Restoring Eden: Women in the Age of Postmodern Evangelical Reform

by

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Class of 2013

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors from the College of Social Studies
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Acknowledgments

I complete this thesis with great thanks to Professor Richard Elphick, who has taught, mentored, rebuked, counseled, corrected, and inspired me since the morning of my first day at Wesleyan when I showed up in his office as a randomly assigned freshman advisee and from which I now leave as his senior thesis student. More than any other person, Prof. Elphick is responsible for enriching my Wesleyan experience, helping me turn seemingly insurmountable challenges into great opportunity, showing me how bitterness crumbles beneath the power of forgiveness, and demonstrating how wise leaders respond to crisis with the clearest of minds and purest of motivations, regardless of circumstance.

I would never have dared down the path that led me through the College of Social Studies and this thesis without my mother, who showed me the kind of woman I could be, and my father, who expected nothing less of me. My dad began teaching church history and theology to me as a little girl, planting in me a love so instinctive that I almost did not realize it was an academic research interest. He started lending me his books in middle school and has lived the writing of this senior thesis vicariously through me as I take the ideas we always discussed one step further.

Finally, I would like to thank Wellspring Church, Dunfee Missionary Church, and the many patient individuals who have counseled and supported me throughout the last year. Chief among them are, my friend and colleague Mike McKinniss, whose skill in taking half-formed ideas and suggesting ways to complete them played a critical role in the formation of my argument and whose personal interest in the topic served as a great encouragement when I faced problems and paradoxes that I
thought could never be resolved; the Rev. Dr. Kathryn Greene-McCreight whose reading recommendations constantly reminded me of the vastness of the academic field I am studying and who represents everything I hope to one day become; InterVarsity’s Central Connecticut Area Director, Barbara Ettinger; Mickie Dame and the tutors in the College of Social Studies; my peers in the College of Social Studies; and my friends in the Wesleyan Christian Fellowship.
Introduction
A New Evangelicalism

A passionate and disappointed, young evangelical pastor recently wrote in the New York Times, “evangelicalism as we knew it [emphasis added] in the 20th century is ending.” His claim echoes the sentiment of the primary Christian research organizations in the United States, academia, and the news media. As the mountain of quantitative evidence indicates—from the rising number of “nones,” that is, those who do not associate themselves to any kind of spirituality, to the decline of the Religious Right and the growing exodus of young people from evangelical churches and associations, he is correct.1 However, a new, twenty-first century evangelicalism has arisen, and its growing strength, influence, and impact is undeniable.

The twentieth-century evangelicalism described in the Times editorial and the kind of evangelicalism emerging in the twenty-first-century are distinct. They are primarily set apart by the attitudes and mindsets of the people they are trying to reach, namely the Millennial generation and those accepting the postmodern worldview that Millennials embrace. Defying the expectations of some who have noted the decline of evangelicalism, the pews, coffee shops, and rented elementary school cafeterias of growing postmodern evangelical movements are filled with these Millennials, singles,

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and other people typically differ from what was once conceptualized as an average American parishioner—a member of a socially conservative family.\(^2\)

The Millennials are a young-adult demographic taking over the workforce, moving to the cities, and abandoning the evangelical Christianity of their parents’ generation.\(^3\) Their postmodern, secularized and pluralistic worldview replaces the rationalism, reasoning, and absolute truths of the Enlightenment with skepticism. They pursue meaning through narratives instead of logic and value communities over individuals.\(^4\)

Because these characteristics contrast with twentieth-century approaches to faith, evangelical Christianity has been forced to reexamine how it relates and communicates with secular cultures. Through this reconsideration, many evangelical movements that are sensitive to the demographic changes are making the necessary adjustments and growing. However, despite the momentum that these movements are gaining, they have no major theological differences with the earlier modern evangelicalism that is said to be “ending.” Evangelical movements that reach Millennials and those that do not both preach the same core teachings: a redemptive message of God’s creation; humanity’s fall; humanity’s restoration to God and his


creation through the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ; and Jesus’ second coming.\(^5\)

Since modern and postmodern evangelicalism teach the same gospel, the differences between them would appear to be stylistic—postmodern evangelicals relate better to the secular public than modern evangelicals do, because their communication styles appeal better to secular cultures. Practically speaking, this includes everything from musical styles to decorative banners and the type of building that the groups meet in. While much of U.S. Protestantism has been characterized as de-emphasizing the arts, this does not accurately describe much of postmodern evangelicalism, which incorporates the arts into its teachings and ministries.\(^6\) Also, in appealing to the narrative and technological preferences of postmodernists, some evangelical movements have incorporated story telling to their teaching styles and rely more heavily on digital communication than on traditional print media.\(^7\)

Another plausible explanation for the emergence of postmodern evangelicalism is doctrinal change. This argument supposes that postmodern evangelicals either consciously or subconsciously adopt their positions on certain “non-essential” issues of belief that allow them to maintain secular relevancy without compromising the core beliefs of their faith. In this way, less popular beliefs are


\(^{7}\) Keller, “Preaching the Gospel to a Post-Modern World,” 33; Andrew Springman, email message to author, April 3, 2013. Andrew is the Director of Worship and Information Technologies at Wellspring Church in Berlin, Connecticut, which is a church 500+ in size whose leaders serve as evangelical religious leaders in the state.
removed as roadblocks to the growth and spread of the Christian faith. However, this explanation, like that which attributes stylistic change as reason for the emergence of postmodern evangelicalism, is insufficient.

Citing Bible verses, sometimes the exact same ones, evangelicals disagree among themselves, as Christians always have. Among the most popular and controversial of their doctrinal debates concerns the roles of women—in the home, in the church, and in the workplace.\(^8\) One view, the complementarian, argues that men and women fulfill different roles in marriage. These roles are believed to be of the same worth, but the man is to be the self-sacrificial leader, putting the good of his family above all else. The woman is the affirming co-laborer, who supports her husband and submits to his leadership. Outside the home, her role matches her role in marriage; she is called by God to use her skills and abilities to serve him, but ultimate authority and responsibility does not rest with her. It belongs to a male leader. Single women, though not able to practice this authority model at home, are held to the same standard as married women in their roles in the church and in the world.\(^9\) The alternate view, that of egalitarianism, asserts that men and women fulfill different and equally valuable roles in marriage, but that there is no God-given, pre-ordained leadership structure in the family. In the absence of such norms, all women are

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\(^8\) One of the most commonly cited passages on the roles of women that is used to argue different points is Ephesians 5:22-25, with verse 21 sometimes being included. Rick McKinniss, *Equally Yoked: What the Bible Really Teaches About God’s Ideal for the Genders*, (USA: Xulon Press, 2009), 224-240.

encouraged to pursue whatever roles, in leadership or otherwise, that they believe themselves to best suited for in their homes, their churches, and the workplace.¹⁰

Both complementarianism and egalitarianism have thrived and flourished in postmodern evangelicalism, even though most secular Americans deem the hierarchical structure of complementarianism discriminatory. The success of complementarianism defies the simplistic analysis that evangelicals are surviving, even thriving, by merely changing “with the times.” It would be possible for complementarian evangelical movements to package their unpopular beliefs in tasteful ways so as to appeal to secular cultures. In this way, they would not need to change doctrinally, just stylistically. However, even a cursory study of complementarian evangelical movements in the United States proves that they do not attempt to do so.

Senior leaders of the foremost complementary organization in the country, the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, cite the predominance of egalitarianism among evangelicals as a reason for becoming more outspoken about their complementarian beliefs. If complementarians sought to keep their unpopular views quiet, the movement would not so publicly challenge egalitarianism. However, because complementarian movements are, like most egalitarian evangelical movements, forthright about their beliefs on gender roles, the rise of

complementarian evangelicalism with the Millennials cannot be explained by mere stylistic or doctrinal change. Complementarian ideas are too unpopular.

Twenty-first century evangelicalism has grown with the Millennial generation, for whom women’s issues are important. However, the tension and conflict between complementarian and egalitarian evangelical movements are not derived from Millennial approval or disapproval of their views. The movements themselves are capable of growing regardless of secular opinion on this doctrinal issue. The reasons why evangelical movements are able to successfully engage Millennials, regardless of their complementarian or egalitarian position, is critically linked to the core of their belief system—the Christian gospel.

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Part I. Christian Belief

Women and the Gospel after the Fall
Chapter 1. Evangelicalism and the Church

Dividing and defining who influenced who is a tedious process, especially given the doctrinal diversity of American evangelicalism. However, by clarifying central biblical teaching essential to one’s faith from more secondary doctrinal issues and how evangelical communities apply their beliefs, a clear definition of evangelicalism emerges and the importance of various differences among evangelicals, all other Christians, and non-Christians is explained. According to the historian David Bebbington, evangelicalism is a Protestant movement that places a fourfold emphasis on:

- conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed;
- activism, the expression of the gospel in effort;
- biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible;
- what may be called crucicentrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.\(^{12}\)

This model, known as the Bebbington quadrilateral, avoids the pitfalls included in many definitions of evangelicalism that marry the word to specific characteristics of a particular era. Historians often use the word to refer to churches born in the Reformation of the sixteenth-and seventeenth-centuries. By the eighteenth-century, evangelicalism had become synonymous with religious movements that were “of the gospel,” meaning that they were gospel-preaching congregations associated with revivalism and the Great Awakening.\(^{13}\) In the later centuries, the term took on an increasingly institutionalized connotation via church denominations that used it,


\(^{13}\) *Ibid.*, 8.
although evangelicalism was never uniquely associated to any single specific movement.\textsuperscript{14}

Not even fundamentalism, a strain of ultra-conservative Christianity that emerged in the 1920s and gained prominence for its avowed loyalty to scripture could claim exclusive rights to the word “evangelical.” The fundamentalists emerged as the opposing party to the increasingly popular liberal theology that challenged orthodox Christianity. But while one needed to be an evangelical to be a fundamentalist, one did not need to be a fundamentalist to be an evangelical, meaning that the fundamentalists could not claim a monopoly on evangelicalism.

Jesus’ final instruction to his disciples was to “go and make disciples of all nations.”\textsuperscript{15} This “Great Commission” ushered in the era of the early church. According to church history as recorded in the book Acts, many miracles were performed and the church rapidly expanded throughout Israel and abroad under the influence of the Holy Spirit, who was promised by Jesus and received by the disciples on the day of Pentecost.\textsuperscript{16} This growing community of Christ followers is said to have walked under the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit, taking Jesus’ instruction to heart, and leading each other and new believers from the time of Jesus’s life on earth to the age before his second coming. The hallmark of their work according to Acts was intense effort toward the fulfillment of the Great Commission.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 1.
\textsuperscript{16} Acts 2 (NIV).
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
The movement of the early church has since expanded, encompassing the entirety of the globe, manifesting itself in tradition and art, powerfully altering the lives of millions of people, and radically changing the history of the world, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. As in the first century, the church is made of flawed individuals, who, captivated by the self-sacrificial love expressed through what they believe to be Jesus’ atoning sacrifice on the cross, accept eternal restoration with God through the gift of salvation, which is something they believe to be freely made available to them through Jesus’ death and resurrection. These disciples live as imitating followers of Jesus’ life and teaching.¹⁸

The ensuing chaos and conflict involving the Christian Church over the last several hundred years, resulting in war, division, and differing representations of Christ, as well as civil differences in theological opinions, different teaching and worship styles, and tensions arising from the practical challenges in large group organization, has resulted in many individual and independent groups of churches—Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox. Even though these local bodies range in size from one or two small families meeting in a living room to multi-thousand person mega-churches, by definition, the holy catholic church is still the body of all Christian believers, not a building, a program, or a denomination.¹⁹

By this definition, Christians gathered on a Sunday morning, students studying the Bible together, families thanking God for their food, and a volunteer serving the homeless at a rescue mission could all be part of the “church,” even

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¹⁹ Catholic refers to the universality of the church, not the Roman Catholic Church.
though the word “church” does not necessarily call to mind such an all-encompassing definition. Therefore, in order to avoid confusion between “church,” as it is often understood and “church” as I have just defined it, groups that meet the qualifications for “churches” will be referred to as “Christian movements” and ones that are part of “the evangelical church” will henceforth be called “evangelical movements.”

Based off a model borrowed with permission from Charles Twombly, religion and philosophy professor emeritus of Wesleyan College, Georgia, is a structure of Christian belief that separates “core beliefs” from issues deemed less important by Christians. This is not to say that, for example, beliefs regarding the ordination of clergy are unimportant, but that ordination is less important than salvation. This

*Figure 1.1

Model of Christian Belief

- **Gospel**
- **Doctrine**
- **Practice**

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20 The definitions I am using for gospel, doctrine, and practice come from Prof. Twombly’s model. However, he calls gospel “dogma” and practice “theology.” Charles Twombly, email message to author, October 30, 2012.
model also shows how a teaching such as Romans 12:2, whose meaning and interpretation is generally uncontested by Christian movements manifests itself in practice in a number of ways. In the passage, the Apostle Paul says, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Though two Christian movements may agree that Christ’s followers are to be set apart, how they actually do this ranges widely. Consider, for example, the difference between Amish communities and a congregation in midtown Manhattan.

The core of orthodox Christianity, which is shared by Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Eastern Christians, is the Christian gospel. While a wide birth separates these Christian groups from each other on a many biblical questions, even movements that do not recite the creeds in worship liturgy believe the statements found in the early creeds to be core truths and foundational principles of the Christian faith. Traditionally, the Nicene Creed, finalized at the First Council of Constantinople in 381, and the Apostles’ Creed from 390 are recognized for these purposes. These concise statements comprise the foundational beliefs from which all doctrine is derived. As C.S. Lewis put in the title of his most famous apologetic work, this gospel is Mere Christianity. Given its importance for other Christian belief and practice, a contradiction with the gospel is often enough for an individual or group to be labeled as heretical.

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21 Romans 12:2 (NIV).
24 Twombly, email message to author.
According to Twombly’s model, doctrine is the next level of belief, built upon the gospel. While these doctrines are not so essential to the Christian faith that to contradict them necessarily makes one a heretic, they play a major role in informing Christians’ behavior and frequently spark lively debates among Christians. This diversity of thought among Christians is represented in figure 1.1, because doctrine circle is larger than the gospel circle. Doctrine extends from the gospel in a way that allows for a certain amount of difference in opinion. The differences arise from questions of scriptural interpretation that are not included in the gospel. Often, Christian movements outline their doctrine in confessional statements or statements of faith. Common topics included in these statements are eschatology, justification by faith or works, sanctification, and the nature of sacraments.

The final realm of Christian belief is practice. The gospel and doctrine establish what one believes, but practice is the act of turning one’s beliefs into livable practices. As represented in figure 1.1, practice is the outmost circle in the realm of Christian belief. Its size indicates that there is the greatest variance among Christian bodies at this level. This variance is primarily accounted for by doctrinal differences among Christian movements, which beget different practices. However, personal preferences and circumstances also have an affect on practice. For example, how an egalitarian committee chair runs a mixed-gender committee in twenty-first century America may be different than how he or she would run it in eighteenth-century Britain, even though the chair could maintain the exact same interpretation of Scripture. This process of adapting one’s beliefs to culture is contextualization, an important theme in explaining how the church copes with secular change, and
ultimately, why postmodern evangelicalism is indeed thriving in spite of America’s secularization.
Chapter 2. Contextualization and Culture

The popular Christian author and New York City pastor Tim Keller declares that "contextualization is not 'giving people what they want.'; instead, it is “giving God's answers (which they may not want) to questions they are asking and in a form they can comprehend.”25 Put another way, "to contextualize the gospel means removing cultural and linguistic impediments to the gospel presentation so only the offense of the cross remains.”26 As hundreds of thousands of Christian churches throughout the world demonstrate, the gospel message that Christian movements share is universal—extending to peoples of all nations, ethnicities, and backgrounds, but despite its relatively constant content, it is presented and received differently across cultures.

All means by which it is possible to teach, explain, demonstrate, or share the gospel across cultural barriers is contextualization, but this process of communicating a believed truth to an outsider is not unique to Christianity. Understanding how the term applies in a secular context helps explains why contextualization is related to the gospel, a key insight in understanding the dynamics surrounding evangelical views on the roles of women and how Christian movements cope with secular cultural change.

In a climatic final scene of the classic 1997 movie, Good Will Hunting, Robin Williams’s character, a therapist, at last convinces a blue collar genius, a South Boston young adult played by Matt Damon, that the abuse and abandonment he

26 Ed Stetzer quoted by Darrin Patrick, “Contextualization in Church Planting.”
experienced as a child was not his fault. Cognitively, there is no doubt that Damon’s character has always known this. He is smarter than the therapist and everyone else he has ever met, but it was only through the therapist’s response to his experiences that made his breakthrough at the end possible. In this way, though the words, “it’s not your fault” became very meaningful in the climatic scene and are repeated over and over, it is not the words themselves that communicated the therapist’s message. They merely expressed what had at last been revealed to the young genius through his relationship with the therapist, who contextualized the truth about his childhood in a way understandable to him.

The consequence of the therapist’s contextualization of the truth was a cultural change in the life of the young genius. This is not a necessary consequence of contextualization, but it is possible one. After the young genius finally understood the message the therapist had been trying to communicate to him, he changed his perspective, and in doing so, he changed his individual “culture.” While culture is often considered part of “governing ideas, values and presuppositions of society” and is accurately described in categorical terms, like high culture, pop culture, ethnic culture, and political culture, these terms merely describe cultural manifestations. Culture itself is what we make of the world.28

**Millennial Contextualization**

The Millennials are coming of age, filling leadership positions vacated by retiring Baby Boomers, and working alongside Gen-X, the generation that immediately proceed them. At least in the United States, the generation is not distinct

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merely because of its young age. This group, born between 1979 and 1994, will never look exactly like the generations that it is succeeding. Among them, normalcy of routine, and in some cases stability, is openly abandoned in pursuit of unique personal journeys. For better or worse, the family is being redefined, as many do not expect to marry anytime soon, if they ever marry at all. Millennials value diversity and fairness, and will not hesitate to give both positive and negative feedback immediately and bluntly. By extension, they strongly prefer continual feedback on projects at the office to annual performance reviews. Probably because of the technology they were raised using, making them subject to more advertising, marketing, and media than any generation before, Millennials are remarkably gifted at multitasking. This skill reshapes their lives and goes a long way to defining a dynamic group of young people and the cultures they create.

The Millennials present a unique challenge to Christian movements and evangelicalism. Like, the young genius in Good Will Hunting, the problem is not simply the accurate transmission of information. In the United States, many young adults attended a Christian church in high school, implying that they were exposed to the basic teachings of Christianity. However, given that approximately two of every five young non-Christians have a bad impression of Christianity, with 87 percent of young non-Christians believing the faith to be judgmental, 85 percent calling it

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30 Kinnaman and Lyons, Unchristian, 22-23.
hypocritical, and 78 percent believing it to be old-fashioned, simply exposing Millennials to Christianity is not sufficient to build a favorable reputation.\textsuperscript{31}

Breaking Christianity’s negative image, perceived or otherwise, requires a stalwart effort on behalf of the Christian movements. What has been done to communicate the gospel to new generations in the past will not work because the Millennials have a genuinely different cultural composition—they ask different questions. Their worldview is informed by postmodernism, a perspective that, in the view of prominent theologians such as N.T. Wright, contrasts with “the antitransitional, anti-story attitude of the Enlightenment.” This perspective informed modernism and built on the narratives and individual perspectives of the individual animating the story.\textsuperscript{32} In order for Millennials to understand the gospel and to have a possibility of their accepting it, they must have the gospel communicated in a way that demonstrates its relevancy to the questions they are asking, which frames questions on justice and social issues in ways that contrast with preceding generations.

Consider this example. The gospel is constant and is meant to be relevant to all peoples, yet certain questions could not even have existed a century ago. Does this mean that the gospel is not relevant to the individuals and cultures for which those questions are important? More specifically, could the gospel have relevance to Millennial environmentalists who care greatly about climate change when climate change did not exist centuries ago? Provided it does, how could the truth and

\textsuperscript{31} The data is based on a study of Millennials born between 1984 and 2002. \textit{Ibid}, 17, 28.

\textsuperscript{32} Wright, \textit{The New Testament and the People of God}, xvii.
relevance that they find in the gospel related to this issue have always been true, given that an early-twentieth-century farmer could never have comprehended a relationship between the gospel and climate change?

Christian Millennial environmentalists connect biblical instruction on stewardship of the Earth to environmental issues, even ones like climate change that have not always existed. In this way, they unite passion and culture with Christianity. In light of the model of Christian belief introduced in chapter one, the gospel is epitomized in the creeds and is the core component of orthodox Christianity, doctrine is found in confessions or statements of faith made by Christian movements, and practice is the act of turning the gospel and doctrine into livable practices. The Millennial environmentalists who see the relevancy of the gospel to their culture are contextualizing the gospel at the level of practice.

Since the gospel is the core of Christianity and is thought to have a relationship to everything and since culture constantly changes, to deny that the gospel must speak to new questions and problems over time would be shortsighted.
As the core, the gospel informs all Christian worldviews. If the religious beliefs of the Millennial environmentalists were primarily informed by secular cultures, then the model of Christian belief would change. The gospel would no longer be the core and nothing would remain as a Christian constant in a world of ever-evolving secular and religious cultures. Eventually Christianity would undermine itself.

Many of the changes that have precipitated successful contextualization of the gospel to Millennials, an initiative that has become particularly important to Christian movements since postmodernism began challenging the twentieth-century, modern evangelicalism now said to be ending, were popularized in Donald Miller’s 2003 landmark memoir, Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality.\textsuperscript{33} This book has been particularly formative for evangelical movements, because Miller’s explanation of the Millennial worldview emphasizes ways in which the gospel can be contextualized with an emphasis on three of Bebbington’s points in the definition of evangelicalism—conversionism, activism, and biblicism.\textsuperscript{34}

At 21, Donald Miller, left his Texan home and took a road trip across the US; when he ran out of money in Portland, Oregon he stopped travelling and began auditing classes at Reed College. The book chronicles his experiences as a searching Christian at the liberal institution, which in the year he was there, was named by the Princeton Review as the university where students are most likely to ignore God.\textsuperscript{35} With methodical patience and subject to unlikely positive influences, Miller explored fundamentalism, Unitarianism, the meaning of community, political activism, and

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{34} Bebbington, \textit{Evangelicalism in Modern Britain}, 3.
\bibitem{35} Miller, \textit{Blue Like Jazz}, 37.
\end{thebibliography}
ultimately adopted a Christian faith deeply rooted the cultural framework of the Millennials. Ultimately, he resolved, “Christian spirituality is like jazz music.” While it is “difficult to get on paper,” it remains real, meaningful, and beautiful. Miller illustrates the beauty of the gospel he means to describe through a number of personal anecdotes chronicling the lives of his friends; each one, almost like a parable.

Through his personal experiences, mostly the lessons he learns about faith, redemption, and the view of God found in scripture that is different from what is sometimes perpetuated by evangelical movements, Miller explains how gospel contextualization is possible within the generational perspectives of the Millennial. This important accomplishment speaks to the possibility of evangelicalism successfully breeching postmodernism and the twenty-first century. However, beyond practical examples of how Christian movements can contextualize the gospel and relate to Millennials, Blue Like Jazz itself serves as a concrete example of how Christianity creates new cultures. The book had a major impact on evangelicalism, initiating the transition toward postmodern evangelicalism.

A new wave of literature, programs, and approaches to ministry followed the publication of the New York Times bestseller. Cru, formerly known as Campus Crusade for Christ, bought several hundred thousand copies of the book, which it distributed on hundreds of college campuses throughout the United States. The

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38 Penny Carothers, “All that Jazz: Penny Carothers (yes that Penny) Gets Real with Donald Miller about his Landmark Book, the New Movie it Inspired and the Tension
book spiraled in popularity over the next several years—strongly resonating with college-aged Millennials who, through the text, were given permission to publicly grapple with faith in ways not previously encouraged by evangelical movements. Perhaps even more significantly, older generations were introduced to the skills needed for effective ministry with Millennials.  

The shift in American evangelicalism represented through the popularity of *Blue Like Jazz* was largely welcomed by many evangelical movements, despite their difficulty in contextualizing the gospel to Millennials. Cultural embodiment of the gospel in ways understandable outside of the church’s own cultures implicitly threatens a tradition many centuries long and poses critical questions about how the church can change without sacrificing its integrity. However, there is also no doubt that Christian movements have an image problem, especially amongst Millennials, and the burden of proof for its relevancy lies with it. Cultural change in Christian movements is rightfully a slow and conservative process. After all, many aspects of Millennial culture are in direct contradiction with the Bible. Some, like promiscuity are easy to see and reject, but countless others are much harder to discern.

Music offers the easiest vantage point from which to study how efforts to relate to secular cultures can undercut the Christian movements. A popular and contentious point in many evangelical movements, music is usually incorporated as a

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40 David Dark, quoted by Penny Carothers, “All that Jazz,” 59.
central act of worship to God in weekly Sunday services. Stylistically, it ranges from traditional organ and piano century-old hymns to all forms of contemporary music genres. If one accepts the premise that the gospel both latches onto the culture of the individuals who accept it and simultaneously creates new cultural goods, then this diversity is not only expected, but is often welcomed, at least in some capacity. However, gradual music change also often accompanies meaningful shifts in focus and potentially promotes narrow or distorted theology.

Popular contemporary music in local evangelical bodies is often criticized for being theologically shallow. While there is validity to this claim inasmuch as some worship choruses, characterized by the repetition of simple phrases, lack the theological depth and complexity of Martin Luther’s “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” and the other great hymns of the faith, it is an oversimplification of a vastly complex topic. This criticism does not clearly distinguish two issues: the difference between contextualization of the gospel in the style modeled by Blue Like Jazz, which will necessarily engender new cultural goods, in this case music, and the question of the quality, musical and theological, of the new goods. However, it does show how well-meaning Christian movements have neglected to connect with Millennials and why gospel contextualization is always a tenuous process.

Chapter 3. Restoring Eden

I propose that while it is possible to alter the gospel and doctrine in pursuit of cultural contextualization, it is uncommon. Most change concerns practice, meaning that it does not actually alter belief. Certainly many individuals and individual churches have succumbed to secular influences as they have attempted to contextualize the gospel, either in going with the culture or reacting against it, but, as I intend to show, this does not characterize the majority of American evangelical movements. Changing practice through contextualization has had an affect on evangelical movements, but by in large, instead of eroding doctrine and the gospel, it has bolstered them.

Because of contextualization, the secular changes that were brought on through the Millennials had the exact opposite affect as what one may expect. It is bringing an end to modern, twentieth-century evangelicalism, but instead of ending evangelicalism itself, postmodernism is fueling revival. With a newfound passion for the gospel has come adamant pursuit of restoration—the repair of broken people, relationships, and everything else damaged by humanity’s fall in the Garden of Eden. The hope of restoration is at the forefront of this newfound energy, because, according to the gospel, it is why Jesus died. While the gospel is sometimes minimized to Jesus’s death for the sake of the world so that we could all go to heaven, this is a drastically simple analysis that in many ways completely misses the big
picture. Christ came in order for restoration to be possible, and it was his intent that humanity would be restored to him, each other, and the rest of creation.\textsuperscript{43}

According to the book of Genesis, the world was perfect at the time of its formation. The first chapter states seven times that God’s creation is good. Light, land and seas, plants, night and day, and animals are all specifically called “good” and, at the end of the final day of creation, God calls all of his creation good.\textsuperscript{44} By design, everything was whole and operated with seamless order.

On the sixth day, God created, blessed, and gave humanity the responsibility of caring for his creation. He said:

\textit{Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, and over the livestock, over all the early, and over all the creatures that move along the ground...Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground}.\textsuperscript{45}

With this direction to rule, humanity received full authority and accountability to God for the Earth and everything in it.

According to Genesis, the wholeness of God’s creation was broken through Adam and Eve’s sin in the garden. The repercussion for eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge was not only personal separation from God, but it was the destruction of the world’s perfect order. As a result of the fall, God informed Adam that it is only by the sweat of a man’s brow that he would eat and that men would work and toil

\textsuperscript{44} Genesis 1:3, 1:10, 1:12, 1:18, 1:21, 1:25, 1:31.
\textsuperscript{45} The plural tense used in this passage refers to the Holy Trinity. Genesis 1:26-28.
until they returned to the ground from which they were created.\textsuperscript{46} Eve’s punishment was greatly increased pain in childbearing for all women, and in words important to the study of the roles of women in Christian movements, God says, “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”\textsuperscript{47}

This narrative shows that God did not create brokenness in the beginning. Christians interpret this to mean that brokenness was not his desire, nor his desire now. By eating of the fruit, Adam and Eve not only severed their relationship with God, they damaged their relationship with each other and with all of creation. This brokenness was set right through Jesus who established his kingdom on the earth and has left full accessibility to God through his atoning sacrifice. But, though death has been conquered and Jesus has won, brokenness still exists. This theme of “inaugurated eschatology” is explained as the “‘already and not yet’ paradoxical dynamism of New Testament thought.” Satan has already been defeated and God’s kingdom has come, but it has not yet been consummated in world history through the second coming of Christ.\textsuperscript{48} In the meantime, God’s people are called to exemplify the restoration that has been returned to humanity for the first time since the fall in the Garden. This pursuit of restoration is part of the gospel message and of the Great Commission.

With this desire to make whole what is broken has come fresh study of the gospel and doctrine, included increasingly passionate debate on views on the roles of women. Seeking to restore what they believe male/female relations to have been

\textsuperscript{46} Genesis 3:17-19.  
\textsuperscript{47} Genesis 3:16.  
before the fall, egalitarians advocate full and equal partnership between and among men and women. Complementarians, by contrast, believe that Eve was Adam’s “helper” in the sense that we understand the world today and seek to restore and women as men’s helpmates as God designed.⁴⁹

To defend their position, complementarians look to several passages, but most famously to Ephesians 4:22-25, which states,

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

According to the most common complementarian definition of submission and interpretation of this passage, wives are not called to be passive, confined to a life of domesticity, or permanently stuck beneath the dictatorial rule of a man whom they hope will exercise benevolence and selflessness in his leadership, but they are called to submission.⁵⁰ Men are called to love them as Christ loved the Church, a weighty command given the significance of Jesus’ death. Men are also are called to recognize the gifts, skills, and talents of their wives. This means that though they retain ultimate decision-making power, men must make decisions that elevate and honor their wives. In practice, husbands will sometimes go along with the preferences of their wives despite their own objections, because they recognize, for example, that

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their wives are more knowledgeable in a given area or have more experience.\textsuperscript{51}

When a man does not uphold his end of this relationship dynamic, according to complementarian belief, his wife is encouraged to appeal to her local church for support. Hierarchically, she is beneath her husband, but he is beneath the Church. In this way, though she is called to submit to husband, she is not bound to submit in cases of mistreatment or abuse.\textsuperscript{52}

Egalitarians do not ignore the strong language in Ephesians 4:22-25, but they often include Ephesians 4:21 in their study of this passage, which says, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Often, this verse is separated from verses 22-25. Egalitarians contend that the inclusion of verse 21 in scriptural study changes its meaning and aligns it with passages like Galatians 3:28 that affirm that there is no hierarchical relationship between men and women. Galatians 3:28 says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Egalitarianism and complementarianism are obviously incompatible and since evangelicals believe the Bible to be the truthful word of God, this is a problem. Either the Bible gives contradictory instructions or one school of thought is wrong.

The positions of evangelical movements on the appropriate roles of women have always been, to some extent, uncertain and inconsistent. Egalitarian movements often allow women to serve in any leadership role, but regardless of how long these movements have held this position, many have very few, if any, many historical

\textsuperscript{51} Plaster and Plaster, “Roles in Marriage.”
\textsuperscript{52} Driscoll, “The Shack.”
examples of women in senior leadership. For their part, complementarian movements often reserve leadership roles for men, but allow women to serve as lay leaders or instructors to children, and these same churches will send women as missionaries to other nations.

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53 The United Brethren in Christ Church denomination is an example of a doctrinally egalitarian denomination whose practice does not match what they say they believe. Of the denomination’s 200 churches, three are led by women. Steve Dennie, Director of Communications for the United Brethren Church, phone interview by author, April 5, 2013.

Part II. Practice

“Biblical” Gender Roles in Contemporary Culture

Model of Christian Belief

Practice

Doctrine

Gospel
According to any standard measure, evangelical movements in the United States are diverse. It is easy to find a variety of ethnic congregations; every age demographic, fellowships made of young families, older families, and no families; and individuals differentiated by any other category one could think of. Because of the number of cultures in which Christian movements operate, they must contextualize the gospel, but more importantly, each movement must contextualize differently. For example, Millennial contextualization at Reed College, the west coast, liberal arts institution featured in Blue Like Jazz, is not the same as Millennial contextualization at the politically and socially conservative, Hillsdale College, famous for training Washington, DC’s young right-wing political operatives.\(^{55}\)

However, despite the multiplicity of cultures initially represented in the various evangelical movements, the varying types of contextualization, and distance and time, which tends to separate groups, the vast majority of evangelical movements in the United States still hold to strikingly similar understandings of gospel and doctrine.

Using the doctrinal issue of the roles of women to make my argument, I will examine four case studies, each broadly representative of a major portion of American evangelicalism. They are the Missionary Church, the Acts 29 Network, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship USA, and Converge Worldwide. InterVarsity is egalitarian; Acts 29 is complementarian; and both Converge and the Missionary Church though officially committed to a complementarian position, have noteworthy egalitarian movements in their past and present. By looking at the views on the roles

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of women that these evangelical movements hold and their apparent connection or lack of connection to the gospel, I will demonstrate the origins of complementarianism and egalitarianism in postmodern evangelical movements. This discovery will demonstrate that in most cases, the gospel itself is the primary motivation for both egalitarianism and complementarianism.

Though the four movements vary in size and tradition, together, they cover the entire United States and interact with many different demographics and cultures. Each has, in some marked way, changed how they communicate in order to relate with Millennials. Since these groups are willing to change and have done so to reach young people, then it might be supposed that they are striving to keep up with, or defy, secular cultural developments. Since I am arguing that this is in fact not the primary cause of their views on the roles of women, selecting select case studies that leave open this apparent possibility is a requirement.
Chapter 4. Missionary Church

The Missionary Church is a 448-church denomination born in the 1967 merger of the United Missionary Church (UMC) and the Missionary Church Association (MCA).\textsuperscript{56} Though the MCA had no significant history of women in leadership, the UMC had, in the early twentieth-century, a rich history of female instructional, administrative, and spiritual leadership. The denomination sent young women to urban areas in the Midwest, where they planted churches. These women, known as ministering sisters, were responsible for founding approximately fifty percent of the Missionary Church’s congregations in the Midwest, the region of the country where the Missionary Church’s presence today is most dense.\textsuperscript{57} However, the leadership influence of women faded in the twentieth-century. By the time of the 1969 merger, the UMC had become fully complementarian, which is the position the UMC and MCA adopted when they became the Missionary Church.\textsuperscript{58}

The Missionary Church has experienced a huge spike in growth in the last decade—particularly in urban areas and among Millennials. From the denominational perspective, much of this is due to more effective “church-planting” strategies, that is, the planning, preparations, and founding of new congregations. In the 1980s, the movement began a more rigorous screening of its prospective church-


\textsuperscript{57} Bill Hossler, interview by author, Fort Wayne, IN, January, 11, 2013. Dr. Hossler is president of the Missionary Church.

\textsuperscript{58} “Articles of Faith and Practice,” Missionary Church, accessed January 16, 2013, \url{http://mcusa.org/AboutMC/PositionPapers/ArticlesofFaithandPractice.aspx#MarriageHome}. 
planters and only supported ones who exhibited at least nine of thirteen qualities it had identified as essential skills, also called “catalytic leadership skills” by the denomination.\footnote{The thirteen qualities are visioning capacity, intrinsic motivation, ability to create ownership of ministry, ability to relate to the unchurched, spousal cooperation, ability to effectively build relationships, commitment to church growth, responsive to community, ability to utilize the giftedness of others, flexibility and adaptability, ability to build group cohesiveness, resilience, and acting in faith. Prospective church planters are evaluated against these qualities in leadership training. Bill Hossler, email message to author, January 17, 2013; Hossler, interview by author.} In the subsequent decades, the movement has continued to perfect its leadership-selection processes, which has created even greater momentum in its church-planting efforts.

It is important to note that the Missionary’s Church’s new success in church-planting was not predicated on any change in how it sought to reach new people, because they are doing the same kind of outreach activities that they always have done. Its ministries, according to the example they believe they observe in Jesus Christ, seek to build relationships with those outside of the Christian community, demonstrate the character of Christ, and evangelize the non-Christian. The only change has been procedural.\footnote{Bill Hossler, interview by author, January, 11, 2013.} The denomination is more effective, because it has become wiser stewards of its members’ leadership abilities and intentional in its efforts to train young leaders. In addition to screening its potential church-planters, the movement has begun targeting Millennials under-the-age of 25 in long-term denominational planning, which it does through its semi-regular “Emerging Leaders Summits.”\footnote{Emerging Leaders Summit: Create Communities, Develop Leaders, Cast Vision,” Missionary Church USA, accessed March 4, 2013, http://mcusa.org/Portals/8/Documents/Emerging%20Leaders%20Summit%202013.pdf.}
The result of this recruiting shift in church-planting is observed most profoundly in New York City, the location of the Missionary Church’s most successful domestic church-planting initiative. The movement began sending Jeff Getz as its representative to multi-denominational meetings on how to contextualize the gospel to the secularized New York City in 2005. Since that time Getz has moved his family to New York City, planted seven churches, helped established churches grow to the point where they began offering multiple worship services, and helped established multilingual worship services in diverse communities. Currently, Getz is working with two church plants, two soon-to-be church plants, and at least five churches that are planting their own churches.62

Most of Getz’s work is done through NewYorkIsCalling, which is a 501(c)3 organization legally separate from the Missionary Church. However, the organization was founded under the influence of the Missionary Church, funded by Missionary Church churches, staffed by Missionary Church congregants, regularly prayed for in Missionary Church churches, and most of the churches the ministry helps plant decide to join the movement. Four of the movement’s mega-churches have deeply invested in NewYorkIsCalling, giving priority to it as their number one missions focus. They regularly send teams of volunteers and their support makes up approximately 10 percent of the ministry’s budget. About twenty smaller churches have also given priority to its ministry. In addition to volunteer and financial support, they regularly intercede for New York City and NewYorkIsCalling.63

63 Ibid.
The movement’s momentum in greater New York City, as well as other regions of the country where the denomination is growing, suggests that while the Missionary Church is still doing the same outreach that it has always done, its leaders’ skills are more appropriately matched for their work. However, this match and growth among ministry with Millennials does not explain the denomination’s complementarianism. For the Acts 29 Network, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, and Converge Worldwide, views on the roles of women are inextricably linked to the gospel itself and, in turn, to practice. For them, the restorative truth of the gospel, is connected to gender roles, because fixing the order of male/female relationships is part of bringing wholeness in the broken world. Evidence of this connection is clear in their practices. However, while the Missionary Church seeks to propagate the gospel, it does not associate gender roles with the gospel. This lack of connection has created confusion in the denomination on gender issues, and as a result of the movement’s recent growth, is starting to cause problems.

The Missionary Church’s constitution states, “The home is a divinely ordained institution in which the husband is the head but serves its members by a law of love.” The constitution goes on to state, “Filial obedience is to be rendered to children in the spirit of mutual respect and love,” but, at no point, does it make any specific mention of women’s roles in the family.\textsuperscript{64} The absence of traditional complementarian language about the woman’s role as an affirming co-laborer who, operating under the provision of her husband, affirms him and serves as his council is

\textsuperscript{64} Constitution of the Missionary Church, (Fort Wayne, IN: Denominational Office, August 2011), 9.
conspicuous. According to the Missionary Church constitution, the woman’s role in the family is undefined.

Later in the section on church leadership, the constitution states, “We must recognize the patriarchal structure of the Old Testament and the Greco-Roman culture of the New Testament were quite different from the culture of the latter 20\textsuperscript{th} century.” The clause goes on to argue that cultural differences do not serve as grounds for dismissing universal, biblically-based criteria for leadership, but that “biblical principles of leadership applied in our situation may look different when applied to different cultures at different times.”\textsuperscript{65} These statements formally recognize gospel contextualization, because they speak to the importance of having the denomination’s leaders take the truths of the gospel and apply them to different cultures.

The passing reference to ancient patriarchy in discussion on Christian leaderships alludes to the acceptability of women leaders in ways that the Missionary Church does not observe in scripture. They say that there are not prominent examples of women leadership, but that the historic, secular cultural context of scripture is partially to blame for this absence. In this way, the movement makes a distinction between what they believe to be God’s instruction in the Bible and the cultures through which God gave his instruction. This distinction is manifest in the Missionary Church’s ordination practices. Though it happens rarely, women are ordained. This is permitted because, like the role of teaching, which the constitution assigns to women in as well, ordination does not bestow “authority.” In the

\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Ibid}, 50.
Missionary Church, it is merely proof of calling, spiritual gifts, and preparation for a life of vocational ministry in the Missionary Church.\textsuperscript{66}

The distinction between ability and authority, which is the line with which the Missionary Church divides its male and female leadership, is quite arbitrary. Baring extreme circumstances, which usually means that a man is not willing to do the job, women are prohibited from serving as senior pastors or as denominational and district overseers, but they are formally affirmed as instructors over co-educational classes in local church bodies, as leaders on various boards and committees, as servants in parachurch ministries, as speakers from the pulpit in services, and as members of ministerial staff.\textsuperscript{67} While the Missionary Church cites complementarian interpretation of scripture for limiting the roles of women, it does not use scripture to clarify why female leadership is appropriate in one context and not in another. The clearest example of this is the denomination’s approval of a woman as a leader in the foreign mission field, where she may be the only Christian leader, and its disapproval of that same woman serving as the senior pastor at the Missionary Church she grew up in.

This point is further elucidated by my research interview with the movement’s president. In a well-intentioned effort to get to know me before I began asking my questions, Dr. Bill Hossler asked if I was married. When I replied that I was not, I was asked if I had any prospects.\textsuperscript{68} A professional meeting was clearly an inappropriate setting for such questions, but I was made especially troubled by the implications Dr. Hossler’s questions carried. He knew the purpose of our meeting,

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid, 57.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid; Hossler, interview with author.
\textsuperscript{68} Hossler, interview with author.
which was to learn about the Missionary Church’s view on the roles of women and church practices. His opening questions almost implied my personal unsuitability for the task of writing this thesis because I am a single woman in my twenties.

My personal interaction with the Missionary Church president does not represent the whole of gender relations and teachings within the denomination, though it clearly elucidated an element of complementarian traditionalism within the movement. Dr. Hossler cited “cultural acceptance” as justification for the denomination’s two largest churches in Puerto Rico, which are both pastored by women. Lack of American cultural acceptance for female leadership was one of his reasons for not allowing it in the United States. If his doctrinal view on the issue was driven by the gospel and not by the Missionary Church’s own culture, then he would have had a problem with practices that allow female pastors in any context. The relative terms he used to rationalize the Puerto Rican churches should have had no standing.

The incomplete definition of complementarianism in the constitution, the affirmed, yet limited role women are given in the constitution, and the element of church traditionalism have, at the practical level, left the roles of women in the Missionary Church in an ambiguous state. Because of this ambiguity, local churches have made their own interpretations of the denomination’s instructions, and have, more or less, done what they want. Within the context of the movement’s recent success in church-planting, women have filled whatever roles they were capable of, a situation which has brought the question of the roles of women back to the forefront

\[69\text{ Ibid.}\]
of denominational discussion. Among other roles, in many cases, women are emerging as the *de facto* pastors of local congregations.\textsuperscript{70}

For current leaders in the Missionary Church, this emergence of women pastors has brought Biblical gender roles into question. In recent history, the movement has never supported women as senior leaders in the United States, yet the fruit of the women’s ministry and positive impact on communities is unquestionable. Local-level ambiguity on the issue has begun to raise the questions on the appropriate roles of women at district level, where pastors, vocally aware of how their complementarian position is inconsistent with popular secular opinion, are seeking scriptural justification for their positions and struggling to form and articulate their opinions.\textsuperscript{71}

At the Missionary Church’s most recent national conference, which established the vision and direction of the denomination for 2012 and 2013, there were no female speakers. When honoring leaders for their years of service to the denomination, rows of women filed on stage, each behind her husband, indicating her support for his ministry over the years. No single woman was honored for her service, and no woman was honored for her leadership achieved with the support of her husband. In all cases where a woman was recognized, she was recognized with

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{71} Dennis Rowe, phone interview with author, October 19, 2012. As cohort leader for the Missionary Church’s Central Region, Rowe is responsible for coaching local pastors in matters pertaining to congregation health and growth.
and secondary to her husband.\textsuperscript{72} Likewise, in keeping with the constitution, national leadership teams were all male.\textsuperscript{73}

The conflict between this scene—where women have no prominent leadership role, and the grassroots level—where women are quickly growing in leadership and influence, is becoming more profound. The tension will continue to grow until such time as the movement is able to fully connect its partially articulated complementarianism to the gospel it preaches or it becomes egalitarian.

\textsuperscript{72} Missionary Church General Conference, Dallas, Texas, July 12-15, 2011. 
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
Chapter 5. Acts 29 Network

The Acts 29 Network is an evangelical movement of over 400 churches that focuses on the planting of new congregations. Its 1997 founding makes it the youngest of my four case studies. The Network mimics a traditional denomination, in that there is a doctrinal statement and structure of accountability between local bodies, though it does not refer to itself as a denomination. In fact, its member congregations are permitted to be simultaneously part of the network and of a denomination.74 The movement is nearly exclusively made up of educated, urban millennial professionals and is boisterously complementarian.75 Acts 29 has no women in places of senior leadership and its member churches frequently teach complementarian gender roles.76

The Acts 29 Network was founded by Mark Driscoll, who planted the now-mega-church Mars Hill in Oregon while he was in his mid-twenties, with only “a handful of people and about six years of faith in Christ to draw on.”77 Being a considerable distance from the Bible Belt and any vestige of a dominant Christian culture, Driscoll recognized the absence of churches from the northwestern region as

74 Darrin Patrick is lead pastor at The Journey in St. Louis, which is a Converge and Acts 29 church. Darrin Patrick, “Contextualization in Church Planting,” Surge: Ignite Conference 2012.
well as the absence of young people from the churches that were there. Driscoll lists his reasons for starting Mars Hill and does so in the flamboyant style that has brought him into the limelight of evangelicalism:

First, I hated going to church and wanted one I like, so I thought I would just start my own. Second, God had spoken to me in one of those weird charismatic moments and told me to start a church. Third, I am scared of God and try to do what he says.

Driscoll describes the congregants of Mars Hill in its early days as “a dysfunctional small group of Christian college kids and chain-smoking indie rockers who all shared the clueless look of a wide-eyed basset hound that just heard a high-pitched whistle.” He calls the sermons he gave to this group a “combination of boring systematic theology and uninspiring motivational talk.”

However, along the way and early enough in his ministry to keep his young church from dying, Driscoll became passionate about “mission,” which he noted was absent from his ministry and many of the region’s surrounding congregations. The focus on mission is what turned his floundering congregation to a multi-thousand person, multi-site church. Today, Mars Hill operates under the constant possibility of an additional 500 people showing up on a Sunday for no apparent reason.

According to the Acts 29 model, efforts directed toward social and political causes, as well as Christian events and activities, like mission trips and student

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78 Ibid, 10.
80 Driscoll, Confessions of a Reformission Rev, 39
81 Ibid, 40.
82 Ibid, 19, 179.
ministry events, are meant to spread the gospel, and often do. However, the
programmatic approach to these activities can also distract from the gospel and the
expansion of God’s kingdom. To remain constantly mindful of a missional focus
helps keep this from happening.

For Driscoll, mission has three bases: the gospel, the culture, and the church. Mission is not merely sending a couple to a country on the other side of the world, “it is every Christian being a missionary to their local culture,” and recognizing that evangelical movements have no position of privilege in secular culture. Therefore, mission-minded movements must demonstrate their purpose and credibility through the love of Christ that they aim to model. This urgency to contextualize the gospel is driven by recognition that accepted theologies in secular culture range “from ancient orthodoxy to heterodox liberalism” and are “built on postmodern denials of true truth and known knowledge.” Through this understanding, the Acts 29 network has successfully converted, trained, and mobilized Millennials for ministry.

The movement’s dynamics and effectiveness in reaching young people, as well as its emphasis on traditional gender roles, make it unsurprising that Mars Hill church averages more than two weddings a week. No doubt these figures would be similar for other congregations in the Acts 29 movement. It is common for people to enter an Acts 29 congregation single, become Christians, and then marry. However, also affecting this statistic is the connection the Network makes between marriage, the gospel, and the restoration the gospel strives to achieve. In this way, according to

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83 Ibid, 52-54.
84 Ibid, 19.
85 Ibid, 11.
Acts 29 teaching, complementarian marriages are a model of ordered relationships, but they are not the only a model.

The Acts 29, Apostles Church NYC’s recent conference on Singleness, Dating, Marriage, and Sex highlighted the restorative component that Acts 29 member congregations see in all relationships, married and single. The weekend was grounded in the definition of the will of God, which senior pastor J.R. Vassar defined as being “less about what you should do” and more about what kind of person you should be.\textsuperscript{86} Because “God is healing us and all creation,” the disorderly state of our relationships with him and with each other ought to be brought into order.\textsuperscript{87} Our relationships are only fully restored as we become sanctified, which occurs when we become “more and more conformed to the image of Christ.”

The Acts 29, complementarian model gives special attention to marriage, because marriages are meant to be a model of the relationship between God the Father and Jesus.\textsuperscript{88} According to this model, the submissive and affirming role of women in marriage is in no way based on the supposed “indecisiveness” that women are credited with in traditionalism.\textsuperscript{89} As a partial representation of the Trinity, it is designed to be Holy and representative of the kingdom of God. This connection links Acts 29’s complementarianism with the gospel.

\textsuperscript{87} “I’m New Here,” Apostles Church NYC, accessed April 6, 2013, \url{http://www.apostlesnyc.com/info/new-here/}.
\textsuperscript{89} Keller and Keller, \textit{The Meaning of Marriage}, Loc. 3141-3936.
Chapter 6. InterVarsity Christian Fellowship USA

InterVarsity is an egalitarian collegiate ministry founded at the University of Cambridge in 1877. The ministry sent a missionary to Canada in 1928 to found a student evangelical movement, which was brought to the United States for the first time in 1937.\(^\text{90}\) By 2012, InterVarsity USA had 843 chapters on 576 campuses in the United States.\(^\text{91}\) Most campuses have an undergraduate InterVarsity chapter, but some larger campuses have also established Greek, multiethnic, Asian American, Black, Latino, and Native American chapters. These social and ethnic-specific ministries account for the 267 campuses that have more than one chapter.\(^\text{92}\) Though the organization has grown and now oversees a major book-publishing house and other ministries, it remains “an undergraduate, student movement—of students, by students, and for students.”\(^\text{93}\)

\(^\text{93}\) This quotation from InterVarsity’s founder Stacey Woods in 1952 still accurately represents the organization. Areas that the organization has grown into, including graduate and faculty ministries, as well as its book publishing house, are extensions of its undergraduate ministry. C. Stacey Woods, The Growth of a Work of God: The story of the early days of the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship of the United States of America as told by its first general secretary, (Downers Grove, IL; Inter-Varsity Press, 1978), 158; “Our History,” InterVarsity Press, accessed February 17, 2013, http://www.ivpress.com/about/history.php; “Graduate and Faculty Ministries: About
As a collegiate campus ministry, InterVarsity represents a major cross-section of American evangelicalism that is not represented in the Missionary Church, the Acts 29 Network, or Converge Worldwide. Unlike a local congregational church body, InterVarsity chapters are largely interdenominational groups of students who gather once or twice a week for Bible study and worship, which often includes singing and corporate prayer. In some ways, these large group gatherings mirror that of a traditional evangelical Sunday morning service. Many are smaller than an average Sunday service, but others are larger. Some have a staff worker who fills a pastoral role. Often, the chapter supervises formal, smaller communities that are responsible for taking care of each other in times of need, holding each other accountable to their Christian faith, and sponsoring campus evangelism. These small groups function more or less like those in in local church bodies. However, regardless of these similarities to congregations, InterVarsity remains distinct because it plays a supporting role to local church bodies as a “parachurch organization,” meaning that it is not meant to serve as the primary institution of spiritual instruction.


95 Sunday is the traditional Sabbath for evangelical churches in the West and most services are held in the morning. However, some of these bodies celebrate the Sabbath and hold services similar to traditional Sunday morning gatherings on other days of the week and at other times of day.

96 Bramadat, The Church on the World’s Turf; 5-6.

97 Parachurch organizations are typically characterized by evangelism and or their social activism, often serving as a gateway to Christianity. Because of this structure,
Though it was culturally iconoclastic at the time of its founding in the late 1930s, the InterVarsity stance has always been that all positions, for both paid staff members and student leaders, have been open to men and women. The organization intentionally has no formal written egalitarian statement, but by having no statement, it has been *de facto* egalitarian. From the top down, no distinction is given or has ever been given between the roles and responsibilities of men and women. A woman served on InterVarsity’s first national leadership board and women were among the first campus staff workers.\(^98\) They continue to serve in both of these capacities and many others.

In recent years, the number of new InterVarsity female employees has exceeded the number of male employees. Between 1998 and 2005, women outnumbered men at new staff orientation by margins as large as 22 percent, and while there remain a disproportionate number of men in mid-and upper-level leadership roles, women are quickly assuming more of these roles.\(^99\) The 2012 program director for Urbana, InterVarsity’s triennial student’s missions conference, was female. The conference attracted approximately 16,000 students from across the United States and prominently featured women speakers.\(^100\) Three of the ministry’s the parachurch ministry will likely be the primary institution of spiritual formation for non-Christians, but its leaders will likely be involved in a local church body as well.


\(^99\) “Employment Information,” *InterVarsity*, complied October 2005, used with permission; Barbara Ettinger, email to author, March 26, 2013.

fifteen trustees are women and two of eight members of the executive team are women.\footnote{Stephen Hayner, “Women in the Ministries of InterVarsity;” “Board of Trustees,” \textit{InterVarsity}; “Executive Team,” \textit{InterVarsity}.} In 2005, 29 of 100 Area Directors were female.\footnote{Area Directors are responsible for overseeing \textit{InterVarsity} chapters at multiple campuses in a geographic region.} Today, this number is much larger, more closely reflecting the gender breakdown of campus staff ministers, which has been very nearly 50/50 for well over a decade.\footnote{“Employment Information,” \textit{InterVarsity}; Barbara Ettinger, email to author.}

However, the most convincing evidence of \textit{InterVarsity}'s egalitarianism is not statistical. It is found in the leadership practices at individual university campuses across the nation, where numerous young women from all kinds of different backgrounds have taken a variety of ministerial, administrative, and supportive leadership roles in their local chapters. They are trained for leadership through service in their campus chapters and eventually become its senior leaders. Any number of examples from specific universities supports this claim, from Wesleyan University to Connecticut College and Stanford University.\footnote{Lionel Nyange, interview by author, February 21, 2013; “Student Leaders,” \textit{InterVarsity Christian Fellowship at Stanford}, accessed March 28, 2013, \url{http://www.ivstanford.org/student-leaders.html}.} However, the most convincing data on the training of female leaders comes from a 2012 study on women in \textit{InterVarsity} by Ellen Hallin, a Ph.D. candidate at Fuller Theological Seminary. In her study, Hallin concludes that \textit{InterVarsity} creates “a positive environment for

\footnote{Ellen Hallin, “Women in the Ministries of \textit{InterVarsity},” “Board of Trustees,” \textit{InterVarsity}; “Executive Team,” \textit{InterVarsity}.}
many women to thrive in their leadership and ministry gifts.” According to Hallin, many women who have been a part of InterVarsity have a strong sense of loyalty and commitment to the organization, which affirms their positive experiences.\textsuperscript{105}

While it might not appear obvious, the connection between the practices that allow women to rise to positions of leadership and the restorative power of the gospel is maintained because InterVarsity chapters have a near-complete turnover in leadership every four years. This unique characteristic clearly sets it a part from my other case studies. InterVarsity’s structures and leaders are constantly in transition. Institutional memory is much more than event planning and recordkeeping, and the knowledge of how to wisely handle crises, the importance of certain themes and topics to Christianity, and effective delegation of roles and responsibilities must be relearned each fall in the absence of the previous year’s senior class. Because of the constant need to rebuild itself, sometimes from scratch, each InterVarsity chapter must reinvestigate the basic claims of its faith every year and apply it to dynamic environment of the American university.

Charles Troutman, InterVarsity USA’s first full time staff worker and associate general secretary under the IV founder, Stacey Woods, coined the term “continuing kindergarten” to describe the spiritual state of Christian students at the secular university.\textsuperscript{106} The youthfulness and inexperience of Christian students, now immersed in hyper-secularized non-sectarian universities, created a direct need of


training in the basics of Christianity, including a real and practical understanding of the gospel and basic spiritual disciplines.

It was through this practice of constantly renewing training in the basics of the faith that students are able to engage effectively in a kind of cognitive bargaining that allow them to prosper as Christians on campus. In his 2000 ethnographic study of the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship at McMaster University, in Hamilton, Canada, the largest InterVarsity chapter in North America, sociologist Paul Bramadat noted his surprise at the means by which evangelical students used to cope with the secular ethos of their university. He commented:

When I began my fieldwork among the IVCF [InterVarsity Christian Fellowship], I expected to find examples of what Peter Berger describes as 'cognitive retrenchment,' the erection of a fortress of resistance to secularism and pluralism, and indeed I was not disappointed. However, what I did not expect to find (and what made this study so interesting to me) were so many bridges, so many examples of what Berger calls 'cognitive bargaining', the relatively conciliatory negotiation with the 'other's' (in this case, non-Christian) worldview.¹⁰⁷

In this statement, Bramadat not only identifies the plight of Christian students on secular campuses, in that they experience a near-constant tension between what they believe to be right and the universities’ secular cultures they, but he also alludes to the impossibility of fully easing this tension. Removed from the supportive Christian environments most of them come from and physically relocated to a college campus where their lives and the lives of all other students are largely unregulated, Christian students must personally engage the campus with some amount of cognitive bargaining or renounce their faith.

¹⁰⁷ Bramadat, The Church on the World’s Turf, 22.
In reference to students who clung to their faith amidst this tension, pursuing the basic Christian training and seeking to reconcile it with their campus’ secular cultures, Woods said, “Repeatedly, we have seen God lay hold on a handful of naïve students. They followed in faith; God responded in power and in might”¹⁰⁸ Unlike the Missionary Church, the Acts 29 Network, and Converge Worldwide, InterVarsity chapters do not even have the option of disengaging from secular culture. Because they are forced to learn the basic truths of the gospel, which includes restoration, and contextualize it with their college environment, which seeks restoration through secular culture, the restorative aspect of the gospel cannot be minimized. In this way, the restorative aspect of the gospel is never separated from gender relations. In the absence of complementarian teaching and the presence of a restorative mindset, women are affirmed as equals.

Chapter 7. Converge Worldwide

Converge Worldwide is a movement of over 1000 churches founded by Swedish immigrants in 1852. Though it has officially adopted a complementarian position, this has always been contested and, at the national level, is not enforced. The movement has vocal leaders of both complementarianism and egalitarianism. This apparent inconsistency is the byproduct of delegated authority rather than indecisiveness or lack of conviction. As it is in both complementarian and egalitarian Converge churches that the roles of women are connected to the restorative aspect of the gospel.

Like the Acts 29 Network, the Converge movement functions as a traditional denomination, even though it is no longer refers to itself as one. The kind of the connection among its congregations has changed, especially over the last several decades. In the movement’s early history, its Swedish composition and Baptist identity were central to its group cohesion and identity. These characteristics were enforced by the movement’s name—until 1945, the Swedish Baptist Conference. The movement dropped the “Swedish” title at the annual meeting that year. Its ethnic

background had slowly eroded as more and more churches became English-speaking and as the Swedish congregants welcomed others into their parishes.113

Even though denominational loyalty was on the decline in Converge, as well as a number of other evangelical movements, Converge has grown exponentially over the last decade. Its Mideast and Florida districts grew 98 and 102 percent between 2001 and 2010, each increasing the number of congregations in the region from the low forties to the lower eighties. Almost every other district in the United States also grew in double-digit percentages.114 This rapid expansion is indicative of the health of the movement’s health at-large. However, since the growth was not occurring around the identifying factors that had formerly held the denomination together, namely its Baptist name, the movement’s leaders sought to provide long-term directionality that would hold the movement together over time. Because the growth of the last decade was primarily the product of a “one mission” focus—the kingdom of God, a new name was called for to encapsulate this focus.115 In 2010, the movement again changed its name, this time from Baptist General Conference to Converge Worldwide.116

Complementing the Converge name-change and all that had precipitated the name change was an increase in regional and local authority. With “a more diverse leadership core at the pastoral level,” a diminished commitment to

115 Ibid, 150-151.
denominationalism, increased use of independent Christian resource centers, and the growing operational independence in individual congregations, came a need to reorganize the movement’s structures.\textsuperscript{117} This shift has led to an increase in the role of regional districts, of which there are eleven.\textsuperscript{118} These districts localize administrative responsibilities and oversee church development and planting in their regions. In this way, though a national body articulated a complementarian position in 1974, specific views and practices regarding the role of women are open for interpretation in districts and local congregations.\textsuperscript{119}

Women fulfill a full range of leadership roles in Converge—church-planters, foreign missionaries, pastors, teachers, deacons, and elders. However, while there are individual congregations where women are permitted to fill any of these roles, there are others where women are prohibited from nearly all of them.

At Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minnesota, led for many years by the popular Reformed pastor John Piper, women are prohibited from any pastoral position that gives them authority from the pulpit.\textsuperscript{120} Piper helped found the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, the leading organization advocating complementarianism in the United States. The Council was founded in 1987 “to help the church defend against the accommodation of secular feminism.” The group accuses secular feminism of encouraging the rise of evangelical feminism and its departure from the

\textsuperscript{117} Don Reed, “Perspective,” in \textit{New Century}, 35.
historical teachings and practices by evangelical churches regarding the roles of women in the church and in the home.\footnote{121}

However, the leading egalitarian organization in the United States, Christians for Biblical Equality, which promotes the “fundamental equality of men and women of all ethnic groups, all economic classes, and all age groups,” was also founded under the leadership of Converge leaders, most notably Berkeley and Alvera Mickelsen.\footnote{122} This group, organized in 1988, only one year after the founding of the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, opposes the council on all topics relating to the Christian understanding of the role of women.\footnote{123}

\footnote{123}Spickelmier, email message to author.
Part III. Doctrine
The Case for Interrelated Doctrines
Having studied the four movements’ stances on gender relations and the relationship of these stances to each movement’s practice, it is necessary to understand the layers of conviction that underpin their practices—that is, their doctrines. Doctrine, I have noted, is defined in the confessions or statements of faith held by local Christian movements, and associations of Christian movements. Doctrinal issues do not represent the core convictions of Christianity found in the gospel like the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. However, they do include numerous important topics that often cause sharp divisions amongst evangelical Christian movements. Some of the most contentious are the roles of women, justification, eschatology, baptism, the nature of the sacraments, and the charismatic spiritual gifts.  

In Part II, I have shown evidence of the connection between practice and the gospel in Acts 29, InterVarsity, and Converge. To demonstrate that this alignment is not random but rather the product of a broader alignment of beliefs, doctrine must be examined. Stand-alone analyses of contemporary phenomena, like the growth of these movements among the Millennials or their views on the roles of women, only show the extent to which a given movement either aligns or does not align with secular culture on a particular issue and how each movement explains its position. This is, of course, a necessary study. However, it is insufficient, because it ignores

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124 Spiritual gifts are evidence of the Holy Spirit’s outpouring on a believer “given for the common good,” utilized by individuals playing their roles in building up “the body of Christ.” These talents, ranging from encouragement and teaching to speaking in tongues and healing, are meant to complement each other in Christian community. The charismatic gifts are the visibly supernatural gifts—tongue speech, interpretation of tongue speech, healing, and the working of miracles. 1 Corinthians 12:7, Romans 12:1-13 (NIV).
the possibility of evangelical movements deciding what they believe based on practice and then claiming that their practices are based on beliefs.

In order to demonstrate convincingly that the movements are not merely proof-texting scripture in order to adopt a view on the roles of women acceptable to its members and to the culture at large, there must be a consistency between gospel, doctrine, and practice. It is an inconsistency between doctrine and practice that demonstrates how the Missionary Church’s complementarianism is derived from traditionalism and fundamentalism not from reflection on the gospel, while Acts 29’s complementarianism is in fact connected to the gospel in the thinking of the movement’s members.

Each of my four case study movements has a broad, Christian worldview that is derived from the gospel. These worldviews, like all worldviews, provide “the stories through which human beings view reality.” However, the Christian worldviews of evangelical movements are more specific than the gospel core of Christianity. At the doctrinal level, their worldviews answer “the basic questions that determine human existence: who are we, where are we, what is wrong, and what is the solution?”; express our answers to “questions of identity, environment, evil and eschatology”; and demonstrate our praxis, which is the action we take to pursue our life purpose, whatever it may be.  

Jonathan Haidt explains the affects of different interacting worldviews in his popular and groundbreaking 2012 text, A Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion. In it, he argues that one’s worldview, or “moral

world,” shapes one’s opinion on a host of issues. It is possible for individuals with conflicting worldviews to debate an issue, like the role of women, but because their starting point for discussing women is different and deeply connected to other views, without a worldview shift, which is rare, they will likely not come into agreement.\textsuperscript{126}

This does not mean that individuals do not seek to understand those that oppose them. However, what Haidt calls the “pre-existing moral narrative” that shapes one’s worldview limits one’s ability to understand and accept a contrary viewpoint. With education, individuals become increasingly skilled at supporting their positions on a set of issues, but regardless of their growing sophistication, their moral thinking remains “much more like a politician searching for votes than a scientist searching for truth.”\textsuperscript{127} In Haidt’s view, moral reasoning becomes little more than post hoc constructions designed to advance strategic objectives. For this reason, he says, it is easy to understand why an American liberal is likely to support increasing financial regulations on Wall Street, support gun control, and oppose tax cuts, and why it is difficult for many American conservatives to agree with any one of those positions.\textsuperscript{128} Simply put, “It is difficult to empathize across a moral divide.”\textsuperscript{129}

In the same way, a complementarian is unlikely to agree with an egalitarian on a number of related doctrinal issues that do not directly involve the role of women.

\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Ibid}, Loc. 1486.
\textsuperscript{128} \textit{Ibid}, Loc. 102.
\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Ibid}, Loc. 997.
Chapter 8. Missionary Church

In the mid-nineteenth-century, a number of revival leaders in the American Midwest and Ontario came under the discipline of the Mennonite Church. Chastised for such things as “adhering to the ‘Pentecostal’ movement,” holding prayer and testimony meetings in which they followed “as the Holy Spirit would direct,” hosting revival meetings, teaching Sunday schools, preaching in English, and in the case of the United Missionary Church, allowing women to lead “as they felt called”—Daniel Brenneman, Solomon Eby, Joseph Ramseyer, and John Krupp separated themselves from the Mennonite church and formed what would soon become the United Missionary Church (UMC) and Missionary Church Association (MCA), the two movements that eventually formed the Missionary Church in 1969.130

Coming from an Anabaptist Mennonite tradition, both movements maintained an Arminian theology, that is, a theology that stresses the unlimited atonement offered by Jesus for the sins of all of humanity, the free choice of humans in accepting or resisting God’s grace offered for salvation, and the aid of the Holy Spirit in accepting eternal salvation.131 This lens framed the UMC and MCA movements’ approach to ministry. In fact, both movements were considerably “freer” in their practices than their Mennonite predecessors had been. Inspired by their Arminian theology, which leaves open the possibility that we may not have understood what the scriptures teach and might and need to adjust our thinking, and by their break from

conservative Mennonite traditionalism, both denominations placed women in positions of leadership and influence.

In 1884, twenty-two year old Janet Douglas, a UMC member, left her home and began “an intensive program of visiting and preaching” in a small hall she rented in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The following year, she was formally recognized by the denomination as a “mission worker” and the district conference passed a resolution declaring that “women have the right to go forth and labor in the vineyard of the Lord.” This declaration served as commission to over 250 UMC women between 1885 and 1961.132 Many of these women moved into town two-by-two, rented a store or an empty hall and took up residence in the often cheerless rooms at the back. Here they held services almost every night of the week, visited the sick, comforted the distressed, took food to the poor and lonely, offered the Bread of Life to the rich and lonely, fasted and prayed and fasted and prayed—often because there was no food in the house to allow them to do otherwise.

Despite their scant resources, many of these women saved their allowances to buy books and commentaries that would allow them to become better preachers. Once they had completed their course of study, they took the same examination as male UMC clergy and were given the title “Approved Ministering Sister.” Once the sisters’ missions became of sufficient size and sustainability to maintain a livable wage, the district conference re-commissioned the women, sending them to plant a new church in a new city again.133 It was the work of these women that helped the

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133 Lageer, Merging Streams, 75-76.
UMC transition from being a small, rural denomination to one that had a presence in urban centers.¹³⁴

Although, the MCA also commissioned women into ministry, it did so far less often and did not eagerly send them to cities.¹³⁵ The primary reason for this difference is that most UMC churches were planted after the denomination’s founding, whereas, most MCA churches “received into its fellowship many independent groups that already had a measure of organization.” In this way, there was less of a natural opportunity for women to emerge as new leaders in the MCA, because it was not rapidly growing through church-planting, where new opportunities for leadership naturally arose. The MCA also already had an advanced training program for its clergy in the early-twentieth-century. Its Fort Wayne Bible College had been preparing men for the ministry since 1904, which is only six years after the denomination’s founding. The male graduates of the college became the denomination’s leaders.¹³⁶

Both the UMC and MCA have a history of egalitarianism, though it would be a stretch to argue that their egalitarianism was fully connected to the gospel at any point. Even when the UMC was actively commissioning women into ministry, it distinguished male and female leaders. Aside from being re-commissioned when their church plants became sustainable, women were required to follow other rules that were not required of their male counterparts. Among them, was their ankle-length, long-sleeved and high-necked uniforms. The pattern they were to follow

¹³⁴ Ibid, 74.
¹³⁵ “Memorial to Women in Ministry,” in Reflections.
¹³⁶ Lageer, Merging Streams, 77.
dictated the “the size of the collar, the type of button to be used and whether or not tucks would be permitted.” However, despite these limitations on female leadership, both denominations were putting women in positions of leadership at a time when it was culturally unpopular and when there was no long tradition of female leadership in their movements to build on.

This practice suggests that there was a connection between doctrine and practice in the UMC and MCA movements, however temporary and faint. Having recently emerged from the Mennonite church and having separated from Mennonites on account of multiple doctrinal and practical issues, doctrine was at the forefront of their movements. The commission that approved Janet Douglas’s call to ministry approved the practice of women in ministry, meaning the practice of women leaders was approved of because of doctrinal belief. At this time in the movements’ history, their egalitarianism was related to other doctrinal issues. However, because the Missionary Church now has women leaders and yet does not formally condone them, there is an inconsistency in the movement’s doctrine and practice.

137 Ibid.
Chapter 9. Acts 29 Network

Acts 29 member congregations are “first Christians, second Evangelicals, third Missional, and fourth Reformed.” The Missionary Church, InterVarsity, and Converge are also Christian, evangelical, and “missional,” meaning that they are contextualizing the gospel, but the Acts 29 Network is the only movement included in my study that requires a Reformed, or Calvinist, doctrine for membership. In contrast to the Arminian doctrine, a Reformed or Calvinist doctrine teaches:

The absolute foreordination by God of every event which takes place in the universe.

The unconditional predestination of men unto eternal life and eternal death.

A limited atonement, or an atonement made for those only, who by the decree of God are predestined unto life.

The infallible regeneration of those unto whom God sends his spirit for that end. This is usually called irresistible or unfrustrable grace.

The infallible perseverance or preservation unto eternal life, once regenerated.

Because of the connection Calvinists make between God’s all-knowing power and his desire to see the world restored, Reformed movement’s quest for restoration often includes a more rote set of regulations than what is found in Arminian movements, like the Missionary Church. If God desires order, knows everything, and has revealed himself to us through scripture, then our behaviors ought to remain constant even amidst changing times and circumstances. Such rigidity of practice can co-exist with contextualization, because contextualization is about communicating the gospel.

John Calvin, the reformer and founder of Reformed doctrine, was preoccupied with orderly living and went to great lengths to enforce what he believed to be “Christian behavior.”

His attempts to “Christianize” the social order was a lifelong struggle and included such regulations as fines for missing Sunday services, which were excused only if it was “necessary to leave someone behind to take care of children or animals.” The community was encouraged to publicly shame those who did not attend services, and “if after intimation they continue to default,” the fine was raised.

The relationship between century-old Calvinist practices and the Acts 29 Network are closer than one might expect. The Acts 29 Network was founded in 1997, but founder Mark Driscoll makes a distinction between what he perceives to be the watered down Calvinism that exists in many Reformed movements in America today and the writings and sermons of men like John Calvin and nineteenth-century British theologian Charles Spurgeon.

The seriousness with which these men were known for building and restoring order, Calvin especially for his writings and Spurgeon, credited by Driscoll, as the first modern mega-church pastor, is remembered in the Acts 29 movement. In 2007, a conflict among the leadership at Mars Hill church led Driscoll to instruct the church’s members to shun the elder who refused to repent for his sin. One member complained about this instruction on an

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online message board and immediately had his membership privileges suspended, because according to Driscoll, he had sinned through questioning the authority of the movement.\footnote{Worthen, “Who Would Jesus Smack Down.”}

The Acts 29 movement is distinct from early-twentieth-century fundamentalism in that its reputation is based on cultural engagement. Members are free to keep “their taste in music, their retro T-shirts, and their intimidating facial hair.” Mark Driscoll is known nationwide as “the cussing pastor.” However, when it comes to traditional interpretations of scripture, there is no room to change.\footnote{Ibid.} In this way, though Acts 29 has shed the cultural recalcitrance of fundamentalism, it maintains fundamentalist, Calvinist legalisms.

With regard to its complementarianism, the Acts 29 movement cannot merely be reacting in opposition to secular cultures, because it has always been complementarian. Its view on the roles of women, like other doctrinal issues, cannot change. Any attempts to change interpretation of scripture are met with intolerance and discipline that Driscoll describes as fitting for “dogs.”

Dogs are idiotic ideas, stinky styles, stupid systems, failed facilities, terrible technologies, loser leaders, and pathetic people. Most churches know who and what their dogs are but simply lack the courage to pull the trigger and shoot their dogs. Therefore, it is vital to name with brutal candor the people, programs, structures, and ministry philosophies that are dogs needing to be shot. Be sure to make it count and shoot them only once so that they don’t come back in bite you.\footnote{Driscoll, \textit{Confessions of a Reformission Rev.}, 34-35.}
Chapter 10. InterVarsity Christian Fellowship USA

InterVarsity’s 1938 founding at the University of Michigan provides a focused view of the rich history of Christian student movements at universities. There were no ambitious plans for what InterVarsity would one-day become. InterVarsity USA’s founder Stacey Woods commented in the 1950s that the organization “had no thought of conquering the student world. Rather, it was simply doing each day’s task and living a day at a time.” However, in the process of simply doing each day’s task, a small group of staff workers educated undergraduates in the basic, practical tenets of the Christian faith, and helped enable the emergence of American fundamentalists from a self-imposed exile and the rebirth of Christian intellectualism and academic engagement.

Placed in the religious and historic frameworks of the twentieth-century, this accomplishment becomes all the more remarkable. The liberal/fundamentalist debates of the 1920s divided evangelicals on doctrinal lines, and also many of America’s institutions of higher learning. Among the most famous divisions was John Gresham Machen’s separation from Princeton Theological Seminary and his founding of Westminster Theological Seminary, a move that began over a central theme in the liberal/fundamentalist debates—the authority of Scripture. This dispute was closely tied to the founding of InterVarsity.

146 Ibid, 39.
147 A. Donald MacLeod, C. Stacey Woods and the Evangelical Rediscovery of the University, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2007), 21.
149 Woods, Growth of a Work of God, 16-17.
While an undergraduate at Wheaton College in the 1930s, Charles Troutman, InterVarsity USA’s first full time staff worker and associate general secretary, petitioned Machen’s newly formed League of Evangelical Students to emphasize basic Christian discipleship in their chapters. Troutman perceived the need for personal, spiritual growth and continuing, steady evangelism as an acute need on college campuses. His request for an emphasis on discipleship went publicly unanswered by the League. However, it was this lack of response that initiated the relationship between Troutman and InterVarsity USA’s founder, Stacey Woods, thereby serving as the impetus for the founding of InterVarsity in 1938.\(^{150}\)

Unlike the Missionary Church, Acts 29, and Converge, InterVarsity’s doctrinal statement is intentionally vague. Originally, it did not even refer to the Trinity.\(^{151}\) This absence did not imply that the dogma was unimportant. It was only that, amidst the liberal/fundamentalist debates at the time of InterVarsity’s founding, belief in the Trinity was an assumed position that was believed to derive from the infallibility of scriptures. InterVarsity heartedly affirmed the “divine inspiration, entire trustworthiness and authority of the Bible” in its doctrine, so a statement about the Trinity was deemed unnecessary.\(^{152}\)

Though much more explicit than its original statement, InterVarsity’s doctrine still remains intentionally vague. Among other affirmations, it declares the existence of “only true God, the almighty Creator of all things, existing eternally in three persons Father, Son, and Holy Spirit full of love and glory;” the divine inspiration and

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\(^{150}\) Ibid, 17-18.
\(^{152}\) Ibid.
authority of the Bible; “the value and dignity of all people”; the humanity, divinity, and perfection of Christ who offered an atoning sacrifice for the sins of all people; “justification by God’s grace to all who repent”; “the indwelling presence and transforming power of the Holy Spirit”; the unity of all believers in Jesus Christ; and the “victorious reign and future personal return of Jesus Christ.”

These statements make no allusion to the points of conflict between the Calvinists and Arminians. They summarize the gospel beliefs shared by all evangelical movements. In the absence of a set soteriological worldview, InterVarsity accommodates considerable diversity in doctrine, which is represented in its students who come from all kinds of backgrounds. The absence of a specific doctrinal statement naturally accommodates egalitarianism, because the corresponding absence of prohibition on female leadership allows women to emerge as leaders. But unlike the Missionary Church, whose complementarian doctrine is disconnected from its egalitarian practices, InterVarsity’s default egalitarian practices and default egalitarian doctrine are mutually supportive. They are also closely related to the movement’s understanding of the gospel. The absence of specific doctrines and the training in basic Christian discipleship that Charles Troutman pleaded for as a student, begets an ordered gospel focus with an emphasis on restoration.

Instead of freely engaging in argument about justification or baptism amongst themselves, Christian students are constantly forced to confront the reality of the gospel with a host of ever-evolving social issues that dominate campus life. These already volatile issues are magnified on the campus, which are sometimes seedbeds
of activist training.  These confrontations occur daily; while they include standard conflicts on abortion and gay marriage, they also embrace women’s issues, environmental sustainability, democratic movements abroad, responses to natural disasters and human tragedy, race conflict, gender confusion, poverty, economics, and countless other topics all-falling under an umbrella broadly conceived as “social justice.”

In choosing to pursue Christianity, students must resolve these issues in the context of their faith, but they must also simultaneously reconcile their own means of achieving resolution with their friends’ secular approach. The ethnographic study of the InterVarsity chapter at McMaster University demonstrates that students are “either intuitively or intellectually aware that introducing their beliefs about the ‘Lordship of Christ’ into the academic discourse of the classroom or the social discourse of the cafeteria would be considered… an unwelcome ‘frame intrusion.’”

In order to avoid such a “frame intrusion,” Christian students must fully understand their own beliefs and be able to fit them into campus cultures that are searching for meaning and justice in other ways. This requires contextualization, but it also explains why InterVarsity has not become preoccupied with secondary doctrinal issues like the roles of women. The constant need to apply the gospel and the answers it supplies to secular questions of social justice connect the movement’s egalitarian practices to the restorative aspect of the gospel, even in the absence of an official doctrinal statement.

Chapter 11. Converge Worldwide

The nineteenth-century Swedish Baptist settlers in the United States who formed what is now known as Converge Worldwide, drew much from their Swedish background.\(^{155}\) Believing that civil powers were necessary to sustain the Reformation, the Swedish state had become inseparably bound to Lutheranism.\(^{156}\) The evangelical Lutheran clergy were “the chaplains of the Swedish kingdom” and wielded a debilitating power over the people.\(^{157}\) No one could be trained for a job or become a member of secular trade society without the permission of the clergy. There were notable exceptions, but, in general, both the manners and morals of the Swedish Lutheran clergy were reproachable. As a religious minority operating beneath their regulatory powers and unfavorable opinion, Swedish Baptists were oppressed.\(^{158}\)

Unlike the Lutherans, Swedish Baptists practiced believer’s baptism, the practice of baptizing adults as a public proclamation of their Christian faith. This practice descended from the Anabaptists, a radical subset of Protestants that emerged during the Reformation, though there is evidence of individuals following what would one day become the Baptist tradition as early as the twelfth century.\(^{159}\) While there were many types of Anabaptists, ranging from the fanatical and violent to those who

\(^{155}\) Adolf Olson, *A Centenary History: As Related to the Baptist General Conference of America*, (Chicago: Baptist Conference Press, 1952), 43.


\(^{157}\) Quotation from Bishop JH Thomander, in *A Centenary History*, 10.

\(^{158}\) *Ibid*.

\(^{159}\) *Ibid*, 1.
simply believed in adult baptism, they were universally oppressed across Europe—including in Sweden.¹⁶⁰

For the Swedish Baptists, believer’s baptism was an act of separation from the state. It was a public statement of one’s personal convictions, but it also reflected important doctrinal differences with the Swedish Lutheran church. The Baptists’ focus on Luther’s own *sola scriptura*, a founding tenet of the Reformation that emphasized the stand-alone authority of the Bible, led to a belief that church membership should be open only to the regenerate. From their perspective, the “magical and saving power in baptism led early to the idea of infant baptism,” which undermined “the Godly way of life that rested simply on obedience to the scripture as a sufficient guide to God and life.”¹⁶¹ In this way, denying the legitimacy of infant baptism was a denial of a way of life.

By the early-nineteenth-century, a wave of Swedish emigration to America brought a faithful group of Baptists to the US.¹⁶² The group originally settled in Delaware and later moved west to the Minnesota, Illinois, and Iowa in pursuit of land.¹⁶³ On the cusp of spiritual revival, the first Swedish General Baptist Church was founded in Galesburg, Illinois in 1852.¹⁶⁴ This kind of spiritual revival was characterized by the convictions that had set the Baptists apart in Sweden and became the driving impetus behind the formation and organization of congregations through

¹⁶² In Sweden, Baptists were fined, imprisoned, and exiled. This persecution served as impetus for their emigration. Adolf Olson, *A Centenary History*, 15-17, 20.
the Midwest.\textsuperscript{165} The original intent was not form a denomination, although it
eventually reached a point in size and structure that they formally organized.\textsuperscript{166}

The movement’s early Arminian composition is reflected in its old name, the
Baptist General Conference. Historically, General Baptist has referred to
Arminianism and Particular Baptist to Calvinism.\textsuperscript{167} However, today, the movement
has much more soteriological doctrinal diversity. Though Converge does not have
complete doctrinal uniformity, the doctrines of the movement’s Arminian and
Calvinist congregations remain in alignment with views on the roles of women
suggested by the previous case studies. Arminians are egalitarian, and Calvinists are
complementarian. This is observed through several prominent pastors and
congregations, including the previously noted Bethlehem Baptist, which was led by
Reformed theologian John Piper for over 30 years and the Arminian, Greg Boyd,
pastor of Woodland Hills Church in Minnesota.\textsuperscript{168} While Woodland Hills does not
specifically affirm egalitarian or complementarian marriages, it does “affirm that
ministerial authority is based on a person’s character, calling and giftedness, not his
or her gender.”\textsuperscript{169} This view on women in leadership is clearly in accordance with
egalitarianism and the broader doctrinal framework of Arminianism.

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid, 58.
\textsuperscript{166} Larson, interview with author.
\textsuperscript{167} Olson, A Centenary History, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{168} David Mathis, “Piper’s Final Weekend as Pastor,” Desiring God, March 30, 2013,
http://whchurch.org/about/more-about-woodland/history.
\textsuperscript{169} “Controversial Issues,” Woodland Hills, accessed April 11, 2013,
http://whchurch.org/about/beliefs/controversial-issues.
The Calvinist/complementarian and Arminian/egalitarian observation in Converge is also enforced by a 1977 newspaper publication at the movement’s Bethel University, known as Bethel College at that time. Six Bible department professors and one seminary professor provided their viewpoints on the ordination of women. Three professors answered in the affirmative and three in the negative. The complementarian and egalitarian views they expressed were in alignment with their broader Calvinist and Arminian doctrines. Some even went so far as to explicitly connect their views on women to soteriology. This connection between the roles of women as a specific doctrinal issue and a broader doctrine represented by soteriology convincingly suggests that they share a non-random relationship.

Because the divergent doctrines of Calvinist complementarianism and Arminian egalitarianism are accommodated within Converge, the movement must be unified by some other means, and it is. Both complementarianism and egalitarianism thrive side-by-side in the movement because both views on the roles of women are connected to the gospel and its power to restore relationship between men and women, which is the unifying thread between them.

170 The Bethel University associated with Converge is in Minnesota and is not to be confused with the Bethel College of Indiana, which is run by the Missionary Church.
Part IV. Gospel
Gospel and the Garden

Model of Christian Belief

Gospel
Doctrine
Practice
The postmodern approach to truth embraced by Millennials recognizes some indisputable facts—it is raining, crops need water, photosynthesis requires sunlight. But postmodernism also stresses that there is a subjective dimension to truth. The phrase “I am telling you the truth” may very well mean, “this is how I see it.” In this way, truth has a certain amount of ambiguity, because it includes individuals’ perspective. What we personally accept as truths are sometimes called tastes, experiences, and emotions—a painting is beautiful, a memory is sweet, and a parent loves his or her child.\textsuperscript{172} If recognition of this subjectivity is necessary for acceptance by postmodern culture, evangelical movements would appear doomed to fail, quite apart from of their views on the roles of women.

Scripture does not tread lightly on the exact nature of the gospel. In his letter to the churches in Galatia, the Apostle Paul states: “If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!”\textsuperscript{173} As the core of Christianity, the gospel is understood by evangelicals to be “true” yesterday, today, and tomorrow, and is thought to be is true for all people.\textsuperscript{174} However, evangelicals do not regard the universal nature of gospel truth to be abandoned when (1) different parts of it are emphasized in order to respond to the needs of a particular culture or generation, or when (2) it is believed that some doctrines or practices have been wrongly regarded as part of the gospel and may therefore be discarded.

These exceptions explain why evangelical movements can hold to their constant truth in the gospel and interact with, and even to some extent embrace,

\textsuperscript{172} Wright, \textit{Truth Happens}.  
\textsuperscript{173} Galatians 1:9.  
\textsuperscript{174} Psalm 119:160; Galatians 1:6-9.  

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postmodernism. This is what separates Acts 29, InterVarsity, and Converge from the Missionary Church. Though all four movements are contextualizing the gospel and effectively reaching Millennials, only the first three have employed postmodernism’s approach to truth to help correct understandings of the gospel that were overextended and distorted in modernity. Their emphasis on the divine order of male and female relationships, be it complementarian or egalitarian, and the connection between this order and the gospel, is evidence of their willingness to re-examine the maladjusted perceptions of the gospel in twentieth-century modernity. The differing doctrines and practices between the complementarian Acts 29 and Calvinist Converge congregations and the egalitarian InterVarsity chapters and Arminian Converge congregations are shaped by their shared belief and passion for the gospel and desire to see it brought to its fullest form.
Chapter 12. Breaking Tradition; Keeping Truths

The modern era underemphasized the restorative power of the gospel. While it understood and emphasized the role of Christ-followers in evangelizing the world, it did not recognize the role of Christians in repairing and re-creating the world as they believe God made it. Postmodernism’s break from rationalistic, binary truths helped evangelical Christianity deconstruct its identity and ask new questions of itself. The consequence of this was not a break from biblical teaching, but the separation of what evangelical movements have said and taught in recent history from what the Bible is now understood to say.

According to Max Weber, Calvinists removed the “magical” qualities of salvation that dominated the thinking of many in pre-modernity and replaced it with predestination.\(^{175}\) While the doctrine of predestination left no possible way to change the status of one’s own salvation, it means to acquire assurances of one’s own salvation and eternal hope—namely, through fulfillment of a calling, which was the task personally given by God to his people.\(^{176}\) Through this act of striving to fulfill God’s commission, Calvinists built a culture that placed a high value on the work ethic. In the eighteenth-and nineteenth-centuries, their business success shaped the business practices of non-Calvinists and eventually instilled the value of vocational calling through Western culture at large.\(^{177}\) However, this progress came with


\(^{176}\) *Ibid*, 39.

\(^{177}\) *Ibid*, 16-17.
consequences, and these are particularly relevant to study of how Christians express and understand their gospel today.

According to the Weberian model, modernity also eventually brought forth an “iron cage” of rationality and bureaucracy. The primary characteristics of this cage were a decline of artistic expression, spontaneity, and impulsive behaviors in political and ecclesiastical communities, including evangelical movements.\textsuperscript{178} Christian movements and secular cultures both became bound by the bureaucratic structures of “large party organizations and private enterprises,” including the separation of one’s work and private lives, a hierarchical authority, and loyalty tied to “impersonal and functional purposes” instead of to personal or family relationships.\textsuperscript{179}

The disenchantment of the world and the rise of bureaucracy changed the practices of Christianity. In order for evangelical movements to reach the communities beyond their own walls, they needed to respond to the needs and questions of a secular culture differently than they had in pre-modernity. The arguments of rationalists and secularists like David Hume, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire, and Thomas Jefferson, all of whom rejected Christianity’s supernatural elements, necessitated a response.\textsuperscript{180} In denying the incarnation, atonement, miracles of Jesus, the resurrection, and supernatural characteristics of the kingdom of God, the rationalists challenged the orthodox core of Christianity.

\textsuperscript{179} Weber, \textit{From Max Weber}, 196-199.  
\textsuperscript{180} Wright, \textit{How God Became King}, 34.
But also being affected by the iron cage, Christian movements were limited in their ability to respond. The primary reason to study natural science had always been to “glory at the marvel’s of God’s design,” and even in the mid-nineteenth-century scientific research seemed be aligning with the Bible; however, by the end of the century, nearly all such research had been discredited.¹⁸¹ Modernity’s rationalistic assaults received two primary responses from American Protestant movements. Liberal Protestants offered a rationalist theology that diverged from the gospel as it had been understood, while the fundamentalists, who coalesced into a movement opposing the liberals, rejected many of the social, scientific, and political advancements of the Progressive Era.¹⁸²

The dominant legacies of fundamentalism in today’s evangelicalism are its countercultural protests and stringent behavioral requirements. Fundamentalist activism was observed most famously in the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1929, which brought teaching evolution in schools to the forefront of public debate, and also in the fight for temperance.¹⁸³ Though it later evolved and moderated throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, early-fundamentalism launched what are now called the “culture wars,” which regards evangelical Christianity’s response to perceived secular cultural decay as a political battle. In it, evangelicals fight the “moral failings” they observe in the world. This framework pits evangelicals against an evil social conspiracy that can only be stopped through name-calling and

¹⁸² Bendroth, *Fundamentalism & Gender*, 54-55.
¹⁸³ Ibid.
boycotts.\textsuperscript{184} Such activism, along with fundamentalists’ conservative behaviors, which ranged from obtrusively modest dress codes to prohibitions on the use of face cards in euchre games, kept much of evangelical Christianity from meaningful interaction with secular culture in the first half of the twentieth-century. Though their presence was known in the secular world, the fundamentalists’ separatism did little to evangelize a world they believed to be lost, dying, and going to hell.

The Anglican bishop and leading New Testament theologian, N.T. Wright asserts that this response to the “intellectual ventures of the Enlightenment” denied the gospel its intellectual depth.\textsuperscript{185} While advanced theological training is not necessary to accept the gospel or to live as a Christ-follower, intellectual retrenchment in the era of fundamentalism delegated faith to the realms of emotionalism and experience—important sources of religious dynamism but inadequate by themselves to engage in the Great Commission. In championing a moral code they believed they observed in the gospel, fundamentalist evangelicals missed other parts of the gospel, creating a distortion.\textsuperscript{186}


\textsuperscript{186} Wright, \textit{How God Became King}, 33.
Under the leadership of Billy Graham and others in the 1950s, fundamentalist separation from secular cultures faded. By the 1950s, many culturally disengaged evangelical Christians were united and at the forefront of popular culture. Their unity is striking given that the group was made up of evangelical movements “as diverse as black Pentecostals, Mennonite peace churches, Episcopal charismatics, Nazarenes, and Southern Baptists.” These neo-evangelicals were a group for whom “no one party could presume to speak” and yet they were organized and carried influence in secular culture.

Among the hallmarks of the twentieth-century evangelicalism that rose at this time is the “sinner’s prayer.” Printed on the back covers of devotionals, taught to children, and preached on Sunday, the sinner’s prayer became a catechism-like tool for explaining the gospel and accepting salvation. Though the exact words have taken many forms, in general, the prayer acknowledges one’s personal sin and separation from God, belief in Jesus’s death and resurrection, and acceptance of his forgiveness. Offering this prayer to God is often explained as the way to “ask Jesus into one’s heart,” “become a Christian,” and eventually die and go to heaven. Through it, scripture’s complexities are removed as barriers to evangelism.

While it would be difficult to argue that the sinner’s prayer violates scripture, the text of the prayer and instruction to pray such a prayer for salvation is certainly not found in the Bible. However, it served and continues to serve as an effective tool

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188 Ibid, 65.
for communicating the redemptive message of the Christian gospel to the public at large. In this way, it is an effective contextualization tool. Its simplicity communicates a clear message central to the gospel, although it does not communicate the whole gospel. The incomplete picture that it provides is why the restorative aspect of the gospel was underemphasized in twentieth-century evangelicalism.

In many instances, Western Christianity has understood the majority of New Testament references to heaven to refer to a place where God dwells and where humans have the ability to go after death. However, in most cases, scriptural references to heaven actually mean “God’s kingdom,” which embraces this world and the present.\(^{190}\) God’s kingdom is about bringing about the truth

That happens when human beings, in the power of the Spirit are talking about the shame and folly and sin and failure of the world on the one hand, but also about what through the work of Jesus Christ and the power of the Spirit God is doing to bring about new creation.\(^{191}\)

The sinner’s prayer emphasizes Jesus as the perfect sacrifice for humanity’s sin and is used to preach a message about going to heaven, not advancing the kingdom of God in the present.\(^{192}\) While the physical heaven the prayer speaks to is biblical, the singular interpretation of heaven in the prayer drastically limits people’s understanding of the Bible’s meaning. This approach to the gospel represents most evangelical movements throughout the twentieth-century.

The height of this kind of evangelicalism and the movement’s mid-twentieth-century rise ended long before Time Magazine deemed 1976 “The Year of the

\(^{190}\) Wright, *How God Became King*, 42.

\(^{191}\) N.T. Wright, *Truth Happens*.

Evangelical.” 193 By the 1970s, not even Billy Graham could provide a coherent definition of who an evangelical was, because a series of political and doctrinal conflicts, as well as the moral failings of some of its most prominent public leaders, had divided the coalition and weakened its influence. 194 Given this state of disrepair and limited understanding of the gospel, recent proclamations such as that in the New York Times stating that “20th century evangelicalism as we know it is ending” are not nearly as negative as they sound. 195 Evangelical movements were not healthy as they had been at the height of the neo-evangelical age, and significant growth of any kind required real change.

The shift that initiated the transition to the “big picture,” restorative gospel observed in Acts 29, InterVarsity, and Converge began primarily under the influence of E.P. Sanders. His 1977 Paul and Palestinian Judaism challenged many of the traditional conceptions about the Apostle Paul, beginning an avalanche of research that separated actual study of first century Judaism and the early church from several hundred years of Christian teaching. 196 In many ways, his work gave theologians permission to challenge commonly held ideas without immediately losing credibility for making “heretical” statements. Notably following up on Sanders’ work are theologians N.T. Wright and Dallas Willard, whom I have referenced many times. Their work, like that of a handful of other theologians, distinguishes the legacy of the

193 Marsden, Understanding Fundamentalism, 63.
194 Ibid, 63, 73.
195 Dickerson, “The Decline of Evangelical America.”
Reformation from the Christian faith itself. The Acts 29 Network, InterVarsity, and Converge show how the ideas expressed by these academics disseminated through evangelicalism and eventually shaped the doctrinal view and practices regarding the roles of women observable in much of American evangelicalism.

The Missionary Church represents American evangelical movements that have not, at least fully, adopted an understanding of the “big picture” gospel. There is no doubt that part of the denomination’s hesitancy to change its views on women’s roles, like the hesitancy in much of American evangelicalism, is based on a well-intentioned effort to maintain orthodoxy. With the “liberal” or “modernist” trajectory of several mainline denominations from the 1890s to the 1930s in mind, as well as contemporary examples there is a consciousness about the potential negative impact of adapting to secular cultural values.197

On the conservative and reactionary end of the evangelicalism that has abandoned orthodoxy are movements like Westboro Baptist Church, which is known for inflammatory protests and provocative political language. Among the group’s widely deplored behaviors is its protest of the funerals of American soldiers and signs that say, “God hates fags.” Most of evangelicalism perceives Westboro members as radical cultural reactionaries and publicly condemns their actions, lest evangelical Christianity become synonymous with hateful speech and behaviors.198 Among those accused of liberal heresy and merely “going along with the culture” are figures like

197 Bendroth, *Fundamentalism & Gender*, 54-55.

A fear of swinging too far to the right or to the left has made evangelical movements that have not embraced the “big picture” gospel wary of relativism and abandonment of the gospel. Accordingly, though the Missionary Church’s interaction with Millennials has brought the role of women in doctrine and practice to the forefront of discussion, it is yet to connect its inconsistent beliefs and practices to the gospel it preaches out of the fear of being influenced by the secular cultures it is trying to reach. The primary reason for its hesitancies has been an intent to be loyal to the gospel. However, regardless of such pure motivations, N.T. Wright put it eloquently when, in reference to biblical studies, he stated:

\begin{quote}
Much Christianity is afraid of history, frightened that if we really find out what happened in the first century our faith will collapse. But without historical enquiry there is no check on Christianity’s propensity to remake Jesus, never mind the Christian God, in its own image.\footnote{Wright, \textit{The New Testament and the People of God}, 10.}
\end{quote}

Wright contrasts a humanity made in the image of God, as described in Genesis 1:26, with humanity turning God into its own image, which has no scriptural basis. The former describes the perfect order that existed before the fall in Eden; the latter is a form of idolatry. Therefore, the defensive tendencies of evangelical movements to protect themselves from the constant, cultural changes in the secular world are natural
and from their prospective, justifiable, but defensiveness does not mean that loyalty
toward the gospel is a given.

My interview with the president of the Missionary Church elucidates this point. While citing scriptures he believed to limit the authority of women, Dr. Hossler also spoke of his grandmother, who went into city bars, became friends with the alcoholics, and converted them to Christianity. Full of pride, Dr. Hossler discussed the article she wrote in the denomination’s mission magazine and admitted that though both his grandmother and grandfather were pastors, his grandmother was the leader. In Hossler’s eyes, his grandmother did impressive work to advance the kingdom of God. Yet, despite this recognition, Hossler was unable to bring the practice of women leadership into accordance with his own doctrine. He could not make the “big picture” gospel connection between his complementarian doctrine and the egalitarian practice that he does not promote but finds hard to condemn.

The alignment of the gospel, doctrine, and practice is essential to the long-term growth and viability of American evangelicalism. By evaluating and measuring the success of its church plants, the Missionary Church has been forced to confront its complementarian position. The role of women has re-arisen as a point of conflict within the movement through its successful efforts to engage Millennials. Despite the denomination’s doctrinal belief, women are beginning to lead. Until such time as the movement is able to connect its complementarian doctrine to the gospel and abandons its egalitarian practices, or, on the other hand, brings its doctrine and understanding of the gospel into alignment with its egalitarian practices—both of which will only be

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201 Hossler, interview with author.
possible when it embraces a “big picture” gospel—the movement will be unable to resolve its conflict on the roles of women.

However, provided that the Missionary Church continues to engage Millennials, it will eventually have to resolve the issue. Engagement with secular culture first raised these questions about the roles of women and revealed the movement’s inconsistencies. The Missionary Church, like all engaging evangelical movements with inconsistencies between its beliefs and practices, cannot sustain its outreach without eventually resolving the conflict, because it must be able to provide coherent answers to the questions that postmodern outreach raises.

As a Reformed movement with a consistency in its “big picture” gospel, doctrine, and practice, the Acts 29 Network continues to adhere to Calvinism’s immovable doctrine. To that end, it teaches that the subordination of women is inherent in the order God created. For this Reformed school of thought, sin intensified hierarchical gender roles, but it did not create them. Christ’s death and resurrection “made men and women spiritual co-heirs,” but Calvinists remain only “guardedly optimistic about the possibilities of social amelioration in women’s status.”202

Aside from the movement’s consistency in beliefs and practice, Acts 29’s view on the roles of women could not be primarily derived from secular cultures or be reasonably framed as reacting against them, because the movement itself rose with intentional ministry to postmodern Millennials. Its rapid growth was initiated and sustained because of a belief in the restorative power of the gospel. While its views

202 Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*, 36.
on the roles of women were always a part of the movement, it was only one of many conservative and legalistic doctrinal positions, all of which were taught in light of the “big picture” understanding of the gospel.

Though their current postmodern context is different from that of the last century, university students have always been forced to engage with secular culture. They live as part of it. This engagement has allowed InterVarsity to stand a part as an evangelical movement that has maintained a “big picture” conception of the gospel since its inception. In his 1978 autobiographical account of the founding of InterVarsity USA, Stacey Woods commented,

Present-day shotgun evangelism with its four or five point presentation (usually omitting conviction of sin, repentance and the Lordship of Christ as well as the cost of discipleship) has become an accepted norm in the approach of professional evangelism. Thousands of decisions are reported. Which is not to say that among this multitude there are not instances of valid regeneration. The question is whether this is the biblical pattern, the usual way in which the Holy Spirit works. God’s work must be done in God’s way and at God’s time for it to be truly God’s work.²⁰³

This criticism of the kind of evangelism represented in the sinner’s prayer anticipated the views of Wright and others in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries. Woods went on to affirm a “big picture” gospel as he criticized the frame of thought that assigns salvation’s climax to the moment of conversion. He argues that the moment of conversion is important, but like the “primitive” locations to which Western students often imagine sending missionaries,

The Western world also has become a major missionary field. People in the West are crassly ignorant of the Christian faith. They are biblical illiterates, tough sophisticated in Western lifestyle. Hence for them also the gospel of

God’s grace must be taught. This has been the conviction of Inter-Varsity from its outset.\textsuperscript{204} Therefore, in the place of shotgun, salvation evangelism, InterVarsity put in place what it referred to as friendship evangelism.\textsuperscript{205} This method of outreach must be based on the “big picture” gospel because the university climate naturally raises questions about justice that are key to gospel reconciliatory themes. To be able to engage their campuses, students must address secular responses to questions of justice, which can only be done with a “big picture” understanding of the gospel.

In the absence of highly defined doctrine and any doctrinal statement with specific reference to gender roles, the movement has defaulted to egalitarianism, because women have simply moved into positions of leadership. However, their emergence is not random. InterVarsity’s emphasis on the restorative power of the “big picture” gospel has served as an unofficial commission to these women. In this way, the movement’s egalitarianism has been chiefly connected to the gospel, and not to the university’s secular culture.

Converge’s recent name-change and decentralization indicate a deliberate willingness to accommodate the “changing times” and grow with the Millennials. Its new name symbolizes intentional collaboration with other movements working to expand the kingdom of God, and its decentralization allows for such collaboration to occur at the grassroots level. This community-based structure reaches-out to Millennials more effectively than the earlier denominational structure did and serves

\textsuperscript{204} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid, 103.
as practical evidence of a “big picture” gospel that the movement has embraced, because of its emphasis on restoration.

Despite the “big picture” gospel common to Converge congregations, the movement has greater internal doctrinal differences than any of my other three case studies. Its prominent pastors range from renowned Reformed theologian John Piper and to the radical Arminianism of the well-known, open-theist Greg Boyd. The internal diversity of the Converge movement presents the most compelling case among the evangelical movements I am studying for the interrelatedness of doctrine. From the founding of the primary egalitarian and complementarian organizations in the United States, Christians for Biblical Equality and the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, to the current doctrinal debates that divide Piper from Boyd, Converge demonstrates how the specific worldviews, namely Calvinist/Arminian doctrines, shape one’s view on a broad range of issues, including the roles of women. These fully formed doctrines, rooted in the movement’s shared “big picture” gospel, shape the varying practices in Converge movement congregations.

Each view on the role of women connected to the “big picture” gospel in my case studies is motivated by an effort to restore order and live as Christians believe God intended them to in the Garden of Eden before the fall. Complementarians maintain a hierarchical view of the genders, and egalitarians do not, but both seek to incorporate their beliefs into practice out of a sincere desire to see the truths they find in the gospel made into a reality. Evangelical movements’ abilities to hold to a constant truth and yet fully function and engage with the relativistic, postmodern
society of the Millennials speak to their commitment to the Christian faith and their desire to see the world redeemed and “saved,” not just in the afterlife, but in the present. The hope of their gospel is not just for eternal salvation, but also for the restoration and advancement of God’s kingdom on the earth right now, in which relationships, especially those as foundational as that which exist between men and women, play an essential part.
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