of the Korean mega-churches is due to the ability of charismatic pastors to enchant the world, to make it magical, and to make their members

²¹⁷ Kim, “Ethereal Christianity,” 214-215.

feel the sense of transcendence. The charisma of the founders or senior pastors takes on an understandable significance. The charismatic authority of the senior pastors has been unconstrained by rational-legal considerations.”²¹⁸

Furthermore, Hong claims that this method has three primary goals: 1) to offer a sense of certainty to the laity; 2) to create opportunities for transcendent religious experiences; and 3) to ensure the commitment of congregants.²¹⁹ Each of these goals in turn feeds back into the primary institutional aim of “church growth” which is the modern Korean Evangelical understanding of “progress.” The power, conviction, passion, and confidence with which conservative Korean Evangelical pastors speak and preach is meant to instill the same attributes in their followers. They have no question that their church, their denomination, their reading of scripture, their theology, and their cultural outlook is the obviously correct one, and this offers church members a sense of certainty. The incorporation of healing services, unquestioned miracles, fervent prayer services, and emotional outpourings behind pulpits give the laity opportunities to engage in religious experiences that break from the mundanity of a secularized modern ideology. The relationship that these activities build between the head pastor, possibly a large ministerial staff, and the congregation helps to keep the laity committed to that particular church (what Hong called “churchism”). This final goal is very important in a culture built on competitiveness and where the perception of ministry success is predicated primarily upon the size of the congregation.

At the end of his analysis, Hong keenly recognized that the Korean Evangelical church’s response to modernization, both in the sense of secularization theory and the

²¹⁸ Hong, “Encounter with Modernity,” 247.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 248.

practical modernization of Korea's economic and technological spheres carried with it some major pitfalls. He recommended that the mega-churches be vigilant to avoid a quantity-oriented culture, and that it would be paramount to their continued progress to reflect on the quality of their growth. He seems to have been aware that while the size, and thus social influence, of Evangelical Christianity had grown in South Korea, its social credibility had diminished. He even seems to have warned against future events that would encourage this downward perception. Near the end of his article Hong cautioned that:

In the near future Korean mega-churches have to confront unavoidable internal institutional dilemmas in the form of the generation gap between founding members and the younger generation, hyper-bureaucracy, and the problem of succession. Once modern rationalization and institutionalization subvert the original dynamic charismatic experience, mega-churches will have difficulty in keeping their vitality. Charisma may diminish ... and then it may be devoured by routine hyper-institutionalization.²²⁰

Hong's warnings have been accurate; it is not hard to envision him as a Hebrew Bible prophet, crying out to the religious elite to change their ways, but whose words ultimately fell on deaf ears. The cultural perception of Evangelicals, their churches, and particularly their leadership has continued to decline in South Korea, a situation acknowledged by a number of scholars. More importantly, it has been a major point of cultural tension publicly.

Park Jin Kyu, Professor of Media and Communications at Seoul Women's University, has studied the rapid growth of Christianity and its current state as perceived by Koreans by analyzing the public reactions to the television serial drama, *Wang-kkot Seon-nyeo-nim* (Lotus Flower Fairy) which included theatrical confrontations between

²²⁰ Hong, "Encounter with Modernity," 252.

Christian and Shamanic characters. By studying the public discourse surrounding this TV drama, he has come to some conclusions about the current public perception of conservative Protestantism. The most apparent social framing that emerges from the discourse surrounding this TV drama has been that Christianity is seen as unique or exclusivist in a very multi-religious society. Park explains:

By analyzing audience postings on the serial's official website, I focus on the observation that the popular discourses have developed a demarcation between "Christianity and the other." I argue that despite the multi-religious situation of the Korean religious landscape, its symbolic map constructed by the popular seems to be drawn in terms of the dichotomous division. This appears to reflect that Christianity in Korea has gradually become a symbolic object that is challenged and criticized in the public sphere.²²¹

Before he begins his analysis, Park first recounts some of the important Korean Christian history that has led up to the current social discourse in a way very similar to what I have done here. He describes the way in which Christianity played an important role in the modernization of the country after the end of the colonial period, conservative Protestantism's beneficial relationship with various forms of South Korean government (highlighting the support it offered dictators like Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Hwan), and mentions the resistance of liberal Christians against the same. He also corroborates my conclusions that the support from conservative Christians was offered because of shared interests (e.g., anti-communism, a focus on modernization, economic prosperity, and numerical growth), and not so much due to any real amity between the political and religious factions. Similar to Hong and Kim, Park argues that this history has linked conservative Protestantism to modernity, and that this is now proving to be detrimental to the perception of the religion publicly. The modernization of South Korea, though lauded

²²¹ Park, "Are You Christian? I'm the Other," 108.

in the past, has recently received critical epithets, calling it “compressed modernization,” or saying it became “too modern, too soon.”²²²

In his study, Park analyzed perceptions expressed by those who identified as “other,” and those who identified themselves to be Christians.²²³ There were five consistent themes he identified within his study of “other” reactions: 1) exclusivity; 2) Westernization; 3) Christianity as a political group; 4) ethical corruption of pastors and churches; and 5) categorically separating Christianity from Christians. Exclusivity was really the heart of most other criticisms. Christianity was described by “other” identifying commenters as having little tolerance for other religions or even other ideas, and labels such as dogmatism and religious fanaticism were often levied against it. Christians were portrayed as being obsessed with proselytization and many people expected Christians to hate the drama because it represented a shaman as the main character. Reacting to the perceived exclusivity one commenter wrote: “The world is becoming pluralistic. We have to have a society where all races live together and all religions are in harmony. Vulgar Christians in our society should learn about difference and harmony before they argue for their righteousness.”²²⁴

The next common perception espoused was connecting Christianity to Western power. Reacting to comments from Christians suggesting that the television show promoted superstitions, “other” commenters argued that Christianity was a Westernizing influence and not truly Korean. “You guys want to see a drama full of praise to Jesus,

²²² Park, “Are You Christian? I’m the Other,” 110.

²²³ I would add here that in the Korea language, the word *Kidokyo*, which directly translated is simply “Christian,” normally refers to Protestants. A different word is used to refer specifically to Catholics. This has actually led to a situation where many older Koreans do not understand that Catholicism and Protestantism are both branches of Christianity. They often consider Catholicism to be a totally separate religion from Protestantism. Because of this, the term “Christian,” when used in a popular Korean context should be interpreted as synonymous with “Protestant.”

²²⁴ Park, “Are You Christian? I’m the Other,” 114.

don't you? To you guys, things like Dangun or shamanism or indigenous faith are all superstition. You guys are like a child possessed by Western demons, who don't know anything about its own roots," wrote one forum member.²²⁵ Park again describes this type of reaction as expressing the late modern reconsideration of a history where Christianity has been linked to modernization, and modernization tightly linked to Western powers. Related to this, Christianity was often spoken of as a political power. One poster wrote: "Korea doesn't work very well because of *Cho-Jung-Dong* and *Gaedokyo*."²²⁶ Another noted: "Christians often say that they were persecuted a lot in the past. But now in this society they are ruling instead."²²⁷ This perception has been fueled by the strong social and political influence garnered by conservative Evangelicals in Korea, especially through the public voices of rich and famous pastors and the political rallies organized by the mega-churches in Seoul.

Tied to this perception is the growing stereotype that many churches and para-church organizations are ethically corrupt. A debate about materialism came up on the drama's forums when Christian posters had criticized what they perceived to be the materialist focus of traditional Korean Shamanism. Many "other" commenters responded by highlighting greediness as a common attribute of Christian organizations. Concerning the materialist accusation against Shamanism, one poster wrote: "As far as I know, Christians don't hate money, either. Isn't it really easy to buy a house when you minister

²²⁵ Park, "Are You Christian? I'm the Other," 115.

²²⁶ "Cho-Jung-Dong," is a slang phrase combining the names of three Korean newspaper companies perceived to be very conservative politically, and *Gaedokyo* is a slang term combining the word for "dog" (*gae*) with the word for a Christian person (*Kidokyo*). While the first is mainly just a descriptive political phrase, the second term is a rather extreme pejorative in Korean.

²²⁷ Park, "Are You Christian? I'm the Other," 115.

a church for only three years? Where does the money come from? I hate Christians more and more because of those who interpret everything in this drama in a religious way.”²²⁸

The final theme that Park recognized in the religious discourse surrounding *Lotus Flower Fairy* was one of disconnection. Many posters claimed to respect Christianity as a religion. They just did not hold the same respect for its practitioners. A poster wrote: “Can a real Christian say that this drama is degrading Christianity or that there’s Devil in this drama, or something like that? What is important in Christianity is not that kind of exclusivism. Isn’t it something like love or self-sacrifice? I think Christianity is really a good religion and its doctrine is also great. But everything about Christianity is criticized because of those ‘bogus’ Christians who claim to be Christian.”²²⁹ This perception was echoed by some Christian posters as well, often citing the failure of Korean Christians to act and live in a way that is consistent with their professed beliefs. This allowed for an apologetic attitude in which they could find commonality with “other” posters. The actions and lifestyles of conservative Korean Evangelical Christians were portrayed as hypocritical or inconsistent with the popularly understood teachings of Christianity, by both Christians and “others.”

Attempting to find common ground was not the only response to the discourse by Christian posters. Some Christian posters displayed a simple and straightforward dislike for the drama all-together, while others framed their disapproval in a context of spiritual warfare. A Christian poster wrote: “What’s surprising is that MBC unreasonably criticizes Christianity through many programs, and now through this drama it glamorizes

²²⁸ Park, “Are You Christian? I’m the Other,” 116.

²²⁹ Ibid., 116-117.

superstitious *musok*²³⁰ in order to intensify the public bias against Christianity. . . . This is to imprison those who are influenced by this drama within the hands of the Devil, who has the power of this world.”²³¹ Such framing created an adversarial relationship between Christianity, the show, and the media company that produced it. A less combative approach was espoused by some Christian commenters who framed the subject in a more hopeful light: “So-called *mubyung*²³² can be cured. Demons will run away if you order it in the name of Jesus Christ. Many possessed people in the Bible were all cured. Although it is fiction, I hope Chowon²³³ would go to church and get healed in the name of Jesus Christ.”²³⁴

In contrast to these reactions, other Christians were much more accepting of the television series. For many of them a fictional TV show was nothing more than just that. One poster representing this view said: “I’m Christian and also a big fan of *Wang-kkot seon-nyeon-nim*. As a believer in God, I don’t believe in superstition. But I like this drama very much. Drama is just drama. Many Christians, including me, may think like this.”²³⁵ There was clearly a breadth of Christian responses to the show, and not all of them fit into the cultural stereotypes and perceptions of the “other” commenters. That said, many Christians did display the exclusivism and combativeness that was felt by those who identified themselves as “other.”

How then should scholars incorporate these perceptions into our understanding of the discourse on conservative Evangelicalism in South Korea? Exclusivity is a core

²³⁰ This is a common term for traditional Korean Shamanism.

²³¹ Park, “Are You Christian? I’m the Other,” 118.

²³² *Mubyung* is the term for the sickness or disease (*byung*) that takes a shaman over when they are connecting to spirits.

²³³ This is the name for the main character in the drama.

²³⁴ Park, “Are You Christian? I’m the Other,” 119.

²³⁵ Ibid., 120.

attribute of Evangelical Christianity in a number of ways, and has been a point of contention in both America and Korea. Interestingly however, religious exclusivity by itself is not what has turned “other” people away from a positive perception of the religion in Korea. The Evangelical belief that Jesus is the only way to salvation is rarely questioned or seen to be morally wrong. Instead, it is the *social* exclusivism that concerns non-Christians. Churches in Korea tend to be clan-like in nature.²³⁶ Pastors act as the chief executives of their religious corporations, competing within their own denominations for congregants and other barometers of fame. This rampant churchism, as Hong called it, is a major factor in the decline of Evangelicalism as a respected religious movement.

During my observations in Korean churches I found the business-like atmosphere rather visible. Church offices had rooms filled with official forms for everything from baptism, to Bible studies, to church membership classes. Church directories read like religious LinkedIn pages, and elders were more often than not older men who were clearly upper-middle class. The marriage of the conservative Korean Evangelical church to authoritarian politics and to business powers has created a perception where the church is seen to be just another cog in the ruling establishment machine. Political and economic scandals perpetrated by publically avowed Evangelicals have exacerbated this perception. The 1990s saw a number of damagingly hypocritical events exposed.

In 1992, Yi Changnim predicted that the rapture would take place on October 28th, using that predication to extort money from his congregants and investing it in a bond that did not mature until after the predicted date. Another public scandal took place in 1995, when the Samping department store collapsed killing 502 people and injuring

²³⁶ Grayson, *Korea*, 165.

many more. They were infuriated to learn that the owner of the building, a deacon at the Yongnak Presbyterian mega-church, had done nothing to repair the building despite awareness of signs of imminent collapse. In 1997, it was discovered that then President Kim Young Sam's Evangelical son Kim Hyon Chol, had been peddling political influence for money, particularly with a company named *Hanbo* Steel. Kim's son was sentenced to two years in prison, and Kim himself was further shamed by the incident because it was a major catalyst for the national economic meltdown which became the Korean contribution to the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis.²³⁷

More recently, the pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church (said to be the largest single congregation in the world), David Yonggi Cho, was convicted of embezzling 13 billion Won (US\$12 million), along with his son, Cho Hee Jun, who was the chairman of Yeongsan Christian Cultural Center. Both Cho and his son were sentenced to jail time, and the pastor was fined 5 billion Won (US\$4.7 million). This however was not the first time Pastor Cho has been accused of illegal or morally questionable dealings. In 2011, the elders of the church accused him of embezzling \$20 million, and he has been criticized for privatizing church assets in the past.²³⁸

It would be incomplete and ultimately incorrect to assign the problems within the conservative Korean Evangelical discourse on authority to sensational headlines and the failings of a comparatively small number of church leaders. If the day to day practices of Evangelicals and their understanding of the Bible provided a positive counter-narrative for those outside the church, then the mistakes of leaders and the perceived political bias

²³⁷ Lee, *Born Again*, 148.

²³⁸ ChristianityToday.com, "Founder of World's Largest Megachurch Convicted of Embezzling \$12 Million," last modified 2015, accessed August 14, 2015, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2014/february/founder-of-worlds-largest-megachurch-convicted-cho-yoido.html>.

would not sway the discourse as they do. That this is not the case is telling, and so a critical analysis of Korean Evangelical church practices and biblical ideologies will be necessary. I need to apply the information that has been gained from studying Korean religious, political and cultural history. How Korean Evangelicals use the Bible in their churches, what locations it privileges, who holds it, and why must be questioned. The hierarchy of leadership in Korean Evangelical churches needs to be reviewed, and the relationship between the laity and religious professionals needs to be examined. How does Korea's pluralistic religious history reveal itself in the Korean Evangelical church? Do the social structures or values of Confucianism and Shamanism play a part in the structures of Evangelical churches? Do preachers still promote a conservative political ideology, and if so, why? Is there space in the Korean conservative Evangelical discourse on authority for internal critique and change? Are there differences between the generations that reflect a shift in the perception of authority? To these questions I now turn.

KOREAN CONSERVATIVE EVANGELICAL PHILOSOPHY AND LITERARY PRACTICES

“Korea has a special story in the universe. God has blessed us. The Bible says the opposite of what the world says. . . . Throughout history humans have led each other astray. Like Hitler or Communists. They thought after their governments they could have everyone equal and live well. These people say they make a paradise, but they didn’t and they can’t do this. We need Jesus. Say the name of the Lord. Let’s pray that we will be sealed!” – Galilee Methodist Church, Sunday sermon ²³⁹

In speaking the above words, the teaching pastor at Galilee Methodist Church was preaching from the Korean Evangelical cultural discourse on national identity and politics. He offered his congregation an Evangelical response to world history, one set in his interpretation of the contents of Revelation 7. The authorities and powers of this world had failed to realize the paradise they had promised. The Christian hope, counter to “what the world says,” was found in the paradise that Jesus would establish, and so he called them all to pray together, shouting “*Joonim*,” asking to be “sealed.” In this he encouraged his church to see that they, Korean Christians, were special in some way. They had received a special blessing from God on their country, and he went on in his sermon to argue that they would continue to be blessed so long as they continued to be true Christians personally, and communally evangelize their country. His conviction while preaching was visible to all. At specific moments of deep fervor he would raise and shake his fist, and his speaking was rhythmic and melodic, with tones that colored certain terms darker or brighter than others. When he called for the congregation to shout “Lord” there was no hesitation. The whole community began calling out to God in a chaotic, yet practiced swell of human voices.

²³⁹ Brower observation notes, Galilee Methodist Church, Cheonan City, South Korea, 3/23/2014.

This was just one experience of many that I had while attending two of the larger Evangelical churches in Cheonan, South Korea. In this chapter I will delve into the social and biblical constructions of authority that inform religious practices, such as the one just described, within the Korean conservative Evangelical church. Just as with the American side, my analysis will attempt to discern a consistent discourse of authority. There is considerably less scholarship on the biblical practices of Korean Evangelicals when compared to American Evangelicals, and this pushed me out into the field. I have observed months of Sunday services, attended evangelism events and leadership training days, interviewed pastors, and surveyed portions of each congregation to build a set of data that will illuminate how these communities function, and how they deal with issues of power.²⁴⁰

As I review this information, three themes will figure prominently. First, Korean conservative Evangelical church practice has a consistently practical, this-world orientation. Harkening back to the early converts during the colonial period who asked whether or not there was much food or opportunity to make money in becoming a Christian, contemporary Korean Evangelicals will often focus on the practical benefits of being a part of a church community in the here and now. Authority within the community is thus highly connected to the ability to provide benefits that that community most earnestly desires. Second, the social hierarchy is complex and orderly, and knowing one's place within the church community is seen as important to all. Pastors, deacons, elders, Bible study hosts, church workers, men, women, children, etc., all have their place within the church system of authority, and it is rigidly kept. Finally, a strong sense of religious

²⁴⁰ Prior approval for this project was obtained from the Missouri State University IRB (February 6, 2014; approval #14-0272).

professionalism pervades Korean Evangelical communities. I will show that pastors in particular are held to be different than the rest of the congregation. In the religio-social understanding of most Korean Evangelicals, pastors are called by God to be placed in a special seat of authority, and to challenge that positioning is to effectively challenge God. There are different ways this is expressed, but a strict vertical relationship from laity, to clergy, to the divine, holds true throughout Evangelicalism in South Korea.

There are differences between the Korean and American conservative Evangelical constructions of social authority, but both expressions use the Bible to uphold their unique systems of power. American Evangelicalism, with its populist, egalitarian, and individualist ideologies, envisions the Bible to be God's final authority in the church, accessible and understandable by anyone who will read it "literally" or "plainly," while it restricts the intellectual and critical study of scripture, and masks any train of thought that would suggest human church authority is derived from any location outside the Bible. Korean Evangelicals on the other hand have strong authoritarian, communal, and professionalized ideologies of social authority. They envision the Bible to be God's final authority for the church as well, but it is through the special, God-given, and studied authority of a religious professional class that they gain access to the scriptures "true" meaning. This might take the form of a confident, Confucian-scholar-like Presbyterian minister who declares the systematic theologies of Calvin each Sunday, and whose prayers are powerful, Bible verse filled exhortations. It might also take the form of a charismatic Shaman-pastor who performs miracle services for healing and blessing, proving for his audience the deep connection he has with the Holy Spirit.

When different Evangelical leaders in Korea come into conflict, the stability of the religious discourse is jeopardized (Is one leader not educated enough? Is one not holy enough?), and the most common response is to separate from or vilify one another. In both countries, the difficulties inherent in holding a text to be the final religious authority are masked, and the negative consequences brought about by this are quietly ignored, or worse, denied. This destructive situation is maintained in order to support a set of interlinked religious, social, and literary ideologies that are at the core of Evangelical identity, and yet are demonstrably untenable. I will return to this argument after having examined the facets of authority within the Korean context in more detail. At that point, I will be ready to analyze what remains of conservative Evangelical authority when culturally located aspects have been thoroughly identified.

Cultural Influences on Authority: Practicality, Place, and Professionalism

On a pleasant Sunday morning, May 18th, 2014, I was sitting among the congregation of Galilee Methodist Church. At the end of the sermon, the head pastor lifted his hands, palms up, toward the congregation, who responded in kind. This came to be a familiar gesture to me as I attended Korean Evangelical congregations during that summer, happening at nearly every service regardless of denomination or church I attended. The pastor began to speak a closing prayer of blessing over the audience. He thanked God for the ability to worship freely in their country, he asked for help to surpass their personal limitations and for each member to live in the Holy Spirit. He expressed his hope that Galilee church would be used by God to reach people in rural places and in the city. The pastor then raised one of his hands into a fist and increased his volume as he

prayed for Satan to “go away in Jesus’s name,” and for the illnesses that members were suffering from to be healed (seemingly connecting these two requests). He finished by asking God to bless the businesses owned by members of the church and to help everyone in their economic difficulties, requesting that the “water of life” be given to the congregation so that they might overcome such hard times.²⁴¹

The final prayers of the pastor that day, and the consistency of similar prayers throughout my time observing impressed upon me the first theme, the very practical, this-world focus of conservative Evangelicalism in South Korea. I discussed at length how the religions existent prior to the advent of Korean Christianity had also been of a practical bent (particularly Korean Primal Shamanism and later Confucianism), and these tendencies have also become a facet of Evangelicalism in the culture. That this is the case has been discussed by a number of scholars, who focus their studies on the concept of “blessing,” which in Korean is “*kibok*.” Grayson noticed that a material focus had continued from the beginnings of Korean Christianity, to the time of his own study, saying:

Much of the content of preaching is centred on belief in *kibok*, a wish for blessings in this life. Joint, out-loud congregational prayer (*tongsong kido*) is impressive not only for its volume but also for its fervent nature. Attendance at church and fervent prayer are believed to create a spiritual condition in which the believer will be blessed (often understood to be material blessings), a clear reflection of the shamanistic religious traditions of Korea.²⁴²

Sociologist Andrew Kim, citing a study of sermons collected from prominent pastors, echoes Grayson: “In his analysis of collected sermons by thirty leading pastors in South Korea, Daegon Kim (1983) found that the theme of material blessings upon accepting

²⁴¹ Brower observation notes, Galilee Methodist Church, Cheonan City, South Korea, 5/1/2014.

²⁴² Grayson, *Korea*, 165.

God as the savior was the predominant focus of their sermons, and that the instances of miracles in the Bible were given particular attention.”²⁴³ He goes on to offer other examples of a materialistic emphasis in biblical explanations offered by Evangelical pastors. The section of Matthew 5, commonly known as the Beatitudes, was often interpreted with a very this-worldly lens. For example, verse 5, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth,” was claimed to be “literally”²⁴⁴ interpreted as meaning that Christians would be blessed with land ownership. Similar, “literal,” this-worldly interpretations of the other blessings of Matthew 5 were common.²⁴⁵ Lee adds his description of the materialist focus within Evangelical Christianity: “Held by a significant portion of Korean Protestants, *kibok* is the belief that one’s faith – once properly lived out – will enable one to obtain not only otherworldly blessings but also this-worldly blessings, such as material wealth, cure from disease, and resolution of personal problems.”²⁴⁶

The largest and most influential example of this aspect of Korean Evangelicalism is the nationally known theology of Yoido Full Gospel Church, and its pastor, Cho Yonggi. Pastor Cho wrote in his book, *Salvation, Health, and Prosperity: Our Threefold Blessings in Christ*:

I cried and prayed with tears day in and day out, earnestly seeking. After I spent much time in supplication, God finally spoke to my heart. His words, warm and full of hope, were a revelation to me. The word from God contained truth of the threefold blessings of salvation, health, and prosperity written in 3 John 2: “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.” Since that

²⁴³ Kim, “Korean Religious Culture and its Affinity to Christianity,” 120.

²⁴⁴ An interesting question to ask here: Would American conservative Evangelicals consider this “literal” interpretation a proper one? Did Jesus mean that Christians should be blessed with more land ownership? If not, then which “literal” interpretation should be followed? Is one more “literal” than another? Should not there be only one “literal” interpretation? This again highlights the difficulty and problems introduced by a loosely-defined, and inconsistent hermeneutic.

²⁴⁵ Kim, “Korean Religious Culture and its Affinity to Christianity,” 120.

²⁴⁶ Lee, *Born Again*, 122.

time this truth has been the foundation of all my sermons, and I have laid the foundation of my ministry on this scripture.²⁴⁷

Interestingly, the forward to Cho's book was written by Oral Roberts, a famous preacher from America often connected with Pentecostalism and the "prosperity" gospel movement. This reinforces my conclusions, but it also encourages me to question the way in which international Christian movements may have influenced Cho. There are of course Korean Christians and pastors who criticize Cho, and those like him, who place such a strong emphasis on the practical benefits of being a Christian in the here-and-now. These critics often level accusations of shamanistic influence against such beliefs, but the long history of these theologies in Korean Protestantism and their wide spread acceptance reveals that Cho's ministry and others like it reveal symptoms, not causes. I have established that it has an effect, but *how much* of the practical, this-worldly focus is a product of a shamanistic religious heritage? What about the years of national economic focus? Or, *how much* of it can be linked to prosperity gospel movements in the West? These questions would be difficult to answer with sufficient accuracy. Instead, I can say with confidence that a focus on blessing in the current life is a major characteristic of the conservative Korean Evangelicalism religious discourse, and that the inclination emerged from South Korea's difficult history, shamanic religious heritage, economic political policies, and that international connections further encouraged it. This characteristic greatly influences how human authority emerges from the social discourse of Evangelicalism in South Korea.

Evangelical leaders in America have to speak from within the larger cultural discourse where populist ideology and individualism reign. The myriad factors that

²⁴⁷ Lee, *Born Again*, 122.

inform the American Evangelical discourse on authority must all be masked in subjugation to a biblical ideology that effectively merges the Bible with the deity who inspired it. Likewise, Korean pastors must also speak from within the discourse that permeates their church culture in order to gather and hold onto social authority. It looks quite different however, and the themes of place and professionalism emerge out of a larger Korean cultural backdrop.

Before further analyzing the social hierarchy of the Korean Evangelical church, it is important to recognize that Korean culture, in general, has a higher degree of stratification and categorization compared to American culture. The best example of this is probably the Korean language. In South Korea, first names are not used for people who you do not know closely, or who are not exactly the same age as you. In the vast majority of social relations and interactions, titles based on age, gender, rank, education level, or particular relation are used. This is true whether one is discussing familial, work, school or general relationships. For example, a girl will call her older sister, *unni*, and her older brother, *oppa*, while a boy uses totally different titles, *noona*, and *hyung*, respectively. All paternal and maternal relatives have different titles, denoting their parental side. If you work at a restaurant, your boss is called *sajangnim*, but if you work at a private academy, they are *weonjangnim*. The word for teacher, *seongsaengnim*, can be used for any educator, but it is also used for any person you wish to show an extra amount of respect.

All these titles are not just nomenclature either; they directly define the power relationship expressed in each situation. A *noona* has responsibility over her little brother, and he owes her his respect. If a group of children are playing dangerously in the street, and an *Ajoomah* (a general title for any fully grown woman who you do not know,

similar to “ma’am” in English) yells at them, they should obey her warnings. Surprising to many visitors in Korea is the use of familial titles among friends, and even between romantic partners. People call their older friends *unni*, *noona*, *oppa*, or *hyung*, depending on the gender and age relationship. Women will often use the term for “older brother,” *oppa*, when addressing their older boyfriends or husbands, which is seen as a form of cute or even flirtatious speech by most Koreans. Interestingly, the reverse is not the same. A man using *noona* when addressing his older girlfriend or wife is not seen to be flirting or acting cute. Instead, men will commonly use their wife’s real name or another title for spouse or lover. This in effect raises the man up to her level socially. This system of personal titles, with the attendant power relations they express, saturates the Korean social experience. This must be kept in mind when analyzing the discourse on social or human authority in the Korean Evangelical church.

South Korea’s deeply saturated, linguistically supported, social stratification has directly affected church practices of authority, and this is expressed through the themes of place and professionalism. Church members in Korea know their place and position in relation to every other member. Titles are used inside the church as well, and you will rarely, if ever, hear a church member greet their pastor or another member by name. Some titles differ between denominations, but many of them are used broadly. The most common title used between church members is *gipsanim*, often with the person’s family name used as a prefix (e.g., Kim *gipsanim* or Lee *gipsanim*). Pastors are called *moksanim*, assistant/youth pastors often use the title *jeondosanim*, and elders are called *jeongronim*. There are many more titles, and each of these titles carries with it an implicit, and sometimes explicit, aspect of authority. As with many systems of human power, the

Korean Evangelical one is pyramidal in nature, with the *gipsanim* (church members) making up the large portion at the bottom, and the head *moksanim* (pastor) standing alone at the summit. The middle portions can vary from church to church, but in most communities the assistant or youth pastors are officially right beneath the head pastor, with the elders below them. There are times when other factors, such as age, wealth, or time attending a certain congregation can overrule the official church hierarchy.

The one certain thing is the power of the pastor in Korean churches, and this ties into the final theme, professionalism. In the Korean Evangelical church the head pastor is *the* leading expert on religion in his (or very rarely her) community; more than that though, they are believed by most Korean Evangelicals to have a special calling from God that makes them different from all other members of the church. Hong has argued that Korean Evangelicals believe their pastors to have “special spiritual power.”²⁴⁸ In accord with this, and what I discussed before, mega-church pastors are viewed by many Korean Evangelicals to have an extra amount of this “specialness,” which they often display through their charisma, their passion while preaching, large emotional public actions, and in some churches, spiritual experiences such as glossolalia, or healing services.²⁴⁹

This understanding was confirmed in my own survey studies. While observing Galilee Methodist and Central Presbyterian Church in Cheonan, I conducted a small survey among the lay members of both congregations. With the permission (and much appreciated help) of the pastoral staff from each congregation, surveys were distributed at various church events (Bible studies, youth gatherings, etc.) between June and October of

²⁴⁸ Hong, “The Backgrounds and Characteristics of the Charismatic Mega-Churches in Korea,” 103.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 112-114.

2014. I gave out five hundred survey forms in total, and collected 338 sufficiently completed, legible forms (a response rate of 67.6%). I discarded any largely incomplete or illegible responses. The survey was intended to gather data on the basic doctrinal beliefs of lay church members in these two representative Evangelical congregations. The survey had three sections of questions, covering 1) basic theological positions;²⁵⁰ 2) biblical ontology and hermeneutics;²⁵¹ and 3) views on church leadership.²⁵² For further analysis, I divided the responses into three groups based on age, one for 19-27 year olds (168 respondents), the next for 28-49 year olds (115 respondents), and the final one for respondents 50 and older (51 respondents).²⁵³ I chose these age ranges because they roughly represent social divisions already present in both churches' organizational structures.²⁵⁴ I labeled the first group "students," the second "family age," and the final group "elders."

Under the section titled, "Church Leadership," I asked a number of questions concerning the pastor's position in a church. For one question, I offered the statement, "*Pastors are authorities in the church mainly because of ...*" and I allowed for four possible responses: 1) theological education; 2) calling from God; 3) charismatic personality; and 4) skills in organization leadership and planning. Responders were also informed at the beginning of the survey that they could abstain from any question at their

²⁵⁰ This section included six questions dealing with common Christian beliefs, such as the uniqueness of Christianity, the Trinity, and the resurrection of Jesus.

²⁵¹ This section included eight questions about the nature of the biblical text, differences between laity and clergy when reading the Bible, connections between the Bible and science, as well as the importance of biblical languages.

²⁵² This section included five questions focused on the status of leaders in church communities, personal attributes that the participants expected in their pastors, and qualities that participants looked for when searching for a new church to attend.

²⁵³ Four respondents chose not to reveal their age, so their answers were included in the overall data, but not in any age groups' data.

²⁵⁴ Both churches had ministries devoted to students or young adults, ministries for married members and members with children, as well as ministries designed to cater to the needs of older members, especially those without family nearby or the infirm. My age groups follow the age ranges of these ministries.

discretion, which represents a fifth possible response. The large majority of participants, 87 percent, responded with “calling from God,” though elders (94 percent) were more likely to do so than students (83 percent).²⁵⁵ Another question asked the participants to respond to the statement, “*Pastors should be holier than other church members*,” to which 77.5 percent marked the “strongly agree” or “agree” responses. Equally informative is the small number of “disagree” and “strongly disagree” responses, with only 3 percent. Most participants who did not agree instead marked “no opinion” (15.7 percent).²⁵⁶ What can be taken away from these two questions is that most Korean Evangelicals surveyed understood their pastors to be both placed by God in their positions of power, and in some way “holier” than the average church member. These figures fit Hong’s summations discussed earlier. Considering the rigid title system of Korean culture, the vertical hierarchy it represents, and the theologically and socially privileged position of pastor, one can see how the conservative Korean Evangelical social discourse on power leans towards a singular head instead of populism. I highlighted this preference for authoritarian leadership earlier when I discussed the way in which the conservative Evangelical church condoned the autocratic dictators that ruled Korea in the mid-twentieth century. Lee highlighted that political trend and he has also discussed the internal authoritarianism of Korean Evangelical churches, citing a fellow Korean scholar who said: “A common characteristic of the successful churches is that almost none of them are so-called democratized churches.”²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ Brower Survey, Galilee Methodist and Central Presbyterian Churches, Cheonan City, South Korea, 2014.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Lee, *Born Again*, 99, citing Sin Songjong, “*Iron Kyohoe Ka Songjang Handa*” [Numerical Growth Will Continue for Some Time], *Kurisuchyan Sinmun*, June 4, 1983.

Place and professionalism not only prop up the authoritarian power of the leadership, but they also reinforce the communal focus within Korean Evangelical churches. In contrast to the individualistic focus of American Evangelical culture, Korean Evangelical culture is built upon a political and social discourse which favors the structured harmony of the community. This is readily visible in the socio-linguistic aspects of Korean culture, but it is also expressed through gendered and devotional practices. Traditional gender roles, which are still primarily defined by Confucian ideologies in South Korea, are reinforced within churches. Men hold the vast majority of leadership roles, which of course includes pastoral positions, but is not limited to them; elderships, and the more practical leadership positions within churches (financial chairs, missions boards, etc.), are also predominantly male. Earlier I briefly mentioned Min's study of Korean churches in America, and it can reveal something here as well. She found that a gendered hierarchy among such churches was extremely consistent, and even exaggerated for a variety of reasons. Korean men living in America tended to desire positions of power within their church communities even more than their counterparts back home, and women tended to fill nearly all of the, in her words, "nurturing"²⁵⁸ positions (cooking, cleaning, child care, etc.).

All of this in itself is not that different from what might be found in more traditional, conservative American Evangelical churches, but the spread of gendered social positioning to denominations commonly accepting of female leadership outside Korea is notable. In Korea, many denominations have adopted conservative Presbyterian social models, such as systems of elders, deacons, and so on. This has extended to

²⁵⁸ Min, "Severe Underrepresentation of Women in Church Leadership in the Korean Immigrant Community in the United States," 227.

denominations, such as Methodist, Baptist, or Nazarene, which have traditionally not had strong hierarchies for the laity. In Min's summation, the adoption of a highly structured Presbyterian system of lay ranks maintains the Confucian social climate, and makes church social order more understandable for Koreans.²⁵⁹ The thrust of Confucian social philosophy is to foster public harmony, and to create a system in which each person is placed where they will be most helpful to the community. Individual desire is often repressed for communal benefit and conformity. Korean society in general still bears many hallmarks of this social philosophy, so it is not surprising to find it ingrained in church hierarchical structure and gendered stereotypes.

Communalism is also favored by the forms of devotional practice that are common in the conservative Korean Evangelical church. Spiritual experiences are prioritized and made public in churches, and as Hong has argued, events such as healing services, claims of the miraculous, revivals, communal prayer nights, etc., all play a role in magnifying the spiritual "specialness" of the pastor, but also of the local church organization in which they occur. Hong says that these devotional practices need to be displayed so that the laity can join in their function. I understand Hong, but I would add that these practices also reinforce the socio-religious narrative crafted by church authorities, that their church is special, their pastor powerful, etc. To be part of these experiences is to be part of the church community, but to not participate, or to question them for any reason is to set oneself outside the community. Even in a church context, all the feelings of social rejection and shame can be felt when a member chooses not to participate, particularly if they are doing so because they express a rejection of, or

²⁵⁹ Min, "Severe Underrepresentation of Women in Church Leadership in the Korean Immigrant Community in the United States," 231.

disagreement with the leadership. This situation is extremely rare in Korean Evangelicalism though, precisely because of the social pressure and shame that goes along with setting oneself outside the communal view. Instead, communal devotional practice is encouraged and taught.

On June 1, 2014, I attended a Sunday school leadership training event that was for both adult Sunday school teachers and the child leaders of each Sunday school class. We met in the children's ministry worship hall. As I arrived, those gathered were worshipping and a lay (older, male, well-dressed) member offered an opening prayer. The pastor in charge of the event then approached the podium, gave some lighthearted opening comments, shared the day's announcements, and then began to give his sermon. At the beginning of the sermon he made some comments concerning the blessing of being involved in the children's and Sunday school ministries. Addressing the leaders, he spoke about the way God would bless them for their service, and one particular comment stuck out to me. He said: "Even though you don't go to the mountain,²⁶⁰ you will be healthier; even though you don't take a vitamin, you will be healthier."²⁶¹ There was a clear emphasis in his preaching that there are this-world benefits for being a leader in the church. The adult congregation would often respond with head nodding and small shouts of "Amen" or "Hallelujah," but the children rarely responded in any observable way. As the pastor was closing he asked the congregation to pray for someone they knew and that they would come to the church to become Christian. He specifically said: "Call on Jesus ten times, then the person's name you want to pray for, then pray."²⁶² This formulaic call to prayer was answered quickly by the adults, who all began shouting "Joonim" together,

²⁶⁰ South Korea being a mountainous country, hiking is a common form of exercise and relaxation.

²⁶¹ Brower observation notes, Galilee Methodist Church, Cheonan City, South Korea, 6/1/2014.

²⁶² Ibid.

until each had spoken it ten times. At the same time I observed the child leaders, who seemed, in my view, to be made uncomfortable by this situation. They wiggled where they sat, some with heads bowed in prayer, some looking around, but none of them followed the call to shout “Lord.” As noted earlier, it is quite common in Korean Evangelical churches. Here I began to understand that the practice is more than a culturally learned behavior; it is purposefully taught. While practices like this probably afford a warm, mutually encouraging feeling to those participating, they also encourage group conformity, and loyalty to those who call for the action.

In his study of Evangelicalism in Korea, Lee has also concluded that devotional practices play a role in community formation in Korea, and that they are both quite fervent and frequent. He says:

The intensity of devotion in Korean Evangelicalism is attested partly by the variety and frequency of devotional services that a typical Korean Protestant church holds each week. It is not unusual for a Korean Protestant church to engage in five kinds of congregational services weekly: the main Sunday worship, Sunday evening worship, Wednesday worship, Friday nightlong prayer worship, and daily – including Sunday – daybreak prayer worship. In addition, most churches have a system of weekly cell meetings, in which members meet in small groups, or cells, typically on Friday evenings for prayer and Bible study.²⁶³

The number of services that Korean Evangelicals are encouraged to attend is impressive. The time and length of services, some beginning at 4 a.m., and others lasting several hours (in some cases all night), is also staggering. Nearly every day has some kind of communal service, and this creates a situation in which the daily life of Korean Evangelicals is orchestrated by their church commitments and schedule. A deep level of commitment to the community is also observable in their tithing practices.

²⁶³ Lee, *Born Again*, 126.

Tithing in Korea is promoted by most Evangelical churches as an obligation of the “true” Christian, not something that is a personal decision. Both churches I attended had a time during the Sunday morning service for the collection of the offering, and the congregations used small colorfully decorated envelopes in which to obscure the amount. These were familiar practices of tithing to me, but unfamiliar were the large shelf-like pieces of furniture outside the sanctuaries, in which each member had a small slot reserved. These slots were used for tithing if one could not give on a Sunday morning, or if one wished to give further. Sacrificial giving, beyond the tithe, is seen as an especially devoted practice, and it plays in to the church hierarchy as well. All the *jeongronim* (elders) to whom I was introduced during my time at each church were middle-aged or older men, most of whom were long time members of their respective communities, and many of them were also successful businessmen and particularly wealthy. Earlier I mentioned that Korean Evangelical churches pray for and support the businesses of congregants such as these. Other benefits, such as the good reputation that comes with being a leading member at a large church, and the social network derived from being part of an influential community fit the practical focus of Korean Evangelicalism. In my time visiting these churches, it was clear to me that eldership, money, and loyalty to the particular organization, as well as the authority contingent in these things, were highly connected.

The social structures and practices of the Korean Evangelical church demand much from believers, going far beyond just mental or willful assent to a set of beliefs. Congregations are physically, financially, and temporally tied to their respective organizations and leaders. Religious authoritarianism and communalism, expressed

through the themes of practicality, place, and professionalism, are the ideologies of power within the Korean Evangelical church. These practices and the supporting philosophies have helped to create the negative popular perception of the Korean Evangelical church described in the previous chapter. Instead of following in the footsteps of the radically progressive freedom protesters of the colonial period, whom the Korean Evangelical church claims as their heritage, it has turned inward socially, and fallen prey to a discourse of authority that emphasizes the specialness of some, while branding as “other” those who would question the status quo, or who do not neatly fit into a rather rigid social system. Instead of holding secular and public leaders to a high moral standard, it tolerated human rights violations in order to better enfranchise itself to a political establishment that supported its evangelistic efforts. The discourse has also fed the external and internal “exclusivism” perceived by many non-Christian Koreans.

When I asked my survey participants to respond to the statement, “*Other religions (Buddhism, Islam, etc.) are human-made attempts to know God,*” the results were more varied, with 45.5 percent responding in agreement,²⁶⁴ 32 percent disagreeing,²⁶⁵ and 21.6 percent having no opinion. When I asked them to respond to the statement, “*Other religions are false worship, of evil spirits, demons, or Satan,*” 70.4 percent responded in the affirmative, and only 11.2 percent disagreed.²⁶⁶ With such a view held by a sizeable portion of the congregations I studied, it is not hard to understand the external perception of exclusivism, but there is a divisive internal aspect to it as well. The Korean Evangelical church is plagued by church splits and scathing accusations thrown from

²⁶⁴ “Strongly agree” or “agree” responses.

²⁶⁵ “Strongly disagree” or “disagree” responses.

²⁶⁶ Brower Survey, Galilee Methodist and Central Presbyterian Churches, Cheonan City, South Korea, 2014.

pastors at one another. The divisive nature of Korean Evangelicalism has been noted by a number of scholars, who often connect it back to disagreements over church practice (especially biblical practices) and leadership styles. Yi, Hong, and Kim have all commented on various divisions within the Evangelical church in Korea, primarily associated with accusations of shamanic practices,²⁶⁷ their denominational beginning and social class differences,²⁶⁸ or a comparative Male/Confucian/Presbyterian vs. Female/Shamanistic/Charismatic categorization.²⁶⁹ I have tried to take many of these views into account. As in the American chapters, I hold that the above cultural and philosophical factors contribute to the problems of authority found within the Evangelical Church, but they are not the root, because they are particularly located symptoms. In the end, the glue of the discourse of power within Evangelicalism is the Bible.

Biblical Practices

Here I will discuss the biblical practices of conservative Korean evangelicals, primarily described through analytical and ethnographic methods. Korean religious scholarship has provided support for much of my analysis, particularly on political, historical, or gender issues, and these studies at times do touch on Bible use, but it has not been their primary exploration. There is no Korean equivalent to what Bielo has done with American Evangelical biblical practices, or what Boone has done with American Fundamentalist biblical ideology. As such, the observations, interpretations, and conclusions offered here will be my attempt at beginning such a project. The same methodologies used in the American section will be applied here. Borrowing from Bielo

²⁶⁷ Lee, "A Brief Research on Changes in the Korean Church Service Format," 98.

²⁶⁸ Hong, "The Backgrounds and Characteristics of the Charismatic Mega-Churches in Korea," 102.

²⁶⁹ Kim, "Ethereal Christianity," 218-219.

again, the questions and critical observations applied to Korean biblical practices will be separated into four categories, biblical ideology, biblical hermeneutic, biblical rhetoric, and Bible as artifact. What is the Bible to Korean Evangelicals? How do they understand its origin? How much emphasis is placed on the Bible in their theological discourse? These were some of the questions I asked of biblical ideology while I visited and participated in South Korean Evangelical church communities.

Lee has written that Evangelical Korean churches almost entirely adhere to a doctrine of biblical inerrancy.²⁷⁰ Though I agreed with him, I wanted to confirm it more thoroughly, and not just among doctrinal stances of denominations, but among the professed beliefs of common Korean Evangelicals. Table 1 below contains the survey statements pertaining to this topic and the response percentages.

Table 1. Survey Questions Pertaining to Biblical Ideology.²⁷¹

Statement	Agree/Choice A	Disagree/ Choice B	No Opinion/ Abstaining
The Bible is: (A)Directly the words of God OR (B)Written by people but still valuable.	96.15%	2.37%	1.48%
If (A) the Bible is directly the Word of God: (a)It should be read only literally OR (b) sometimes not literally.	29.88%	52.96%	17.16%
A Christian must believe every word of the Bible is without error to be a true believer.	78.70%	8.29%	13.02 %

²⁷⁰ Lee, *Born Again*, 118.

²⁷¹ Brower Survey, Galilee Methodist and Central Presbyterian Churches, Cheonan City, South Korea, 2014.

These numbers bring up a plethora of interesting questions. It is clear that in the church communities I studied, the Bible was almost unanimously understood to contain words directly from God (Table 1). This question also had the greatest consistency among generations, and between denominations. There was no substantial difference between the Presbyterian and Methodist church responses, and over 90 percent in all three age categories agreed that the biblical text had a divine origin.²⁷² If these churches represent the general Korean Evangelical biblical ontology (their adherence to the official biblical stances of the two largest denominations in the country suggests they do), then it can be safely said that the Bible enjoys an authoritative status linked to the divine.

In Korean Evangelicalism however, this high status is not immediately connected to literalism (Table 1). This is not surprising when I compare these findings to the sermons and Bible studies I observed. Korean pastors were often fond of metaphor when explaining biblical passages, and would paraphrase verses into rather different expressions in order to communicate their point to the audience. Bible stories were reinterpreted into a modern context or a current event happening in Korea, and never once was the pastor's contextual interpretation challenged or even questioned by a member of the congregation or Bible study. For these congregations, the Bible contains the direct words of God, which should be interpreted and taught by a trusted religious professional.

Finally, biblical Inerrancy is held by slightly over three-fourths of the lay members surveyed (Table 1). When asked to respond to the statement, "*A Christian must believe every word of the Bible is without error to be a true believer*," 96.1 percent of

²⁷² Brower Survey, Galilee Methodist and Central Presbyterian Churches, Cheonan City, South Korea, 2014.

elders agreed, along with 85.2 percent of family aged persons, and 68.5 percent of students.²⁷³ The student group had significantly more “no opinion” responses, suggesting a shifting understanding of this doctrine, from either doctrinal ignorance or rejection. Inerrancy is still the dominant biblical ideology, but adherence to this doctrine may be changing. The Bible’s authority is derived from its strong ideological connection to the voice of God among Korean Evangelical laity, but unlike American Evangelicals, they do not seem to directly link it to other doctrines, such as literalism, and even inerrancy is shifting in acceptance, though is still the dominant understanding.

Biblical hermeneutics has been a central topic for this study, and this was reflected in the survey I conducted. I tried to probe more with these questions, both to gather more data, but also to test some of the social boundaries I had uncovered through all of my observations. Because Korean culture has a strong verticality apparent within its language, as well as familial and official systems of authority, it can be quite unnerving for a Korean to be directly questioned about challenging authority. The anonymous survey gave me an opportunity to ask questions that indirectly problematized the authoritative place of church leaders, with the hope that answers would be offered honestly and openly. Table 2 below contains the survey statements and responses concerning biblical hermeneutics.

²⁷³ Brower Survey, Galilee Methodist and Central Presbyterian Churches, Cheonan City, South Korea, 2014.

Table 2. Survey Questions Pertaining to Biblical Hermeneutics.²⁷⁴

Statement	Agree	Disagree	No Opinion/Abstain
1) Any person can read the Bible and understand what it means.	71.60%	15.98%	12.42%
2) Special education or training is required to understand the Bible correctly.	81.06%	10.65%	8.28%
3) A Pastor can read the Bible better than a regular church member.	66.57%	14.20%	19.24%
4) Reading the Bible in Korean is just as good or accurate as reading the Bible in the original Hebrew or Greek.	35.21%	29.29%	35.51%
5) The Holy Spirit will help Christians to read the Bible properly.	91.12%	0.60%	8.29%

Each question is representative of a core part of hermeneutics connected to authority in this study: 1) perspicuity; 2) intellectualism; 3) professionalism; 4) language issues; and 5) influence of the Holy Spirit. Let's take the first three together, as at first they seem to conflict. Among the Evangelicals surveyed, the Bible is an understandable text for general readers, but there is still room for better or worse readings. Unlike their American counterparts, Korean Evangelicals who responded here were largely in favor of special education and training regarding biblical interpretation, and two-thirds affirmed that pastors were more equipped to read the Bible correctly than regular church members (Table 2). Far from displaying anti-intellectualism, they favor intellectual training and qualifications. Confucian cultural influence and the historic preference for religious professionals are possible explanations for this difference. The large majority of Korean

²⁷⁴ Brower Survey, Galilee Methodist and Central Presbyterian Churches, Cheonan City, South Korea, 2014.

Evangelicals desire educated, socially approved, and denominationally ordained religious leaders. Interestingly, there was not a consistent understanding of the impact biblical languages and translation issues have on Bible reading. Some felt reading a Korean translation was just fine. Others did not have a strong opinion on the matter, and still others responded that Korean translations were not as accurate. The most consistent agreement was in response to the statement claiming that the Holy Spirit would help believers read the Bible properly. Regardless of generation or denominational affiliation, every category responded with more than 85 percent affirmation to this statement.²⁷⁵

Some questions did have larger variance among respondents, particularly when divided by generation. For example, in response to the statement, “*Any person can read the Bible and understand what it means,*” which measured biblical perspicuity, elders overwhelmingly responded in the affirmative, at 92.2 percent, but the family age and student categories responded with much less assurance of this idea, at 67.8 percent and 67.3 percent, respectively.²⁷⁶ Another area of difference was in the privileged interpretive power of the pastor. Students were much less affirming of the statement, “*A pastor can read the Bible better than a regular church member.*” Only slightly over half of students, 54.8 percent, agreed with this statement, whereas nearly all, 94 percent, of elder respondents affirmed it.²⁷⁷ These figures track very well with relatively recent Korean history and the growing negative perception of church leaders in contemporary Korea. Older Korean Evangelicals would have been more directly influenced by the events of the early and mid-twentieth century, and will have garnered both a preference for strong

²⁷⁵ Brower Survey, Galilee Methodist and Central Presbyterian Churches, Cheonan City, South Korea, 2014.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

human authority, and the importance of the Bible to each believer. Younger Korean Evangelicals hold that special training is required to read the Bible well, but they are less trusting of pastors, as they have grown up among a culture that is less trusting of Evangelical leadership in general.

That is one possible interpretation of the generational difference, but it is important to remember that the younger generation of Korean Evangelicals is still more similar to the previous two than it is different, in all categories. Another interpretation of the data could be that the younger generation simply has not developed strong convictions on certain theological or doctrinal matters. This would explain the larger increase in “no opinion” responses compared to the smaller growth of disagreeing responses. Regardless of interpretation, there are demonstrable differences between generations concerning their approach to biblical interpretation and the place of church leadership, and the differences reflect a turn away from traditional understandings.

I noticed a number of teaching and rhetorical practices while attending Evangelical congregations in Korea that may provide further context to these figures. Both churches I attended produced their own Bible study guides and “quiet time” devotional pamphlets which were written primarily by the head pastors of each congregation. During Sunday Service, the pastor preaching at the Presbyterian church would ask the congregation to recite, by memory, the weeks study verse, and most of the time the sermons were connected in some way to these teaching materials. I never attended an event, whether Bible study, evangelism meeting, or ministry training time, where a pastor was not the one leading discussions on the Bible. Lay leaders performed many tasks, but interpreting the Bible was not one of them. Pastors also rarely referenced

any sort of interpretive methodology. In sermons or lessons, they would use phrasing quite similar to that found in American Evangelical hermeneutics; they would say, “God is speaking to you through the Bible,” or “God says,” or “Jesus is saying,” to rhetorically position the interpretation that followed.

The power of the pastors’ preaching in a Korean Evangelical church should not be underestimated. The hermeneutics they employ, and the rhetoric they use to communicate their theological views is almost never challenged. The survey showed that many Korean Evangelicals expect their pastors to be holier than the average church member, and that their position of authority is viewed as a calling from God, and so it should not be surprising that many Korean Evangelicals believe these extra special people deserve a very high level of obedience, particularly regarding their biblical rhetoric and religious pronouncements. In response to the statement, “*Church members should always agree with their pastors on Bible topics or Christian issues,*” 45.6 percent agreed, and only 26.3 percent disagreed.²⁷⁸ This may seem like a lower affirmation than some of the other survey questions, but I should note the extreme nature of this question. In translating it to Korean I made sure to make the emphasis on the word “always” as apparent as possible. This question was not asking whether or not church members should normally follow their pastors in religious matters. It was asking if they should “always” do so, without question. That nearly half of the respondents believed this level of obedience to be proper, and that only one-fourth directly disagreed, expresses rather well the power of hierarchical religious authority in Korean Evangelical culture, and informs my argument concerning the power of pastoral rhetoric on the Bible. When Korean Evangelical pastors

²⁷⁸ Brower Survey, Galilee Methodist and Central Presbyterian Churches, Cheonan City, South Korea, 2014.

speak for the Bible, or for God, their congregations nearly always accept them as spokesmen for the divine without question.

Though Korean Evangelicals and American Evangelicals approach human church authority quite differently, and their understanding of biblical ideology and hermeneutics vary in a number of ways, both lead towards a biblical rhetoric that prizes a singular, “proper” reading of the text. What makes a reading “proper” however is defined quite differently between the two cultural expressions. Like American pastors, Korean Evangelical pastors effectively speak “for” the Bible; their sermons are as much the “word of God” as the text itself, maybe even more so due to the cultural stigmas against challenging authority. Their control over biblical interpretation extends beyond Sunday sermons, pervading any contact lay members have with the text. Pastor-created guides are used in Bible studies, and in individual believers’ personal devotional times. The main difference between American Evangelical biblical rhetoric and Korean Evangelical biblical rhetoric is the degree to which it is socially acknowledged. American Evangelical pastors must mask their training and education, and offer their personal readings to an interpretive discourse that wishes to receive them as, “just what the Bible plainly says.” Meanwhile, Korean pastors are required to publicly display their theological and academic credentials, and offer their biblical interpretations as powerful, rock-solid truths which they bring out from the text because of their special position, training, and most importantly, calling from God. In both cases, the Bible is the locus of power and ultimate authority, but it is adapted to the rhetorical preferences developed within each cultural discourse.

The Bible itself, the book, is treated similarly by Korean Evangelicals and American Evangelicals. It is carried by the faithful to church services, read in coffee shops, held aloft by street preachers, and given special settings in believers' homes. During the church services I attended, there were Bibles available in the pews for attendees to use, but many Koreans brought their own personal Bibles with them. Many of these Bibles had quality leather cases with zippers for protection, and were filled with highlighting and notes from years of use. My observations gave me opportunities to experience first-hand the power of the Bible's physical presence in a Korean context. On two separate occasions I attended midday women's evangelism events with pastoral teams. These events were styled almost like birthday parties might be in America, with balloons, finger food, dessert, and lots of group games.

At the event on May, 5th, 2014,²⁷⁹ we went to an apartment owned by a church member, and this woman was our host for the day. There were about twenty women present for the meeting, and about five or six were guests who were not members of the church. The only men present (besides me) were the four pastors who had been invited, including the head pastor. The host and a few of her friends led the event for most of the day, singing songs with the group, playing games and giving out small prizes. Many of the games and songs had a purposefully young style, including lots of clapping, or paired actions akin to what Westerners might think of as a form of "pattycake," and the quiz questions were mostly silly with a lot of word play. This party atmosphere went on for about one hour, and then one of the younger pastors started a short video clip on the television which showed a fictional short story about a train track operator, his son, and an out of control train. Without getting into all the details, the short film displayed a

²⁷⁹ Brower observation notes, Galilee Methodist Church, Cheonan City, South Korea, 5/5/2014.

tragic event in which the train track operator had to sacrifice his little son in order to save a train full of laughing, happy, yet oblivious, people. This video was used by the young pastor to describe the sacrifice of Christ.

Following this the head pastor finally stood to address everyone, and for the first time I saw a Bible used at the event. The head pastor had held it to his side the entire time, for over an hour, and it was obvious that the presence of the scripture at his side marked him as a man with something special to say. The hostess and her friends had been speaking all day, members of the group had sang from the front, and even the younger pastor had stood up near the TV to command the attention of everyone, but the only time the room was utterly quiet and attentive was when the head pastor spoke. The guests even seemed to know what was happening, as they too began to listen earnestly to the pastor's preaching and reading from the Bible, even though they had never met him before. Something about the Bible's physical presence at his side made him different than everyone else, signaled that he was important, and worthy of complete attention.

This is not so different from what one might expect in an Evangelical Bible study or outreach event in America. There too, holding the Bible, or reading from it is an important act. The difference in Korea was more one of degree than of kind. Koreans tend to physically and vocally express the respect they give to the text. They read every verse assigned without skipping, they sit up, they read with a stressed accent, and with a different vocal pattern than normal speech. This applies to every reader nearly all the time, not primarily pastors speaking from pulpits (who often use special speaking patterns or styles in America). The Bible, as an item, has an impact on Korean Evangelicals' social, verbal, and physical practices; it intensifies them. To many Korean

Evangelicals the Bible is a collection of the very words of God, and so the respect they give to the divine voice's physical manifestation seems appropriate, and that this respect also extends to those who carry the Bible, who speak for it, and who teach them the "proper" reading, is consistent. These things all taken together, biblical ideology, biblical hermeneutic, biblical rhetoric, and Bible as artifact, construct a contextually informed understanding of the way Korean Evangelicals use, treat, and share the Christian scriptures. I will combine this understanding with the Korean Evangelical social forms of power that were discussed, in order to organize a well-informed perspective on the discourse of authority in Korean Evangelicalism, and the problems it now faces.

Korean Evangelical Problems of Authority

The Korean Evangelical story and the discourse of authority it contains began long before any Christians set foot on the Korean peninsula. In the second half of this study I have gone over much of the religious history of South Korea so as to gain a fuller understanding by which to view modern day Evangelical social and biblical practices in the country. I have brought up sociologists and historians who have offered interpretations of the way Korea's multi-religious history and current milieu affect the practices of conservative Korean Evangelical churches. Looking at the colonial period showed just how connected Western (mainly American) and Korean Evangelicalism were at the latter's infant stages, and reviewing major historical events and important persons from Korean Evangelicalism's unprecedented twentieth century growth has revealed some of the points of departure between the two expressions. Along with political and economic changes, Christianity pushed Korea along the road to modernity, and it was a

major part of their identity formation during that process. It offered spiritual certainty and security when they were stricken with physical uncertainty and danger. Evangelical Christianity has truly become an indigenized religion of the Republic of Korea, and a discourse of authority unique to it has emerged over the past one hundred and twenty years.

The power of this discourse has molded Korean Evangelicalism into a nationalistic, authoritative, communal culture, with an overwhelmingly conservative political leaning. Due to many hardships over the past century, as well as lingering influence from previous religious ideologies, an emphasis on the material benefits of Christian belief is a commonly recognized aspect of Korean Evangelicalism. Noticeably, leadership styles have grown from and accommodated this emphasis. Korean Evangelicals desire *kibok* (blessing) in their lives right now, as much as they look forward to eternity. Their pastors are seen as specially called by God to act as intermediaries between the more common church members and the divine will. These leaders have received years of education and training for that calling, which Korean Evangelicals greatly respect, and it is because of their calling and education that they are to be obediently trusted in matters of biblical interpretation and devotional practices. Pastors offer their congregations a religious narrative that is unquestionably Evangelical, but it has been infused with the Korean historical, cultural, and political conscience. Unlike their America counterparts, Korean pastors do not have to obscure the fact that they are interpreting the Bible for their followers. That is exactly what lay members expect and require from their religious professionals, and they would almost never think of questioning or challenging these holy leaders. As a group, both pastors and laity

believe that Korea has a special blessing from *Hananim*; in their opinion God has blessed the country with incredible economic growth and brought revival many times to their land. In response to this divine favor they express fervent devotion and commitment.

Though conservative Korean Evangelicals have accomplished much, they are now experiencing internal and external problems that emerge from cultural conceptions of power, an unsettled theological understanding of biblical authority, and a social hierarchy which strongly privileges leaders while it ensures that the laity remains without critical biblical education. The discourse of authority in Korea encourages a business-like church structure, pervasive conformity to the older, male, elite point of view, and an unquestioned separation between religious professionals and normal believers. This situation is highly limiting to healthy criticism of anyone in a superior position, and even more so of church systems as a whole. Lay leaders lack sufficient access to biblical education beyond what their pastors and churches offer them and even if they were able to acquire this, cultural stigmas make it extremely uncomfortable to ever challenge those “above” them. Competition for members, a focus on church size and growth, and inter-church conflict has become common. Instead of critically examining the discursive problems that affect Evangelicalism in Korea, church leaders use the topics discussed in this chapter to accuse one another of error.

Greater Korean society is moving away from Evangelical Christianity due to the recurrent ethical shortcomings of its leaders, the internal focus of churches that appear more like businesses than they do houses of worship, and a perceived lack of spiritual sincerity. Non-Christian Koreans have spoken openly, expressed vividly in popular culture, about their lack of appreciation for some of the exclusivist practices of Korean

Evangelicals, and they see little difference between Evangelicals and secular Koreans that should impress them. If the survey data from this project holds true for any significant portion of Korean Evangelical young people, then there is also a shift happening internally. Younger Evangelicals in Korea are not as beholden to religious professionalism, and this could create further decline in church commitment in future generations if the discourse of power is not seriously examined.

Korean Evangelicalism was a modernizing, people-focused, progressive religious movement in the early 20th century, but it has been usurped by a discourse which protects the status quo, supports those in power, and offers a worldview based in practicality, strict professionalism, and highly organized social stratification. As with the American situation, the claim that the Bible is the sole theological authority in Korean Evangelicalism is an untenable and untrue assertion. This is the primary problem of authority in conservative Evangelical Korean Christianity.

A MULTI-CULTURAL CRITICISM OF AUTHORITY IN CONSERVATIVE EVANGELICALISM

“The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.” - John 17:22-23 (NASB)

The prayer attributed to Jesus in the 17th chapter of the Gospel of John is in many ways both the spiritual and intellectual catalyst for this study. As an academic, the dissonance between the central hope of Jesus’s prayer, the unity of His followers, and the current divisive state of Evangelicalism in both South Korea and the United States pressed me to investigate its historical, social, literary and ideological causes. As an Evangelical Christian, I have desired to better understand these issues in order to clearly articulate the depth of the problems of authority now facing those who claim Evangelical Christian faith. In order to achieve these aims, I began this study with a discussion on theory, especially about the emergence of power from social discourse, the need for self and communal reflection on meaning creation, and the importance of recognizing the influence of the reader in textual exposition. These discussions helped to construct a lens by which I reviewed the relevant history of two of the world’s largest nationalized expressions of conservative Evangelical Christianity, that of the United States and the Republic of Korea. Lessons from each country’s unique history informed my criticisms of the social systems of authority and the supporting literary methods that emerged from each expression. Through this process I was able to sift the differences and similarities between the American and Korean expressions of Evangelicalism.

Both conceive of the Bible as the divinely inspired, inerrant, direct “word of God,” and claim it to be their final authority in all matters of doctrine and practice. Because of this biblical ideology, it effectively has the same authority as God, and this has empowered hermeneutical methods which favor determinate, unchallengeable interpretations of the biblical text championed by religious leaders who then become mediums for the biblical “voice.” This ideology has been so strong in the American situation, that when it mixed with cultural values such as populism and anti-classism, the act of interpretation by religious leaders is nearly always masked, or covered-up in preference for a biblical rhetoric that only allows the Bible itself to “speak.” Conversely, Korean Evangelicals, who prefer religious professionals and carry hierarchical social values, have discursively constructed a biblical rhetoric that gives nearly unchallenged authority to pastoral interpretations which the laity obediently accepts. Each national expression has a culturally defined understanding of what is “proper” for biblical interpretation, but neither is able to criticize this understanding without at the same time questioning the core assertion of Evangelical Christianity, that the Bible is the final authority.

Interestingly, some aspects of Evangelical Christianity that many scholars have assumed to be consistent may not be. Literalism is a shibboleth of American Evangelicalism, and though it is at times mentioned in Korean Evangelical discourse, it is not nearly as powerful of a religious identifier. Biblical perspicuity, the assertion that all believers can read and understand the Bible *equally*, has been shown in this study to be a rather American trait. Korean Evangelicals agree that every believer can read the Bible and understand it, but not to the same extent as their American counterparts. For them,

pastors and religious leaders are specially trained and educated to interpret the Bible in a way that common believers are unable.

The social arena was also a location for many similarities and differences in the discursive emergence of authority. Evangelicalism in America has been experiencing a shift away from denominationalism towards a more cultural, literary, and organic community. Around 150 years ago, novels, commentaries, Bible study guides, Christian periodicals and Sunday school curriculums began filling in the gaps left by a lack of localized church communities. In modern times, forums, podcasts, blogs, Christian celebrities, and other broader forms of religious community are re-interpreting denominational and creedal structures. In Korea, particular pastors, especially those who work in “mega” churches, have garnered immense amounts of power and cultural influence. A large part of Korean Christian literature is produced internally, by pastors for their congregations, and so Evangelicals become more and more beholden to the authority of local religious leaders. Though Noll was discussing the Evangelical approach to the scripture, his comment about needing to develop a “theology of criticism” is equally applicable in the case of socio-cultural locations of authority. Both expressions continue to assert that the Bible is the sole authority of their religious movement, while ignoring, or worse, masking, the massive impact that history, culture, and social values have had on their conceptions of authority.

My goal has been to reveal the discursive web of social, cultural, and literary factors which override the Bible as the final authority for conservative Evangelical communities. In both American and Korean Evangelicalism, I have shown that many factors influence the conversation on authority beyond just the Christian scripture.

Because of this, I reassert that to claim the Bible has been the final authority for these communities is demonstrably untenable, and expresses a lack of critical thought applied to the Evangelical socio-cultural production of power. More importantly however, I further assert that the lack of engagement with the problems of authority in our Evangelical communities has led to a harmful, exclusivist rhetoric that has impaired the Church. Instead of dealing with these issues in charity and unity, we have developed a cyclical pattern of biblical one-upmanship; particular churches, powerful pastors, or each consecutive generation accuses the others of “improperly” reading the Bible, claiming that they, finally, have come upon the correct reading (attended by the biblical rhetoric that is proper for their cultural expression). In many cases this has created opportunities for persons who seek power to gain it by exploiting this situation. Echoing John Williamson Nevin, I would argue that the social and biblical discourse of Evangelical Christianity has become “so many wires, that lead back at last into the hands of a few leading spirits, enabling them to wield a true hierarchical despotism,” that has bound “Protestants once more to human authority, not as embodied in the church indeed, but as holding in the form of mere private judgment and private will.” His prediction, which seems to have been largely ignored, has in many ways come to pass.

As a way of suggesting further study, I would like to offer two ideas which this project has brought to my attention, and to reflect on some of the ways it has spoken to my own religious perspective. I have mentioned two concepts from time to time during this study, *certainty* and *narrative*, which I believe are possible areas for further exploration into questions concerning authority, particularly in religious settings. One of the great attractions of the discourse of conservative Evangelicalism in its current state is

that it claims to offer believers a simplistic sense of *ultimate certainty* about their spiritual situation. The Bible is the very voice of God, unquestionable, literal, inerrant, accessible in text form, etc., and those who claim to speak for the Bible do so with pronounced conviction and fervency. It is easy to see how this situation would inspire confidence in believers, so long as they stay within the discourse presented. To do so, Evangelicals must accept the *ultimate narrative* presented by the discourse. This is made easier for each expression by wrapping the narrative in cultural rhetoric that makes it tickle the ear by comfortably affirming other deeply held convictions (e.g., political agendas, national or cultural pride, economic position, etc.). The danger of ultimate certainty and ultimate narratives is that they open doors to significant power for those individuals who are able to achieve even a small portion of mastery over the discourse, and especially if they can hide that fact from their followers. These discourse influencers become Nevin's "leading spirits" who impose their private will disguised as the divine will. A criticism then of certainty and narrative-production seems appropriate as a next step in understanding the way authority emerges in ideological communities on a philosophical level. It could also apply to forms of human community beyond the religious, such as political or cultural movements.

In the end, I would argue that many people desire an ultimate, or true, explanation of human existence. That is one of the foundations of religion, but it is expressed in other ways as well. Literary critics discuss the true narrative, physicists the unified theory, philosophers the ultimate Good. Evangelical Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the author of the true narrative, the creator of theories yet to be imagined, and source of the Good. They believe the Bible is an inspired collection of texts that contain the greatest

testament to the person of Jesus. Nothing in this study challenges these beliefs, but I hope that the arguments offered here would encourage a deep questioning of the way we Evangelicals have allowed culture, politics, and national predilections to affect us. Great harm has been perpetrated against those in the Church as well as those outside it because we have failed to intellectually scrutinize our systems of authority, which are often patterned after the world, instead of the teachings of Jesus. A good way to start might be to take back the Bible from those who have set it on a pedestal next to God in order that they might hide behind it usurping its authority. Once an ecumenically edifying dialogue is re-opened, we can read the Bible together with the humility, sophistication, excitement, and charity that such a uniquely powerful text deserves. When the problems of authority in conservative Evangelical discourse are internally recognized, Evangelicals can begin to work out understandings of authority that are more intellectually rigorous, socially transparent, and beneficial to the work of the Church.

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