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**CALVINISM AND PUBLIC LIFE:  
A CASE STUDY OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA 1900-1955**

A Thesis in

History

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

Using Pittsburgh's Presbyterian community as a case study, this dissertation argues that American political and religious behavior in modern times has been complex, variegated, and has rarely conformed to simple categorization. Although scholars have described this religious and economic elite as primarily a foe of significant social reform in twentieth-century Pittsburgh, close examination of their religious writings indicates otherwise. Members of this religious subculture, on the contrary, expressed a wide range of perspectives concerning their duty to public life ranging from strongly pro-business to strongly in sympathy with labor. The outcome of these differences, which sprang in large part from competing views of how to interpret their Calvinist theological tradition, was that Pittsburgh's wealthy Presbyterians by the 1930s were openly supporting the cause of labor and urban renewal. The story of this business-minded subculture's foray into social reform demonstrates the inadequacy of characterizing Americans as merely conservative or liberal, reactive or reformist, religious or secular.

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## Introduction

Scholars discussing the influence of Calvinism on modern American society have tended to focus on its role in laying the foundations for, and continuing the influence of, free enterprise capitalism. In the wake of German sociologist Max Weber's seminal 1905 essays which stressed Calvinists' belief that prosperity was a sign of divine favor, historians since have tended to draw out the connections between Calvinism and capitalism.<sup>1</sup> Focusing on Presbyterians, the most prominent of American Calvinists since the early nineteenth century, these historians have confirmed Weber's thesis by showing Presbyterian sympathies for business and their resistance to serious reform measures.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, when writing about the origins of Protestant social reform, the most noteworthy instance being the Social Gospel of the early twentieth century, religious historians have not looked to Calvinism or, for that matter, other theologically conservative-orthodox traditions. Instead, they have traced the origins of twentieth-century Protestant reform to the growth of modernist, or liberal, thinking originating in eighteenth-century Enlightenment sources.<sup>3</sup> The modernist impulse in American Protestantism centered on the idea that religion's greatest contribution to society should not be to steer one's attention to a spiritual afterlife, but rather to aid in the progress of civilization. In reaction to the growth of modernism in the denominations, conservative

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<sup>1</sup> Re-published in 1930 and since as *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner, 1958).

<sup>2</sup> Henry F. May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1949), 53; Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972), 789; Ralph Gabriel, *The Course of American Democratic Thought* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1956), 155-58, 160-61, 164-65. Gary Scott Smith is perhaps the only historian who has written at any length about how Calvinists stood at a critical distance from capitalism; *The Seeds of Secularization: Calvinism, Culture, and Pluralism in America 1870-1915* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> William Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992).

Protestants countered by rallying around strictly orthodox interpretations of the faith, what they termed “the fundamentals” In the 1920s these fundamentalists set forth an opposing platform to the cultural gospel of the modernists: a literal interpretation of the Bible, evangelism, or soul-saving, as the primary form of public engagement, and some attempts to displace secularism and particularly Darwinian evolutionism from public life.<sup>4</sup>

There certainly is merit to this description of American religion, which parallels more general depictions of a nation divided between religious-minded traditionalists who have gravitated towards the Republican party and secular-minded progressives who have gravitated towards the Democratic party.<sup>5</sup> Although this model provides an accurate framework for understanding American society in broad strokes, one must wonder if it overlooks important distinctions. Might there be Americans who have not conformed to either category, even if their temperament reflected that of the conservatives or the liberals in some ways? The history of Pittsburgh’s Presbyterian community, which was not only the most influential and powerful Protestant body in the region, but which also exerted a disproportionate influence on the city’s economic and cultural life, illustrates the limitations of this two-party oppositional model, what one might call the culture wars thesis.<sup>6</sup> Historians writing about Pittsburgh are certainly correct in asserting that these western Pennsylvania Presbyterians were conservative in their basic theology like fundamentalists were, and that their Calvinist heritage did encourage them to adopt a pro-

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<sup>4</sup> George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

<sup>5</sup> James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basicbooks, 1991); Robert Wuthnow, *The Struggle to Define America’s Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals, and Secularism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Longman, 2005) challenges the culture wars thesis, seeing more compromise than conflict today.

business model. But these scholars fail to note how these Presbyterians, despite theological similarities with fundamentalists, nonetheless embraced social reform in Pittsburgh in a manner more characteristic of Protestants of the more liberal bent.

In the instances when historians have discussed the reform efforts of this Presbyterian community they have interpreted these activities as little more than a calculated attempt to placate an angry public with half measures.<sup>7</sup> It is certainly true that these Presbyterians were usually seeking opportunities to promote business whenever possible. But what historians have falsely assumed is that this was the only motive of Pittsburgh's Presbyterian community, that it was monolithic in its devotion to increasing profits and cutting costs. A closer examination reveals a far more complex picture, a subculture whose members held a variety of views about the merits and shortcomings of capitalism. The result of this diversity of views was a vigorous internal debate about one's duty to the public welfare; the clearest outcome of this debate was a shift in attitude from a more uncritical attitude towards capitalism to a much more skeptical one, a transition beginning around 1890 and coming full circle in 1940 at the close of the Great Depression. Over these five decades those Calvinists in Pittsburgh with a burning sense of social justice, with the help of journalistic exposes and pressure from the public, stirred the majority of Presbyterians to sympathize with the poor rather than scorning them as lazy and unproductive, as many had in earlier years.

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<sup>7</sup> Solon J. Buck and Elizabeth Hawthorn Buck, *The Planting of Civilization in Western Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), 120-24; Francis G. Courvares, *The Remaking of Pittsburgh: Class and Culture in an Industrializing City, 1877-1919* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 34-35; John N. Ingham, "Steel City Aristocrats," in Samuel P. Hays, ed., *City at the Point: Essays on the Social History of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), 265-94; Kenneth J. Heineman, *A Catholic New Deal: Religion and Reform in Depression Pittsburgh* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

By and large, historians have not noticed this shift in outlook or the reform initiatives it resulted in and, at the very best, they have dismissed this elite's public contributions as insincere. One of the reasons for this oversight is because scholars have not utilized the religious sources available, in particular two weekly periodicals called the *Presbyterian Banner* and the *United Presbyterian*. Both of these sources reveal a community that did value social reform and that vigorously discussed exactly what Presbyterians' obligation to the public was.<sup>8</sup> The private sector-led reforms and charitable efforts these Presbyterians endorsed and funded resulted in tangible benefits to the city of Pittsburgh, helping to transform it from an industrial morass at the turn of the century into a city that even cynics admitted by 1960 was a vast improvement. The Presbyterian role in how Pittsburgh made this transition to clean air and green hillsides by mid-century illustrates that Calvinism has done more in modern life than simply promote capitalism. But perhaps more significantly, it demonstrates that American political and religious behavior in modern times has been complex, variegated, and has rarely conformed to simple categorization. Although Pittsburgh-area Presbyterians were of a conservative religious temperament, they were not fundamentalists any more than they were liberal Social Gospellers. Instead they represented one version of the middle ground between the two—modern-day Calvinists sustaining the historic Christian tradition of orthodoxy and positive cultural engagement as part of the same whole. That they self-consciously established, occupied, and promoted this middle ground between the divided camps of Protestantism, as well as between the ideological camps separating business

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<sup>8</sup> Due to their similarities, this dissertation will refer to both members of the Presbyterian Church and of the United Presbyterian Church of North America as "Presbyterians" unless otherwise noted.



interests and reformers, again illustrates that there are more than the two types of Americans that the culture wars thesis suggests.

**Presbyterianism in Western Pennsylvania:** Pittsburgh serves as an excellent case study for the intersection of religion and public life for a number of reasons. To begin with, western Pennsylvania had since the early nineteenth century been a stronghold of Presbyterianism so that by the early twentieth century there were, and remain, more Presbyterian church members in Pittsburgh than in any other major metropolitan area in the United States. With three seminaries, several denominational colleges, two religious weeklies, a number of well-known and highly-respected Presbyterian clergy and laypeople, and a precedent of giving generously to Presbyterian causes, this community's activities and pronouncements often reached a national audience. In addition to sustaining their own internal religious subculture, these Presbyterians in western Pennsylvania also had a long history of participating in public life. The region's Presbyterians looked back on their Scotch-Irish forbears, for whom Calvinism was a way of life in both religious and secular expressions, as the founders of the city's first governmental offices and courts, schools, academies, and its first industrial endeavors. Little in turn-of-the-century Pittsburgh was without at least some debt to the Scotch-Irish and Presbyterianism, including the University of Pittsburgh, the Carnegie Technical Institute which later became Carnegie-Mellon University, the region's leading hospitals, philanthropic foundations, museums, and concert halls, not to mention its industrial entities like the Pennsylvania Railroad, U.S. Steel corporation, and the Mellon financial empire.

Their centrality to the life of Pittsburgh also made these Presbyterians the prime target of journalistic exposes that began in the progressive era and continued for decades after. Beginning with Lincoln Steffens' 1904 *Shame of the Cities* the critique usually followed the same lines: Pittsburgh's business community invested its creative resources in making industry as efficient as possible but neglected its civic life in a gross fashion. The result, this argument went, was that workers, who toiled in dangerous factory conditions to begin with, went home to filth-ridden slums where their families lived in squalor. There were other elites in government and business whom journalists found fault with, but the Scotch-Irish Calvinists who congregated in the city's gothic-styled Presbyterian churches on Sunday mornings usually received the brunt of the blame, directly or by implication. Even though Calvinists in Presbyterian circles in Pittsburgh had already voiced many of these concerns before Steffens did in 1904, this public exposure marked a turning point. From this moment onward, Pittsburgh's Presbyterians expressed feelings of shame for their collective sin of neglecting the public in the quest for wealth, spurring the intra-Presbyterian debate over the meaning and uses of Calvinism as a tool for capitalist or reformist activity. This debate revealed more ethical consternation than most observers have assumed this elite was capable of, and it compels us to reconsider whether the reforms that they and other elites supported were intended to do more than pacify an angry public with half-hearted gestures. That Pittsburgh Presbyterians intended these measures to serve both the public and the interests of the business community simultaneously further supports the notion that these elites were sincere in their quest for civic improvement. It was a version of reform that was sympathetic to business interests, underscoring the value of personal responsibility, hard

work, and gradual rather than sudden change, but it was still a version of substantial social reform that deserves our attention.

**Protestantism and Calvinism in Modern America:** As a story of American religion, this study uses a regional subculture to add texture and nuance to the literature on modern Protestantism. Conflict has been the dominant theme in this historiography, which has focused more on the differences between warring camps than the instances in which there has been compromise and synthesis.<sup>9</sup> There is certainly merit to the conflict model because Protestants have been generally insecure in the modern world; this insecurity has bred divisions as liberals responded by accommodating to modern progress and conservatives responded by separating from modern society. Yet it may be the case that historians have over-estimated the conflict model's utility and too quickly overlooked the significant minority of Protestants who do not neatly fit into the categories of liberal or conservative. There is certainly a fair degree of truth to this conflict model as Protestants did generally fall into liberal or conservative categories, yet this study demonstrates that there have been communities that fell somewhere in the middle. This study shows one community's resistance to the idea that Protestants could not be in both camps at the same time; Pittsburgh Presbyterians attempted to do this very thing, calling all Protestants to reunify in modern times under the banner of historic Reformation-era theology and the common causes of both social service and evangelistic, or proselytizing, outreach.

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<sup>9</sup> Three prominent examples: George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Bradley Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, & Moderates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Martin E. Marty, *Modern American Religion Vol. 2: The Noise of Conflict 1919-1941* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

The fact that it was Calvinism which provided these Presbyterians with the theological material to navigate this compromise, this alternative third way to the polarizations of their times, is a direct challenge to the historical literature on American religion. The common assumption of scholars is that Calvinism began dying a long, slow death sometime in the early nineteenth century and that it was barely present in the major denominations by the late nineteenth century as an individualistic, and more optimistic, evangelicalism took its place, exemplified in the career of revivalist Dwight L. Moody.<sup>10</sup> Some literature has argued convincingly that a significant portion of the Protestant mainstream still embraced aspects of Calvinism until as late as the First World War, but that since this point it has only survived in particular denominations and regions.<sup>11</sup> This study confirms the notion that Calvinism has remained strong in pockets of American religion, but challenges the idea that its influence has been negligible by underscoring the wide influence of many of Pittsburgh's Presbyterian leaders through the twentieth century.

Although this study concludes with the 1950s, it was not the end of Calvinism in western Pennsylvania. In the decades following there remained, and remains today, a legacy of the Calvinist influence despite the fact that Pittsburgh's population has consistently declined since the Second World War, intensified as the steel mills closed in the 1970s and 1980s. The Presbyterian churches in Pittsburgh maintain a noteworthy presence, and although no longer possessing the wealth and influence they did a century

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<sup>10</sup> Sydney Ahlstrom makes the case for the slow decline of the Calvinist influence in *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972); Mark Noll questions this assumption in *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Gary Scott Smith, *The Seeds of Secularization: Calvinism, Culture, and Pluralism in America, 1870-1915* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christian University Press, 1985).

ago, they still represent one of the largest concentrations of Presbyterians in the world. Presbyterian-affiliated colleges are still strong and active and many promote Calvinist theology and explain the study of the liberal arts in Calvinist terms. The most active of these institutions are Grove City College, Westminster College, Waynesburg College, and Geneva College, but others educational institutions also promote a Calvinist outlook. Non-denominational evangelical organizations like the Coalition for Christian Outreach have sustained thoughtful Calvinist-inspired societal engagement among tens of thousands of college students in a 250-mile radius of Pittsburgh since its founding in 1971. The Calvinist ideal of orthodox Protestant theology helping support service to disadvantaged communities probably has its clearest and most prominent expression in the Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation, established in 1978 to serve the Pittsburgh area. This conservative Protestant fundraising foundation also oversees two dozen specialized organizations that work to fight poverty, addiction, neglect, and abuse among the most vulnerable members of the city's population. In sum, Pittsburgh today is home to an active Protestant subculture known nationally for its Calvinism and its emphasis on public service, a tradition of service that owes a clear debt to the longstanding Presbyterian-Calvinist presence in the region.

**The Social Gospel and the Protestant Contribution to Reform:** It is important to clarify that the Social Gospel in Pittsburgh, as in other cities across the nation, made its greatest contribution to progressivism by lending moral credibility to the reform cause. Protestant reformers by and large did not, one should note, write the laws or conduct the studies that were central to the reforms of the first two decades of the century; rather, it was through dialogue with the social scientists and other experts that Social Gospellers

made their greatest contribution. This conversation between Protestant reformers and those who wrote and enforced laws and conducted university-sponsored research was the primary means by which these religionists partook in public life through the progressive era and in the following decades. Thus, in assessing Protestants' attitudes towards reform not only during the progressive era, but thereafter, one should measure both what they advocated in their writings, public addresses, and publications and their efforts to carry out these plans alone and in cooperation with others. In many ways, then, this study traces the development of ideas and those who used these ideas to create a kind of political culture where certain reforms would have a chance to flourish.

**Chapter One: Theological Origins, 1890-1930:** The story begins in sixteenth-century Switzerland and traces the Christian humanism of Erasmus through the thought of John Calvin and to Scotland where it found its way into Presbyterianism and eventually the Westminster Confession, along the way becoming a theology of public engagement. This chapter also demonstrates how western Pennsylvania Presbyterians used this orthodox version of Calvinism to promote a compromise between the orthodox, yet militant and separatist, stance of the fundamentalist-conservatives on one end of the spectrum, and the purely cultural Christianity of the modernist-liberals, on the other.

**Chapter Two: The Contrasting Political Styles of Evangelicalism and Calvinism, 1890-1930:** The second chapter examines how Presbyterians' theology manifested itself in a distinct political style, one quite different from the populism common among most mainstream Protestant conservatives, which this study will define as evangelicals. Using William Jennings Bryan and his followers as a standard of the evangelical political style, this chapter shows how Calvinists generally preferred the

erudite over the popular, the institutional over the individual, and in interpreting history, the analytical over the mythological.

**Chapter Three: Presbyterians and the Social Gospel in Pittsburgh, 1890-1930:** This third chapter outlines how Pittsburgh-area members of the ultra-Calvinist United Presbyterian denomination in the 1890s laid the groundwork for the Social Gospel in Pittsburgh. It also shows how these reformist-minded United Presbyterians joined journalists like Lincoln Steffens in challenging their pro-business peers in the Presbyterian Church to take their responsibility to the public more seriously. After 1910 there were visible signs that these pro-capitalist Presbyterians were, in fact, changing their perspective and soon both denominations heartily endorsed the Social Gospel in Pittsburgh, adding their own Calvinist imprint to this religious-led reform effort.

**Chapter Four: The Encounter With Revivalism, 1890-1930:** For a number of reasons, both religious and related to class identity and concerns about respectability, Pittsburgh Presbyterians had always been distrustful of populist politics and thus were openly critical of the excesses of revivalism, more so than most evangelicals of their time. Yet all Protestants faced the dilemma of how to win new converts at a time when secularism seemed to undercut traditional religious faith. Pittsburgh Presbyterians found a compromise by conducting the bulk of their outreach, or evangelism, through their local congregations and thus with minimal aid from non-Calvinist traveling revivalists. This enabled them to teach the new convert the value of Calvinism, with particular emphasis on the Calvinist ideals of education and social service.

**Chapter Five: Rethinking Calvinism in Depression-era Pittsburgh:** The Great Depression was a crisis for all Americans, but posed special challenges to

Pittsburgh's Presbyterians. The steel mills they owned and ran were at a standstill and by 1932 the churches could no longer raise the financial support for local charities; what further underscored their sense of failure was that Catholic working class voters helped swing Pittsburgh from a Presbyterian-supported Republican stronghold to a Democratic one. Presbyterians looked to their own Calvinist tradition in response and concluded that they had sinned in neglecting the poor in their midst, a reinterpretation of the scope and meaning of sin that paralleled, and predated to some extent, the well-touted rise of Neo-orthodox theology in more liberal Protestant circles.

**Chapter Six: Presbyterian Calvinists Embrace the New Evangelicalism, 1941-1980:** In the wake of the Depression Calvinists in Pittsburgh began to turn to resurgent evangelicalism for ideas on how they themselves might influence public life in an era when the federal government seemed the only organization large enough to meet the challenges of the modern economy. Desiring to once again influence local affairs in Pittsburgh with the same effectiveness they had in the progressive era, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh eventually adopted an evangelical organizational model: non-denominational specialized groups targeting specific segments of the population in specific settings. Smaller and more flexible than large denominations, by the 1970s these types of organizations were the primary vehicle by which Calvinists in Pittsburgh were once again promoting evangelism and social service together as they had in an earlier time.

**Significance and Implications:** This story of Calvinist-inspired social reform in Pittsburgh confirms the notion that there are more than two kinds of Protestants, evangelical-conservative or mainline-liberal, or two kinds of Americans, Republican-traditional or Democrat-progressive. Rather, Americans divide up into a far more



complex and varied spectrum than the two-party oppositional model suggests. Presbyterianism in early twentieth-century Pittsburgh represented a distinctly Calvinist understanding of public engagement that balanced business enterprise with sympathy towards the poor and workers, biblical orthodoxy with a high regard for thoughtful public service. This story of Pittsburgh's Presbyterians also demonstrates that not all conservative Protestants have been individualistic, and often anti-intellectual, in both religious and political affairs, despite the fact that a fair number belonging to the so-called religious right conform to this image. Like any segment of the population, evangelicals do not form a monolithic block and the intellectually contemplative, social service-oriented subculture in Pittsburgh today serves to illustrate that point.

And finally this story underscores about religion what Speaker of the House of Representatives Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill used to say about civic and governmental affairs, that "all politics is local." The story of American religion and its evolution over time is little more than the aggregate of its many parts, and the more powerful and influential the part, the greater its effect on the whole. Pittsburgh was economically and religiously a very powerful city in the first half of the twentieth century. The vitality of its steel industry and the wealth it created made Pittsburgh a magnet for laborers and brilliant financial minds alike, boosting the city's population so that it was the sixth largest metropolitan area in the United States right after the turn of the century. Pittsburgh locals often were also among the nation's biggest celebrities, with names like Andrew Carnegie and the Mellon family as well-known to the average American as any were. Pittsburgh also produced, and attracted, some of the nation's rising young Presbyterian minds who saw in the intermixture of wealth, a vast working class

population, and a sizeable Calvinist subculture in the Presbyterian churches the chance to influence the public in marked ways. From their Presbyterian pulpits they often launched national careers by authoring books, selling their sermons in pamphlet and bound form, and speaking at engagements around the world. This influence on American religion continued in the postwar world as Calvinist creativity shifted from the Presbyterian Church to non-denominational evangelical ministries like the Coalition for Christian Outreach and the Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation. The attention that they and other western Pennsylvania organizations have garnered illustrate again that every national movement must derive support, and receive approval from, local constituencies. This fact makes a case study of a city like Pittsburgh a valuable insight into larger trends that have affected all Americans.

## Chapter One: Theological Origins, 1890-1930

Presbyterians in western Pennsylvania believed they were heirs to a distinguished theological tradition that required they cultivate a broad humanist understanding of the world to prepare them for service to, and governance of, society. With the knowledge and wisdom they gained from study in both theology and the humanities, Calvinists like Pittsburgh's Presbyterians believed they were to work for the improvement of society as an act of worship and obedience to God.<sup>12</sup> Even though Calvinists had typically emphasized the doctrine of original sin and thus the limits of human achievement, their understanding of God as sovereign led to a general optimism that Providence was guiding history to an ultimately good end. With this confidence Calvinists from those in sixteenth-century Geneva to twentieth-century Pittsburgh have embraced the idea of a well-informed, broadly-educated, and socially-activist church influencing the affairs of government and serving the poor and disadvantaged.

Events in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, however, would test Pittsburgh-area Calvinists' belief that practical service to the public should be a high priority. With the growth of Darwinian-influenced science and scholarship that undercut biblical claims of the supernatural, an increasing number of Protestant leaders concluded by the late nineteenth century that the churches ought to accommodate religion to the modern scientific world. Protestant liberals, or modernists, therefore downplayed biblical revelation as a source of authority and began to look to culture for divine guidance on

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<sup>12</sup> This dissertation uses the definition of Calvinist as, simply put, those Protestant Christians who adhered to the teachings of John Calvin as appearing in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In sum, this referred to a belief in the authority of the Bible, the sovereignty of God over social affairs, and the belief that "cultural activity was to glorify God and to advance his kingdom on earth." Gary Smith, *The Seeds of Secularization: Calvinism, Culture, and Pluralism in America 1870-1915* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: The Christian College Consortium, 1985), 3, 5, 14-19.

what the church ought to prioritize. By the turn of the century liberals came to embrace, to one to degree or another, progressive-era reforms and offered this Social Gospel as an alternative to the more individualistic and personal concept of salvation of late nineteenth-century evangelicals. Conservative Protestants were appalled and found both the secularization of society and liberals' adaptation to secularism grounds for militant action. Conservatives therefore concluded that the only response was to defend the fundamentals of the faith at all cost; by the 1920s were also diminishing their social service activities because they associated these with modernism and the liberal Social Gospel since modernists stressed social service so heavily. Fundamentalists' diminished view of social activism grew in spite of the fact that their nineteenth-century evangelical forbears had assumed, as Calvinists always had, that orthodox faith was a natural precursor to social reform.

In the 1920s these differences erupted into the splitting of American Protestantism into bitter camps, the fundamentalists versus the modernists, breaking up what had been a broad and unified Protestant evangelical culture in the nineteenth century. Presbyterians observed this fracturing of Protestantism but resisted the pressure from both ends of the spectrum to choose an agenda of just preserving the fundamentals, as conservatives tended to demand, or just promoting a cultural gospel, as modernists tended to demand. Instead, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh continued the heritage of their founder John Calvin to define, promote, and defend orthodoxy but also to bring the principles of orthodoxy to bear on public affairs. This decision to affirm Calvinist concepts in the midst of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy was not accidental, but rather a strategic and diplomatic attempt to convince the two parties to seek common ground as they once had

in the nineteenth century. This common ground that Protestants had shared in the previous century had affirmed both a commitment to some version of orthodoxy as well as activist participation in antebellum causes such as antislavery, education reform, and defense of the most vulnerable members of society. To reach this common ground, Pittsburgh Presbyterians believed modernists ought to return to their historic roots in biblical orthodoxy and fundamentalists ought to return to their socially-activist nineteenth-century past and gently prodded both sides towards this middle ground. For without unity, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh concluded, Protestants could not pool the resources necessary to conduct public ventures like evangelistic outreach or social service with effectiveness. Failing to unify, they feared, would render Protestantism impotent in a society already seeming to lose interest in religion.

**Historiography:** Historians have chronicled in detail the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the twenties and thirties and have given ample attention to how it played out in the northern Presbyterian Church. It was here, where along with the Northern Baptist Convention, that the fundamentalist-modernist controversy had its most public and dramatic confrontations. In Pittsburgh the Presbyterian Church had a large contingent that equaled the size and influence of any Presbyterian community in the United States; the other Calvinist denomination of noteworthy influence in Pittsburgh was the United Presbyterian Church of North America that, because of its uniformly conservative Calvinist stance, did not have enough liberals to cause a conflict within the denomination. The Presbyterian Church has received much attention from scholars who trace the lives of the most controversial figures of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy in this denomination, since doing so lends itself well to telling the story of

how the larger conflict unfolded. Therefore individuals like militant fundamentalist J. Gresham Machen, professor of New Testament at Princeton Seminary who left Princeton's faculty in 1929 to found his own seminary and left the Presbyterian Church in 1936 to found his own denomination, receive much attention.<sup>13</sup> Historians have given some coverage to Presbyterian moderates, but tend to focus just on individuals like Charles Eerdman who attempted to diffuse the situation and promote tolerance rather than exploring whole subcultures or regions that displayed similarly moderate temperaments.<sup>14</sup> When discussing regions and larger communities of Presbyterians residing in them, historians have usually focused on those where there were sharp conflicts between fundamentalists and modernists like Chicago, or where there were strong voices on either end of the spectrum, like the fundamentalists in the Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia or the liberals in the Presbyterian Church in New York.

Few historians, however, have given more than passing notice to the substantial community of moderates in the Presbyterian Church who resided in Pittsburgh. This oversight is probably because historians have focused on the most aggressive and controversial figures in their telling of this controversy and there were few in Pittsburgh at the time. It is also likely that historians have assumed that the relative quiet in Pittsburgh was because the members of this community had nothing to say and exerted no influence on the larger fundamentalist-modernist controversy taking place in the Presbyterian Church. The fact of the matter, however, is that Presbyterians in Pittsburgh

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<sup>13</sup> Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 912; George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 181; William J. Weston, *Presbyterian Pluralism: Competition in a Protestant House* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> Bradley Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

did have much to say about the controversy and offered extensive commentary, calling for goodwill and mutual understanding, reminding their peers of the dangers of excessive finger-pointing and division. This oversight by scholars feeds the false notion that there have only been two kinds of Protestants in modern America, conservatives and liberals, when in fact there have been many between these two extremes. The Pittsburgh Presbytery's efforts to calm the passions of fundamentalists and liberals demonstrates that it is too often the case that those in the middle of the spectrum are overlooked while the loudest, and most controversial, voices at the extremes receive most of the attention.

**The Origins of the Calvinist Ideal for Cultural Engagement:** Pittsburgh's Presbyterians, like other Calvinists since the sixteenth century, derived this model of an orthodox Protestant community influencing civic affairs from Calvin's Geneva. John Calvin led the Protestant Reformation in Geneva, Switzerland, from 1541 until the end of his life in 1564 and based his activism on the assumption that the reform of the church should precede the reform of society. Soon after arriving in Geneva in 1541, Calvin wrote the Ecclesiastical Ordinances, which essentially was a constitution for the Protestant church in Geneva, a constitution which city and state governments also adopted soon after the church did because they found Calvin's ideas about governance so compelling. These constitutions that Calvin authored promoted the idea of collective, representative, leadership in contrast to the commonly-held notion that governance was most efficient when one individual held all of the power. Calvin also set up the church so that its members would influence government and be able to provide direct service to the poor residents of Geneva. To serve this end, Calvin's Ecclesiastical Ordinances set up four orders of ministry for his Reformed church: pastors, who preached and administered

the sacraments; doctors, who studied Christian tradition and taught laypeople the larger meaning of biblical ideas; elders, who maintained discipline within the church; and deacons, who administered charity to the public. Reflecting Calvin's belief that the church ought to influence government, pastors and doctors were both full-time employees of the city of Geneva and together, under Calvin's influence, made recommendations to Geneva's city councils. In another example of Calvin's ideas about the direct connection between the church and service to the public, Reformed church deacons helped operate Geneva's General Hospital, which was the city's prime vehicle for care for the poor and particularly for refugees pouring into the city from abroad. Because of the General Hospital's service, Geneva became a popular destination for refugees from throughout Europe and Calvin's Reformed church worked to assimilate them to life in the city. Calvin himself was involved in virtually every aspect of Geneva's civil life based on this assumption that the reform of the church necessarily meant the reform of society; with his success in Geneva he not only trained Protestants from all over Europe who came to observe a Protestant-influenced city, but provided counsel to political leaders abroad, particularly Protestants who ruled in parts of France.<sup>15</sup>

Calvin also believed it was necessary for church laity to understand the wider meaning of their faith and its ramifications on the many aspects of life, particularly in the area of social and political ethics. For this reason, Calvin labored tirelessly to promote education and to establish the vehicles and institutions necessary to educate church members on the content of the Bible and the course of Christian history since. He himself taught church members and helped institute adult Bible classes and also offered

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Kingdon, "John Calvin," in Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *Encyclopedia of Protestantism* (New York: Routledge), 329-331; and Donald K. McKim, "Calvinism," in Hillerbrand, *Encyclopedia of Protestantism*, 331-332.



his own expansive work of systematic theology, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* first completed in 1536, towards this goal. In order to ensure the continuation of churchly learning in the future Calvin established the College of Geneva, which covered subjects such as Hebrew and Greek and other related disciplines that reflected Calvin's Christian humanist background. Like most Protestant reformers who also believed in the necessity of education as a precursor to societal improvement, Calvin owed a debt to the Catholic Dutch theologian and literary humanist Desiderius Erasmus. By translating the Bible and early church writings into the vernacular, along with building schools to encourage the same, Erasmus hoped that this religious education would reform the church and society. Calvin's early education in Paris reflected the ideas of Erasmus and other Christian humanists that both knowledge of the Bible and knowledge of the classics was vital; Calvin also studied law at Orleans in France then sat under Guillaume Bude at the University of Paris, who was a renowned authority on Greek and Roman law, before fleeing France in 1534 to join the Protestant Reformation. In Basel, Switzerland, he studied the theology of Augustine and Luther; his extensive involvement in promoting lay education thereafter reflected the northern humanist idea of Erasmus and others that education would be a precursor to both religious and societal renewal.<sup>16</sup>

At roughly the same time that Calvin was in Geneva, the Swiss reformer Heinrich Bullinger, along with several English theologians, was developing Protestant theology that would encourage this idea of a socially-involved church. Originally intended to assuage believers who feared God may have predestined them to eternal damnation, federal, or covenantal, theology posited that God voluntarily bound himself to certain

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Kingdon, "John Calvin," in Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *Encyclopedia of Protestantism* (New York: Routledge), 329-331; and Donald K. McKim, "Calvinism," in Hillerbrand, *Encyclopedia of Protestantism*, 331-332.

promises, or covenants, with humanity that provided assurance that he would not act arbitrarily as long as humans followed certain guidelines. Aside from calming anxious predestinarians, covenant theology found inspiration from the story of the ancient Hebrews and underscored the communal, and not merely individual, obligations of the faithful to God and to society. Federal theology found clearest expression in the *Westminster Confession*, a document authored in England in the 1640s that became a comprehensive standard for orthodoxy for English and Scottish Calvinists thereafter.<sup>17</sup> Believers, it stated, were bound to each other “to maintain an holy fellowship” and to seek “mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outwards things.”<sup>18</sup> In addition to underscoring the obligation of the church to both the spiritual and material needs of its members, the *Confession* also underscored the duty of Protestants to civil authorities, to preserve and advance public affairs as a good in and of itself. Since God was “the supreme Lord and King of all the world” and “hath ordained civil magistrates under him over the people, for his own glory and the public good,” it was the duty of the church “to pray for magistrates, to honor their persons, to pay them tribute and other dues.”<sup>19</sup>

The individual who did more than perhaps any other to bring Calvinism to Scotland so that this nation’s people would later adopt the *Westminster Confession*, as they did with more zeal than even the English Calvinists for whom the document was originally written, was John Knox. This Scottish political and religious reformer held Calvin in high esteem and upon his brief, yet formative, time in the winter of 1555-1556

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<sup>17</sup> Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 130-132.

<sup>18</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, *The Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (Richmond, Va.: The Board of Christian Education, 1965), 125.

<sup>19</sup> General Assembly, *The Confession*, 113-115.

as a student of Calvin in Geneva, called the Protestant city “the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the earth since the days of the Apostles.” Upon his return to Scotland Knox sought to bring the same to his homeland where he incorporated parliamentary designs into both religious and secular governing bodies of Scotland.<sup>20</sup> In 1592 the English king and parliament recognized the Calvinist church system that Knox had labored to put in place, and in 1689 Presbyterianism was the official religion of Scotland.

What brought the Scottish people and their religious ideas to American shores in the eighteenth century was their sojourn first to northern Ireland to help King James I of England pacify the region and subjugate its inhabitants. By 1659 there were five Presbyteries in this region called Ulster and Presbyterianism was clearly the equivalent of a national ideology for these Scottish subjects residing in Ireland. Drought, crop failure, and hostility from both their English overlords and their Irish neighbors convinced many of these “Scotch-Irish” to migrate to North America. They first migrated to Boston, but after finding themselves unwelcome there, they migrated to Philadelphia. Eventually a significant majority of these immigrants settled at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers in Pittsburgh. By 1776, Benjamin Franklin estimated that the number of Scotch-Irish in Pennsylvania stood at three-hundred and fifty thousand, about one-third of the population of Pennsylvania at the time.<sup>21</sup> In western Pennsylvania, these Scotch-Irish Presbyterians would attempt to recreate Calvin’s Geneva and uphold the ideal of an educated laity, an activist church in the affairs of governance, and all in the

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<sup>20</sup> Leith, *The Reformed Tradition*, 36, 41; McNeill, *The History and Character*, 93-95, 98, 178, 202-203, 290-96, 301; Placher, *Christian Theology*, 220, 224; Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 265-266; Michael Lynch, “Calvinism in Scotland, 1559-1638” in *International Calvinism 1541-1715* ed. Menna Prestwich (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 225-234.

<sup>21</sup> Leith, *The Reformed Tradition*, 42-43, 47.

framework of biblical orthodoxy. The Scotch-Irish established academies, colleges, and seminaries, used their many churches as vehicles of religious education as well, and attempted to bring this knowledge to bear on political and economic affairs as they established Pittsburgh's first public courts, governmental offices, and its first industries and business ventures.

**Revivalism, Premillennialism, and Holiness Pietism: Scotch-Irish**

Presbyterians in western Pennsylvania, therefore, were quite serious about their Calvinist heritage and its charge that believers educate themselves so as to benefit the greater public good. They were so serious about their Calvinist heritage that in the nineteenth century they aligned themselves with the hard-line Scottish-descended Calvinists at Princeton Seminary. Like all nineteenth-century Old School Presbyterians in the Princeton vein, Pittsburgh-area Calvinists aimed to avoid easy mingling and merger with evangelicals who threatened to water down the distinctiveness of their Calvinist tradition. In the late nineteenth century they supported efforts to combat liberal trends in theology within the Presbyterian Church, but for all their avowed orthodoxy were still very different from the majority of conservative Protestants.<sup>22</sup> This difference with mainstream evangelicalism was evident with the enduring presence of individualistic revivalism in evangelical circles, but also the rise of two other evangelical sub-movements which were also often at odds with the communal vision of the *Westminster Confession* and the Calvinist high regard for social ethics and social engagement.

The first widespread trend of the late-nineteenth evangelical mainstream that already preconditioned conservative Protestants to think in individual, rather than collective or communal, terms was the vast popularity of revivalism. Evangelist Dwight

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<sup>22</sup> Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 276, 463.

L. Moody held great sway as a the most visible representative of evangelical revivalism and even liberals supported him for a time because they believed that the kind of personal transformation that Moody advocated in his revivals might lead to broader societal renewal. Moody's appeals were highly individual and often sentimental in nature and reflected the extent to which evangelicalism had drifted from its earlier antebellum tradition of social reform. Where revivalist Charles Finney had preached in the 1830s about the necessity of both personal salvation and social transformation, spurring movements supporting antislavery, education, temperance reforms, and care for the most vulnerable members of society, this was a different time.<sup>23</sup> Moody, in contrast, made a far more personal appeal and pointed to a spiritual afterlife rather than active service to society. "Where will you spend eternity?" Moody asked. "Will you spend it in the mansion He has gone to prepare for you, with that sainted godly mother, with that praying godly wife? Will you spend it with that lovely child who has gone on high?"<sup>24</sup>

In some ways, Moody's personal message reflected a society that celebrated economic individualism with an intensity that was perhaps without precedent. With Horatio Alger's novels selling in the millions and the nation's greatest celebrities being captains of industry like Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller, it only made sense that revivalists would tailor their message to shifts in popular outlook. Even though liberals grew disenchanted with popular revivalism when it appeared by the 1880s that it had not effected the broader social transformation that many hoped it would, conservative evangelicals would continue to uphold revivalism in the following decades. It is worth

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<sup>23</sup> Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1992), 174-75.

<sup>24</sup> William G. McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, original pub. 1959 by Ronald Press), 4, 248.

noting that evangelicals upheld both revivalism, with its appeal to personal morality and individual salvation, and also upheld various forms of social service and reform during these years and into the twenties. But the message of revivalism that evangelicals supported continued to be individual in its conception so that it was usually the case that evangelicals engaged in social service with the hopes that it would provide the context by which they could more easily evangelize the non-believers. This only further underscored how individualistic evangelicalism had become by the turn of the century and how far it had drifted not only from the social vision of Charles Finney, but that of Protestant reformer John Calvin for whom Pittsburgh Presbyterians still held in high esteem.<sup>25</sup>

In this context of broader cultural individualism there emerged two theological sub-movements among evangelicals that further encouraged a withdrawal from public affairs. The first of these was dispensational premillennialism, which asserted that the current historical epoch, or dispensation, was in a state of inevitable decline that would result in the rise of the Anti-Christ and the eventual destruction of the world. One of Satan's tools would be the church, dispensationalists contended, which would become apostate in end times, an idea which encouraged dispensationalists to reject close association with any major denomination or interdenominational group; this only further undermined social service since often interdenominational unity was a precursor to Social Gospel-styled reforms.<sup>26</sup> Some dispensationalists could make outlandish comments that social reform itself was a tool of Satan to distract the church from saving souls for

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<sup>25</sup> Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 844; Gary Smith, *Seeds of Secularization: Calvinism, Culture, and Pluralism, 1870-1915* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985) and Norris Magnuson, *Salvation in the Slums: Evangelical Social Work 1865-1920* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2004).

<sup>26</sup> Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, 66-67;

eternity; “nothing would please him [the Devil] more,” Isaac Haldeman of First Baptist Church in New York stated in 1912, “than to be able to shut up every saloon and every house of shame”<sup>27</sup> But more representative of dispensational views towards social reform at the turn of the century were the words of James M. Gray, who later was president of Moody Bible Institute and the leading fundamentalist voice in Chicago in the twenties. One should not hope for “the millennium to be brought about by moral and political reforms,” Gray stated in a view typical of dispensational teachings about inevitable decline of society. Yet Gray also expressed compassion for the poor in the same way that progressives were and viewed Christian activism for social welfare as a means to win souls to the church, as this sermon excerpt from 1900 illustrates: “I shall feed [my neighbor] if he is hungry, clothe him if naked, visit him if sick, and especially seek to win his soul if lost.”<sup>28</sup> If dispensationalists like Gray were not as pessimistic in practice as their teachings suggested they might be, they still perceived compassion to the poor on an individual scale, as the extension of one person to another. And in the vein of popular evangelical revivalism, dispensationalists also viewed social service as a means to win souls to eternal glory in the afterlife and not an end in and of itself, or a means to glorify and serve God, as Calvinists did.

Another sub-movement within evangelicalism in the early decades of the twentieth century that added to mainstream evangelicals’ preoccupation with personal, rather than societal, obligations, was holiness pietism. With origins in the mid-nineteenth century, the holiness movement centered on the basic idea that one could attain moral

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<sup>27</sup> Isaac M. Haldeman, pastor of the First Baptist Church of New York, writing in 1912; quoted in Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 126; for a noteworthy exception see Dana Lee Robert, *Occupy Until I Come: A. T. Pierson and the Evangelization of the World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> Quote taken from George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 89.

perfection in this life through a supernatural outpouring of the Holy Spirit. After this dramatic experience the believer would have perfect love for one's neighbor and many advocates of this moral perfectionism brought this brotherly love directly into social service. Revivalist Charles Finney and many of his colleagues at Oberlin college, for instance, were advocates of holiness teaching and fervently supported abolitionism, using Oberlin College as a stop along the Underground Railroad for escaped slaves migrating to Canada. Holiness teaching also influenced the late-nineteenth-century founding of the Salvation Army, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and the urban mission movement. But the widespread acceptance of holiness piety in Methodist churches and its influence on turn-of-the-century Pentecostalism, not to mention how the holiness movement led to the founding of two significant denominations, the Church of God and Church of the Nazarene, also encouraged religious individualism. Advocates of holiness teaching stressed the inward life and denounced behaviors that might threaten one's personal sanctity such as immodest dress, drinking, cursing, gambling, or card playing. Like revivalism, holiness teaching encouraged personal ethics without following through explicitly on the obligations of the individual to society so that by 1895 one clergyman could state a view that would be commonplace by the twenties that the church "is not a benevolent institution or a social institution" but served "one purpose—the winning of souls."<sup>29</sup>

**The Modernist Impulse:** Yet despite these individualistic trends it remained the case that evangelical Protestants still sustained a social service element, albeit with the ultimate aim of winning souls, in the first two decades of the twentieth century. This

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<sup>29</sup> Baptist minister Cortland Myers of Brooklyn in 1895; quoted in Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 81; Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 806, 816-18; Christopher M. Cook, "Holiness Movement," in Hans Hillerbrand, ed., *Encyclopedia of Protestantism*, 877-878.



conservative Protestant social service element would diminish greatly, however, in the 1920s as conservatives reacted against theological modernism in the denominations. Fundamentalists' reaction against theological modernism then led them to reject the modernists' favorite progressive social causes, which led to noticeable decline of social service among conservative Protestants as the fundamentalist-modernist controversy raged in this decade and into the thirties. For all their militancy, however, fundamentalists were correct in identifying that a large segment of Protestants had, in fact, drifted quite far from a respect and regard for the Bible that even the liberals of the nineteenth century had still maintained.

In the 1920s modernists made quite clear and explicit what liberals had been coming to articulate in greater and greater clarity in the preceding four decades, that it was now necessary to accommodate Christianity to the spirit of the times. Modernists contended that the scientific spirit of the age, and particularly historical criticism of the Bible that revealed its inconsistencies, had demonstrated the inherent weakness of orthodoxy and demanded the church seek other sources of authority. Human reason, in the vein of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, could provide this corrective to the shortcomings of biblical orthodoxy. Based on this common-sense approach, modernists asserted that God was calling humanity to see the goodness of social progress, that God was asking the churches to make their priority the improvement, or salvation, or society rather than the spiritual salvation aiming one towards reward in an afterlife. Modernists, therefore, asserted that God was immanent in the affairs of humanity and in the unfolding of social progress. As George Harris, spokesman for liberalism, which also was called the New Theology in the first decades of the twentieth century, stated, "There is a

religious spirit of the age from which we may not separate ourselves,” a “devout Zeitgeist in faith as well as in culture, art and science.”<sup>30</sup> As Social Gospel spokesman Walter Rauschenbusch wrote in “The New Evangelism,” the “Gospel, to have power over an age, must be the highest expression of the moral and religious truths held by that age.” It would be necessary to overthrow “individualistic Christianity,” Rauschenbusch continued, because revivalistic-personalized Protestantism “lacks the triumphant faith in the possible sovereignty of Jesus Christ in all human affairs ... It lacks that vital interest in the total of human life which can create a united and harmonious and daring religious conception of the world.”<sup>31</sup> In summary, advocates of the New Theology, these modernists, wished to effect nothing short of an overthrow of revivalistic Protestantism and its dependence on outmoded biblical concepts of spiritual salvation in an afterlife. In the place of orthodoxy they envisioned a dynamic and modern religion rooted in historic Christianity, but dramatically modified to suit the spirit of the times.

**The Calvinist Response:** By the 1920s fundamentalists would have nothing to do with modernists and were working to purge seminaries and denominations of their influences. At the same time, modernists responded with scathing critiques of conservatives and launched a public campaign to win over those who might sympathize with their cause. This growing division between Protestants committed to preserving the fundamentals and those Protestants embracing “progressive” culture left the nation’s

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<sup>30</sup> George Harris, “Rational and Spiritual Verification,” in *A Century’s Change in Religion* (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, 1914), 471; quoted in Hutchison, *Modernist Impulse*, 102.

<sup>31</sup> George Harris, “Rational and Spiritual Verification,” in *A Century’s Change in Religion* (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, 1914), 471; quoted in Hutchison, *Modernist Impulse*, 102.

<sup>31</sup> Walter Rauschenbusch, “The New Evangelism,” 1904 essay; Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960; originally published 1904), 338-40; both quoted in Hutchison, *Modernist Impulse*, 170-71; Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 786-88; Gary J. Dorrien, *Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity, 1900-1950* (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 2003), 57-62; David U. Liu, “Modernism,” in Hillerbrand, ed., *Encyclopedia of Protestantism* Vol. 3, 1291-1294.

Calvinists in a curious position. With Princeton Seminary as their flagship institution, American Calvinists in the conservative Old School tradition first responded to the growing momentum of liberalism by attacking those who propagated it.<sup>32</sup> When Washington Gladden, editor of the liberal *Independent*, for example, called his co-religionists to move beyond “outmoded” and “immoral” Calvinist doctrines of original sin in the early 1870s, Chicago-area seminary professor George Patton aggressively worked to expose Gladden’s liberalism and drift from orthodoxy. Soon Patton turned his attention to a Presbyterian minister closer to home in Chicago in the much-celebrated controversy over liberal minister David Swing in 1874, which was the first significant confrontation between Protestants that would eventually culminate in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the 1920s.<sup>33</sup> Presbyterians in Pittsburgh, in full and open support of this defense of the faith, praised efforts to hold the conservative line and welcomed Princeton professors to speak in their churches; as Francis Landey Patton, president of Princeton and no known relation to George Patton, expressed on his 1895 visit to the Third Presbyterian Church congregation in Pittsburgh, “we are a doctrinal church” and “the best statement ... of evangelical religion, is the Calvinistic statement.”<sup>34</sup> Echoing these remarks about the centrality of standards like the *Westminster Confession*, the Rev. Jeremiah Kumler of the local Pittsburgh-area East Liberty Presbyterian Church

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<sup>32</sup> Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 815-16; George Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience: A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 241,245.

<sup>33</sup> Hutschison, *Modernist Impulse*, 58-68; John W. Stewart, “Princeton Theology,” in McKim, ed., *Reformed Tradition*, 303-304; G. W. Smith, “Swing, David,” in D. G. Hart, ed., *Dictionary of the Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 254-55.

<sup>34</sup> Francis Landey Patton, D.D. LL.D., “The Fundamental Doctrines of the Presbyterian Church,” *Addresses Delivered at the Quarter-Century Anniversary of the Reunion of the Old and New School Presbyterian Churches* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1895), 23, 27. PHS.

stated in 1900 that the “Bible alone is the supreme judge of all religious questions ... to safeguard the church against dangerous error.”<sup>35</sup>

Yet Calvinists’ insistence on maintaining biblical standards, which itself was part of a long tradition of heresy-hunting among Old School Presbyterians, obscured the culture-reforming instinct that was also quite strong among these Calvinists. Though they sided with evangelicals on the core question of orthodoxy, these Presbyterians shared with liberals a disdain for dispensational eschatology and its pessimism about this world.<sup>36</sup> Princeton conservative Benjamin Warfield, for example, claimed that “Jesus Christ came forth not to war merely but to [to bring] victory [on earth],” that the world was not headed for imminent destruction but a “golden age” when good would eventually triumph and Christ would return.<sup>37</sup> Warfield called holiness teaching “at once curiously pretentious and curiously shallow” and echoed the same criticisms coming from liberals like Walter Rauschenbusch, who targeted evangelical individualism as an “old scheme of salvation ... mechanical and remote,” and woefully out of touch with the pressing demands of modern times.<sup>38</sup> Even though operating from different views of the Bible, liberals and Calvinist conservatives shared a common understanding of the limits of religious individualism as it manifest itself among evangelicals.

Before his abandonment of cultural endeavors and shift to militancy in the twenties and thirties when he left his seminary post and the Presbyterian Church altogether, Princeton professor of New Testament J. Gresham Machen expressed the

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<sup>35</sup> Rev. J. P. E. Kumler, D. D., LL. D., *The Presbyterian Church: A Sermon, Nov. 18<sup>th</sup>, 1900, published by Request* (Pittsburgh: Pierpont, Siviter, & Co., 1900), 6.

<sup>36</sup> De Jong, “Millennialism,” in McKim, *Reformed Tradition*, 240-41.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 136.

<sup>38</sup> From *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (1907), quoted in Hutchison, *Modernist Impulse*, 166; Rauschenbusch quote from a 1919 review appearing in the *Princeton Theological Review*, quoted in Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 98; Marty, *Modern American Religion* Vol. 1, 234-35.

same Calvinist optimism about progress as Warfield did. As Machen wrote during a time when many still believed it would be possible to reconcile liberal and conservative factions, “Instead of destroying the arts and sciences and being indifferent to them, let us cultivate them with all the enthusiasm of the veriest humanist ... instead of obliterating the distinction between the Kingdom and the world, or on the other hand, withdrawing from the world into a sort of modernized intellectual monasticism, let us go forth joyfully, enthusiastically to make the world subject to God.”<sup>39</sup> In the twenties Machen would abandon this culture-embracing view because he believed, as did so many others, that conservatives needed to focus their energy and resources on preserving the fundamentals. But at this earlier date before the fundamentalist-modernist controversy would hit full steam, Machen and other Calvinists were hesitant to blast liberals’ interest in cultural engagement or to threaten a damaging schism. Choosing to take a more diplomatic approach, one Princeton conservative conceded that liberalism’s “desire to reconcile Christianity with the dominant thought of the age ... the harmonizing tendency,” was “most logical and natural” and thus that other Calvinists ought to be careful not to alienate liberals without pause.<sup>40</sup> Out in western Pennsylvania, there was a similar desire to be careful in one’s treatment of liberals. When a Princeton-affiliated conservative named Caspar Gregory visited Western Seminary in Pittsburgh in 1901 to address liberal German theology, the *Presbyterian Banner* called the discussion “of more than ordinary interest,” expressing hope that “the outcome of all the theological ferment in Germany [where modernism had strong support] will be helpful to the progress of

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<sup>39</sup> 1913 quote from the *Princeton Theological Review*, quoted in Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 137-38; Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 45.

<sup>40</sup> George Patton, son of Princeton president Francis L. Patton, from *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, quoted in Hutchison, *Modernist Impulse*, 201.

Christianity.”<sup>41</sup> By the years following the First World War, such optimism about synthesizing liberal and conservative strands of Protestant thought would go by the wayside, but even into this period of religious division Pittsburgh would be one of the few subcultures to maintain both orthodoxy and the humanist ideal of cultural engagement.

**Calvinism and Worldly Engagement:** Although it may have appeared at times that Presbyterians in Pittsburgh were merely following the lead of arch-conservatives like J. Gresham Machen who would soon lead militant fundamentalist in the Presbyterian Church, a moderate impulse was in fact quite strong in western Pennsylvania Presbyterianism. This moderate tendency was evident early, as when William McEwan of Third Presbyterian of Pittsburgh in 1895 stated his hope that the church was entering “an era in our history most memorable and hopeful” to witness the “triumph of faith and love over ... strifes (sic) and jealousies,” to leave behind “the spirit of division, the natural foe of true progress.”<sup>42</sup> Other conservative Calvinists in Pittsburgh offered their appreciation for liberals’ emphasis on social progress and service, even if Presbyterian Calvinists in Pittsburgh also rejected liberals’ downplaying of divine revelation in the Bible. This was evident when United Presbyterian minister James D. Rankin in 1901 balanced his disdain for the “infidel lecturers and writers” of his day with appreciation for the “reverent and God-fearing [liberals]” who promoted the cause of social progress.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> James H. Snowden, “Dr. Caspar Rene Gregory’s Address in the Western Theological Seminary,” *Presbyterian Banner* 88 (September 26, 1901): 5.

<sup>42</sup> Rev. William L. McEwan, *Addresses Delivered at the Quarter-Century Anniversary of the Reunion of the Old and New School Presbyterian Churches* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1895), 14.

<sup>43</sup> For evidence of the conservative nature of the United Presbyterian Church, see James A. Grier, “Conservatism and Aggression—delivered in 1893,” in *Pastoral Homilies: Delivered as Commencement Addresses to the Graduating Classes of the Allegheny Theological Seminary* (Pittsburgh: United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1909), 9.

“Applied Christianity,” Rankin stated in a clear reference to Social Gospeler Washington Gladden’s *Applied Christianity* (1886), “is the most urgent need of the times ... If the church fails to discern this duty and sleeps on in fancied security ... the ruin of civilization—cannot be far away.” His conclusion was what many Social Gospellers at the time had reached, that “The church of Jesus Christ must be more active ... This is its work for the 20<sup>th</sup> century,” even if he and most other Calvinists in Pittsburgh still believed that orthodoxy should inspire this activism.<sup>44</sup>

Yes despite their similarities, Calvinists and Protestant liberals differed over the question of sin and its effects on both the individual and society, Calvinists posing a far less sunny assessment than their Social Gospel and liberal peers. Modernists, one should note, were so comfortable with equating the cause of the church with that of culture because they tended to see humanity as essentially good and had largely eschewed the doctrine of original sin. In contrast with this optimism, Calvinists in Pittsburgh like James Snowden of Western Seminary aligned himself in 1901 with conservatives like B.B. Warfield at Princeton to preserve the “the essential elements of the Reformed faith,” as an “admirable presentation” of Calvinism.<sup>45</sup> Snowden shared Warfield’s sense of the dependence of the “sinner for salvation on Jesus Christ alone” and furthermore the dependence of “all creatures upon his will.”<sup>46</sup> It was because of the goodness of God, and not the “immense latent perfectability in human nature,” to quote Walter Rauschenbusch, that Snowden and other Calvinists believed progress was possible in a

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<sup>44</sup> James D. Rankin, *Nineteen Christian Centuries: A Series of Sermons Preached in the First United Presbyterian Church of Denver, Colorado, by the Pastor James D. Rankin* (Denver: Collier Printing Co., 1901), 70, 101.

<sup>45</sup> James Snowden, “Recent Opinions on the Creed Problem,” *Presbyterian Banner* 88 (August 22, 1901), 5.

<sup>46</sup> James Snowden, “Our System of Doctrine,” *Presbyterian Banner* 88 (September 5, 1901), 5.

sinful world.<sup>47</sup> As Snowden stated, “the builder of all things, in whom all things live and move and have their being,” providentially guided the “processes of the world ... in a perfect and absolute degree.”<sup>48</sup> Snowden could assert to his reading audience in the *Presbyterian Banner* that the “Maker of all things has a disposition of goodwill towards us” and therefore that “we know that all things are working together for the good ... Discipline, disease, death, the very darkest things in the world” despite the frailty and sin of humanity.<sup>49</sup> It was only because of God’s redemption of a fallen world, and not humanity’s innate goodness as modernists asserted, that Calvinists in Pittsburgh like James Kelso, also of Western Seminary, could express hope that “the leaven of Christianity” could redeem “a perverted civilization ... [and] remove the plague spots of our own social order.”<sup>50</sup>

**The Growing Controversy, 1922-24:** The First World War tempered liberals,’ and virtually every observer’s, assessment of human nature and the possibilities for civilization. Washington Gladden and other modern-minded Protestants did not abandon their basic optimism, however, and claimed that liberals needed to simply work harder to bring their cultural gospel, that of modernism, to the world and draw out the basic goodness in humanity. Liberal Baptist Harry Emerson Fosdick became the leading voice of this modernism in the twenties, claiming in *Christianity and Progress* (1922) that faith in progress was merited but that it would require more thorough efforts to take effect.<sup>51</sup>

As the decade’s leading proponent of modernist Christianity, Fosdick also became the

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<sup>47</sup> Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), 422; quoted in Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 786.

<sup>48</sup> “Should We Pray for Rain?” *Presbyterian Banner* 88 (August 8, 1901): 5.

<sup>49</sup> “God is Love,” *Presbyterian Banner* 88 (May 9, 1901), 6.

<sup>50</sup> James A. Kelso, “Introduction,” in Edward Warren Capen, *Sociological Progress in Mission Lands* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1914), 1914.

<sup>51</sup> Hutchison, *Modernist Impulse*, 3, 239, 244, 254-55; Dorrien, *Making of American Liberal Theology*, 377; Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 885.



target of fundamentalists' criticism and he would not stand by idly. Fosdick countered fundamentalists' criticisms with a 1922 sermon entitled, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" and delivered it from a prominent New York City Presbyterian pulpit, sparked the fundamentalist-modernist controversy that lingered well into the thirties in the major denominations, especially in the Presbyterian Church.<sup>52</sup> As the controversy between fundamentalists and modernists took shape in the Presbyterian Church, both fundamentalists and modernists, as well as moderates in the middle, worked to ensure that their side would win the all-important moderator post in the General Assembly. The position of General Assembly moderator of the Presbyterian Church in 1924 fell to the fundamentalists, whose leader at the time was a young native western Pennsylvanian named Clarence E. Macartney, Princeton Seminary graduate, friend of J. Gresham Machen, avowed leader of the fundamentalist cause in response to Fosdick's sermon.

Clarence Macartney was then the pastor of Arch Street Presbyterian church in Philadelphia but in 1927 would assume the pulpit at Pittsburgh's most prominent congregation, First Presbyterian, and for three decades be the region's most well-known clergyman. As moderator of the 1924 General Assembly, Macartney found himself the object of great attention after a narrow victory, which allowed him to appoint fellow fundamentalists to key denominational offices and thus drive liberals to the peripheries of the denomination if he wished to. But Macartney was soon a disappointment to Machen and other exclusivists; despite his combative posturing preceding his tenure as moderator, once in power Macartney displayed a moderate and inclusive temperament that surprised even liberal Presbyterian critics like Henry Sloan Coffin, who feared the Presbyterian Church would split during Macartney's 1924-25 term. In the end, it was a different

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<sup>52</sup> Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 145.

Presbyterian fundamentalist, J. Gresham Machen of Princeton Theological Seminary, who would lead the militants in this church, first in his departure from Princeton's faculty to form a new seminary in 1929, and then his decision to leave the denomination altogether in 1936. Machen commented later about Macartney's tenure and his inclusivist position that "We followed him, and now he deserts us . . . . It's really quite base."<sup>53</sup> The rift between these two conservatives would grow in the thirties and in 1934 Macartney would comment that Machen's split with the denomination was "in spirit and tone harsh, severe, unscriptural, and un-Presbyterian."<sup>54</sup>

**The Moderate Impulse in Pittsburgh:** Macartney's desire to retain institutional unity in the church, even though he adamantly hoped a conservative interpretation of the Bible would prevail and that liberals would change their mind, meshed well with the moderate temperament of the Pittsburgh community he joined in 1927. Despite the Presbytery's longstanding Scotch-Irish Old School conservatism, the Pittsburgh Presbytery had surprised many conservatives in 1923 when they refused to endorse the Philadelphia Presbytery's proposition to punish the New York Presbytery for granting liberals like Fosdick the chance to speak in the first place.<sup>55</sup> "When Christians disagree touching the interpretation of Scripture," Pittsburgh leaders wrote in 1924, "they are beset by the temptation, each to consider the other the offender."<sup>56</sup> Others commented that they had "no sympathy" with the "small censorious element in the Church who have been bent on excommunicating all who differ from them" and offered a "protest" J. Gresham

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<sup>53</sup> 1928 quote from Bradley Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists & Moderates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 175.

<sup>54</sup> From the *Presbyterian*, 1934, quoted in Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 28-31, 209; D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1994); Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1955).

<sup>55</sup> Loetscher, *The Broadening Church*, 110-111.

<sup>56</sup> G. N. Luccock, "Presbyterian Doctrinal Attitudes," *Presbyterian Banner* 110 (May 1, 1924): 6.

Machen's "use of language that is unfair to a brother minister." in reference to his attack on Fosdick. As the drama unfolded Presbyterians in Pittsburgh made it clear that they were not abandoning orthodoxy, but rather the militant exclusiveness of the fundamentalist movement. "The [Presbyterian] Banner has not defended Fosdick, but it has insisted on brotherly treatment of the New York Presbytery," the *Presbyterian Banner* editorialized, "for how can we preach good will among the nations and not practice it in our inter-presbyterial relationships?"<sup>57</sup>

A similar mentality was present on Pittsburgh's other major, if relatively smaller, Calvinist denomination, the United Presbyterian Church of North America. This denomination completely avoided internal controversy because it had no liberal faction pushing for theological change, and yet its contingent in Pittsburgh likewise called for an open dialogue with liberals for the sake of the church's broader mission. "It is to be expected that Christians will differ in their understanding," editorialized the *United Presbyterian* in 1924, as "the human mind is finite" and "controversy is a healthy sign." But they added that "religious controversy" too often sprang from "a spirit . . . of uncharitableness and egotism" creating a situation where the "greatest enemies of the Church are not those outside its membership, but those within it, who possess an unbrotherly and unsisterly spirit." United Presbyterians could admit that theirs was "a homogenous Church" based on "the inspiration and authority of the Word of God," yet clearly rejected the separatism of militants in the church.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, they were in agreement with Presbyterian Church clerics in Pittsburgh on the necessity of focusing attention on public challenges such as poverty, calling for permanent housing and

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<sup>57</sup> William A. Kintner, "The General Assembly," *Presbyterian Banner* 110 (June 5, 1924), 4.

<sup>58</sup> "The Ethics of Christian Controversy," *United Presbyterian* 82 (May 29, 1924): 3.

supportive communities in one contemporary instance for “the young men and women strangers in the city who live in rooming houses and boarding houses.”<sup>59</sup>

**The Pittsburgh Influence on Clarence Macartney:** That the Pittsburgh Presbytery, given its position in response to this controversy, would choose to invite Macartney, a member of what the *Presbyterian Banner* in 1924 termed “the extreme right wing—the Controversialists,” to head its most visible congregation in 1927 inevitably raised some concerns about what effect the fundamentalist leader would have in their city.<sup>60</sup> When Macartney became the moderator of the Presbyterian Church in 1924, the Pittsburgh Presbytery stated that he should set aside his tendency to be “partisan in conviction” and “instinctively [assume] a broader outlook” to “act as a representative of the whole people” as any true leader would.<sup>61</sup> That they invited Macartney to join their Presbytery three years later indicates that they approved of how he handled the moderatorship of the General Assembly and confirmed what they probably hoped, that Macartney would follow in the tradition of his predecessor at First Presbyterian Maitland Alexander, who balanced his conservatism with an active and diplomatic relationship with the public.<sup>62</sup> Historian Bradley Longfield explains Macartney’s moderate instincts as the outgrowth of family and cultural influences, pointing to the Scottish-descended Reformed Presbyterian Church of his youth in eastern Ohio and western Pennsylvania. As a member of this very small denomination, Longfield points out, Macartney learned that maintaining church unity was vital so the church might influence mainstream public

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<sup>59</sup> W. E. McCulloch, “Alone in a Great City,” *United Presbyterian* 82 (June 12, 1924): 4; Jamison, *United Presbyterian Story*, 11-26, 61-75, 97.

<sup>60</sup> William A. Kinter, “The General Assembly,” *Presbyterian Banner* 110 (June 5, 1924): 3.

<sup>61</sup> “The New Presbyterian Moderator,” *Presbyterian Banner* 110 (June 12, 1924): 5.

<sup>62</sup> C.G. Denison, “Maitland Alexander,” in D.G. Hart, ed., *Dictionary of the Presbyterian & Reformed Tradition in America* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 16.

life for the sake of evangelistic outreach and on behalf of worthy causes like antislavery.<sup>63</sup> It is probably the case that Macartney's tenure in Presbyterian Pittsburgh intensified these moderate tendencies, a point Longfield does not consider in his biographical coverage of the minister.

Assuming the pulpit of Maitland Alexander was certainly one factor that encouraged Macartney in his moderate and diplomatic tendencies; once in Pittsburgh the fundamentalist minister assumed a very public role, using his post at First Presbyterian as a springboard for preaching, broadcasting these sermons over the radio, and conducting well-attended weekday luncheons for the city's business leaders and others in downtown Pittsburgh, not to mention his active publishing career.<sup>64</sup> Believing that the real fight for orthodoxy was not as much in the seminaries as it was in the churches, colleges, and in the public eye, Macartney developed his role as pulpiteer in a major denomination that already had an established influence at a time when many were departing the mainline churches. He regularly published in the *Presbyterian Banner*, for instance, even though its editors and contributors exhibited much more moderate and sometimes-liberal tone than Macartney would ever espouse.<sup>65</sup> Macartney also had ties to the influential liberal periodical *Christian Century*, which praised him as "one of the best known and most popular preachers in the Presbyterian Church" and a man of "unusual pulpit power." The *Century* reviewed his historical writings and published sermons and offered positive reviews on most occasions, despite the theological gap between them.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 125-25, 175.

<sup>64</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 216-217.

<sup>65</sup> Clarence E. Macartney, "Dr. Macartney In Mexico," *Presbyterian Banner* 116 (September 12, 1929): 10; "The Christian Act: The Cross," *Presbyterian Banner* 121 (July 19, 1934): 9, are two such examples out of many.

<sup>66</sup> *Christian Century* (September 16, 1942): 1122. See the *Crozer Quarterly* 24 (January, 1947): 98. *The Christian Century* 63 (October 2, 1946): 1185.

In 1939 the *Christian Century* editors asked Macartney to contribute to a series entitled “How My Mind Has Changed in This Decade” that included such prominent figures as Karl Barth and leaders from Congregational, Episcopal, Methodist, and Disciples of Christ churches. In this article Macartney addressed the question of why he chose to remain within a denomination that so many other avowed fundamentalists had left. Macartney wrote of “widening experiences” in his own life that had not shaken his faith in the “underlying truths” of the Bible, but obviously had affected his outlook in comparison to his earlier career in the twenties as leader of the fundamentalist coalition in the Presbyterian Church. He also praised what he described as “a decided swing from the extreme modernist position toward what may be described as the conservative or evangelical position.”<sup>67</sup> Though he made no mention of what had broadened him as a person or who these individuals were who had shifted from modernism to a more biblical-orthodox view, the warm response the article received in Pittsburgh suggests that some of these influences had to be local. John McNaugher of Pittsburgh-Xenia seminary, for instance, congratulated Macartney for holding to “the abiding truths of the Christian Gospel,” but underscored the value of speaking to “the heterogeneous readers of The Christian Century” and doing so in “a fraternal spirit” that “ought to disarm criticism.” So pleased was this well-known author and leader within the United Presbyterian church that he told Macartney that he “strongly advised the reading of the article by our students” at the United Presbyterian seminary.<sup>68</sup> Others in Pittsburgh wrote to Macartney in response to the *Century* article, one minister admitting that he himself was “classified

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<sup>67</sup> Clarence Edward Macartney, “Warm Hearts and Steady Faith: Eighth Article in the Series ‘How My Mind Has Changed in This Decade,’” *Christian Century* (March 8, 1939): 315-319.

<sup>68</sup> Letter from John McNaugher to Clarence Macartney (March 9, 1939), in subject heading “Christian Century Article,” Macartney Archives.

as a liberal,” but found the piece “strong and steady” and added an olive branch, that he “regret[ted] the superficiality of much that poses as liberalism.”<sup>69</sup>

The moderate temperament of Pittsburgh’s Presbyterian community was, in all likelihood, a factor in why Macartney expanded on his own moderate impulses later in life. The Calvinists in the region whom Macartney encountered, individuals like Maitland Alexander who preceded him at First Presbyterian, Hugh Thompson Kerr of Shadyside Presbyterian church, John McNaugher of Xenia Seminary, James Kelso of Western Seminary, and James Snowden of the *Presbyterian Banner*, were members of a broader community of men and women whose conservatism never excluded the possibility of fruitful dialogue with those different from them.<sup>70</sup> Each had moderate-to-conservative leanings, but were well-regarded for their congenial spirit and none fell into the category of controversialist. This regard for civility and kinship had a long history in western Pennsylvania and may help explain why the Pittsburgh Presbytery had no leading fundamentalist newspapers, periodicals, radio programs, congregations, colleges, or seminaries during a time when Philadelphia and other cities like Chicago had many. In summary, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh called for goodwill among Protestants and particularly among their fellow Presbyterians at a time when Calvinists in other regions of the country were attacking each other. They believed it was possible for the warring parties to set aside their differences and remember their common past in not only the broad evangelicalism of the nineteenth century, but the orthodox, yet socially-engaged, Christianity of the Protestant Reformation.

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<sup>69</sup> Letter from Rev. John F. Green of the German Evangelical Protestant Church, McKeesport, Pa., to Clarence Macartney (August 11, 1939), in subject heading “Christian Century Article,” Macartney Archives.

<sup>70</sup> There were few prominent woman leaders in the Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh at this time, though women were dedicated laborers in almost all of the church’s undertakings.

**Cultural Optimism in Western Pennsylvania:** Part of how Presbyterians believed fundamentalists and modernists could regain a sense of the common ground their shared was to embrace initiatives that both parties believed had intrinsic worth. For Pittsburgh's Presbyterians, social service fell into this category and they pushed forth the ideal of cultural engagement during the twenties as a reminder to fundamentalists and modernists that the church had a larger purpose to serve society. Ever optimistic about the usefulness of public service as a means to join conservatives and liberals in a common positive endeavor, Presbyterian leaders in Pittsburgh reiterated their "Christian Optimism" based on "the sovereignty of God and the will of man consecrated to God." Despite the death toll in Europe following the First World War, the ill prospects of a Wilsonian postwar international League of Nations, and growing religious strife, they reminded themselves of Paul's words that "'all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose.'" What they believed were the good purposes of the church in the apostle Paul's day involved "'the great benevolent enterprises of the church,'" a church that "never yielded completely to the narrow view of individual salvation" and maintained both spiritual salvation and social service as its ideal.<sup>71</sup> United Presbyterians saw "signs of real progress towards the Kingdom of God" on earth and cited "the increasing sentiment against war" as evidence that God was immanent in the affairs of humanity in their current time. The possibility of social progress, therefore, ought to provide hope to all Protestants that they could participate in such affairs with confidence, remembering goals that all Protestants should share.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Rev. Paul G. Miller, "Christian Optimism," *Presbyterian Banner* 105 (April 17, 1919), 11.

<sup>72</sup> "The War Against War," *United Presbyterian* 82 (January 17, 1924), 5; United Presbyterians were also quite interested in world missions as part of their calling; see Jamison, *United Presbyterian Story*, 76-95;



Even after the embarrassment of the Scopes Trial when William Jennings Bryan and his fundamentalist followers came off as anti-intellectual and it appeared to many that conservative orthodoxy might be in great peril, the *United Presbyterian* could still assert with confidence that “the men that in every age have lived and taught the Holy Scriptures ... have blazed the way to a better and higher civilization.”<sup>73</sup> Bible-believing Christians, they continued, need not fear a secularizing world as long as they kept faith in God as redeemer of a fallen creation, using his church to transform society for the better. Presbyterian Church members in Pittsburgh also affirmed this faith in God as the sovereign ruler of earth, assuring themselves that “God is the supreme ruler ... [and] the kingdom of God solves all our problems or puts us into an atmosphere and disposition that enable us to solve them.”<sup>74</sup> The trials of any one time might undermine the hopes of reformers laboring on behalf of justice and peace, but these Presbyterians found reassurance that God was the author of history and would continue to redeem and transform their world as long as there were those willing to respond to the call of godly service. Reiterating so many aims that the authors of the liberal Social Gospel had articulated in hope that conservatives might also share the same view, they stated how “[Jesus] did not come to the world as a spectator comes to a battle to witness it from some distant height of safety” but “as the physician and the nurse to minister to the wounded and dying.” Their duty, and that of all Protestants, liberal and conservative, was to “find this same sick, sinful, sorrowing world and enter it in healing ministry.”<sup>75</sup>

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see also John Elliott Wishart, D. D., *The Christian Attitude Toward War* (Pittsburgh: United Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1918).

<sup>73</sup> R. H. Hume, “Atheism’s Campaign Against Christianity,” *United Presbyterian* 85 (August 18, 1927): 11.

<sup>74</sup> “The Need of America,” *Presbyterian Banner* 114 (April 12, 1928): 7.

<sup>75</sup> “How Jesus Lived in the World,” *Presbyterian Banner* 116 (July 18, 1929): 9.

**Conclusion:** Orthodox Calvinism of the Scotch-Irish lineage, for all its contentiousness, also promoted a kind of Christian humanism that was deeply optimistic that the hand of Providence was guiding history towards an ultimately good end. This same optimism had encouraged John Calvin to endeavor to reform not only the Protestant church of Geneva but to believe that the same reforms would make this city's government more equitable and its society more just. Pittsburgh Presbyterians believed that orthodox Protestantism was a natural precursor to the sort of social activism that Calvin had promoted in Geneva and that Charles Finney had in antebellum America through the abolitionism and other reforms. The rendering of Protestantism, and more specifically a Calvinist denomination, into two bitterly-opposed camps seemed to the Presbyterians of Pittsburgh a travesty. It was un-Christian for the hatred it seemed to engender and posed a false dichotomy between orthodoxy, on the one hand, and vigorous social reform, on the other. In response to this sad state of affairs, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh attempted to reach out to both fundamentalists and modernists, assuring them that compromise with the opposing party did not necessarily mean abandoning first principles. To the fundamentalists they affirmed the necessity of a biblical outlook on life, and to the modernists they affirmed the necessity of a church willing to serve the needs of the disadvantaged. In the final analysis, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh repeatedly presented Calvinism and the idea of orthodox social service as the foil, the solution, to this dilemma that had ripped American Presbyterians, and Protestants, into two. Such divisions were unnecessary, Pittsburgh Presbyterians repeatedly argued, if one merely remembered the common past in the Reformation that all Protestants shared.

## **Chapter Two: The Contrasting Political Styles of Evangelicalism and Calvinism, 1890-1925**

At the turn of the century it might have appeared to any observer that Calvinists like Pittsburgh's Presbyterians and conservative mainstream evangelicals were essentially the same. Both shared the belief that evangelistic outreach was a necessary and important venture the churches ought to undertake. They also both believed that, as conservatives, it was necessary to defend biblical orthodoxy and work to curb the spread of liberal theology in the denominations, and also to curb the spread of secularism in society. Furthermore, in the realm of public affairs, conservative evangelicals and Calvinists both shared the Puritan notion that America ought to be a Christian nation, evident in their common support of a variety of attempts to bring religion to bear on public life in one way or another. Within two decades, however, differences between conservative evangelicals, a very large segment of which would enter a militant fundamentalist stage by the 1920s, and Calvinists like those concentrated in western Pennsylvania, became quite evident. As fundamentalists came to distance themselves from social reform because they associated it with modernism, Calvinists in western Pennsylvania sustained their longstanding tradition of social activism.

That Pittsburgh's Presbyterians never participated in this "great reversal," as historian Timothy Smith termed it, was not an accident. Rather, it sprang from the fact that many Calvinists had been resisting the individualistic, popular, flavor of American evangelicalism for nearly two centuries. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the issue had been questions of revivalism and interdenominational cooperation, but in the twentieth century the question that would divide Protestants was how, and if, to embrace

modern culture. Yet the core issue remained the same for American Calvinists from generation to generation, whether to assimilate to American individualism in its many forms or not. These differences between Calvinists and conservative evangelicals sprang from theological differences and resulted in competing outlooks on life and, more specifically, two distinct political styles. In summary, there were three key resulting differences in political style between Calvinists and conservative evangelicals. The first was that Calvinists, like those in Pittsburgh's Presbyterian community, understood the church and society in more communal, institutional, terms than evangelicals did. Both evangelicals and Calvinists distrusted concentrated power, but Calvinists were less inclined than evangelicals to proclaim unfettered personal freedom as the solution and chose to work through institutions when they could. This difference over the utility of institutions was because Calvinists assumed that human sin manifest itself in all aspects of life, individual or institutional. The ubiquitous nature of sin, therefore, required that one vigilantly root it out in all or any of its forms, collective or individual, institutional or personal.

The second difference in political style between Calvinists and conservative evangelicals was that Calvinists preferred a more learned and scholarly type of public discourse than the populist-influenced, highly democratic style evangelicals embraced. Presbyterians and other American Calvinists had always been distrustful of democracy because, again, they believed the promoters of democracy often underestimated how pervasive sin was, even when manifest in the will of the American people. Therefore, Calvinists sought prudence and depth of analysis when thinking through how they themselves were to respond to the controversial and important issues of their day. This

resulted in Calvinists' penchant for extensive scholarship and education as the precursor to thoughtful public engagement; this was to curb even Calvinists' own sinful tendencies that might lead them to rush to quick and rash decisions. The third major difference in political style between evangelicals and Calvinists was in their respective approaches to history. Evangelicals tended to see themselves as direct descendents religiously of the first-century church and politically of the American Revolution, overlooking the centuries in between as negligible at best, corrupt and burdensome at worst. Though similarly patriotic and sometimes dismissive of pre-Reformation history, Calvinists generally took a keener interest in history and sought to understand their times in light of the past. Presbyterians took this interest in history so that they could best inform their political decision-making, for through study of the past, these Calvinists observed both the human capacity for weakness and corruption, but also the redemptive work of Providence.

**Historiography:** Historians have not given more than passing attention to this Calvinist political style, even though president Woodrow Wilson exemplified it perfectly and Presbyterians throughout the United States, especially in Pittsburgh, did as well. It has more often been the case that historians have assumed that all, or most, conservative Protestants have in one way or another exhibited the anti-intellectual and populist tendencies characteristic of a majority, but not all, evangelicals. Historian Mark Noll, in describing modern evangelical political behavior, has stressed the overwhelmingly populist and anti-intellectual tendencies of the majority of evangelicals. Noll echoes the earlier critique of Richard Hofstadter, who argued convincingly that many evangelicals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have contributed to the broader phenomenon of

American anti-intellectualism.<sup>76</sup> William Martin's description of the rise of the religious right in the postwar years likewise highlights the populist and anti-intellectual temperament of most evangelicals, further adding to this false impression that there are no important exceptions to this broader trend.<sup>77</sup> But few scholars, with the exception of Gary Smith, have attempted to trace how Calvinism manifest itself in modern political affairs. Even Smith, however, describes Calvinist political behavior in the early twentieth century rather than focusing on the theological and cultural values that gave rise to a distinctive, and influential, Calvinist political style.<sup>78</sup>

For those scholars who have chronicled a separate Presbyterian approach to politics, there has been the tendency to either chronicle militant fundamentalists like Carl McIntire of the Bible Presbyterian Church, who conforms to the Hofstadter anti-intellectual thesis. Or if not talking about militant fundamentalists' reactive approach to politics, historians have chronicled liberal Presbyterians with some Calvinist leanings, but whose general approach was only remotely orthodox and biblical that it hardly differed from other liberal humanists of a secular bent. It is true that historians have given ample attention to the Calvinist-flavored political ideas of Reinhold Niebuhr and other Neo-orthodox thinkers. But Neo-orthodox theologians were not strict Calvinists and did not wrestle as aggressively as conservative Calvinists or conservative evangelicals with the Bible's requirements. Therefore, Protestant liberals and Neo-orthodox thinkers in Presbyterian denominations like John Foster Dulles, for instance, tended to approach

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<sup>76</sup> Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 154-173; Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), especially chapters 3 and 4; Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); and

<sup>77</sup> William Martin, *With God On Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996).

<sup>78</sup> Gary S. Smith, *The Seeds of Secularization: Calvinism, Culture, and Pluralism in America 1870-1915* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985).

political affairs from a vantage point that was broadly humanist and, in many ways, did not differ much from secular-minded observers.<sup>79</sup> That Pittsburgh-area Calvinists shared the same biblical orthodoxy of their evangelical peers raises the question of why evangelicals rejected “social Christianity” while Calvinists embraced a version of it. This comparison between Calvinists and evangelicals serves as an example of how different Protestant conservatives defined their duties to the public realm. This research also qualifies the general outline of the Hofstadter thesis by highlighting that not all evangelicals had a populist, anti-intellectual, and conspiratorial outlook. It features a broadly evangelical community that challenges common assumptions of how conservative Protestants have behaved in civic affairs.

**Competing Views of Institutions:** Evangelicals and Calvinists did share things in common in their approach to public affairs at the turn of the century, one should note. Both preached against political corruption, wrote exposes of poverty and industrial abuse, and supported settlement houses and city missions for the poor and disadvantaged. Both believed it was necessary to put individuals of character and Christian piety into positions of power so that they could fight the corruption in public life that had eroded, in their perspective, the fabric of society. Conservative vangelicals and Calvinists both worked to reposition Protestantism in the center of American public life and did not hesitate to impose their value systems on the immigrants they professed to help in an often-nativist fashion. And finally there was among conservative Protestants a special preoccupation

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<sup>79</sup> Lefferts A. Loetscher, *The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church Since 1869* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954); William R. Hutchison, ed. *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

with stopping the spread of secularism in the United States and using the political process to this end.<sup>80</sup> But after these broadly-Protestant and middle-class commonalities, evangelicals and Calvinists were different in the way they conceptualized and approached the problems that they sought to resolve in American life. The most significant of these were their divergent perspectives on the nature of social institutions.

**Evangelicals and Institutions:** In the two centuries preceding the progressive era, evangelicals had developed a deep distrust of established institutions and consequently worked to protect individuals from their abuse and control. It was a trend that had its roots in the Protestant Reformation's disdain for heavy-handed monarchs and Catholic bishops, but the American Revolution raised this distrust to a new level and made anti-institutional sentiment a distinctly American attribute.<sup>81</sup> This was evident in the early years of the new republic and the Second Great Awakening further cemented these trends, making the free, self-determining individual the center of society in all regards: intellectually, socially, religiously, and politically.<sup>82</sup> That separate Protestant denominations had to compete with each other for members forced evangelical leaders to be careful not to invoke the authority of the churches or of tradition for fear of alienating their egalitarian-minded audiences.<sup>83</sup> Rather, they identified themselves with the quest

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<sup>80</sup> Smith, *Seeds*, 49-72. Martin Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York: The Dial Press, 1970); H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1937). Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

<sup>81</sup> Hatch, *Democratization*, 5-6; Loetscher, *Brief History of Presbyterians*, 76.

<sup>82</sup> Donald G. Matthews, "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process," *American Quarterly* 21 (1969): 23-43.

<sup>83</sup> Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*, 58-66. Matthews, "The Second Great Awakening," 35-36. George Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience: A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 12, 46-73.



for freedom and individuality while masking the reality that institutions were an undeniable part of life.

Evangelical leaders were careful to observe this cardinal rule and the rhetoric of William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925), three-time Democratic nominee and outspoken defender of fundamentalism, illustrates this well.<sup>84</sup> When addressing the public, Bryan rarely spoke of the authority of the church, the government, the legal profession, or even a volunteer society or charity, but appealed instead to the common sense of the ordinary person.<sup>85</sup> Thus when he delivered his now-famous “Cross of Gold” speech on the floor of the 1896 Democratic national convention, Bryan intentionally praised “the humblest citizen in all the land” as the greatest weapon against “all the hosts of error.”<sup>86</sup>

Institutions were prone to corruption, this line of reasoning went, just as European history and its alliance with the Catholic church had proven; the good fight would always be against these, wherein resided the worst instincts, the pride and arrogance, of human nature. When addressing the question of who had preserved the legal profession, for instance, Bryan claimed it was “men who have stood in thickest of the fight” and who “maintained their integrity” like U.S. Supreme Court justice John Marshall, who had preserved society, glossing over the fact that Marshall did much to build up the power of the Supreme Court itself.<sup>87</sup>

**Calvinists and Institutions:** Like evangelicals, Calvinists believed that it was necessary to have virtuous individuals like John Marshall in power, “well qualified, good

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<sup>84</sup> William Jennings Bryan, “In the Chicago Convention” *Speeches of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1913), 238-249; Paolo E. Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan* (Lincoln : University of Nebraska Press, Vols. 1-3 1964-1969); Lawrence W. Levine, *Defender of the Faith: William Jennings Bryan, the Last Decade, 1915-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

<sup>85</sup> Paolo Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan* Vol. 1, vii, 19, 39. Charles Morrow Wilson, *The Commoner: William Jennings Bryan* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970).

<sup>86</sup> Bryan, *Speeches*, 238.

<sup>87</sup> Bryan, *Speeches*, xviii.

and true” who would not succumb to corruption.<sup>88</sup> But Calvinists never cast individuals against institutions in the same manner; for them, sin was just as dangerous in the individual as it was in the institution because Calvinists interpreted sin broadly and saw its influences essentially everywhere. With this Calvinist understanding of sin in mind, Presbyterian ministers in Pittsburgh reminded their congregations of the presence of individual sin, that “God, who cannot do what is not most just” has “pronounced us to be wicked and worthless,” that they should “die in shame” at displeasing God.<sup>89</sup> But Presbyterian leaders also reminded their congregations of the presence of institutional sin, pointing out that the United States is “now the richest nation of the world,” but that “a more equal distribution of the wealth of the country depends chiefly upon an individual recognition of the law of responsibility in Christian ethics, which demands that the money power shall be used unselfishly for the welfare of all.”<sup>90</sup> For instance, on the occasion of labor strife, as during the Great Steel Strike of 1919, Presbyterians in the city agreed that there was fault on all sides involved, citing “exhibitions of hate, greed, passion” and noting that “the capitalist has been using his wealth unreasonably, if not unfairly, to increase his fortune” while “the workmen have been trying to obtain larger compensation for less service” in a violation of “the golden rule.”<sup>91</sup>

For Calvinists there was indeed an answer to the dilemma of how to trust people or institutions given their susceptibility to corruption and it lay in placing the individual in the right kind of institution with checks and balances, thereby reducing the temptations

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<sup>88</sup> “For Whom Should I Vote?” *United Presbyterian* 60 (October 29, 1903): 5.

<sup>89</sup> Marcus Dods, “To Become Christlike,” *Presbyterian Banner* 91 (January 19, 1905): 9.

<sup>90</sup> C. I. B. Brane, “The Money Power,” *United Presbyterian* 48 (May 29, 1890): 2; “Great Wealth,” *Presbyterian Banner* 87 (February 28, 1901): 6.

<sup>91</sup> “Gary Speaks on America’s Economic Condition,” *United Presbyterian* 79 (January 6, 1921): 8.

of either concentrated power, at one end, or individual autonomy on the other.<sup>92</sup> The Roman Catholic Church, for these Calvinists, had demonstrated through history the dangers of putting too much power in the hands of an elite-governed institution, which led to “a worldly despotism” that “broke to pieces of its own weight and corruption.”<sup>93</sup> On the other end of the spectrum, Calvinists like the Presbyterians of Pittsburgh also believed that Gilded Age politics and capitalism had demonstrated the excesses of individualism and competition and the necessity of a church that was a “united, organized force to attack the vices and crimes of society.” Selfish individualism had given way to these crimes, but the same selfish individualism was to blame for a church that refused to be “militant” enough to unite for “improved reform organization” to “fight the bad bills [in Washington, D.C.] and defend good ones.”<sup>94</sup>

Presbyterian church government, the connectional model, furthermore reflected this concern with providing accountability and curbing the sinful instincts of human nature on an individual and an institutional level; within each Presbyterian congregation, the members elected presbyters, or elders, to sit on a session, which was an elected representative assembly that presided over each congregation. The session existed to ensure that neither the minister, the laity, nor the elected elders would drift off to self-indulgence without someone speaking up to curb their inevitable sinful instincts. Furthermore, each Presbyterian congregation sat beneath a regional Presbytery of elected representatives which were part of regional, national, and world General Assemblies in a

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<sup>92</sup> Loetscher, *Brief History of the Presbyterians*, 73-74.

<sup>93</sup> “Editorial,” *Presbyterian Banner* 96 (April 6, 1910): 6. Jamison, *United Presbyterian Story*, 11-26. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 513-14, 925.

<sup>94</sup> Wilbur F. Crafts, *United Presbyterian* 48 (November 20, 1890): 9.

federal system not unlike American constitutional government.<sup>95</sup> Presbyterians' interest in maintaining institutional connectedness as a check against sinful human nature encouraged leaders in both the Presbyterian Church and its smaller sibling denomination in Pittsburgh, the United Presbyterian Church of North America, to sustain merger talks from the turn of the century until consummating the union in 1958. "Because of the harmony of our doctrinal belief" one Presbyterian Church leader noted, "there is strong feeling in our Church that the United Presbyterian Church should come to us" or that "we should make some effort to go to them."<sup>96</sup> This was certainly an effort to pool resources, with United Presbyterians commenting that Presbyterians were better at reaching "the unconverted world" and Presbyterians commenting that "the United Presbyterian Church would bring ... a higher average of religious intelligence religious steadfastness, and devotion than [found] in the Presbyterian Church."<sup>97</sup> But belief in a common "form of government" as balancing and checking power interests against each other, curbing the effects of sin, was also a commonality between the two.

These opinions about ecclesiology, or church government, led directly to shared views on representative government as it had developed through history and culminated in the United States Constitution. Presbyterians in Pittsburgh praised John Knox for "devising for the Church a Form of Government" that recognized "the rights of the people," the "best safeguard the Church has ever had against priest-craft." Knox, in their view, had not only designed a religious institution that accounted for the possibility of

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<sup>95</sup> Balmer, Fitzmier, *Presbyterians*, 12.

<sup>96</sup> James D. Moffat, "Lessons from the Life Work of John Knox," *Presbyterian Banner* 91 (June 22, 1905): 13.

<sup>97</sup> "Union of Presbyterian Churches," *Presbyterian Banner* 105 (March 20, 1919): 6; W. L. Fisk, "United Presbyterian Church of North America," D. G. Hart, Mark Noll, eds., *Dictionary of the Presbyterian & Reformed Tradition in America* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 264-265; "Union of Presbyterian Churches," *Presbyterian Banner* 105 (March 20, 1919): 6; Loetscher, *A Brief History of Presbyterians*, 148-149

abuse of power, but he also contributed to American “national and state government” so that “we Presbyterians ought to be better Americans, and more Americans out to be Presbyterians” because of the contributions of Calvinists to American institutional history.<sup>98</sup> Most Presbyterians, for instance, took pride that “there is a striking similarity between the Federal Government of the United States and the Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church.” Pittsburgh’s Presbyterians pointed out that early Puritan divine Thomas Hooker of Connecticut, who authored “The Fundamental Orders of Connecticut,” which became a prototype for the U.S. Constitution a century and a half later, was “the father of American Democracy.” Hooker was also, they pointed out, “filled with the spirit of Calvinism and schooled in the principles of Presbyterianism.” This constitutional form of government maintained that “‘the foundation of authority is laid in the free consent of the people,’ that ‘the choice of the public magistrates belongs to the people by God’s own allowance.’”<sup>99</sup> Presbyterians could perceive their own history, one that stressed the need for institutional designs that would account for human sinfulness, as something Providence intended and sustained. Their retelling of the history of how Calvinist ideas of sinful human nature had shaped not only Presbyterian church structures, but the American republic, illustrate just how much they believed sin was pervasive and manifest itself in both individual and collective ways.

One effect of this Calvinist understanding for the necessity of checks and balances in government and in society was that it bred a kind of conservatism that many mistook for a simple defense of the status quo. As Calvinists’ reasoning went, representative

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<sup>98</sup> James D. Moffat, “Lessons from the Life Work of John Knox,” *Presbyterian Banner* 91 (June 22, 1905): 13.

<sup>99</sup> Rev. J. Mont Travis, “Presbyterianism and the American Republic,” *Presbyterian Banner* 88 (December 26, 1901: 7; G. S. Smith, “Presbyterians and Social Reform,” *Dictionary of the Presbyterian Tradition*, 243-246.

government had taken centuries to arrive at “by God’s allowance” and thus constitutional government, “by the people and for the people,” provided the means for the people to voice their complaints and change their society. To alter this form of government, or to pursue change without allowing for the often-slow and deliberative democratic process to unfold, was to threaten something virtually sacred, a governmental design that was, as they put it, “the first in the recorded history of the world.”<sup>100</sup> What made the American republic so distinctive was that, in their perspective, it accounted for human sin on the individual and collective scale, allowing for representation without granting too much power to a single faction. It is true, as critics point out, that this outlook bred a type of conservatism that distrusted any form of sudden or radical change and led Presbyterians to denounce labor strikes, anarchism, and what they often referred to as “Bolshevism.” But the reason Presbyterians in Pittsburgh described labor unions, socialism, and communism as dangerous was not because Presbyterians opposed all reform and wished to preserve their economic self-interest, but rather because they feared that sudden change would greatly upset the balance of powers that American republican government had achieved. Therefore, Presbyterians’ resistance to radicalism was not because they opposed social change, but rather a type of reform that prized gradual change, and only through the existing channels of state and national government so as to limit the effects of any one individual or faction’s innate tendency towards the sinful and corrupt.

**Public Discourse and the Evangelical Rhetorical Style:** The second major difference in political style between conservative evangelicals and Calvinists was in how they conducted their public discourse. Since the days of George Whitefield’s theatrical

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<sup>100</sup> Rev. J. Mont Travis, “Presbyterianism and the American Republic,” *Presbyterian Banner* 88 (December 26, 1901: 7.

sermons in the eighteenth century to the speeches of contemporary revivalists like Billy Sunday at the turn of the century, evangelicals had privileged leaders who were skilled in the language of the common man and conducted their political discourse in populist terms that critics would label anti-intellectual.<sup>101</sup> In addition to the style of rhetoric evangelicals used, it was the media through which they conveyed this message that also reflected an egalitarian outlook: in the eighteenth century it was rousing sermons in spoken and printed form and the best-selling personal journals of religious leaders; in the nineteenth century it was tracts, pamphlets, hymns, and sentimentalized stories delivered from the podium, not to mention a religious press that encouraged an often-simple level of discourse.<sup>102</sup> It should be no surprise, then, that evangelicals' greatest success in public life since the eighteenth century has been winning masses to the faith. As a result, the litmus test for an evangelical leader has typically been his or her ability to demonstrate a familiarity with the experience and mindset of the common person: from small towns and rural settings, preferring common sense reasoning to theory, distrustful of the banks, corporations, and cultural institutions one found on the east coast, and highly conversant in the Bible. Although scholars like George Marsden have challenged this stereotype to an extent, the fact of the matter is that less-educated rural folk comprised a large part of evangelical America in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and evangelical leaders knew how to reach them with remarkable skill.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 61.

<sup>102</sup> Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 124-140. See also Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993); Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism*, 82-87, 115-16; Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan* Vol. 1, 17.

<sup>103</sup> Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 7; Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), chapters 2 and 3 in particular.

The career of revivalist Billy Sunday illustrates this relationship between evangelical leaders and the general public well. He was a successful baseball player-turned evangelist, an ordinary man with grit, toughness, and common sense who used his background and conversion story to become one of evangelicalism's great celebrities. As an entertainer-revivalist, Sunday both embodied and articulated the values of the evangelical audience he played to with such ability, which led to powerful rhetoric that garnered many admirers and won many converts to the faith, but also led to shallow social analysis. "When you destroy the church you destroy civilization," Sunday commented in the years following the First World War. "We can never be grateful enough for the church" for from it, Sunday continued, "we get all that is best." The greatest threat to the church at the time, and thus to civilization, Sunday concluded was the liberal-modernist element, the "anti-Christian-Agnostic-Naturalistic-Modernism-Represented by Fosdick-Grant-their breed of cats."<sup>104</sup>

Though William Jennings Bryan certainly had more credibility as a commentator on social events, he too rarely drifted from the common-sense rhetoric of Main Street-styled evangelicalism.<sup>105</sup> As a form of social analysis, his "Cross of Gold" speech in 1896 again illustrates this tendency of evangelicals to offer crowd-pleasing rhetoric that served to stir the emotions, but did little justice to the complexity of the issues at hand. "Having behind us the producing masses of this nation and the world," Bryan stated, "we will answer their demand for a gold standard by saying to them: You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a

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<sup>104</sup> Quoted in William G. McLoughlin, *Billy Sunday*, 281; Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan* Vol. 1, 6.

<sup>105</sup> McLoughlin, *Billy Sunday*, 146; Martin Marty, *Modern American Religion* Vol. 2, 74-75; Elijah P. Brown, *The Real Billy Sunday* (Dayton, Oh.: Otterbein Press, 1914); Lyle W. Dorsett, *Billy Sunday and the Redemption of Urban America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991); Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 132.



cross of gold.”<sup>106</sup> In Bryan’s oration he won many to the cause of free silver, but it was not through a discussion of why currency was so important in the unfolding of American history, or why the gold standard had its better and worse attributes. Rather, Bryan offered a rhetorically-powerful image of the wealthy abusing the ordinary person, but in the process simplified a highly-complex economic and political problem deserving, at least in some venue, more analysis. Unfortunately, evangelicals usually did not have such venues and, as a result, their understanding of politics rarely transcended the simplistic. Nowhere was the simplicity of Bryan’s political rhetoric more evident, however, than during the Scopes Trial in 1925 when the Great Commoner Bryan stumbled at Clarence Darrow’s questions concerning evolutionism and the Bible. Though just days from the end of his life and obviously confused, Darrow’s questioning revealed the tendency towards sweeping rhetoric and simple explanations common among evangelicals. When asked about the date of the flood depicted in Genesis, Bryan responded “I would not attempt to fix the date,” which led to this exchange:

Darrow: But what do you think that the Bible itself says? Don’t you know how it was arrived at?

Bryan: I never made a calculation.

Darrow: A calculation from what?

Bryan: I could not say.

Darrow: From the generations of man?

Bryan: I would not want to say that.

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<sup>106</sup> Bryan, *Speeches*, 249. Consider the simplicity of Bryan’s comment at the Scopes trial where he stated that teaching evolutionism meant sending children home as “skeptical, infidels, or agnostics, or as atheists.” Quoted in Paolo E. Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan Vol 3* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 252.

Darrow: What do you think?

Bryan: I do not think about things I don't think about.

Darrow: Do you think about things you do think about?

Bryan: Well, sometimes.<sup>107</sup>

**Calvinist Rhetorical Style:** By comparison, Presbyterians' approach to politics would seem dry and elitist when one considers the rousing speeches of individuals like Sunday and Bryan.<sup>108</sup> But this divergence was less a result of turning one's nose up at the vulgarities of the masses than it was an attempt at a more rational and methodical expression of the same earnestness to promote justice that evangelicals like Bryan possessed. According to Presbyterians in Pittsburgh the danger of populist rhetoric was that it might lead the public to a course of action that was imprudent and reflected what seemed right at the time, but in hindsight might appear foolish. Pittsburgh Presbyterians pointed to labor strikes as the perfect illustration of the dangers of what they termed "mob rule." In the case of the Homestead Strike, Presbyterians, like most Americans, tended to side with management but were certainly not unsympathetic with the strikers' complaints. "Who is to blame?" asked the *United Presbyterian* in July of 1892, commenting that "no one who is acquainted with the facts in the case will dare to say that the fault is all on one side" and called for a sentiment of "universal brotherhood." It was not as much that they rejected the claims of the strikers, but the means by which the strikers sought to petition their complaints that bothered Presbyterians in Pittsburgh. Violent labor strikes, they claimed, illustrated that "it is far easier to excite popular tumult

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<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 187.

<sup>108</sup> Loetscher, *Broadening Church*, 21.

than to hold it in check,” that “a mob ... is a dangerous wild beast to be let loose in a community.”<sup>109</sup>

Calvinist political discourse in Pittsburgh, in contrast with the populist leanings of evangelicals, prized the scholarly and begged good citizens to consider a societal problem at length before taking action and when pursuing action. A preference for working through institutional channels was quite evident in these Calvinists’ political discourse because it was these institutional affiliations that provided the expertise necessary for analyzing problems with care and accuracy. When trying to raise funds for their own colleges, for instance, Presbyterians highlighted that schools like Washington and Jefferson College “has among its graduates 1,634 ministers, 100 judges of courts, 70 members of Congress, 20 justices of Supreme Courts, 70 presidents of colleges, 150 professors in colleges and Theological Seminaries.” In order for the church to serve society, to enter “upon the strife and progress of the new century,” it would be necessary to build up its “educational and charitable institutions” because “the greatest and best agency, outside the home, is the Church and the school.”<sup>110</sup> Presbyterians believed that collegiate, seminary, and university training allowed their own clergy, seminary professors, periodical editors, and laity to cultivate “a greater sense of responsibility,” to set aside “partisanship” and to “vote for the man, irrespective of party affiliation,” men who are “upright and honest, with the public good at heart.”<sup>111</sup>

Whether voting or participating in a reform endeavor, Presbyterians ought to seek counsel from experts in the field like, for instance, “Dr. Carroll D. Wright, sociologist,

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<sup>109</sup> “The Homestead Riot,” *United Presbyterian* 50 (July 14, 1892): 8.

<sup>110</sup> William L. Ledwith, “Personal Duty in the Local Sphere,” *Presbyterian Banner* 88 (October 31, 1901): 7.

<sup>111</sup> “For Whom Should I Vote?” *United Presbyterian* 61 (October 29, 1903): 5.

statistician and author of many books on political, industrial and economic subjects.” Presbyterians cited Wright, who spoke to a Washington, D.C., audience at a 1907 meeting of the League for Political Education, a “very good authority” who chided progressive-minded reformers not to see in the past “the tradition of a golden age, ‘the good old times.’” In response to the suggestion of journalists that political corruption at the turn of the century was at a historic tide, Presbyterians sought the perspective of this scholar who argued that even governor William Bradford of the Plymouth Plantation in Puritan times complained of “immoral episodes among the Puritans and their absolute depravity,” adding that “for years after the Revolution members of Congress were in the pay of their friends” such that “Chief Justice John Jay” commented on the “set of scoundrels” occupying Congress at the time.<sup>112</sup>

The average Presbyterian, all evidence suggests, was familiar with the Westminster Confession and the better part of Presbyterian history, enough to know who William Bradford was or that total depravity was Calvinist code language for the broad concept of human failing and original sin laid out in the Synod of Dort in the Netherlands, 1618-19.<sup>113</sup> This high literacy rate was due to the training most Presbyterians received at the home, in Sunday School as children, as well as in the denominational colleges, and sitting under the pulpit of a highly-educated and often well-published clergy. Another source was religious periodicals, the *Presbyterian Banner* and the *United Presbyterian* both enjoying a wide readership in Pittsburgh and providing extensive coverage, from five to ten pages out of the typical thirty in each issue, of

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<sup>112</sup> “The Public Conscience,” *United Presbyterian* 65 (January 10, 1907): 3.

<sup>113</sup> Donald Sinnema, “Synod of Dort,” Donald K. McKim, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 109.

political events on the local, national, and international stage.<sup>114</sup> Often it was the case that they developed a critique of society with Calvinist overtones, stressing the limits of humanity and thus of progress, but for the grace of God. As some commented at the high tide of progressive optimism, “no optimist is so optimistic as to think that ‘all’s right with the world’” as the world was ruled by “corrupt practices in politics, special privileges and unjust methods in business” and “low wages that force people below the standard of decent living.”<sup>115</sup> Their analysis did not lead to despair, however, but a tempered optimism and a reassertion of Calvinist themes about the prevalence of sin, that “whatever we may do towards improving the social order, our first and chief aim should be to reach and eradicate the evil in the human heart.”<sup>116</sup>

Political discourse, these Calvinists asserted, ought to proceed in as rational a manner as possible. Their own religious weeklies operated with that ideal in mind, although many Presbyterians in Pittsburgh believed the nation’s leading media outlets did not and peddled “yellow journalism” with an excess of gossipy and lurid descriptions of human “depravity.”<sup>117</sup> The *United Presbyterian* took aim at William Randolph Hearst and his newspaper empire for creating “hullaboo” in an effort “to build up a public sense of [the newspaper’s] importance,” that it “is being acquiesced by a flock of local politicians who understand to the full the benefits to be derived for their own fortunes.”

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<sup>114</sup> Wallace Jamison, *The United Presbyterian Story: A Centennial Study 1858-1958* (Pittsburgh: The Geneva Press, 1958), chapter 6; William Wilson McKinney, ed., *The Presbyterian Valley* (Pittsburgh: Davis & Warde, 1958) PUT PAGE NUMBER HERE.

<sup>115</sup> “Spiritual Element in Social Wrongs,” *Presbyterian Banner* 99 (February 27, 1913): 5.

<sup>116</sup> “Spiritual Element in Social Wrongs,” *Presbyterian Banner* 99 (February 27, 1913): 5.

<sup>117</sup> “The Public Conscience,” *United Presbyterian* 65 (January 10, 1907): 3. Liberal Protestants, like their Calvinist counterparts, tended to loathe the popular press as gossipy, scandal-obsessed, exploiting religious, political, and ethnic stereotypes in order to sell papers. See the commentary on “A Scorpion Press,” *Christian Century* (January 19, 1922): 74. Macartney Archive, Subject: “Tuesday Noon Club,” *Preaching by Radio* (New York: Department of Recruiting, Board of Christian Education, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., 1924), 2.

They went on to blame Hearst of stirring the public to enter the Spanish-American war, claiming in retrospect that “a more unnecessary war was never fought.”<sup>118</sup> Hearst, a “breeder of wars and hatred,” was a danger not only for his demagoguery, but because of the power of the medium he used with its ability to sway the public with brief and shallow descriptions of problems that required far greater thought and analysis. Clarence Macartney shared this concern about his own burgeoning career as delivered of sermons that the K.D.K.A. station in Pittsburgh carried to a wide regional audience. “With my conservative training and experience in the severe dignity of Presbyterian worship,” he confided in private, “it seemed to me that a radio attachment would be almost grotesque and irreverent.” Macartney continued to broadcast over the radio, but his hesitancy illustrates the extent to which one of the nation’s great pulpit preachers, as a Calvinist, feared the medium might water down the complexities, and in effect the integrity, of the message.<sup>119</sup>

**Calvinism and Woodrow Wilson:** Perhaps it is also no surprise that, given their call for reasoned public discourse, most Presbyterians in Pittsburgh viewed the populist career of William Jennings Bryan as less than ideal, favoring instead a man far closer in political style to their own, Woodrow Wilson. An outspoken Presbyterian and Calvinist, and possessing an impressive resume which included many of the nation’s leading educational institutions, Wilson was a man who had spent most of his adult life developing a theory of governance, of how the very institutions themselves should

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<sup>118</sup> “William Randolph Hearst Resurrected,” *United Presbyterian* 88 (October 23, 1930): 3. Noll, *Scandal*, 155. “A Breeder of Wars and Hatreds,” *United Presbyterian* 88 (October 23, 1930): 3.

<sup>119</sup> Macartney Archive, Subject: “Tuesday Noon Club,” *Preaching by Radio* (New York: Department of Recruiting, Board of Christian Education, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., 1924), 2.

function, before ever assuming elected office.<sup>120</sup> A southern Presbyterian by upbringing and later an elder in the church, he graduated from Princeton University in 1879, American Presbyterianism's flagship institution, he attended the University of Virginia for a law degree, then went to Johns Hopkins University where he wrote a Ph.D. dissertation about the federal legislative system.<sup>121</sup> With an impressive educational record already, Wilson served more time in the academy before running for his first elected public office; he taught at two small colleges before returning to Princeton in 1890 where he became a professor of jurisprudence and political economy, until in 1902 his peers elected him president of the university. Between 1885 and 1908 Wilson published five major works on the nature of government before becoming governor of New Jersey in 1910, when he subdued party bosses and passed a series of broadly Progressive reforms so noteworthy they put him in the running for the presidency.<sup>122</sup>

Presbyterians in western Pennsylvania hailed Wilson's rise to power as historic, claiming that "not since the days of John Quincy Adams has there been a presidential nominee so distinguished in this particular regard as the Hon. Woodrow Wilson."<sup>123</sup> This reference to the sixth President of the United States was a careful and quite intentional reference: John Quincy Adams (1767-1848) was a pious Christian of Puritan descent, a scholar-statesman, and the last president to hold office before Andrew Jackson, man of the people, took office and forever democratized the political process. From the

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<sup>120</sup> Arthur S. Link, *The Higher Realism of Woodrow Wilson* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971), 4; Charles Seymour, *A Crossroads of Freedom: The 1912 Campaign Speeches of Woodrow Wilson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), xi-xiii.

<sup>121</sup> Loetscher, *Brief History of Presbyterians*, 67.

<sup>122</sup> Arthur S. Link, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era 1910-1917* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1954), 8-10; Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: The Road to the White House* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947); John Milton Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); John M. Mulder, *Woodrow Wilson: The Years of Preparation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

<sup>123</sup> "Editorial," *United Presbyterian* 70 (July 11, 1912): 3-4.

presidency of Jackson on, candidates for the nation's highest office tended to be party figures skilled at politics but who often led undistinguished careers; with names like Van Buren, Harrison, Polk, Taylor, Pierce, Buchanan, Grant, Hayes, Garfield, Cleveland, Harrison, and McKinley they hardly approached the fame of the presidents preceding Jackson: Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and the second Adams. Although John Quincy Adams was personally austere and did not enjoy great popularity, Pittsburgh's Presbyterians did not seem to care. What they saw in him was broad experience in ethically-minded statecraft as a diplomat overseeing the end of the Napoleonic wars, formulating the Monroe Doctrine and helping acquire Florida from the Spanish, and after a frustrated presidency his fight to stop the spread of slavery. In this light, Adams the Calvinist and Harvard graduate was a man who led a represented the kind of pious, educated, and statesman-like public servant that Calvinists in western Pennsylvania identified with.

If the Presbyterians in Pittsburgh could dismiss the post-John Quincy Adams presidents with little pause, and by inference Jacksonian democracy and much that it stood for, evangelicals like William Jennings Bryan could not say enough in favor of it. In his "Cross of Gold" speech Bryan claimed that what the nation needed was "an Andrew Jackson to stand, as Jackson stood, against the encroachments of organized wealth."<sup>124</sup> Presbyterians could agree that the trusts had abused their power, but were weary of the excesses of popular democracy in its many forms and found in Wilson the kind of stately and restrained political figure they preferred in the highest office in the land. It was only natural, then, for Pittsburgh's Presbyterians to praise Wilson as an

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<sup>124</sup> Bryan, *Speeches of William Jennings Bryan*, 242; Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan* Vol. 1, 10-11; Lawrence Levine, *Defender of the Faith*, 359.



“elegant speaker” of “self-restraint and self-possession” compared with the “domineering” populism of Bryan, whom they believed was “too small of a man to fill the President’s chair.”<sup>125</sup>

Wilson articulated these Presbyterians’ understanding of good government, that “in order to learn men must for a little while withdraw from action, must seek some quiet place of remove from the bustle of affairs, where their thoughts may run clear and tranquil, and the heats of business be for the time put off.” In the academy, Wilson explained, they would find “a place for the first conspectus of the mind, for a thoughtful poring upon the map of life.”<sup>126</sup> From the quietude of learning would emerge a proper understanding of government and how one might go about reform, for “every concrete thing that [the United States] has done has seemed to rise out of some abstract principle, some vision of the mind.”<sup>127</sup> American government, Wilson believed, was the product of such contemplation and “has stood through a long age” against the whims of the public, “against fortuitous change, against storm and accident.”<sup>128</sup> As a progressive reformer, Wilson described the method by which he and others ought to pursue change; it would be “step by step” and “in the spirit of those who question their own wisdom and seek counsel and knowledge, not shallow self-satisfaction or the excitement of excursions whither they can not tell.”<sup>129</sup> Although thin-skinned and rigid and flawed in carrying out this plan, Wilson nonetheless articulated the Calvinist political style and method that Presbyterians in Pittsburgh embraced. To counter the effects of sinful human nature, it

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<sup>125</sup> *United Presbyterian* 70 (June 27, 1912): 4. “The nomination of Woodrow Wilson is one of the triumphs of our political history,” wrote the *Presbyterian Banner* 99 (July 11, 1912): 5. “The Election,” *Presbyterian Banner* 99 (November 14, 1912): 6.

<sup>126</sup> Woodrow Wilson, “Princeton for the Nation’s Service,” in Frances Farmer, ed., *The Wilson Reader* (New York: Oceana Publications, 1956), 108.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> Woodrow Wilson, “Wilson’s First Inaugural,” in Farmer, *Wilson*, 111-115.

<sup>129</sup> Wilson, “Wilson’s First Inaugural,” in Farmer, *Wilson*, 111-115.

was only after a lengthy political discourse, sober and with as much expert, and often institutional, input as possible, that the body politic ought to take action.

**Historical-Mindedness and Evangelicals:** The third distinction between Calvinists and evangelicals in political style next to their differences over the usefulness of institutions and the tone of their public discourse was the way they approached history. Evangelicals tended to eschew the very notion of history, that the events of the present have causes deeply rooted in the past. Instead, they looked back upon the first-century church as their immediate and only predecessor, that they were in a direct lineage from the time of Jesus, keeping alive a tradition untainted by the burdens, and corruptions, of the past.<sup>130</sup> The American Revolution was the other major historical event American evangelicals looked to, but it was exceptional for evangelicals because they, like most Americans, viewed it as a definitive break from European history and its sordid associations, a break from even history itself.<sup>131</sup> One can see this tendency among American evangelicals to view themselves, and their world, as a-historical in William Jennings Bryan's 1896 "Cross of Gold" speech when he claimed "Never before in the history of this country has there been witnessed such a contest as that through which we have just passed," that never before "has a great issue been fought out as this issue has."<sup>132</sup>

Of course Bryan was using hyperbole to make this point and may not have actually believed that the conflicts of the 1890s exceeded the Civil War in importance,

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<sup>130</sup> Nathan Hatch, *Democratization*, 167-170.

<sup>131</sup> Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism*, 83. See also Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Richard T. Hughes and Leonard Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); T.D. Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

<sup>132</sup> Bryan, *Speeches*, 238.

for instance. But there was more than rhetoric in this comment on history, as Bryan was expressing a deeply evangelical, and American, perspective about the past; without a strong sense of history, evangelicals naturally tended to view their own time and its problems as new and without precedent, which often led to these sorts of overstatements. This tendency to simplify history often fed a kind individualism, almost a folk hero interpretation of history, evident when leaders like Bryan praised “the hardy pioneers who have braved all the dangers of the wilderness” and “erected schoolhouses for the education of their young” so they may “rear their children near to Nature’s heart, where they can mingle their voices with the voices of the birds.”<sup>133</sup> This was history not as complex lesson, but as inarticulate myth, evoking emotion rather than engaging the mind. It made for good oratory, but did not do justice to the reality of the past and the historical origins of the American republic in the estimation of many critics. Nor did it encourage citizens to analyze their own world as a product of history, a history of complexity that led to the contemporary world’s complexities.

**Calvinism and History:** Presbyterians in Pittsburgh shared some similarities with this view, tracing their origins heavily to the Protestant Reformation with less interest in the centuries that preceded it; for instance, they rarely mentioned Roman Catholic or medieval history in their commentaries. These Presbyterians also identified strongly with the American Revolution and particularly the U. S. Constitution, describing it as a high water mark. Despite this, Calvinists in western Pennsylvania were worlds apart both in the extent of their interest in the past, as well as the way they used history to analyze social problems. First, Calvinists invested more energy and resources discussing, writing, and reading about the past and their relationship to it than evangelicals. Second,

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<sup>133</sup> Bryan, “Cross of Gold,” *Speeches*, 241.

they were more analytical and rational in their approach to history, attempting to pore over the basic facts as well as competing interpretations of those facts with the intention of arriving at a well-balanced perspective. And third, the result of this keen interest in the historical origins of current-day issues often led Presbyterians to a more complex manner of understanding social concerns than evangelicals exhibited.<sup>134</sup>

The origins of these traits and habits was theological, stemming from Calvinists' belief that God had providentially guided the course of history and was working in the present time.<sup>135</sup> Calvin himself insisted that God was no distant being who idly looked upon human affairs from afar, but that "the presence of the divine power is conspicuous, not less in the perpetual condition of the world than in its first creation."<sup>136</sup> Thus, when ministers like Clarence Macartney reassured their congregations of God's sovereignty, they were not merely attempting to comfort anxious individuals but were also offering a theology of history that placed God in the very center of all events, big and small. "[Napoleon] was not an accident" stated Macartney while pastor of First Presbyterian. "He came at the appointed time and to do an appointed work in the world," he continued, no matter how "cruel, evil, and sacrilegious" he or any other dictator like "Hitler or Hirohito" may have seemed. "God uses" even the "worst of men" to "fulfill his purposes" concluded Macartney.<sup>137</sup> Though "[we] see through a glass darkly," others agreed, the "Maker of all things has a disposition of goodwill towards us" and "we know that all things are working together for good."<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Noll, *Scandal*, 158-59.

<sup>135</sup> W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenanters* (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 19, 26, 33, 35.

<sup>136</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes*, trans. Beveridge, 171.

<sup>137</sup> Clarence E. Macartney, *Macartney's Illustrations: Illustrations from the Sermons of Clarence Edward Macartney* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), 293.

<sup>138</sup> "God is Love," *Presbyterian Banner* 87 (May 9, 1901): 5.

This interpretation of the past as guided and sustained by Providence helped feed a virtual cottage industry of historical commentary among Presbyterians in western Pennsylvania. The *Presbyterian Banner* and the *United Presbyterian* roughly once a month published an article on the history of the church, and once a year included a four-week series on the development of the Presbyterian Church in Scotland or the United States. Jonathan Edwards received fair treatment in these religious weeklies, cited as both “a faithful man of God” and one whose “intellectual capacities were prodigious,” something they noted Edwards cultivated “at a very early age” through studies of “Latin at [age] six,” attending Yale College “before he was thirteen” where he read “John Locke’s ‘Essay on the Human Understanding,’” which all helped make him “a sort of oracle of wisdom of faith.”<sup>139</sup> Non-religious topics also received ample attention, as when Presbyterians in Pittsburgh pondered the lessons the Civil War taught, for instance. In-depth analysis of “The Battle of Gettysburg,” presented by a soldier in General James A. Beaver’s regiment, reminded Presbyterians to “honor our dead” with “loyalty to the great principles for which they gave their lives.” More than mere patriotic sentimentality on the fourth of July, this article was typical in describing historical events and trends thoroughly, citing that “over 150,000 soldiers were engaged” in the conflict, and recounting the “original breast-works, earth-works, stone walls and shattered trees” that “still remain to remind the visitor of the awful carnage” of the event. This cautionary article used a first-hand account of “the hand-to-hand combat” when “bayonets, swords, butts of muskets and ramrods were used freely,” and carnage so heavy “you could walk from the stone wall to the Emmitsburg road on the dead bodies of Pickett’s men without

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<sup>139</sup> Henry C. Minton, “President John Edwards,” *Presbyterian Banner* 87 (June 6, 1901): 28.

treading on the ground” to remind Calvinist readers of the dangers of following one’s passions to the battlefield.<sup>140</sup>

Presbyterians also employed this analysis of history to temper their passions in the realm of politics, finding in the career of Chief Justice John Marshall a man who “did more to define and limit the powers of the different branches of government under the Constitution than perhaps all others that have ever sat in his seat.” Marshall gave “a great constructive service for the new nationality” by transcending the “factional fights of the most bitter character” of his day, even though he himself was “not free from party spirit.” They also marveled that he did this “in a time and region of much French skepticism” and “[contended] stoutly for the truths of Christianity” in his long tenure.<sup>141</sup> Marshall accomplished what these Presbyterians themselves hoped to in their own time, to rise above pettiness by pursuing higher Christian principles and remaining in, and shaping, the institutions of one’s day to use them for the betterment of the public. In their own more immediate nineteenth-century past they found among the Scotch-Irish settlers of the region the very stubborn partisanship that Marshall, and they, wished to transcend. A history lesson on “A Typical Scotch-Irish Community of Fifty Years or More Ago” taught them that “the division of [a] singing school into two rival and very hostile schools” resulted in “not a few feuds among neighbors and fellow-church people.” That the ensuing “war” went on “for several years” was warning to modern Presbyterians in Pittsburgh of their denomination’s schismatic tendencies. This was a disagreement fought with such ferocity over nothing of import, “as if some great principle of the

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<sup>140</sup> G. G. Walters, “The Battle of Gettysburg,” *Presbyterian Banner* 88 (July 4, 1901): 8.

<sup>141</sup> “John Marshall,” *Presbyterian Banner* 87 (February 14, 1901): 3.

kingdom of God had been at stake” when in fact it was little more than “a ridiculous miscue.”<sup>142</sup>

Pittsburgh Presbyterian clergy also spoke on history and found lessons relevant to their own times. Clarence Macartny was a strong preacher but also an accomplished historian, authoring over a dozen noteworthy historic manuscripts on topics ranging from the Bible, the Civil War, American Protestantism, western Pennsylvania, and one title on the descendents of Napoleon Bonaparte in America.<sup>143</sup> Although none of these offered radically new interpretations of their subject, neither were they insubstantial. Most reflected careful and exhaustive research and many enjoyed publication by well-known New York houses and were broadly reviewed by critics writing for the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Commonweal*, the *Christian Century*, and the *New England Quarterly*, among others. Seeking support for his own battle to defend the fundamentals, Macartny wrote of faithful clerics who, much like himself, stood by their principles during times when such principles were under broader scrutiny. When writing a history of First Presbyterian Church, Macartny recounted the life of Dr. Francis Herron, an early minister of the congregation whose “strong testimony” and “upright Christian character” corrected the “lax discipline” at the time and helped turn the tide in this “frontier town [early nineteenth-century Pittsburgh] of great wickedness,

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<sup>142</sup> John W. Dinsmore, “A Typical Scotch-Irish Community of Fifty Years or More Ago,” *Presbyterian Banner* 91 (March 16, 1905): 13.

<sup>143</sup> His titles dealing with historical topics include: *Lincoln and His Generals* (Philadelphia: Dorrance & Co., 1925), *Highways and Byways of the Civil War* (Pittsburgh: The Gibson Press, 1926), *Lincoln and His Cabinet* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1931), *Right Here in Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: The Gibson Press, 1937), *The Bonapartes in America* (Philadelphia: Dorrance & Co., 1939) co-written with Gordon Dorrance, *Little Mac: The Life of General George B. McClellan* (Philadelphia: Dorrance & Co., 1940), *Christian Faith and the Spirit of the Age* (New York: American Tract Society, 1940), *The Greatest Men of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1941), *Six Kings of the American Pulpit* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for the Libraries Press, 1942), *Great Women of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1942), *Where Rivers Meet* (Pittsburgh: Gibson Press, 1946), *Trials of Great Men of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1946), *Grant and His Generals* (New York: McBride, 1953) *Mr. Lincoln’s Admirals* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1956).

licentiousness, and crime.”<sup>144</sup> Soon, Macartney recounted, Presbyterians awoke to their public duty and shook of their “spiritual deadness” as the “Great Revival of the first decade of the Nineteenth Century” was underway, and helped found the city’s first academy, which eventually became the University of Pittsburgh, along with other early “religious, charitable, and educational institutions,” including “the Pennsylvania College for Women, the Western Foreign Missionary Society, the Western Theological Seminary, and kindred institutions.”<sup>145</sup>

Other Presbyterian clergy in Pittsburgh also used the pulpit to explore the lessons of the past. Some romanticized the city’s founding, recounting the “years when the Scotch-Irish young men braved the mountains of Virginia in order to establish homes, create ideals, and fashioning the life of a community around the confluence of the Allegheny and the Monogahela rivers.” But even within these flowery orations there was often a more substantive message about the need to respond wisely to “the present day” and the city’s “phenomenal growth.” The minister of this prominent Pittsburgh-area congregation articulated the city’s Presbyterian “ideal—a living religion, a practical education and a useful industry, a blending of which is producing the finest type of Christian citizens in America.” “Deeply religious service” was the answer to “that commercial and materialistic tendency which would be inevitable in such a

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<sup>144</sup> Clarence E. Macartney, “Tell It To The Generation Following: Sesqui-Centennial Historical Sermon” (Pittsburgh: First Presbyterian Church, 1934), 16-18; Clarence E. Macartney, *Right Here in Pittsburgh*, 67; Ernest Edwin Logan, *The Church That Was Born Twice: A History of the First Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 1773-1973* (Pittsburgh: Dickwick-Morcraft, 1973); Clarence E. Macartney, edited by J. Clyde Henry, *The Making of a Minister: The Autobiography of Clarence E. Macartney* (Great Neck, N.Y.: Channel Press, 1961), 203. “A Brief Sketch of the History of First Church” 11-21. *Macartney Archives*. Subject: “First Presbyterian”; Clarence Edward Macartney, “Sesqui-Centennial Historical Sermon,” *Presbyterian Banner* 121 (December 13, 1934): 6-10.

<sup>145</sup> Clarence E. Macartney, *Right Here in Pittsburgh*, 72; Clarence E. Macartney, “Tell it to the Generation Following,” *Sesqui-centennial Historical Sermon Preached by Clarence Edward Macartney at the First Presbyterian Church, Sunday Evening, December 2<sup>nd</sup>* (Pittsburgh: First Presbyterian Church, 1934), 13-14.



manufacturing center.”<sup>146</sup> Others underscored the necessity of avoiding the temptation “to look back and see the former days in a rosy light.”<sup>147</sup> The foil to such tendencies was to see the sinfulness of one’s predecessors, to weigh their failings as well as their better instincts side-by-side, and then use this as a tool to see their own time, and tendencies, in a sober light. Since their Scotch-Irish forbears “were uncommonly ‘set in their ways,’” wrote one minister, it was better for current-day Presbyterians to set aside the kinds of “stubborn, narrow-minded [and] pig-headed” tendencies and to foster instead “this same trait [stubbornness] in its nobler manifestation that gave them their strength and heroism.”<sup>148</sup>

**Conclusion:** Calvinists in western Pennsylvania, like Calvinists scattered across the United States, joined conservative evangelicals and other progressive-minded Americans in 1912 to hail Woodrow Wilson’s assurances that if Americans worked together, they could together take control of their society and make it more equitable. Yet there were quite-specific reasons why Presbyterians in Pittsburgh found Wilson so appealing a candidate stemming from a shared view of how one ought to engage public life. In contrast with evangelicals’ distrust of institutions, Wilson and other Calvinists believed it was possible to use them in a constructive way, assuming these institutions had built-in checks and balances, to shape policy and effect lasting societal change. Where evangelicals gained public support through highly-egalitarian and populist forms of rhetoric, Calvinists like Wilson and those in Pittsburgh published books, delivered lengthy sermons, and published scholarly articles to provide as much expert analysis,

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<sup>146</sup> Rev. George Taylor, Jr., Ph.D., “The Ideal of Pittsburgh: Sermon Preached in the First Presbyterian Church of Wilkinsburg, October 29, 1916,” *Presbyterian Banner* 102 (November 9, 1916): 12-13.

<sup>147</sup> “Say Not That the Former Days Were Better,” *Presbyterian Banner* 100 (May 28, 1914): 10.

<sup>148</sup> Rev. John W. Dinsmore, D. D., “A Typical Scotch-Irish Community of Fifty Years or More Ago,” *Presbyterian Banner* 91 (March 16, 1905): 13.

coupled with theological reflection, in arriving at the right course of action one should take in response to a societal issue. And finally, where evangelicals tended to gloss over history and view themselves as direct descendents of both the early Christian church as well as the American Revolution, Presbyterians found in the broad span of human history evidence of Providence and lessons about human frailty, vanity, and the need for constant self-reflection. In sum, Calvinists began with a conservative interpretation of the Bible typical of conservative evangelicals, yet arrived at a political style that was radically different. Pittsburgh Presbyterians' scholarly and reflective approach to history, and especially its emphasis on original sin, would allow them to influence social reform in Pittsburgh and shape the Social Gospel in their city so that it reflected a distinctively Calvinist tone.

### Chapter Three: Presbyterians and the Social Gospel in Pittsburgh, 1890-1930

*“There are many things that even good Presbyterians do not know.”*<sup>149</sup>

The manner in which Pittsburgh’s influential and wealthy Presbyterian community responded to the city’s glaring problems in the first two decades of the twentieth century revealed the competing forces within Calvinist theology. One impulse was towards public duty, evident in John Winthrop’s desire to establish in Puritan New England “a familiar Commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality.”<sup>150</sup> The other was towards hard work and, as Max Weber has pointed out, encouraged the growth of capitalism and that certainly bore its imprint on the Scotch-Irish settlers of western Pennsylvania.<sup>151</sup> At the turn of the century when reformers publicized Pittsburgh’s poverty and filth and found the business and governmental elites to blame, it sparked a crisis among Presbyterians over whether they would follow their service-oriented or profit-oriented impulses. This situation was intensified because three-fourths of Pittsburgh’s industry was under Presbyterian control, a fact critics were well aware of.<sup>152</sup> “The supreme crime in Pittsburgh,” wrote one muckraker, was “willful defiance of the little group of Scotch-Irish Presbyterians who regard themselves as the city’s masters and are, in fact, its masters,” wrote one who concluded that what the city needed was “one large and comprehensive funeral—it needs to bury John Calvin so deep

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<sup>149</sup> “Board of Freedmen,” *Presbyterian Banner* 102 (March 16, 1916): 9.

<sup>150</sup> John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity,” (1649) in *Winthrop Papers* (Boston Massachusetts Historical Society, 1929).

<sup>151</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, first printing 1905, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scriber’s Sons, 1958).

<sup>152</sup> George F. Swetnam, “All Ye That Labor,” in William McKinney, ed., *The Presbyterian Valley* (Pittsburgh: Davis & Warde, 1958), 464.

that he will never get up again.”<sup>153</sup> Despite this indictment, it is the case that Calvinism had as much to do with restoring Pittsburgh to civic health as it did in causing the industrial-related problems in the first place.

**Historiography:** Historians have reiterated Weber’s indictment of Calvinism as a significant factor in causing radical economic individualism, but have failed to acknowledge its contributions to public life and notions of community ethics. As Sydney Ahlstrom states, American Calvinists believed that “God called nobody unto medicancy and inactivity” so that “those who begged and did not work either were being or ought to be punished for their sins.”<sup>154</sup> Accounts of the progressive era have shared this perception, such as Henry May’s assertion that most Presbyterians were too vested in the economic system of their day, and too concerned with preserving the doctrines of the church, to do much for reform.<sup>155</sup> Though Presbyterians were far more conservative in their theology than most Social Gospel advocates, their Calvinism often led them into many of the same kinds of reforms that liberal Protestants were in favor of. Gary Smith underscores this in his study of progressive-era Calvinism, and demonstrates that it was often the case that the more Calvinist the churches were, the more likely they were to embrace progressive-era reforms. Though usually advocating what Smith describes as “a blend of individual transformation and societal improvement with the accent placed much more strongly on the former,” American Calvinists nonetheless supported woman’s

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<sup>153</sup> R. L. Duffus, “Is Pittsburgh Civilized?,” *Harper’s Magazine* 161 (October 1930), 537, 545; quoted in Roy Lubove, *Twentieth-Century Pittsburgh Vol. 1: Government, Business, and Environmental Change* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 59.

<sup>154</sup> Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 789.

<sup>155</sup> Charles Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), 15-16; Henry May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York: Octagon Books, 1949), 83, 193; Gary Smith calls attention to these in *The Seeds of Secularization: Calvinism, Culture, and Pluralism in America, 1870-1915* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christian University Press), 133.

suffrage, racial equality, some redistribution of wealth, improved factory conditions, civil service reform, and more harmonious industrial relations.<sup>156</sup> Such was the case in Pittsburgh and it was United Presbyterians, the more ardently Calvinist of the two Presbyterian denominations in Pittsburgh, that was most aggressive in spearheading the Social Gospel in Pittsburgh, encouraging those in the Presbyterian Church to eventually join the crusade after the pivotal year of 1910.<sup>157</sup>

**Turn-of-the-Century Pittsburgh: “the unbroken and agonizing ugliness”<sup>158</sup>:**

Even though Presbyterians in Pittsburgh were active in reform circles by the turn of the century, like most of Pittsburgh’s residents, the majority did not awaken to the dire need for change until after muckraking journalists and a prominent study of the city made Pittsburgh the object of national scorn. It was Lincoln Steffens who in 1903 initiated what one historian has called the “old journalistic pastime” of the first half of the twentieth century, “who could find Pittsburgh most repulsive and why.”<sup>159</sup> Though Steffens was the one to really awaken the city to the severity of the social crisis in Pittsburgh, there were many others who had already made attempts to do the same beginning as early as the 1870s. Social Darwinist Herbert Spencer commented at this early time that “a month in Pittsburgh would justify anyone in committing suicide.”<sup>160</sup> But it was really Steffens’ “The Shame of the Cities,” published in 1903 that put Pittsburgh, by 1907 the sixth largest metropolis in the nation, alongside New York, Chicago, and St. Louis as one of the nation’s “shameful” locales. Pittsburgh, Steffens

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<sup>156</sup> Smith, *Seeds of Secularization*, 15, 132.

<sup>157</sup> Gary Smith contends that virtually all of the denomination’s leaders and main voices were strongly Calvinist; *Seeds of Secularization*, 15.

<sup>158</sup> H. L. Mencken in Stefan Lorant, *Pittsburgh: The Story of an American City* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), 328; quoted in Lubove, *Twentieth-century Pittsburgh*, 59.

<sup>159</sup> Lubove, *Twentieth-Century Pittsburgh*, 59.

<sup>160</sup> J. Ernest Wright, “Pittsburgh Seventies,” *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* (September-December, 1943): 137.

wrote, was plagued by longstanding municipal corruption, it had a business community complicit in this corruption, and a wealthy class who lived extravagantly while its working class residents suffered in unspeakable smoke-filled squalor.<sup>161</sup> Other writers echoed this critique of a divided city, like H. L. Mencken who commented in 1910 that Pittsburgh was a place of “enormous enterprises, of prodigious prosperity, of fabulous income,” but a “wretched and degraded proletariat.” The surveys of muckraking journalists and researchers confirmed that Mencken’s claims were not an exaggeration.<sup>162</sup>

These journalistic efforts, along with other factors, led directly to one of the progressive era’s great sociological initiatives, the Pittsburgh Survey of 1907-08. The *Survey* was the first ever to integrate studies on industrial conditions, housing, corruption, and vice instead of examining just one element independent of the others. Echoing the muckrakers, the Survey’s authors concluded after a year of research that Pittsburgh suffered from an imbalance in its public affairs: business leaders invested great energy and expertise into running their mills and banks with brilliance, but they and others in power did little or nothing to apply the same ingenuity to community life. In the words of one Survey investigator, “never before has a great community applied what it had so meagerly to the rational purposes of human life.” This imbalance resulted in “destruction of family life, not in any imaginary or mystical sense, but by the demands of the day’s work, and by the very demonstrable and material method of typhoid fever and industrial

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<sup>161</sup> Lincoln Steffens, *The Shame of the Cities* (New York: Young People’s Missionary Movement, 1904), 102-115, 147, 155-60; cited in Keith Zahniser, *Steel City Gospel: Protestant Laity and Reform in Progressive-Era Pittsburgh* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 82;

<sup>162</sup> H. L. Mencken, “Pittsburgh’s Dreams,” *Baltimore Evening Sun* (date unknown, 1910), cited in Gary Smith, “Pittsburgh and the Social Gospel, 1900-1925,” 5; also see Edward K. Muller, “Ash Pile or Steel City? H. L. Mencken Helps Mold an Image,” *Pittsburgh History* 74 (Summer 1991), 54.

accidents.”<sup>163</sup> For those conducting the Survey, it was not only business and governmental elites who were an obstacle to progress, but the Protestant clergy in the city who failed to press their congregations on their responsibility for the city’s ill health.<sup>164</sup> As investigator Robert Woods summarized, the Pittsburgh churches were “sincere but otherworldly,” “shamefully indifferent [to] matters of public morality,” and far more interested in building a “hospitable garrison to defend the faith” instead of a “conquering army of righteousness” to transform the city’s dysfunction into health.<sup>165</sup>

Undoubtedly, there was much truth to these claims. Presbyterians themselves admitted their deep loyalty to individual achievement and there was much of it coming from Calvinist theology. Work, for the Calvinist, was a form of worship, “the culmination of our vocation,” a duty sacred enough that Presbyterians in Pittsburgh could declare that “anyone unwilling to work should not eat.”<sup>166</sup> Indeed, accepting one’s calling was a sign of submission to the will of the divine, as the words of Calvin indicate: “each man will bear and swallow the discomforts, vexations, weariness, and anxieties in his way of life, when he has been persuaded that the burden was laid upon him by God.”<sup>167</sup> If God required one to work and determined how and if one were to experience material blessing as a result, then it only followed that prosperity was a sign of divine favor. This high regard was evident in how well Presbyterians talked of the wealthy, commenting that “it seems to me that it is rank ingratitude for a church to beg for and

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<sup>163</sup> Edward T. Devine, “Results of the Pittsburgh Survey,” *American Journal of Sociology* 14 (March 1909): 661-62; quoted in Lubove, *Twentieth-Century Pittsburgh*, 9-10.

<sup>164</sup> Daniel L. Marsh, *The Challenge of Pittsburgh* (New York: Missionary Education Movement, 1917), 227.

<sup>165</sup> Robert A. Woods, “Pittsburgh: An Interpretation of its Growth,” in Kellogg, ed., *The Pittsburgh District Civic Frontage* (New York: Survey Associates, 1914), 3-4.

<sup>166</sup> Carnegie Samuel Calian, “Work,” Donald K. McKim, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 402-403. Second quote, 2 *Thessalonians* 3:10.

<sup>167</sup> John Calvin, John T. McNeill, ed., *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (3.10.6.) (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press), 725.

accept the gold of a fortunate man, and then coolly inform him that his chances for eternal joy are deplorably slender,” stressing more emphatically that “lazy Christians prevent good.”<sup>168</sup>

**Oliver McClintock and the United Presbyterian Ministerial Association, 1885-1900:** At the same time that liberal Episcopalians were initiating reforms in the late 1880s that would do their part to contribute to a full-blown Social Gospel in Pittsburgh after the turn of the century, conservative Calvinists were undertaking their own ventures that would also shape the course of reform. The first of these was a Presbyterian merchant, reformer, and philanthropist named Oliver McClintock. In the words of an admiring Lincoln Steffens, this “single citizen’s long, brave fight” against the municipal corruption of the Magee-Flinn machine in Pittsburgh in the 1880s was “one of the finest stories in the history of municipal government.” In the words of one historian, McClintock had his hand in “almost every important reform or reform organization in Pittsburgh,” but was most regarded for his crusade against the bribery and corruption of the Magee-Flinn Republican machine at public expense. Even though a local judge under the influence of Magee-Flinn dismissed the case that McClintock brought before the court, this Presbyterian accomplished much in the way of awakening Pittsburgh to the corruption in its midst years before Steffens’ arrival.<sup>169</sup>

McClintock was also candid that it was his Calvinism that motivated and justified this commitment to reform, that his “Scotch-Irish ancestry” could not tolerate “ecclesiastical and political domination ... autocracy in church, or state,” a reference to

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<sup>168</sup> Mauric Thompson, “A Pleas for the Rich,” *United Presbyterian* 48 (May 1, 1890): 3.

<sup>169</sup> Zahniser, *Steel City Gospel*, 47-49.



the political, religious, and natural hardships that the Scots had faced for centuries.<sup>170</sup> As an elder at Second Presbyterian, President of Board of the Western Theological Seminary, and a trustee of the Presbyterian-affiliated Pennsylvania College for Women McClintock certainly had the institutional ties to Presbyterianism, but there were theological influences as well to explain his drive towards reform. “I have endeavored during my life,” he shared looking back, “to comply with the obligations of stewardship toward God, my bountiful Benefactor,” calling for others to embrace “the great work of world reconstruction whose burden now rests upon all Christians.”<sup>171</sup> Other Calvinists in Pittsburgh shared his sentiment that “Duty, not desire, should be the rule of our life, and duty is obedience to God’s will,” an attribute that Presbyterians were aware of, that they did their good deeds with a sense of obligation to God in mind: “the city of Pittsburgh is rather known for what her citizens do than for making a noise about it.”<sup>172</sup> The roots of this unassuming, but resolved, work ethic go far back to the instructions of John Calvin, who stated in his *Institutes* that such devotion with little regard for results was an act of submission to God, as “each man will swallow the discomforts, vexations, weariness, and anxieties in his way of life, when he has been persuaded that the burden was laid upon him by God.”<sup>173</sup>

The career of Oliver McClintock reveals the Calvinist’s deep regard for the legal structures of republican government, which inevitably bred a type of conservatism as these reformers hesitated to alter the government, especially in relation to business,

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<sup>170</sup>“Oliver McClintock,” *History of Pittsburgh and Environs*, George T. Fleming, ed. (New York: American Historical Society, 1922), 6; quoted in Zahniser, *Steel City Gospel*, 48-49.

<sup>171</sup> *Pittsburgh Post* (October 29, 1922); quoted in Zahniser, *Steel City Gospel*, 48.

<sup>172</sup> “Chronicle and Comment,” *Presbyterian Banner* 88 (June 20, 1901): 1.

<sup>173</sup> John Calvin, John T. McNeill, ed., *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (3.10.6.) (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press), 725; *United Presbyterian* 48 (August 28, 1890): 1.

except in the most minor of fashions. As Calvin wrote, “No deed is considered more noble ... even among philosophers, than to free one’s country from tyranny. Yet a private citizen who lays his hand upon a tyrant is openly condemned by the heavenly judge.”<sup>174</sup> McClintock certainly viewed himself as a private citizen acting in obedience to his “bountiful Benefactor” and, like so many of his peers, was careful not to challenge the system of government of his day, but rather the sinful men who had allowed it to become corrupt. Other Calvinists in Pittsburgh made this distinction between the government and those who ran it, commenting that “It is hard enough to maintain a Christian character in the face of the temptations of [the public] world without being intimately associated with the ungodly.”<sup>175</sup> How individual sinfulness manifest itself was in “corrupt police” and the “corruption of the officials” of governance, where those enforcing the law end up “providing political funds and enriching politicians.”<sup>176</sup> The root of this was not as much the system of government in the United States, the greatest in the world as most Presbyterians in the region viewed it, but instead “poor, human nature, weak, and a prisoner” to one’s desires and one’s sinfulness.<sup>177</sup>

This Calvinist approach was especially evident in the activism of another influential early reformist group in Pittsburgh, the United Presbyterian Ministerial Association and its crusade against prostitution in 1892. Their crusade began in the summer of 1892 when a Catholic priest named Father Morgan M. Sheedy complained to municipal authorities about a thriving prostitution industry in his neighborhood; soon a journalist at Pittsburgh’s *Commercial Gazette* decided to run a series of expose stories.

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<sup>174</sup> John Calvin, John T. McNeill, ed., *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (3.10.6).

<sup>175</sup> *United Presbyterian* 48 (August 28, 1890): 1.

<sup>176</sup> “Corrupt Police,” *Presbyterian Banner* 88 (August 22, 19-1): 1.

<sup>177</sup> *United Presbyterian* 48 (August 28, 1890): 1.

The mayor offered a partial compromise, but by the fall time when it was clear that this had done nothing to slow business in the neighborhood's sex trade, Pittsburgh's United Presbyterian clergy took action. Rev. J. D. Sands of the Seventh United Presbyterian Church and others on the Ministerial Association, along with the *Gazette*, publicly accused the police and mayor's office of tolerating prostitution and refusing to enforce laws in an arrangement that profited them through bribes.

Mayor H. I. Gourley complained that it was impossible to eradicate brothels and red light districts in major cities and threatened that shutting down houses of ill repute would make 3,000 women homeless overnight. The reformers did not relent and in December of 1892, with public pressure mounting, the mayor ordered the police to close down all the houses of prostitution in the city. The more prominent madams, long accustomed to a protective arrangement with city authorities, stormed the city hall and demanded the mayor do something immediately. Others found their way to the home of the Rev. J. T. McCrory of the U. P. Ministerial Association, guided there by policemen who had given the protesters carefully-written notes with the Reverend's home address. The crisis passed soon after when the Director of Public Safety, supposedly acting alone but certainly in response to the mayor's office, reopened the city's brothels. For the mean time, Presbyterian reformers and their allies at the *Commercial Gazette* and around the city had not prevailed, but the public confrontation set a precedent that others would build on.<sup>178</sup>

Like McClintock of Presbyterian Church circles, the United Presbyterian Ministerial Association was deeply Calvinist and attacked the corruption of Pittsburgh's municipal government as an outgrowth of individual sin. "The most potent factor in

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<sup>178</sup> Zahniser, *Steel City Gospel*, 49-53.

politics is righteousness,” they commented and added that “whatever importance may be attached to ordinary political issues ... they are not to be compared with the questions relating to character and right-doing in the sight of God.” The Ministerial Association was much less prone to critique the way the government functioned on an administrative level than they were to attack the “wicked men in power,” the “corrupt practices in the administration” rather than what they termed “the ordinary political policy.” This reflected a strong Calvinist preoccupation with law as a necessary restraint against human sinfulness, thus making both the moral law within the Bible and civil law that governments enforced two parts of God’s sovereign rule on earth, a “mirror” that, in the words of John Calvin, “discloses our sinfulness, leading us to implore divine help.”<sup>179</sup>

This emphasis on personal sin rather than environment as the cause of municipal corruption and other social problems of the day was not typical of Social Gospel advocates, who stressed “the cause and cure of social evils in external conditions.” But it was how these conservative Presbyterians chose to approach reform, clinging to the evangelical doctrine of original sin and rejecting Rauschenbusch’s hopes of stirring the “immense latent perfectability in human nature” in favor of the view that the best way of “improving the social order” was “to reach and eradicate evil in the human heart.”<sup>180</sup> Issues of human nature aside, however, these conservatives’ protest against the prostitution and the police corruption sustaining it was a lead-in to the Social Gospel mentality of focusing on environment as the cause of social problems. Presbyterians might have stressed human sinfulness as the root cause of social problems where Social

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<sup>179</sup> Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1907), 422; “Spiritual Element in Social Wrongs,” *Presbyterian Banner* 99 (February 27, 1913): 5.

<sup>180</sup> Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1907), 422; “Spiritual Element in Social Wrongs,” *Presbyterian Banner* 99 (February 27, 1913): 5.

Gospel liberals stressed poverty and governmental abuse more than human failing and sin. But Presbyterians also believed that sin manifest itself not only in individual ways but institutionally and socially as well. This idea of the societal manifestation of sin was evident in the United Presbyterian Ministerial Association's targeting of systemic police corruption that had given rise to prostitution, what Calvinists and other progressives certainly saw as a social problem. In identifying environmental factors, or more specifically the institutional manifestation of sin in public life, Presbyterian Calvinists in Pittsburgh were expressing a Calvinist understanding of the Social Gospel. Sin may have been at the root of society's problems, Pittsburgh Calvinists believed, but it manifest itself in a wide variety of ways, in the systems of governance as well as through personal decisions.

**United Presbyterians and a Calvinist Social Gospel, 1900-1917:** The actions of Presbyterian Oliver McClintock and the United Presbyterian Ministerial Association were both part of a Calvinist tradition of social-political activism, but McClintock's sense of ethical outrage was more characteristic of those in United Presbyterian circles than his own denomination. Despite their religious conservatism and pro-business temperament, United Presbyterians had in the middle- and late-nineteenth century devoted themselves to antislavery, the cause of the freedmen following the Civil War, temperance, Sabbath observance, and eventually combating vice and governmental corruption. Thus it was only natural that after the turn of the century when journalistic exposes had made the needs of the city a pressing concern, United Presbyterians like H. H. Marlin, minister of the Fourth United Presbyterian church of Pittsburgh, jumped at the opportunity to respond. Like nearly all United Presbyterians in a position of leadership, Marlin was a

staunch Calvinist and based his social philosophy on the assumption of “the nearness and goodness of God” in human affairs.<sup>181</sup> Yet he also admired Social Gospel figures of a much more liberal bent like Walter Rauschenbusch, Washington Gladden, and Josiah Strong despite their theological differences. Though engaged as a full-time minister, Marlin nonetheless devoted himself to understanding the city’s industrial conditions and became an outspoken critic of its abuses through pamphlets, and speeches, including a bibliography of labor conditions and social service resources that he compiled for United Presbyterian pastors to read and disseminate to their congregations. He also made sure that United Presbyterians maintained their support of Federal Council of Churches even though it fell under criticism in these years for its liberal Social Gospel leanings.<sup>182</sup>

Marlin also served on the United Presbyterian church’s Committee on Industrial Conditions and presented reports to the church that were scathing enough of United Presbyterian-owned businesses to land him in the middle of noteworthy controversies. In 1913 the U. P. General Assembly, in an attempt to quiet this Pittsburgh-based critic, moved Marlin’s Committee on Industrial Conditions from independent status to become a subset of the Board of Home Missions. In a few years, however, the denomination restored Marlin’s position and granted him an editorial post at the *United Presbyterian* where he resumed his campaign for industrial justice for two decades. In 1921 he reminded his readers that “Allegheny county leads all counties in the state in the number of fatal industrial accidents.” “We have made our national slogan, ‘Safety first,’” he continued, “but the practical operation of that motto in the industrial life of Pennsylvania

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<sup>181</sup> “God Is My Shield,” *United Presbyterian* 73 (November 2, 1916): 9.

<sup>182</sup> H. H. Marlin, *A Handbook on Christian Social Service* (Pittsburgh: U. P. Board of Home Missions, no date); *Minutes of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church* 1911, p. 966; 1912, p. 180ff; 1913 p. 521ff; cited in Jamison, *United Presbyterian Story*, 109-110.

seems to make a very pitiful showing.” Even if it “cost millions” to do so, he added, the mills had the duty “to install every conceivable form of safeguards for industrial workers of every class and degree.”<sup>183</sup>

Besides Marlin there were others in United Presbyterian circles who used their influence as civic and religious leaders to add momentum to the progressive movement in Pittsburgh. For instance, as the public absorbed the findings of the Pittsburgh Survey following its publication in 1908, critics blasted the Protestant churches for not doing enough, that Protestants were “shamefully indifferent in matters of public morality.”<sup>184</sup> Though much of this criticism was aimed at Presbyterians and United Presbyterians, it did not stop members of the latter denomination from agreeing and offering their own critique of Protestants’ failure to act. When the city’s Protestant clergy called for a day of prayer in response to the findings of corruption in the government, for instance, the Hon. M. Clyde Kelley of Braddock United Presbyterian Church blasted the event as a cowardly attempt to brush the problem under a rug, “one of the most pathetic things ever witnessed in Pennsylvania.”<sup>185</sup> Kelley had good company in this, evident when Albert Jay Nock, the well-known journalist writing in a 1910 edition of *The American Magazine*, asked whether “the iron-clad militant Protestantism” of the city “was worth having if the city has to feel its way towards elementary social Christianity” with such weak leadership.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> “Industrial Fatalities in Pennsylvania,” *United Presbyterian* (January 20, 1921): 7.

<sup>184</sup> Robert Woods, “Pittsburgh: An Interpretation of Its Growth,” 38-41; quoted in Zahniser, *Steel City Gospel*, 164.

<sup>185</sup> Clyde Kelley, *Machine Made Legislation* (Pittsburgh: Percy F. Smith, 1912): 143.

<sup>186</sup> Albert Jay Nock, “What A Few Men Did in Pittsburg: A True Detective Story,” *The American Magazine* 70:6 (October 1910): 818; quoted in Zahniser, *Steel City Gospel*, 164.

**The Christian Social Service Union:** This sense of outrage among proponents of social Christianity led to the formation of the Christian Social Service Union (C.S.S.U.) in 1912, which at the outset boasted support from 400 Pittsburgh congregations from each of the city's major denominations and a constituency of 400,000. United Presbyterians were a sizable contingent of the city's Protestant population, commanding 15 percent of the total of Protestants in Pittsburgh, but exerted an even greater influence on reform efforts in the region; they were prominent in the C.S.S.U.'s leadership as they had been in virtually every major reform organization, religious and secular, to this point.<sup>187</sup> The more radical leanings of the Union, especially towards workplace reform, eventually brought it into conflict with critics who claimed that liberals were using it to speak for all the churches when they were really the voice of a minority faction. Despite this, United Presbyterians in particular were supportive of the C.S.S.U. and its goals, denouncing the "offensive luxury of the suddenly rich" and pointed to "responsibility of employers" to provide decent wages and the duty of the churches to lead in these efforts.<sup>188</sup> The denomination stated that it "placed the Church on record as standing firmly for equal rights and complete justice for all men in all

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<sup>187</sup> *United Presbyterian* 73 (November 11, 1915): 16. *United Presbyterian* (June 10, 1915): 165; "Dr. McCulloch's Resignation," *United Presbyterian* 78 (December 16, 1920): 4; James Gray, one of the city's most prominent Protestant laymen and a committed United Presbyterian, was one of seven laypersons active in the C.S.S.U.'s leadership and would be active in later ventures to come. The Union's president was United Presbyterian pastor Rev. William E. McCulloch of the Homewood U. P. Church from 1895-1920; McCulloch was active in denominational circles as author of a 1925 study of United Presbyterian outreach efforts, associate editor of the *United Presbyterian*, moderator of the denomination's General Assembly in 1917-18, and a member of the Federal Council of Churches' evangelism committee. But he also involved himself in wider civic affairs, serving on countless local organizations like the Homewood Y.M.C.A., the Homewood Board of Trade, and his efforts as president of the C.S.S.U. In the spirit of Washington Gladden's 1893 *Applied Christianity*, he delivered sermons with titles such as "Christianizing the Home," "Christianizing the School," "Christianizing Business," and "Christianizing Politics"; from Smith, "Pittsburgh and the Social Gospel," 14. Washington Gladden, *Applied Christianity: Moral Aspects of Social Questions* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1893). Zahniser, *Steel City Gospel*, 164, 165, 169.

<sup>188</sup> *United Presbyterian* (November 15, 1906); *United Presbyterian* (September 30, 1909); quoted in Zahniser, *Steel City Gospel*, 154.



stations of life,” calling for “proper housing,” the “abolition of child labor ... suitable provision for the old age of workers and for those incapacitated by injury,” the “most equitable division of the product of industry that can ultimately be devised,” and at least one day a week of rest for workers. The *United Presbyterian* noted that this 1913 denominational report was “passed without a dissenting vote,” and claimed it represented “an increasing apprehension of the fact that the principles taught by the Christ and lived by the Christ must be applied to every condition and circumstance of human life.”<sup>189</sup>

**The Presbyterian Church and Reform, 1900-1917:** Presbyterian Church members, in contrast with their United Presbyterian siblings, did not share the aggressiveness of this critique, though they would drift in that direction during the first two decades of the century. One reason for this difference is that United Presbyterians were the more self-consciously Calvinist of the two denominations and thus took their cues more from Calvin’s *Institutes* and the *Westminster Confession* than they did from broader trends in the evangelical mainstream. United Presbyterians comprised a relatively small denomination of 130,000 nationally and 30,500 members in Pittsburgh circa 1917 compared with the 60,000 Pittsburghers belonging to the Presbyterian Church. Their smaller size, and the presence of a much larger Calvinist denomination in the city, allowed them to act as the intensely-Calvinist alternative to the Presbyterian Church in the northeast United States.<sup>190</sup> The Presbyterian Church certainly had a strong Scotch-Irish Calvinist identity in Pittsburgh, but the denomination was formed out of an English Calvinist lineage and thus was more experiential than the dogmatic style of the Scottish

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<sup>189</sup> “The Fifty-Fifth General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, Georgia, May 14, 1913,” *United Presbyterian* (May 29, 1913), 9. *United Presbyterian* (June 19, 1913); from Zahniser, *Steel City Gospel*, 154.

<sup>190</sup> Smith, “Pittsburgh and the Social Gospel,” 46.

church.<sup>191</sup> This dogmatic Scottish-descended Calvinism that manifest itself in the Old School Presbyterianism of Princeton in the nineteenth century had never been very effective at winning the bulk of American Protestants, who preferred more immediate, emotional, and less scholarly ways of experiencing Christian faith. But it did mean that United Presbyterians had an intensely, and very specific, Calvinist identity that they prized unabashedly.

It was also the case that members of the Presbyterian Church were heavily vested in the region's industry, such that many famous names were on the membership rolls of the city's fashionable congregations. For instance, all of Willa Cather's five "Lords of Pittsburgh," Andrew Carnegie, Andrew Mellon, George Westinghouse, Henry Clay Frick, and Henry John Heinz, had ties to the Presbyterian Church and the Mellon and Heinz families were particularly active.<sup>192</sup> As the pastor of the prominent East Liberty Presbyterian congregation stated, "if you will scan the list of [our church's] elders, deacons, and trustees, you will find bank presidents, leading merchants, and manufacturers, prominent physicians, lawyers and judges of our courts."<sup>193</sup> United Presbyterians knew that their denomination had "not a few men in its membership of large wealth," but not nearly of the fame as the Presbyterian Church, a state of affairs that allowed them more latitude to criticize industry, and the Presbyterians who controlled it, more openly. Yet despite this difference, it is also true that United Presbyterians were

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<sup>191</sup> Gary Smith, *Seeds of Secularization*, 17; Randall Balmer, John R. Fitzmier, *The Presbyterians* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1994), 24; Jamison, *United Presbyterian Story*, 128.

<sup>192</sup> Andrew Carnegie was not a Presbyterian, and was open in his agnosticism. But he did exhibit the hard work ethic and sense of public duty characteristic of Calvinism; his sense of public duty was evident in his authoring of the Gospel of Wealth, which required the rich given their assets away to better the public; Quoted in Eleanor Foa Dienstag, *In Good Company: 125 Years at the Heinz Table (1869-1994)* (New York: Warner Books, 1994), xiii; James H. Smylie, *Scotch-Irish Presence in Pennsylvania* (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania Historical Association, 1990), 29.

<sup>193</sup> Georgina Negley, *East Liberty Presbyterian Church: With Historical Setting and a Narrative of the Centennial Celebration April 12-20, 1919* (Pittsburgh: Murdoch, Ken & Co., 1919), 133.

themselves highly vested in the industry of western Pennsylvania and had much to lose as well, which underscores just how progressive they were given their station.<sup>194</sup>

Although Presbyterians would eventually play a central role in the Social Gospel through the Pittsburgh Council of Churches (P.C.C.), established to replace the C.S.S.U. in 1917, in the early years of religious-led reform it was United Presbyterians who represented the Calvinist viewpoint in the coalition of Episcopalians, Methodists, as well as Catholics and Jews, in these endeavors. This was noteworthy because the Presbyterian Church was so powerful in the region and had more members than any other Protestant church in the city. Yet despite their noticeable absence, there were still many contributions Presbyterians had already made; one should recall that reformer Oliver McClintock was a Presbyterian and, along with a handful of Calvary Church Episcopalians, Unitarians, Baptists, and the United Presbyterian Ministerial Association, helped launch the city's progressive movement.<sup>195</sup> Presbyterians were also instrumental in establishing the Protestant-run Kingsley House in 1893 in the Strip District, an important step in breaking down the denominational boundaries that stood in the way of unified service. It is also noteworthy that in the first decade of the twentieth century as critics blasted Presbyterians and other Protestants for saving "their heaviest blows against secondary evils" while ignoring "the prime wrongs, the ones that dry up the roots of community life," Presbyterians generally did not side with the business community. When business leaders, for instance, attempted to discredit the Pittsburgh Survey after its publication in 1908, Presbyterians did not join in but rather expressed regret, commenting

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<sup>194</sup> *The United Presbyterian* Vol. XLVIII (August 21, 1890): 1.

<sup>195</sup> Zahniser, *Steel City Gospel*, 48, 67.

that “Pittsburgh continue[s] to drink the cup of its municipal shame,” and that they felt remorse at this “humiliation of the city.”<sup>196</sup>

This sense of shame was legitimate enough to cause a shift in Presbyterian attitudes from a somewhat uncritical celebration of capitalism to the growing conviction that it was they who had caused this state of affairs. In 1901, before the journalistic exposes of Steffens and others, it was common for Presbyterians to remark that it would be hard to find a “blacker pessimist” than the individual who questioned free markets.<sup>197</sup> Indifference to the poor was also strong, with Presbyterians stating as late as 1908 that the poor had a habit of “work-shunning” that led to “the miseries and diseases and vices and crimes and dangers arising from it,” rhetoric that was far less commonplace among United Presbyterians, for instance.<sup>198</sup> Despite this insensitivity there had been currents running in the opposite direction, with many Presbyterians demanding that their denomination do more to build affordable housing for “the industrious and self-helping” poor, those “who are not in circumstances to secure for themselves homes, and are, consequently, living at a disadvantage and suffering loss.”<sup>199</sup>

By 1910 the frequency of such sympathetic commentary had noticeably increased in Presbyterian circles, with more and more admitting “we regret to acknowledge that there was a time when it seemed as if the best people,” and by this we may assume they meant Presbyterians and other members of the respectable elite, “took but little interest in

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<sup>196</sup> John Fitch, *The Steel Workers*, (vol. 3 of the Pittsburgh Survey), ed., Paul U. Kellogg (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1910), 223; *Presbyterian Banner* (March 31, 1910): 7; Robert W. Jones, “Pittsburgh, A City to be Proud of,” *Pittsburgh Gazette-Times*, a four-part series that appeared between December 1909 and January 1910, cited in Bauman and Spratt, “Civic Leaders and Environmental Reform,” 159. Zahniser, *Steel City Gospel*, 118.

<sup>197</sup> “The Case of George D. Herron,” *Presbyterian Banner* 87 (May 2, 1901): 6.

<sup>198</sup> “Give Work, Not Charity,” *Presbyterian Banner* 94 (September 3, 1908): 9.

<sup>199</sup> “Homes for the Poor,” *Presbyterian Banner* 89 (January 8, 1903): 5.

social conditions,” adding that “that is now history.”<sup>200</sup> The future held opportunities for civic action now, they continued, that “the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.” was “at least, waking to a sense of its social duty,” and was “being educated along social lines as never before.” In response to those who criticized them for being in a state of “moral adolescence” and being more preoccupied with “achieving of a great material destiny” than cultivating “aspiration and moral enterprise,” the Pittsburgh Presbytery began reporting in 1910 on the steps it was taking to making things right, to repent of what it believed were its sins of negligence.<sup>201</sup> “The Presbytery of Pittsburgh is doing perhaps the foremost work [in comparison to other major cities] among foreigners,” with “twenty-two churches and missions, with twenty-nine ministers and missionaries” in service to a county that was “more than one-quarter foreign speaking.” Similar reports followed at a more and more regular rate than had before.<sup>202</sup>

But Presbyterians also made it clear, as did their United Presbyterian peers, that this new commitment to reform was not a capitulation to the Social Gospel or to liberal theology. “The right and the wrong, the good and the evil that come out in human character and conduct and are embodied in business and politics and the social order have their roots down in the hearts of men,” they declared, and not in “the material conditions of society.” They could concur that socialists were correct in identifying environmental factors as causing corruption and vice, adding that “we do not deny there is truth and a large measure of truth in this general theory.” But they concluded that, “however much

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<sup>200</sup> Rev. C. L. Palmer, “Civic, Citizens’ and Voters’ Leagues,” *Presbyterian Banner* 96 (March 24, 1910): 32.

<sup>201</sup> Robert Woods, “Pittsburgh: An Interpretation of Its Growth,” *Pittsburgh District/Civic Frontage*, 10-12.

<sup>202</sup> Rev. Malcolm L. MacPhail, “The Social Service of the Presbyterian Church,” *Presbyterian Banner* 96 (December 8, 1910): 12.

truth there is in the theory that environment makes men, there is immensely more truth in the theory that men make their environment.” Identifying themselves as Calvinists and evangelicals, they underscored the belief that “sin is the deepest root of all these wrongs” and that its only cure was “to repent and be cleansed through the grace of Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world.”<sup>203</sup> Good Christians, they furthered, were to respond to this gift of salvation by deciding to serve, to “leave the church [and] begin to specialize ... to study and seek to solve the business problems, others political questions, still others the problems of moral reform, and others the deeper question of the social order” to develop a “special competency for handling these matters and can speak with some authority in settling them.”<sup>204</sup>

This insistence upon a theologically orthodox version of the Social Gospel is evident in the career of Maitland Alexander, pastor of First Presbyterian Church from 1899-1924. Alexander admitted in 1905 that churches like his and others had been “painfully unaware of [downtown Pittsburgh’s] need,” noting that “fifteen years ago there were no churches that maintained their own missions in the needy parts of the city.”<sup>205</sup> But by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, First Presbyterian had engaged itself with the surrounding industrial community at a time when most other prominent churches had fled to the suburbs. With members who opted to make the long commute to keep attending an urban church, First Presbyterian was able to raise the funds to build a new edifice with the practical space for accommodating outreach efforts, hiring a dozen staff to evangelize and to serve the needs of the poor who resided in the vicinity of the

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<sup>203</sup> “The Spiritual Element in Social Wrongs,” *Presbyterian Banner* 99 (February 27, 1913): 5-6.

<sup>204</sup> “The True Work of the Church,” *Presbyterian Banner* 99 (March 6, 1913): 5.

<sup>205</sup> J. M. Duff, *A Record of Twenty-five Years of the Pastorate of Maitland Alexander* (Pittsburgh: First Presbyterian Church, 1924), 27.

church.<sup>206</sup> Yet like the Presbytery to which they belonged, the members of First Presbyterian resisted a pure Social Gospel approach, clarifying that they were in that long tradition of “strong, Biblical typical of Calvinistic theology” that was “the foundation of the Presbyterian Church.” “We disagree with those,” Alexander commented, who find “personal evangelistic effort disagreeable” and offer “a merely humanitarian enterprise that stresses the social and physical need” at the expense of the traditional Gospel message.<sup>207</sup>

Other prominent “society” churches with a conservative Calvinist background made similar changes at the time to a greater sensitivity to the suffering of the poor. Third Presbyterian, which unlike First Presbyterian did migrate to the verdant suburbs in the East End of the city, did not abandon its commitment to benevolence, contributing over \$3 million in the first three decades of the twentieth century to a variety of causes. Its minister William McEwan made no secret of his commitment to orthodoxy, to “the philosophy of life” that refused “to explain the world and the facts of life by any theory of Utilitarianism, but insisting always that the chief end of man is to glorify God.”<sup>208</sup> McEwan preached that the Old Testament law in the book of Deuteronomy “was plainly intended to prevent people from growing into a state of indifference and of irresponsibility in the matter of safe-guarding life” adding that “God will hold men responsible and accountable for the trust that He has committed to their keeping.”<sup>209</sup> J. P. E. Kumler’s pastorate at East Liberty Presbyterian (1884-1901) was likewise similar in

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<sup>206</sup> McKinney, *Presbyterian Valley*, 426-27.

<sup>207</sup> Duff, *Pastorate of Maitland Alexander*, 24, 61.

<sup>208</sup> Rev. William L. McEwan, *YearBook of the Third Presbyterian Church, Fifth and South Negley Avenues, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 1903-1904*, 11.

<sup>209</sup> William L. McEwan, *A Patriot’s Duty, Preached at Third Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh, Pa., July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1928*, 4-5.

transitioning the congregation from insularity to become what admirers termed “a great city church” with its own social service programs and many prominent members in some of the city’s many reform groups, including Sarah Heinz, wife of Henry J. Heinz, and others involved the Allegheny County Sabbath School Association, the Y. M. C. A., the Y. W. C.A., and countless similar ventures.<sup>210</sup> Kumler made it clear, as did those ministers who followed him, that East Liberty was committed both to “the fundamentals of our faith,” but also to ideal and practice of “social service.”<sup>211</sup>

One of the reasons that historians have tended to overlook these efforts at reform was because of the resignation of Charles Stelzle from his post as head of the Presbyterian Church’s Department of Church and Labor in 1913, a position he had occupied since the formation of the department in 1906. Writing in his 1926 autobiography, Stelzle commented that it was “a small coterie of Conservative Presbyterians” who had opposed his pro-labor work and contributed to his resignation.<sup>212</sup> Stelzle was one of the highly-regarded figures of the Social Gospel, which made his conflict with wealthy Pittsburghers all the more pronounced and helped foster the notion that Presbyterians and Calvinists have been uninterested in all kinds of legitimate reform.<sup>213</sup> Certainly the accusation that Presbyterians stood in the way of labor unions was not unfounded. The 1892 Homestead strike was a case in point where the Presbyterian Church was certainly not as sympathetic to the strikers as most of the city’s

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<sup>210</sup> Georgina Negley, *East Liberty Presbyterian Church: With Historical Setting and a Narrative of the Centennial Celebration April 12-20, 1919* (Pittsburgh: Murdoch, Ken & Co., 1919), 28.

<sup>211</sup> J. P. E. Kumler, *Historical Sermon October 9<sup>th</sup> 1894*, in Negley, *East Liberty Presbyterian*, 105; Frank Sneed, in Negley, *East Liberty Presbyterian*, 28.

<sup>212</sup> Charles Stelzle, *A Son of the Bowery: The Life Story of an East Side American* (New York: Gorge Doren Co., 1926), 168; quoted in Zahniser, *Steel City Gospel*, 186.

<sup>213</sup> Swetnam, in McKinney, *Presbyterian Valley*, 464. L. M. Japinga, “Stelzle, Charles,” in Hart, ed., *Dictionary of the Presbyterian & Reformed Tradition*, 251-52



newspapers were, the *Presbyterian Banner* editorializing that Henry Clay Frick's rationale for his harsh actions "was not easy to set aside."<sup>214</sup>

Yet Presbyterian views towards labor, like their general attitude towards reform, softened in this first decade of the twentieth century. "Is the Church opposed to workingmen?" they asked in 1905 in response to the widespread accusation; are the churches "not made up of the rich capitalist class and do not their ministers fear and flatter this class?" Quoting Charles Stelzle, Pittsburgh's Presbyterians answered with the reply, "Don't believe it ... the Church that you have been scorning is not the Church of the rich rascal," but "is the Church of that man of God who has sympathized with the poor and suffering." Though this was obviously more a statement of intent than of reality, it demonstrates that Presbyterians, in hiring a man as outspoken as Stelzle and forming the nation's first Protestant denominational labor-oriented agency of its kind, truly believed it was possible to change.<sup>215</sup> Stelzle published regular articles in the *Presbyterian Banner* where he praised the "labor press of the country" for "raising the standards of the workingmen by fighting the battles of all the people." These battles for the "workingmen" were often against the very readers of the *Banner*, those "bank presidents, leading merchants, and manufacturers" who attended congregations like the fashionable East Liberty Presbyterian.<sup>216</sup> Yet the conflict of interest was not enough to keep this influential Presbyterian periodical from continuing its calls for genuine change with regards to the most controversial issue in Pittsburgh, industrial relations. "The

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<sup>214</sup> *Presbyterian Banner* 78 (July 20, 1892); quoted in Swetnam, "All Ye That Labor," in McKinney, ed., *Presbyterian Valley*, 463.

<sup>215</sup> "Is the Church Opposed to Workingmen?" *Presbyterian Banner* 91 (January 5, 1905): 6.

<sup>216</sup> Georgina Negley, *East Liberty Presbyterian Church: With Historical Setting and a Narrative of the Centennial Celebration April 12-20, 1919* (Pittsburgh: Murdoch, Ken & Co., 1919), 133. Rev. Charles L. Stelzle, "How Organized Labor is Raising the Standards of Workingmen," *Presbyterian Banner* 94 (July 23, 1908): 31.

Pittsburgh Survey revealed to all interested in industrial conditions a state of affairs in many respects surprising,” they commented, concluding that “it is the obligation of every Christian employer, a part of the essential Christian teaching of the brotherhood of man, to pay every employe (sic) a living wage, that is, a wage on which not only the worker can live under proper sanitary conditions but the average family” can as well. Certainly, there were those in Pittsburgh who lauded Stelzle’s work and believed that the churches should reverse their historic indifference to labor’s concerns.<sup>217</sup>

**The Pittsburgh Council of Churches, 1917-1930:** The clearest expression of this conservative Social Gospel was the Pittsburgh Council of Churches (P.C.C.), which virtually all of the Protestant churches supported as a reform institution to replace the C.S.S.U. in 1917 because it would give them more control over its direction. Though it would never carry out the kinds of radical reforms that many journalists and critics were clamoring for, especially with regards to the ongoing problem of workplace abuses and the blame that business leaders shared in this, it did accomplish much to improve Pittsburgh’s civic life.<sup>218</sup> Presbyterians were at the forefront of the P.C.C.’s leadership, with local minister Charles Zahniser serving as executive secretary from 1917 until 1929 after which he left to take up a prestigious post at Boston University as Professor of Applied Christianity.<sup>219</sup> To enlist the churches and publicize the work of these

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<sup>217</sup> “The Church’s Appeal on Behalf of Labor,” *Presbyterian Banner* 96 (January 13, 1910): 24.

<sup>218</sup> Zahniser, *Steel City Gospel*, 186. Roy Lubove, ed., *Pittsburgh* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1976), 20-21; S. J. Kleinberg, *The Shadow of the Mills: Working-Class Families in Pittsburgh, 1870-1907* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), 301. Smith, “Pittsburgh and the Social Gospel,” 56, called my attention to these citations. Smith and Zahniser, *Steel City Gospel*, 211, give a similar assessment of the Social Gospel as more positive in its effects than is typical of most social historians of the city.

<sup>219</sup> “Who’s Who in Pittsburgh Churches,” *Pittsburgh Christian Outlook* 18 (April, 1922): 4; cited in Smith, “Pittsburgh and the Social Gospel,” 17-18; The Council’s president was W. I. Wishart of the Eighth United Presbyterian congregation, and half of the Council’s key leadership had Calvinist origins, with Presbyterian layman W. R. Farmer, United Presbyterian judge James H. Gray, pastor W. E. McCulloch of the

Protestants and any others who would join them, the Council undertook a major survey of Pittsburgh's social and industrial life in 1917, published soon after as the *Challenge of Pittsburgh*. This was a study in the spirit of the *Pittsburgh Survey* to assess where the city had come since that landmark a decade earlier as a tool to assess where next to take action. The *Challenge of Pittsburgh* reached a similar conclusion that the Pittsburgh Survey had, that the city's life was divided between a brilliant application of creativity in its economic life, coupled with a lackluster application of the same creativity to the city's civic and living conditions.<sup>220</sup>

The response of the Council's leaders was to attempt to promote among Pittsburgh's churches "equal rights and complete organized justice for all men in all stations in life," "the abatement and prevention of poverty," "the protection of the worker from dangerous machinery, occupational diseases, and mortality," "a release from employment one day in seven," and "a living wage as a minimum in every industry." It was upon the churches, the *Challenge* exhorted, to fight the "foes of social welfare," that "politico-business group," those "predatory financial interests" that perpetuated the suffering of the poor.<sup>221</sup> Churches in Pittsburgh did welcome this message, the first 5,000 copies of the book selling immediately with another printing coming later that same year. Both Protestants and non-Protestants discussed its findings publicly and it was popular and effective enough that the journal of the National Liquor Dealers charged its own constituency to fight against these do-gooder rabble-rousers.<sup>222</sup> Presbyterians

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Homewood United Presbyterian Church, all playing key roles in its leadership and growth. Other leaders in key Council initiatives were George Montgomery, superintendent of the Pittsburgh Presbytery, and R. H. Hutchison, corresponding secretary of the United Presbyterian Board of Home Missions.

<sup>220</sup> Gary Smith, "Pittsburgh and the Social Gospel," 17-20.

<sup>221</sup> Marsh, *Challenge of Pittsburgh*, 72, 145, 152.

<sup>222</sup> Charles R. Zahniser, "The Pittsburgh Council of Churches," *Pittsburgh Methodist* 6 (October, November, December, 1917): 12. Cited in Smith, "Pittsburgh and the Social Gospel," 25.

were among the most enthusiastic of activists, the North Presbyterian congregation reporting that it had an average of seventy-five in attendance at its Wednesday evening services to discuss its findings, the Perrysville Presbyterian congregation welcoming Zahniser to speak in similar meetings that could boast an attendance of 156.<sup>223</sup> This activism of P.C.C. leaders, in cooperation with the churches, remained strong over the next decade until essentially to the end of the twenties, surviving the split between liberals and conservatives in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy where most orthodox Protestants abandoned such reform efforts as dangerously liberal.

The *Challenge* exhorted Christians in Pittsburgh not to allow the growing conflict between fundamentalists and modernists to force them to make a choice between social service or evangelism, underscoring that “true Christianity” had two sides, “looking up to God in prayer, worship, [and] dependence,” and “reaching out to mankind in help, service [and] protection.”<sup>224</sup> They held conferences for others interested in religious-based reform, worked for the enforcement of prohibition laws, and to remove a corrupt U. S. district attorney who was a “politician of the old school,” and encouraged their constituency to “vote intelligently.”<sup>225</sup> They defended “the fundamental rights” of citizens during the Red Scare of 1920 and protested “any legislation, rules, regulations, or executive action” that stood in the way of individual freedoms.<sup>226</sup> When William Frey Long, the vice president of the Employers’ Association of Pittsburgh, sent a letter to 300 area churches exhorting them not to support a pro-labor Y.M.C.A. action, the P.C.C.

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<sup>223</sup> “The Challenge of Pittsburgh Campaign,” *Pittsburgh Christian Outlook* 11 (October 1917): 1-2; cited in Smith, “Pittsburgh and the Social Gospel,” 1-2.

<sup>224</sup> Statement of Daniel Marsh, Methodist minister, 1917; *Challenge of Pittsburgh*, 275.

<sup>225</sup> “U. S. Attorney Arraigned,” *Pittsburgh Christian Outlook* 18 (April 1922): 2; in Smith, “Pittsburgh and the Social Gospel,” 2.

<sup>226</sup> “Statement on Civil Liberties,” *Pittsburgh Christian Outlook* 16 (June, 1920): 3; Smith 29.

made it clear that they viewed this an inappropriate move to curtail “the historic right and duty of the church to proclaim the whole truth of Christ as revealed in the Scriptures and as applied under the Holy Spirit to every relationship in life,” adding that Long had not spoken for many of the city’s “high-type Christian employers.”<sup>227</sup>

A major point of pride for the P.C.C., and perhaps its greatest achievement, was in convincing the city to establish the Morals court in 1918. The Morals court allowed young offenders the chance to enter a probation program with Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish mentors; this was instead of the legal system sending them to juvenile prison, what Calvinists called a virtual “school for crime” where their mentors would not be good citizens, but professional criminals they met while incarcerated.<sup>228</sup> It was the first court of its kind in the United States and was the response to longstanding reformer complaints that those presiding over the city’s police courts were incompetent and uncaring.

The P.C.C. also sponsored small-scale surveys in Pittsburgh neighborhoods, established a program to offer folks aid in finding “respectable and reliable” hotel and living arrangements in 1917 as a way to stem prostitution. The Council also operated an elaborate hospital visitation program, as well as a similar venture in 1921 of sociological casework among delinquents, immigrants, and African-Americans that Zahniser and a University of Pittsburgh sociologist oversaw.<sup>229</sup> In addition, the P.C.C. lobbied governor Gifford Pinchot for prison reform in 1923, decrying the “intolerable conditions and

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<sup>227</sup> “Ministers Rebuke Employers’ Ass’n for Denying Church Aid,” *Pittsburgh Christian Outlook* 17 (July-August 1921): 3; Smith, “Pittsburgh and the Social Gospel,” 30.

<sup>228</sup> “His Honor, the ‘Greatest Gang Leader in the U.S.A.’” *Literary Digest* 74 (August 29, 1925): 46; Smith, “Pittsburgh and the Social Gospel,” 31.

<sup>229</sup> “Case Work in Christian Service,” *Pittsburgh Christian Outlook* 17 (October, 1921): 1; “Case Work in Christian Service,” *Pittsburgh Christian Outlook* 19 (February, 1923): 6; Smith, “Pittsburgh and the Social Gospel,” 36.

practices at Western Penitentiary in Pittsburgh and succeeding in getting several Protestant Social Gospel activists, including two Presbyterians and one United Presbyterian, to serve on its board of directors.<sup>230</sup> In 1920 the P.C.C. created a Department of Women's Work in 1920 to better involve their influential segment of the population in its Morals Court work, its efforts to get women to vote, and to involve more in its activism.<sup>231</sup>

The Pittsburgh Council of Churches also took an interest in African-Americans at this point when the Great Migration to northern cities was beginning to make a noticeable difference in Pittsburgh's demographics. In 1918 the Council issued a report on the growing Pittsburgh black community and entertained a discussion open to the public on the migration, living and working conditions of blacks, and vice, stressing the churches' role in protecting blacks from "designing politicians" and "the unscrupulous spenders of money in politics."<sup>232</sup> Over the next decade, the Council worked with black pastors and lay leaders towards these ends, even as the African American churches formed their own Alliance of Negro Churches in 1918. In 1927 the Council of Churches established the Department of Work Among Negroes that began with fifty-eight congregations whose board was interracial and worked to improve the terrible conditions they faced in the city's mills and mines.<sup>233</sup>

**Conclusion:** The Pittsburgh Council of Churches, like the vast majority of citizen-led reform organizations of the progressive era, had its limits. It failed to

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<sup>230</sup> "New Penitentiary Board," *Pittsburgh Christian Outlook* 19 (August-September 1923): 6.

<sup>231</sup> Ida B. Little, "Aims and Ideals of the Department of Women's Work," *Pittsburgh Christian Outlook* 17 (September, 1921): 3. Smith, 37.

<sup>232</sup> "The New Negro Population," *Pittsburgh Christian Outlook* 12 (February, 1918): 5; Smith, 39.

<sup>233</sup> S. R. Morsell, "The Problems and Needs of the Newer Negro Population," *Pittsburgh Christian Outlook* 24 (June-July, 1927): 3; Smith, 41.

dramatically improve housing for the poor and the factories remained places of injustice in the eyes of many, evident in worker dissatisfaction and the violence of the “Great Steel Strike” of 1919. Regardless of what it did not accomplish, a decade after its founding the Pittsburgh Council of Churches could nonetheless claim a Pittsburgh membership of 200,000 and boast of a wide influence, winning praise from outsiders as “a sort of laboratory of interchurch community work” where the city’s “powerful church forces” took direct action instead of merely offering reformist rhetoric, which was the norm among most American Protestant groups.<sup>234</sup> Those in the Federal Council of Churches and in congregations across the nation found themselves emulating what they observed in Pittsburgh, where the Protestant churches could point to tangible results of their efforts.<sup>235</sup>

Presbyterians in Pittsburgh were central to the Pittsburgh Council of Churches and to the broader Social Gospel as it unfolded in Pittsburgh. This illustrates three main points that correct scholarly misperceptions, or at the least, over-generalizations, about the influence of Calvinism in modern life. First, the fact that the Presbyterian Church shifted from an indifferent or hostile attitude towards embracing progressivism and the Social Gospel by 1910 demonstrates that these wealthy industrialists did have a sense of social responsibility. This change of mind challenges the assumptions of scholars like Henry May and Sydney Ahlstrom who have long depicted Presbyterians as the foes of reform in the modern context. Second, the fact that Presbyterian Church members utilized Calvinist concepts of public duty, and not liberal Social Gospel teachings or

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<sup>234</sup> Fred B. Smith, internationally known reformer and evangelist, quoted in Charles Reed Zahniser, *Pittsburgh Council of Churches*, ii.

<sup>235</sup> Carman C. Johnson, “Editorial,” *Pittsburgh Christian Outlook* 20 (May, 1924): 7; cited in Smith, “Pittsburgh and the Social Gospel,” 9.

secular progressive concepts of efficiency, in this push towards reform illustrates that Calvinism itself had the potential to inspire social service. Finally, the example of the ultra-reformist and activist United Presbyterian church in Pittsburgh, which was the more intensely-Calvinist of the city's two denominations, further underscores that Calvinism had a reformist dimension. In the thinking of these historically-informed Presbyterians in Pittsburgh was forever the memory of John Calvin's Geneva, where the Reformed church sought to worship and obey God by serving the poor and improving how the government administered justice.



## Chapter Four: The Encounter With Revivalism, 1890-1930

Since the colonial times, American Calvinists had never been friendly towards the concept of revivalism. Puritan Old Light Congregationalists protested the emotionalism of the Great Awakening and a century later Old School Presbyterians questioned the new evangelicalism's tendency to water down denominational distinctiveness, as they perceived it doing. This was a serious enough disagreement that the Presbyterian Church split between New School and Old School factions between 1837 and 1869, resolved because the Old School hard-liners realized how difficult it was for a divided church to accomplish much, be it evangelism, social reform, or world missions. Pittsburgh Presbyterians had sided with the Old School faction and had concluded the same about the necessity of a unified church, but nevertheless remained ambivalent about the effects of revivalism.<sup>236</sup> As the *Presbyterian Banner* expressed it around the turn of the century, revivalism was an attempt at "popularizing" Christian faith, but it suggested "that the only way to render evangelical truth popular among unregenerate men is to tone it down, suppress certain parts of it, give a misleading appearance to its humbling articles, or, in two words, by omission and perversion."<sup>237</sup>

Given this opinion, it may seem surprising that Calvinists in western Pennsylvania embraced revivalism enthusiastically after the turn of the century, going so far as to bring

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<sup>236</sup> Lefferts A. Loetscher, *The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church Since 1869* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954), 3; George Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience: A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970); Peter Wallace, "The Bond of Union: The Old School Presbyterian Church and the American Nation, 1837-1861" Dissertation: University of Notre Dame, 2004.

<sup>237</sup> "Popularizing Evangelical Doctrine," *Presbyterian Banner* 88 (July 18, 1901): 5.

the flamboyant Billy Sunday to the city in 1914 for a month-long campaign. This was not a betrayal of Calvinist principles, a desperate attempt to bring in a professional to do what the churches themselves could not, reach the masses of people with the Christian gospel. Rather, it was an extension of Pittsburgh Presbyterians' elaborate localized outreach efforts that they utilized to both draw new members to the churches and to advance Calvinist themes of social service and education. This localized approach was not unique to Pittsburgh or to Presbyterians, but what distinguished it from what other evangelicals were doing was that the latter neither sustained the social service element with the same gusto or longevity than did Presbyterians in Pittsburgh, nor did they view the social service element as a good in and of itself as Calvinists in Pittsburgh did. The effect of this was that the Pittsburgh Council of Churches, which Presbyterians influenced to a significant degree, boasted that it advanced the "two-fold" goals of revivalism and reform, to "have better people in the world" and "a better world for the people to be in."<sup>238</sup> With Social Gospellers and other liberals wanting to have nothing to do with individualistic revivalism in these same years, Presbyterians in western Pennsylvania truly found themselves occupying territory where few others ventured.

**Historiography:** This case study confirms some major trends in the literature on American Protestant revivalism. To begin with, it shows that the efforts of individual congregations over a long period time, and not large-scale revivals like those of a Billy Sunday, have served as the greatest factor in determining Protestant church growth.<sup>239</sup> Historian William McLoughlin uses the example of Pittsburgh's First Presbyterian to

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<sup>238</sup> Charles Reed Zahniser, *Pittsburgh Council of Churches: A Historical Interpretation* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Council of Churches, 1943), 15.

<sup>239</sup> McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 3; Jon Butler, *Softly and Tenderly*, 92; McLaughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 159.

illustrate this point and the research presented here confirms the same; local efforts on the part of Presbyterians account for the steady growth of membership rolls over these years with hardly any change due to Sunday's 1914 visit.<sup>240</sup> Secondly, this study confirms that periods of revival have been more than mere reactions to social change, but rather, complex attempts to mediate between the church and a society that has moved past it in some way.<sup>241</sup> The Presbyterian attempt to craft a social service kind of evangelism, and their insistence that the Pittsburgh Council of Churches reflect this goal, demonstrates that they held high expectations that revivalism would lead to deeper and lasting reforms.

Furthermore, this study confirms McLaughlin's assertion that revivals have also been attempts to mediate between competing factions within the church. Presbyterians' rhetoric at the time, when discussing evangelism, was diplomatic and shows just how much they labored to repair broken ties between those more liberal and more conservative than they. Yet this study also challenges the dominant literature at key points. Where McLaughlin finds that most Protestants were unable to design a revivalism to incorporate reformist themes with any degree of real effectiveness, this study demonstrates the opposite. Presbyterians continued to experience regular membership increases through the first three decades of the new century and also participated in the leading reform initiatives of the city. McLaughlin also concludes that most revivalists were unable to bridge the gap between the competing factions within the Protestant family, those who believed that winning souls should be the primary concern

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<sup>240</sup> McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 431.

<sup>241</sup> McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 7; William Warren Sweet, *Revivalism in America: Its Origin, Growth and Decline* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith Publishers, 1965; orig. printing 1944, Charles Scribner's Sons), 8-9; Butler, *Softly and Tenderly*, 6.

of the church and those who stressed, almost exclusively, the agenda of social reform.<sup>242</sup> Presbyterians alternative approach again challenges this assumption.

This study also sheds light on a scholarly debate about why conservative churches have grown so consistently in the twentieth century while their more liberal mainline counterparts have declined in numbers. Sociologists Roger Finke and Rodney Stark assert that the types of Protestant sects that have increased in size most consistently since the eighteenth century are those that have been conservative and otherworldly in theology, aggressive in outreach efforts, and that have demanded much in the way of time and energy from their members. This is the exact opposite claim from what the majority of religious historians have long held, that the mainline denominations have grown through American history until the 1960s, at least, and the cause has been their increasing openness and liberality, theological and otherwise, stressing a this-worldly, practical, theology.<sup>243</sup> Pittsburgh's Presbyterians are an odd case that does not fit neatly into either category, that of Finke and Stark or more traditional line of research. But overall, this study confirms the Finke and Stark's contention that aggressive, activist, and theologically conservative churches have been those most "successful" in America's "religious economy." Though the Presbyterian Church and the United Presbyterian Church of North America were mainline denominations and not an outsider sect as Finke and Stark focus on, and though they were quite this-worldly when it came to social-

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<sup>242</sup> McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 283; Butler, *Softly and Tenderly*, 91;

<sup>243</sup> Roger Finke, Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 8, 244; William Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950), 242; Martin E. Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York: The Dial Press, 1970), 244; Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972); Martin E. Marty, "Foreword," in Dean R. Hoge, David A. Roozen, eds., *Understanding Church Growth and Decline, 1950-1978* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1979), 10; Winthrop S. Hudson *Religion in America* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1981);

political affairs, the city's Presbyterians were conservative in theology and demanded much of their members. This enlisted the laity in outreach and probably accounts for the clear numerical growth of their churches in the first three decades of the twentieth century equal to what otherworldly evangelicals were accomplishing.

**Presbyterians Change from Controversialists to Protestant Mediators, 1837-1900:** Pittsburgh had sided with the divisive Old School faction in the 1837-69 Presbyterian Church because they did not wish to assimilate with American mainstream evangelicalism for fear it would water down the distinctiveness of their Calvinist heritage. New School Presbyterians, in contrast, had taken steps to assimilate with these mainstream evangelical trends, evident in their attempts to tone down their Calvinist theology and their embrace of evangelical causes such as revivalism and interdenominational cooperation. During the Old School-New School schism of the mid-nineteenth century, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh sided with the Old School faction to preserve their Calvinist identity, but also learned that the division had been damaging. This revelation is what brought the Old School faction, which was fast losing members, back to the New School in 1869 in the spirit of healing and good feelings following the end of the Civil War. It was the common agreement among Presbyterians after healing the schism that such divisions sewed ill will, undercut interdenominational efforts “in the upbuilding and extension of the Kingdom,” and violated the Christian ideal of “mutual trust and brotherhood.”<sup>244</sup>

This impulse towards unity and cooperation was strong in Pittsburgh and soon put the region's Presbyterian community increasingly in the role of mediator as new divisions

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<sup>244</sup> “Union of Presbyterian Churches,” *Presbyterian Banner* 105 (March 27, 1919): 5; “The Moderator on the Fosdick Decision,” *Presbyterian Banner* 111 (October 16, 1924): 7.

appeared between Protestant liberals and conservatives in the first three decades of the century. This diplomatic tendency was evident at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the reunion of the Old and New School factions in 1895 as Pittsburgh's Presbyterian leaders made sure not to open old wounds, saying that the event "illustrates the evident purpose of God to bring all of his followers into closer union of spirit," banishing "the spirit of division, the natural foe of true progress."<sup>245</sup> This same spirit prevailed for the decades to come, the *Presbyterian Banner* editorializing after a 1901 General Assembly doctrinal conflict that "men of equal ability and brilliance and prominence were on both sides ... [for] deeper than all their differences were their common faith and brotherhood."<sup>246</sup> Even though their denomination was strongly of the Scottish-Calvinist bent, United Presbyterians could concur that "in our union we have proved the truth of the words, 'How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.'"<sup>247</sup> Both denominations committed themselves to interchurch endeavors in the spirit of the 1869 reunion, supporting the Evangelical Alliance in the 1870s, helping to found the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ (F.C.C.) in 1908, the Pittsburgh Council of Churches (P.C.C.) in 1917, and participating in the Inter-Church World Movement for mission efforts in 1919.<sup>248</sup> As plans for the F.C.C. were afoot, United Presbyterians set aside their strong doctrinal tradition for the sake of "united and concerted action" for the "Church ... to lead effectively to the conquest of this world for Christ."<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Rev. William L. McEwan, "Address Delivered at the Quarter-Century Anniversary of the Old and New School Presbyterian Churches, Held in 3<sup>rd</sup> Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh, Pa., May 23, 1895," (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1895), 14-15.

<sup>246</sup> *Presbyterian Banner* 87 (May 30, 1901): 4.

<sup>247</sup> Rev. F. Z. Browne, "Union an Accomplished Fact" *United Presbyterian* (February 27, 1913): 24.

<sup>248</sup> Wallace Jamison, *The United Presbyterian Story: A Centennial Study 1858-1958* (Pittsburgh: The Geneva Press, 1958), 207-209.

<sup>249</sup> "The Federation of American Churches," *United Presbyterian* 63 (October 12, 1905): 5.

As the new century wore on, divisions over the usefulness of revivalism would appear and would thrust Pittsburgh's Presbyterians into the role of mediator, forcing them even more urgently to craft a compromise between those in favor of a Social Gospel, and those advocating revivalism. Before the 1890s there was widespread sentiment that revivalism would transform individuals, which would lead to broader societal improvement; liberal and conservative Protestant confidence in Dwight L. Moody as "the right man at the right place" illustrates this. But by the 1890s there were bitter feelings over its apparent failure with even Moody himself admitting that his revivals had not visibly altered the urban landscape, and its many problems.<sup>250</sup> It was not only embittered Social Gospellers who spoke out against revivalism as an obstacle to reform, but some evangelicals who were at the turn of the century saying that professional revivalists were "sordid, self-seeking, and unworthy of character."<sup>251</sup> Social Gospel liberals like Josiah Strong concluded what many liberals were at the time, that the church "must seek to save *men* rather than *souls*."<sup>252</sup> Evangelicals for the most part could not bring themselves to part with revivalism, even though it was clear to them as well that at this point it had failed to produce societal regeneration.<sup>253</sup>

Aware of these differences and wishing to hold both social service and revivalist aims together, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh called for "a broad Christian spirit [of]

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<sup>250</sup> Rev. J. M. P. Ott, "Evangelists and Lay Exhorters," *Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review* XLIX (April, 1877): 305-06. Quoted in McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 220.

<sup>251</sup> Rev. George E. Horr, *The Watchman* (January 20, 1898): 8; (October 26, 1899): 9-10; (November 30, 1899): 10; (December 21, 1899): 7; (January 4, 1900): 12. Quoted in McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 349.

<sup>252</sup> Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964; originally published 1907), 67, 65. Josiah Strong, *The Next Great Awakening* (New York, 1902), 83, 115, 108-09. Italics are Strong's. Quoted in William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), 171.

<sup>253</sup> A.C. Dixon, *Evangelism Old and New* (New York, 1905), 43; quoted in McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 352.

practicable Christian unity.”<sup>254</sup> They went to great lengths to clarify that the preachers and evangelists they supported were of the highest caliber; for example, when describing New Jersey-based Presbyterian revivalist J. Axford Higgons before his 1901 visit to Pittsburgh Presbyterians clarified that “there is nothing sensational about his methods,” and that “he is a clear, concise and powerful speaker, carrying conviction to the minds and hearts of the people by his logical presentation of the truth.”<sup>255</sup> When speaking of Christian Endeavor, an interdenominational youth-oriented organization that boasted a worldwide membership of four million, Presbyterians again clarified that at a 1901 event “cracks and faddists were conspicuous in their absence.” “The Christian Endeavor movement,” they continued, “seems to have passed the danger point of falling into the hands of ill-balanced leaders” and boasted instead such prominent figures such as Booker T. Washington who underscored the virtues of “practical Christian service.” In sum, as they pointed out, Christian Endeavor was “a force in developing loyalty to denomination and home church” and did not aim to supplant the historic institutional Christianity or erode denominational distinctiveness.<sup>256</sup>

The way that Presbyterians in Pittsburgh endorsed the Welsh Revival of 1904-05 likewise demonstrates this mediating role between those in favor, and those against, revivalism. The movement in Wales arose suddenly in early 1904 and stunned observers around the world with its intensity of emotion, its success in producing nearly 100,000 converts in a matter of months, and the effect it had on Welsh society where the rate of crime dropped noticeably. Though much of the evangelical world was ebullient in its

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<sup>254</sup> “The Federation of American Churches,” *United Presbyterian* 63 (October 12, 1905): 5.

<sup>255</sup> “Evangelistic Meetings in Harrisburg” *Presbyterian Banner* 87 (March 14, 1901): 25.

<sup>256</sup> “The Christian Endeavor Convention,” *Presbyterian Banner* 88 (July 18, 1901): 5-6. Edith Virginia Bradt, “Twentieth International Christian Endeavor Convention,” *Presbyterian Banner* 88 (July 18, 1901): 25-26. Natalie Snyder, “Christian Endeavor” *Presbyterian Banner* 102 (June 10, 1915): 9.



praise of these happenings, there were critics who visited the revival who said it was little more than “the fizz of a bottle of pop” and others pointed to the “supreme confusion” it caused, calling it “a sham Revival,” little more than “exhibition ... froth,” and “vain trumpery.”<sup>257</sup> Presbyterians nonetheless approved and hoped something similar could find its way to American shores, pointing out that even those who prided themselves for their “self-restraint” found themselves “profoundly stirred” by what they saw, that there was “no shouting, no hysteria of any kind” at the meetings. Despite the fact that “there is much that is purely emotional in the revival,” they continued, the ends justified the means, for “it is having wonderful results ... the fruits are the great apologetic for its methods.”<sup>258</sup> These ends included not only personal conversions, but an “ethical side of the movement,” whereby “quarrels between union and non-union workers have been made up, public houses or saloons have been deserted, and magistrates are left with nothing to do.”<sup>259</sup> Speaking of a revival campaign taking place in Denver, Colorado, that many viewed as the effect of what began in Wales, Presbyterians described their expectation of a bridging of old-time revivalism and the Social Gospel. “Our hearts have been stirred as we read of the great revival in Wales,” and “and we rejoice that our own country is not behind in these movements.”

**Local Outreach and Calvinist Teaching as the Compromise in Pittsburgh, 1905-1920:** In commenting on the Welsh revival, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh clarified that Americans were different in their revivalism because here it was “carried on through

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<sup>257</sup> Unnamed American businessman at the Welsh revival, quoted in J. Edwin Orr, *The Flaming Tongue: The Impact of Twentieth Century Revivals* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973), 13. Rev. Peter Price, Record of Christian Work (Chicago: 1905): 131; quoted in Orr, *Flaming Tongue*, 23; Campbell Morgan, The Christian (5-I-05), quoted in Orr, *Flaming Tongue*, 16.

<sup>258</sup> “Remarkable Revivals,” *Presbyterian Banner* 91 (February 2, 1905): 5.

<sup>259</sup> “The Revival in Wales,” *Presbyterian Banner* 91 (March 9, 1905): 5.

the Church as an agency” where “the work abroad is conducted in great tabernacles erected for the purpose.”<sup>260</sup> Though this was not entirely true as many American revivals had, indeed, flourished in tabernacles and under movable tents, this comment indicates just how much Presbyterians sought to promote a kind of revivalism that would not undercut the established church. Their own way of reconciling the two themes was to promote evangelism as a local congregational affair, partly to demonstrate to those critics like professional revivalists themselves that the city churches were not lifeless and stagnant, as many claimed. But beyond this it was also true that Calvinists believed the church alone should nurture the new believer. In the words of John Calvin, it was the “common mother of all the godly,” that “there is no way of entrance into [eternal] life unless [the church] conceive us in her womb, give us birth.”<sup>261</sup> With this in mind, and with a long history of Reformed Protestants fighting for a church-controlled version of evangelism behind them, it was not hard for Presbyterians in Pittsburgh to find in “visitation evangelism,” originally the invention of contemporary Presbyterian revivalist J. Wilbur Chapman, a reasonable compromise. “Visitation evangelism,” “personal,” or “pastoral evangelism,” was a strategy that a vocal minority of evangelicals were advocating at the turn of the century but that never caught on in the mainstream because most evangelicals, with some important exceptions, felt it was too great a departure from the familiarity of the mass tent revivals that had predominated in the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, this localized approach had strong support in Pittsburgh among Presbyterians and they justified it by pointing out the failings of revivalism, that even

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<sup>260</sup> Mrs. M. A. Martin, “The Denver Evangelistic Campaign,” *United Presbyterian* 63 (February 9, 1905): 7. “Remarkable Revivals” *Presbyterian Banner* 91 (February 2, 1905): 5.

<sup>261</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV, I, 4, quoted in John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 215.

“Mr. Moody himself felt [revivalism’s] drawbacks and tried to get out of it into quieter and more personal methods” and that Chapman’s method was “much more direct and persuasive” and conveyed “all the tenderness and might of personal interest and sympathy and affection.”<sup>262</sup>

As these Calvinists in the Presbyterian and United Presbyterian denominations viewed it, visitation evangelism allowed for not only a more personal and theologically-specific public interaction, but it was practical; it could also enlist the laity, a vast untapped resource that leaders in the city believed was vital to the survival of the churches. As the Presbytery of Pittsburgh concluded in 1901, it was upon the “ministers and people,” for example, and not just imported revivalists or the clergy, “to edify the saints and preach the gospel,” and “to devote themselves to much prayer both in secret and at the family altar for a revival of religion in the home and Church.” The churches could bring to the “out posts in the more populous district of our city” a Calvinist message of “guilt and the penalty of sin” and the “need of repentance until life” and not merely hope and good feelings.<sup>263</sup> “We do not need a new Gospel or essentially new or sensational methods of presenting the old Gospel,” they commented around this same time, for “the old [Calvinist] Gospel and the means and methods of preaching it as old as Pentecost must be used.”<sup>264</sup>

**Individual Congregations and Localized Outreach:** Presbyterian churches in Pittsburgh tended to sustain active congregational outreach and three major churches’ efforts illustrate this broader regional trend. The most prominent was First Presbyterian

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<sup>262</sup> “Personal Work” *Presbyterian Banner* 88 (December 19, 1901): 5.

<sup>263</sup> “Recommendations of the Presbytery of Pittsburgh” *Presbyterian Banner* 88 (November 28, 1901): 13.

<sup>264</sup> “The Means of Revival” *Presbyterian Banner* 91 (February 9, 1905): 6. “The Evangelistic Movement” *Presbyterian Banner* 88 (November 14, 1901): 5. Thomas Park, D.D., “Pittsburgh, Allegheny, and Vicinity,” *United Presbyterian* 58 (October 11, 1900): 16.

Church under the leadership of David Breed in the 1890s and Maitland Alexander, who served from 1899 to 1922. Rather than migrating out to the East End suburbs away from industrial and immigrant problems as many downtown churches were doing, First Presbyterian remained and took it upon itself to venture into “real city evangelism” and to serve “the needy children of the district in which [the church] was situated.” Its congregation of well-to-do Presbyterians supported this decision to stay downtown and volunteered to sustain its outreach efforts, which helped lead to its growth in members from 688 when Breed assumed the pastorate in 1899 to 1,227 seven years later, reaching 2,549 by 1920; benevolence giving was high and in 1906 the church estimated it reached an audience of six thousand individuals in the course of a week.<sup>265</sup> More often than not, regular members who joined and contributed to the church’s life were native-born Anglo Americans raised in a Protestant denomination and not the immigrants who Presbyterians and other turn-of-the-century Protestants hoped to convert and assimilate. But it was usually the case that the missions these churches operated within their own congregations or as satellite congregations in steel-producing neighborhoods did serve a limited ethnic population.

East Liberty Presbyterian was located in the East End suburbs away from the working class population but was still active as a “mother church” that had colonized four new congregations during the nineteenth century, including an Italian mission to recent immigrants. Its members had founded a Ladies’ Aid Society in 1909 that gave generously to benevolence causes and, along with other congregational-level initiatives, helped raise the church’s membership from 1,000 at the turn of the century to 1,500 ten

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<sup>265</sup> J. M. Duff, *A Record of Twenty-five Years of the Pastorate of Maitland Alexander, D.D., L.L.D., in the First Presbyterian Church in the City of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: First Presbyterian Church, 1924), 20, 24, 27, 31, 32, 45.

years later. Outside observers would later call this “one of the most important churches in this presbytery” for its “liberality” and its “missionary zeal.”<sup>266</sup> Unlike First Presbyterian which remained in the city, Third Presbyterian had migrated to the suburbs but nonetheless was also an activist congregation and sustained its own initiatives like its Women’s Home Missionary and Benevolent Society and Sunday School. Rev. William McEwan encouraged his congregation to involve themselves in public life and criticized the complacent rich who “have not time, nor taste, nor strength for the performance of civic duties.” Members like Mrs. Ellen Murdoch Watson took this message to heart and served in leadership roles of the temperance movement and the congregation not only gave millions in benevolence but evangelized aggressively, growing from 610 members in 1890 to 1,723 by 1930.<sup>267</sup>

**Three Types of Local Outreach:** Closer examination of this localized outreach reveals three modes by which these Presbyterian congregations conducted outreach: evangelism through social service and reform, evangelism through educational programs and events, and evangelism through small-scale, neighborhood revivals. Beyond these local efforts were larger regional ventures where Presbyterians joined other Protestants in welcoming nationally-known revivalists such as Gypsy Smith, J. Wilbur Chapman, and Billy Sunday, but these big-scale campaigns were thought to merely complement what was already in place on the local level. Each mode allowed Presbyterians control over

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<sup>266</sup> Rev. J. P.E. Kumler, *East Liberty Presbyterian Church: Historical Sermon Delivered October 9, 1894 on the Tenth Anniversary of his Pastorate* (Pittsburgh: Spahr & Ritscher, 1894), 3, 47, -9, 15, Georgina Negley, *East Liberty Presbyterian Church: With Historical Setting and a Narrative of the Centennial Celebration April 12-20, 1919* (Pittsburgh: Murdoch, Ken & Co., 1919), 24, 27, 28, 29, 32, 34, 62, 64, 71, 72, 94, 95, 96, 130-35, 153; “Pittsburgh and Vicinity,” *Presbyterian Banner* 105 (March 13, 1919): 22.

<sup>267</sup> Rev. William L. McEwan, *A Patriot’s Duty: Preached at Third Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh, Pa., July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1928* (Pittsburgh: Third Presbyterian Church), 8; Rev. William L. McEwan, *Yearbook of the Third Presbyterian Church, Fifth and South Negley Avenues, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 1903-1904* (Pittsburgh: Third Presbyterian Church, 1904), 34-35, 37, 39-42. “Memorial Service for Mrs. Ellen Murdoch Watson, Held at Third Presbyterian Church Pittsburgh, Pa., on Thursday, March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1914” (PHS), 6.

their relationship with the public and thus allowed them to incorporate Calvinist themes of education and social service into their outreach.

**Social Service/Reform:** The notion of using social service as a form of evangelistic outreach was not something that Presbyterians had invented, but it was something they developed and employed in Pittsburgh to a degree that is worthy of note. Evangelicals were active at the turn of the century in organizations like the Salvation Army, the Y.M.C.A., the Volunteers of America, urban rescue missions for women, and many other initiatives that were denominationally-specific, and used charity and reform specifically, and solely, as a means of recruiting new adherents to the faith.<sup>268</sup> What made the Presbyterian case different was that these Calvinists viewed social service as an end in and of itself. Presbyterians assumed that God required them to fight on behalf of “justice” since, as they stated, “we do not live in a world which righteousness is always paid for with material gain,” that “some rich men are rich because they are robbers.”<sup>269</sup> Reform organizations like “Civic, Citizens’ and Voters’ leagues,” they pointed out, have therefore done much “for the cause of righteousness” by “stimulat[ing] interest in local conditions.”<sup>270</sup> There were times when Presbyterian conservatives like Maitland Alexander at First Presbyterian clarified that this service-related evangelism was “in no sense, a sociological experiment or a merely humanitarian enterprise” along liberal Social Gospel lines, but rather the combination of “practical, missionary, and sociological effort.” Presbyterians like Alexander believed that their combination of evangelism and

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<sup>268</sup> Norris Magnuson, *Salvation in the Slums: Evangelical Social Work, 1865-1920* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1977), x.

<sup>269</sup> “Sunshine and Rain on the Just and Unjust,” *Presbyterian Banner* 96 (July 14, 1910): 5.

<sup>270</sup> Rev. C. L. Palmer, “Civic, Citizens’ and Voters’ Leagues,”

social service was no “faddist scheme” that stresses only “the social and physical need” but a combination of revivalist and Social Gospel aims together as equally valid.<sup>271</sup>

Thus it was only natural that these Presbyterians, with a longstanding commitment to reform as a fundamentally Christian and Reformation-derived activity, would incorporate social service into their effort to convert souls and attract new members to their congregations. One of their most prominent efforts was to hire a Presbyterian-trained evangelist from eastern Europe, Dr. Vaclav Losa, to supervise “all the departments of Presbyterian work among the European nationalities in Pittsburgh.”<sup>272</sup> Losa preached on the streets in McKees Rocks, but also provided a “night school for English study,” a “sewing school” to meet the residents’ needs on the “social and educational side.” The Presbytery established an institute in 1904 to train foreign-born women through a three-year curriculum in English, Bible, “physical hygiene and care for the body,” “first aid to the injured, care of children, diatetics, and sanitation” so that graduates could then enter communities of those who spoke their tongue to provide “house-to-house visitation” to provide skills for those in the neighborhood such as “plain sewing, cooking, housekeeping, and kindergarten instruction.”<sup>273</sup> These women, eighteen in 1919, would then join foreign-born preachers as essentially missionaries to their own people, trained, funded, and supervised by Presbyterians.

There was certainly a degree of nativism to these endeavors, and it was the case that the Presbyterian businessmen who funded these efforts believed that “civilizing, educating and Americanizing these vast hordes of the worst elements from foreign

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<sup>271</sup> Maitland Alexander, “The Changing Order: A Sermon by Maitland Alexander April 16, 1905” 28, 61.

<sup>272</sup> Churches and Ministers” *Presbyterian Banner* 87 (January 10, 1901): 26. “Pittsburgh and Vicinity” *Presbyterian Banner* 87 (May 23, 1901): 26.

<sup>273</sup> Zahniser, *Pittsburgh Council of Churches*, 263.

shores” would lead to a more disciplined and efficient workforce.<sup>274</sup> Yet nativism was common in most progressive endeavors from temperance to woman’s suffrage and the settlement house movement, and it was the case that more than one motive could be at play in driving these reform initiatives, some noble and some cynical. Presbyterians in Pittsburgh were as condescending and fearful of the effects of immigration as any other middle or upper-class American at the time, but they thought of themselves as progressive-minded and humane in their intentions. For instance, many agreed with historian and journalist-reformer Henry Adams that immigrants were victims of negative environmental influences, where “the greed of the bosses” crowd people “into the barest shanties” that are “vermin and germ-ridden.”<sup>275</sup> It was out of this well-intentioned, if condescending, desire to uplift the foreigner in their midst that Presbyterians in Pittsburgh operated venues like the Market Street Mission, an agency intended to keep street folks away from crime, alcohol and drug abuse, and prostitution that claimed 300 converts in the second year of its operation after opening in 1917, no small feat.<sup>276</sup>

If First Presbyterian church was one of the city’s four most active social service congregations according to outside estimates, United Presbyterians could boast that a second of the four was their own, First United Presbyterian Church on the North Side. This congregation was across the Allegheny river from downtown Pittsburgh in an industrial neighborhood known for its crime and poverty. At the cost of \$300,000, First United Presbyterian constructed a “community house, contiguous to the church” to provide “social and physical welfare of the neighborhood” and “to win individual to a personal acceptance of Christ.” This house had “a large swimming pool, shower-baths

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<sup>274</sup> J. I Frederick, “The Making of Americans,” *United Presbyterian* 61 (January 3, 1903): 11.

<sup>275</sup> Henry Adams, “America’s Peril and Opportunity,” *United Presbyterian* 83 (November 2, 1916): 9.

<sup>276</sup> “Churches and Ministers,” *Presbyterian Banner* 105 (March 20, 1919): 22.



for men and boys as well as for women and girls, a large kitchen and dining-room; offices, reception-rooms, an auditorium, maternity dispensary ... free milk station ... quarters for women, girls, men, and boys; a large gymnasium, bowling-alleys, manual training” with a roof “finished for outdoor games and as a roof-garden.” Eighth United Presbyterian church, located in a “community in need” with many poor residents near them, also had a similar establishment. Dozens of other congregations, Presbyterian and United Presbyterian, had their own “mission stations” and church members participated in countless interdenominational community ventures as well that likewise intermixed social service and direct evangelism.<sup>277</sup> Second Presbyterian, Pittsburgh, even offered to open “rest rooms at the church” every day of the week “for those who wish to drop the cares of life for a little while.”<sup>278</sup>

Many congregations and missions of the Presbyterian Church and the United Presbyterian denomination offered night courses in English in the immigrant neighborhoods, but also made efforts to communicate in the native tongue of those residents, publishing and distributing 5,000 copies of their Polish-speaking bimonthly periodical, and 1,500 copies of an Italian-language periodical. The United Presbyterian Women’s Association and the Home Missions Department raised funds for hospitals and orphanages, with women activists volunteering their time and efforts for local missions, and serving the nearby community from within the local church.<sup>279</sup> Like those belonging to the Presbyterian Church, United Presbyterians maintained charities for the elderly, orphanages, and employed several ordained Italian ministers who worked at six sites in

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<sup>277</sup> Rev. R. A. Hutchison, Corresponding Secretary of the Board of Home Missions, appearing in *The Challenge of Pittsburgh*, 269-272.

<sup>278</sup> “Pittsburgh and Vicinity,” *Presbyterian Banner* 97 (October 6, 1910): 26.

<sup>279</sup> “Pittsburgh,” *United Presbyterian* 63 (February 2, 1905): 16.

the city among Italian-Americans. These ministers to the foreign-born certainly did evangelistic work, “the usual missionary and evangelistic house-to-house visitation” and “Sabbath-schools [and] preaching services,” but incorporated social service efforts to be sure to “aim ... to improve the family and community life as well as to evangelize the individual.”<sup>280</sup>

The Pittsburgh Council of Churches offered its own version of social reform-as-evangelism that very much meshed with Calvinists’ desire to overlap the two without diminishing either. The P.C.C.’s stated goals were to promote “communitywide (*sic*) evangelism” and activity “in dealing with concrete issues, such as the liquor traffic, prostitution, Sunday rest, indecent shows and political corruption, and with rescue mission work, relief of poverty and similar services on the other.”<sup>281</sup> Both Presbyterians and United Presbyterians were active in this effort to “emphasize Evangelism” and “things that enrich the spiritual life” but they pointed out as well that “revival meetings” were for the “consecration of lives to social and personal service.”<sup>282</sup> One way in which these Calvinists, along with other members of the P.C.C., could accomplish both was through volunteering to mentor and support young individuals who came before the Morals Court, a Council of Churches-supported Allegheny county office that dealt with infractions and offered youths the opportunity to seek rehabilitation rather than a jail sentence. The P.C.C. was an important lobbyist for the original creation of the Morals Court and thus supplied the volunteer mentors to work with the youthful offenders,

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<sup>280</sup> “Our Church News,” *United Presbyterian* 63 (October 5, 1905): 16.

<sup>281</sup> Charles Reed Zahniser, *Pittsburgh Council of Churches: A Historical Interpretation* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Council of Churches, 1943), 4.

<sup>282</sup> A. M. Buchanan, “What the Denominations Are Doing: The Presbyterians,” *Pittsburgh Christian Outlook* 13 (November, 1919), 4. W. I. Wishart, “What the Denominations Are Doing: United Presbyterians,” *Pittsburgh Christian Outlook* 13 (November, 1919): 4. Charles Reed Zahniser, “Social Evangelism,” *Pennsylvania Outlook* 9 (September, 1915): 1. “Pittsburgh and Vicinity,” *Presbyterian Banner* 105 (August 1, 1918): 1774.

Presbyterians doing their share in this endeavor.<sup>283</sup> Participants in the P.C.C. also supported law enforcement against “vice interests and corrupt political forces,” for temperance, better legal representation for the poor, to combat “the evil of non-voting,” as well as publishing its own journal, the *Pittsburgh Christian Outlook*.<sup>284</sup>

**Education as a Form of Outreach:** In 1900, the Ministerial Association of the United Presbyterian church in Pittsburgh made a statement about how Presbyterian colleges fit into the larger task of “the salvation of the world,” likening the whole church to “an organism” whose “parts are vitally related to each other,” its colleges serving to “raise the educational standard for the denomination as a whole.”<sup>285</sup> Indeed, with a longstanding interest in promoting Christian humanism, these Calvinists perceived education as a means of drawing new members into the church by teaching them the relevance of theology to the whole of life. They particularly wished to avoid the tendency in Protestant education to present what they saw as an “inaccurate, unintelligent, and disconnected” theology, opting rather to promote Calvinism and its emphasis on a broad learning as a springboard for thoughtful, well-conceived, participation in public life. The “fruit of a revival,” they concluded, was not merely to produce “a sort of mystic” and individualized piety, but to encourage the “life of the Sabbath school,” an “increased benevolence of the people” and “an intelligent appreciation of the elements of worship, prayer, praise and alms-giving.”<sup>286</sup> In sum,

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<sup>283</sup> “Y.M.C.A. Expands Its Program,” *Presbyterian Banner* 114 (July 28, 1927): 16.

<sup>284</sup> Zahniser, *Pittsburgh Council of Churches*, 15-34.

<sup>285</sup> “Pittsburgh,” *United Presbyterian* 58 (February 22, 1900): 4.

<sup>286</sup> S. M. Glenn, “Revival and Conversions,” *Presbyterian Banner* 91 (January 5, 1905): 7; Samuel A. Martin, “The Deplorable Failure of the Modern Sunday School,” *Presbyterian Banner* 87 (February 14, 1901): 6-7.

education could be a tool for outreach for these Calvinists because they believed it was a central part of how one should enter and participate in the Christian church.

Some of this emphasis on education Presbyterians undoubtedly gleaned from Protestant liberals, who cited Horace Bushnell's notion of Christian nurture, that training children in Sunday schools was the best means to church growth, the best thing to replace mass evangelism.<sup>287</sup> Though this was a commonplace notion at the end of the nineteenth century as many lost faith in mass evangelism, Presbyterians also supported Sunday schools and other church-led educational ventures because it allowed them to mediate the terms by which the new convert's faith grew. The broad appeal of the nineteenth-century Sabbath school movement and the specific interests of Calvinists to influence their members' theology probably both contributed to the popularity of these educational efforts in western Pennsylvania. Pittsburgh Presbyterians Henry and Sarah Heinz of "pickle" fame, alongside their involvement in numerous philanthropy and reform endeavors such as lobbying for the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906, were also among the nation's strongest supporters of Sunday schools. Henry Heinz served as president of the national Sabbath School Association in the 1880s and remained active in the Allegheny County chapter his whole life, which yielded clear results in Pittsburgh. In 1900 Allegheny county claimed 646 Sabbath schools, 8,828 teachers and 118,293 students in the region; by 1910 that number had grown to 789 schools and 184,415 students, placing it first in the state for the number of schools per county; by 1929 the Sabbath schools were still going strong by every measure.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 150-151, 454.

<sup>288</sup> "Pittsburgh and Vicinity," *Presbyterian Banner* 97 (October 6, 1910): 26. "Allegheny County Sabbath School Association," *Presbyterian Banner* 116 (September 12, 1929): 24.

Sabbath school, as Presbyterians described it, should demand “a fairly accurate and comprehensive knowledge of the literary contents of Scripture including the history, biography, prophecy and poetry of these books,” in “the party of what Matthew Arnold declared was the characteristic in Christ is his preaching, namely, the setting forth of the truth with sweet reasonableness.”<sup>289</sup> The reference to Arnold reveals the class prejudices of most Presbyterians and there is no question that part of their affinity for higher education was a desire to ensure their children and church members possessed a degree of genteel sophistication. But it is also apparent that these Calvinists believed Sabbath school to be a vehicle not only to teach the Bible but also the humanities broadly defined, to uncover the latent goodness within the creation. Given that both Presbyterian denominations required their young people be familiar with the *Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly*, a 107-question-and-answer summary of Reformed doctrine, it is safe to assume that much of the content of their Sabbath school education was of a Reformed nature.<sup>290</sup> For instance, the *Shorter Catechism* outlined Calvinist concepts of human failing, that “the fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery” such that all “deserveth God’s wrath and curse” and prohibited “envying or grieving at the good of our neighbors.” But is also underscored positive Calvinist themes like the first answer that “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever” and underscored cultural endeavors on the assumption that “God’s works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.”<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Rev. Samuel A. Martin, “The Deplorable Failure of the Modern Sunday School,” *Presbyterian Banner* 87 (February 14, 1901): 6; W. E. Slemmons, “Chaman and Alexander,” *Presbyterian Banner* 102 (March 30, 1916): 2. “Churches and Ministers,” *Presbyterian Banner* 100 (October 2, 1913): 26.

<sup>290</sup> T. F. Torrance, “Catechism,” in McKim, *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, 60. “Pittsburgh,” *United Presbyterian* 58 (May 24, 1900): 16.

<sup>291</sup> *The Westminster Shorter Catechism With Proof Texts* (Philadelphia: Great Commission Publications, 1978).

Furthermore, it was not merely the children of Presbyterians attending these Sunday schools; some congregations like Calvary Presbyterian of Wilkinsburg had “nearly 600 scholars” out of a congregation of only 400 adults and children, which shows that many youths attending Sabbath school were not themselves of member families. Three years later, the same church had 710 members, 300 of whom were due to conversion by the efforts of the congregation.<sup>292</sup>

Presbyterian Charles Zahniser, speaking as the head of the Pittsburgh Council of Churches and one of the nation’s leading architects of an evangelism that stressed social service, advocated using Sabbath schools as a means of teaching “the social service message” through “Old Testament studies” of the Hebrew prophets.<sup>293</sup> Presbyterians sought the same, printing 25,000 tracts to “interest the children of its Sunday schools in its work among the foreign-speaking people of Allegheny county.” Many of its congregation’s Sabbath schools, like First Presbyterian, likewise used Sabbath schools, twelve in this instance, to advance a variety of similar “benevolent causes.”<sup>294</sup>

Presbyterians used Vacation Bible Schools in the summer months to reach their own children, but also boasted in 1921 that “we have twelve schools in foreign-speaking churches,” assuring their members and supporters that all instructors sat through a “largely attended training school” before “the opening of the schools.”<sup>295</sup> Young Presbyterians would leave their churches as high schoolers and had the option of attending a Presbyterian college or seminary, several of which were located within two

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<sup>292</sup> “Pittsburgh and Vicinity,” *Presbyterian Banner* 100 (July 3, 1913): 26.

<sup>293</sup> Charles Reed Zahniser, “The Social Emphasis in the Sunday School Lessons,” *Pennsylvania Outlook* 9 (September, 1915): 4.

<sup>294</sup> “Pittsburgh and Vicinity,” *Presbyterian Banner* 100 (July 10, 1913): 26. “Pittsburgh and Vicinity,” *Presbyterian Banner* 91 (May 25, 1905): 26.

<sup>295</sup> “Churches and Ministers,” *Presbyterian Banner* 108 (July 14, 1921): 18.

hundred miles of Pittsburgh. This produced not only an educated laity but an educated Presbyterian clergy, with a sizable percentage proudly adding letters after their name for a doctorate in theology degree or an honorary doctorate of literature they received for publishing something of note. Clergy and laity alike consumed a steady diet of theology, current events, and commentary coming from denominational publishing houses and bookstores in the city, and from the region's two Presbyterian periodicals, the *Presbyterian Banner* and the *United Presbyterian* in the quest for a "living, thinking Church."<sup>296</sup>

This knowledge was not to remain just among Presbyterians, but was to spill out to the public as Presbyterians featured guest speakers at a particular congregation, one of the city's two seminaries, or at a public venue. These public lectures were a way to attract the curious to attend, especially those who would not normally consider membership in a Presbyterian, or even Protestant, congregation. It is difficult to measure exactly how effective this method was in drawing new members, but there is no question that Presbyterians believed they were effective and viewed such lectures as a central part of their mission to the public. Among those who Presbyterians invited to Pittsburgh during these years were Princeton-affiliated defenders of Calvinist orthodoxy Francis L. Patton, Clarence Macartney, J. Gresham Machen, Charles Eerdman, the occasional Social Gospel liberal such as Henry Sloan Coffin, Presbyterian missionary Robert Speer, promoter of ecumenical missions John R. Mott, retired revivalist and then-president of a

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<sup>296</sup> "Pittsburgh," *United Presbyterian* 58 (February 22, 1900): 16. "Pittsburgh," *United Presbyterian* 58 (January 18, 1900): 16. "Pittsburgh and Vicinity," *Presbyterian Banner* 105 (March 6, 1919): 22.

Bible college in Los Angeles, Reuben A. Torrey, as well as visits from seminary and college professors of a wide variety.<sup>297</sup>

Presbyterians also welcomed figures from outside of Protestant circles, like attorney Clarence Darrow, who debated Western Seminary professor James Snowden in 1928 in what turned out to be a quite-civil exchange of ideas between the Scopes Trial attorney and a relatively open-minded seminary professor.<sup>298</sup> Others visited Presbyterian-sponsored gatherings, like former Pennsylvania governor and Civil War general James A. Beaver, the president of the University of Pittsburgh, President Harding's Secretary of Labor James J. Davis and Rufus M. Jones, the nation's most prominent Quaker mystic and professor of philosophy at Haverford College near Philadelphia.<sup>299</sup> When Presbyterian pastors were away on vacation or for ministerial work, their congregations often used the absence to bring in speakers from around the nation and the world, harkening from locales as diverse as Philadelphia and New York, Chicago to Seattle, Scotland, Ireland, and England.<sup>300</sup> Many churches, especially those more prominent, sent their pastors overseas for periods of ministry in foreign nations, as speakers at conferences and often also to receive education at a seminary or headquarters of some sort. For example, Dr. William McEwan of the Third Presbyterian Church sailed to an ecumenical world missions conference in Scotland in 1910 with the expectation

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<sup>297</sup> "Pittsburgh and Vicinity," *Presbyterian Banner* 111 (June 26, 1924): 22. "General," *United Presbyterian* 63 (May 4, 1905): 16. "Devotional Meeting of Pittsburgh Presbytery," *Presbyterian Banner* 108 (November 24, 1921): 6. "Pittsburgh and Vicinity," *Presbyterian Banner* 100 (July 17, 1913): 26. "Pittsburgh and Vicinity," *Presbyterian Banner* 97 (October 6, 1910): 26. "Pittsburgh and Vicinity," *Presbyterian Banner* 105 (July 11, 1918): 1702.

<sup>298</sup> "Pittsburgh and Vicinity," *Presbyterian Banner* 114 (April 12, 1928): 20.

<sup>299</sup> "Pittsburgh and Vicinity," *Presbyterian Banner* 108 (January 5, 1922): 26. "Pittsburgh and Vicinity," *Presbyterian Banner* 91 (May 18, 1905): 26. "Pittsburgh," *United Presbyterian* 63 (May 4, 1905): 16.

<sup>300</sup> "Allegheny," *United Presbyterian* 63 (May 4, 1905): 16. "Pittsburgh and Vicinity," *Presbyterian Banner* 100 (July 17, 1913): 26.



that, upon his return, he would deliver a public address for Presbyterians and others to attend concerning his experience.<sup>301</sup>

What also helped advertise the services of the Presbyterian churches was that their ministers and professors were often quite active in public life, speaking at civic events and sharing the platform with many a notable figure. When Charles Lindbergh visited Pittsburgh in 1927, for instance, there were two noteworthy figures who had the privilege of introducing him, the mayor of Pittsburgh and the Rev. Hugh Kerr of Shadyside Presbyterian.<sup>302</sup> Presbyterians also participated in the Pittsburgh Schools of Religious Education in the decade following the war, which was an ecumenical endeavor that provided courses on teaching Sabbath school to the young, with sessions that Presbyterians hosted on topics such as “Bible Geography,” “the Apostolic Age,” “Psychology,” “Religious Pedagogy,” “Social Service,” “Old Testament History,” and “Child Psychology.”<sup>303</sup> With meetings held on the campus of the University of Pittsburgh and official sponsorship coming from the Western Theological Seminary, Presbyterians viewed such initiatives as evangelistic, claiming in 1927 that “there is no surer or quicker way to help the child, the church and the kingdom, than by training the teachers and workers.”<sup>304</sup>

In summary, these attempts to keep education front and center in the way that Pittsburgh’s Presbyterians administered and conducted their evangelistic outreach illustrate these Calvinists’ high regard for learning. This understanding of education as

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<sup>301</sup> “Pittsburgh and Vicinity,” *Presbyterian Banner* 97 (July 14, 1910): 26.

<sup>302</sup> “Pittsburgh and Vicinity,” *Presbyterian Banner* 114 (August 4, 1927): 16.

<sup>303</sup> “Pittsburgh and Vicinity,” *Presbyterian Banner* 105 (February 20, 1919): 22. “Pittsburgh and Vicinity,” *Presbyterian Banner* 108 (October 13, 1921): 14. “Pittsburgh and Vicinity,” *Presbyterian Banner* 108 (September 8, 1921): 14.

<sup>304</sup> “Allegheny County Schools of Religious Instruction,” (September 22, 1927): 20. “Pittsburgh and Vicinity,” *Presbyterian Banner* 105 (February 27, 1919): 22. “Churches and Ministers,” *Presbyterian Banner* 108 (September 8, 1921): 14.

central to the conversion experience reflected John Calvin's idea, which he and other Protestants had gleaned from Erasmus, that knowledge of the Bible and knowledge of the meaning of faith in light of classical studies and the humanities was vital to the Christian experience. An educated laity would avoid falling into ignorance, the Protestant reformers believed, but perhaps more importantly, would be positioned to serve society in an intelligent manner that also reflected Christian ideals. This frame of mind contrasted with the anti-intellectual temperament of much of popular revivalism and its calls for personal morality and promise of reward in the afterlife for the individual believer. Presbyterians in Pittsburgh resisted this individualism by presenting soul-saving and reform on the same footing, as equally valid, and used education as the means to teach the new believer to embrace a version of Protestant faith that prioritized one's obligation to society.

**Small-Scale Revivals:** Another means by which Presbyterians in Pittsburgh conducted outreach in a manner which allowed them to preserve the essentials of their Calvinist faith was by conducting smaller-scale revivals. These were usually limited to just a section of the city, a community, or a neighborhood, and involved a single congregation, or a handful of congregations, with local pastors coordinating and sometimes welcoming a traveling revivalist. The small-scale revival in Pittsburgh typically brought in a small number of converts, between one and four dozen per two-week revival, but were so frequent and consistent that they did much over the long-term to bolster membership numbers. In Pittsburgh small-scale revivals were most frequent in the first two decades of the twentieth century when both reform and evangelistic outreach were at their highest, but even as the public lost interest in large-scale revivalism and

progressive reform in the twenties, Pittsburgh's Presbyterians continued this with regularity.<sup>305</sup> Evidence of how common such efforts were in Pittsburgh abound; communities like Elizabeth, located to the south along the Monongahela river, conducted an interdenominational two-week revival in the winter of 1900, twelve days of revivals claiming nine conversions and "twelve who have already united with the church," those who renewed their membership to Presbyterian churches.<sup>306</sup> In the community of Allegheny, in another instance of local revivals conducted by the pastor and laity, the small congregation of Tenth United Presbyterian convert fifty-one, thirty-eight of whom joined their church at the same time of the Elizabeth revival.<sup>307</sup>

Other revivals featured a traveling evangelist who was well-known enough to draw attention, but not so much as to require the financial expense and effort of a major city-wide revival campaign, such as when revivalists Rev. Charles H. Pridgeon and his wife, "Mrs. Pridgeon," the "well-known religious speaker and authoress, Miss Louise Shepard," visited the city after Mrs. Pridgeon's quite-successful "evangelistic tour of Great Britain, Belgium, Switzerland and France."<sup>308</sup> In another instance, a former member of Dwight L. Moody's staff, Harry L. Maxwell, "the singing evangelist," visited a number of Presbyterian churches in the Pittsburgh area, producing several dozen conversions.<sup>309</sup> Often these revivals spilled onto the sidewalks, such as during the summer of 1908 when East Liberty Presbyterian put a canopy by its Penn Avenue entrance for the purpose of "song services" held "under the auspices of the Christian

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<sup>305</sup> "Pittsburgh and Vicinity," *Presbyterian Banner* 97 (July 21, 1910): 26. "Pittsburgh and Vicinity," *Presbyterian Banner* 100 (Jul 24, 1913): 26;

<sup>306</sup> "Pennsylvania," *United Presbyterian* 58 (February 1, 1900): 16.

<sup>307</sup> "Allegheny," *United Presbyterian* 58 (February 8, 1900): 16.

<sup>308</sup> "Pittsburgh and Vicinity," *Presbyterian Banner* 87 (January 10, 1901): 26.

<sup>309</sup> "Pittsburgh and Vicinity," *Presbyterian Banner* 87 (January 24, 1901): 26.

Endeavor Society,” a plan that was “productive of much good” in the estimation of church leaders.<sup>310</sup> Civic officials often encouraged these events, such as when the downtown post office allowed the interdenominational Pittsburgh Evangelistic Committee to hold meetings on its front steps, as was common “in the open air at other points, also in tents and mills at the noon hour,” at “one of the ‘red light’ districts,” which “for about two weeks” had produced “quite remarkable conversions.”<sup>311</sup>

Local revivals were frequent in western Pennsylvania until the war, which diverted much public attention to patriotic rallies and other events, though outreach by Presbyterians did continue at a lessened pace and resumed in full once the war ended. For instance, congregations like Glenshaw Presbyterian in the northern suburbs continued to grow during the war and Mt. Washington Presbyterian, overlooking the city, grew as well in the summer of 1918, adding sixteen new members to its rolls due to consistent efforts over the years.<sup>312</sup> Once the war ended, both denominations launched outreach efforts from their national offices, the New Era Movement among those in the Presbyterian Church and the New World Movement among United Presbyterians, both of which exemplified personal outreach as well as Social Gospel-toned aims, “intensive evangelistic effort” and “a Christ-like type of social service.”<sup>313</sup> These national denominational initiatives helped sustain local evangelism and keep it strong in Pittsburgh, such as the 1919 “Militant Campaign for Christ” in the Homewood district of Pittsburgh, which two Presbyterian and two United Presbyterian congregations joined

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<sup>310</sup> “Pittsburgh and Vicinity,” *Presbyterian Banner* 100 (July 10, 1913): 26.

<sup>311</sup> “Pittsburgh and Vicinity,” *Presbyterian Banner* 97 (July 21, 1910): 26.

<sup>312</sup> “Pittsburgh and Vicinity,” *Presbyterian Banner* 105 (July 25, 1918): 1750. “Pittsburgh and Vicinity,” *Presbyterian Banner* 105 (July 18, 1918): 1726.

<sup>313</sup> *Pittsburgh Christian Outlook* 13 (November, 1919): 4. “Pittsburgh and Vicinity,” *Presbyterian Banner* 105 (January 30, 1919): 23. “Pittsburgh and Vicinity,” *Presbyterian Banner* 105 (February 6, 1919): 22.

several others in sponsoring.<sup>314</sup> Radio helped further the cause of evangelism for Presbyterians in the twenties like Point Breeze Presbyterian congregation, which received thirty-seven new members after being the first Presbyterian Church to broadcast its service over K.D.K.A., the nation's first commercial radio station, in the summer of 1924.<sup>315</sup> Within a year, Point Breeze church had outgrown its sanctuary, literally having to turn away "hundreds" from their church services in the spring of 1925. Their church membership numbers had grown from 700 in 1921 to over 1,300 in 1925.<sup>316</sup> Other congregations with the resources and contacts utilized radio, like Hugh Kerr's Shadyside church which used the K.D.K.A. station to broadcast special programs and enjoy a steady rise in memberships.<sup>317</sup>

#### **Presbyterians and Big-Time Revivalism, 1905-1920, William A. "Billy"**

**Sunday:** With this backdrop, an activist church that conducted its outreach on the local scale through the use of its own pool of Calvinist-leaning clergy, Presbyterians had the luxury of supporting the nation's famous big-time revivalists with the knowledge that they were not dependent upon them for the survival of their congregation or its theology. It was therefore possible to tolerate a watered-down message and some of the populist excesses of famous revivalists with the knowledge that once the revivalist left town, they would control what their churches did and what they taught. This was the case when Billy Sunday came to Pittsburgh in 1914; Presbyterians and United Presbyterians were ambivalent about Sunday and his style, admitting that he and the hundreds of revivalists who imitated his style could often say "dreadful things" in their attempt to be "*en*

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<sup>314</sup> "Pittsburgh and Vicinity," *Presbyterian Banner* 105 (February 6, 1919): 22.

<sup>315</sup> "Pittsburgh and Vicinity," *Presbyterian Banner* 111 (October 9, 1924): 22.

<sup>316</sup> "Pittsburgh," *Presbyterian Banner* 111 (April 9, 1925): 58. "Pittsburgh," *Presbyterian Banner* 111 (April 23, 1925): 22.

<sup>317</sup> "Pittsburgh and Vicinity," *Presbyterian Banner* 110 (April 3, 1924): 22.

*rapport*” with their audience and that “visitation evangelism,” with “the personal touch,” was the preferable approach.<sup>318</sup> Yet, like so many others, they dreamed of a resurgent Protestantism and knew of his success during these years, and like many hoped he could reach working class Pittsburghers, factors which led them in the end to support the Sunday event with a public face of enthusiasm.

In coming to terms with the 1914 revival, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh admitted that Sunday’s approach was folksy, but such language was “the means of gripping and converting” those “whom we would class as the underworld,” who “never entered the church, never had much use for the ministers and less for the ordinary church members.”<sup>319</sup> Sunday’s anti-clericism was partly justified, they contended, as “he ridiculed many of the worn-out customs of the church” and demonstrated that even they were used to “telling others of their faults [to the extent] that the spirits of the Pharisee creeps into our minds.” In the final analysis, Pittsburgh’s Presbyterians concluded that they could support a figure like Sunday because he helped to foster “the union of all the Protestant churches,” against the “saloonkeepers and speakeasy proprietors,” the “black-hearted gamblers” and the “grafters who took the wages of sin from the unfortunates in the red-light districts.” Even if many Presbyterians could admit that they “would not use, could not use” Sunday’s aggressive, barn-storming approach on a regular basis in Pittsburgh, they concluded that in the short term he helped lead individuals into their

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<sup>318</sup> Rev. E. C. Little, “The Wireless Dynamic,” *United Presbyterian* 73 (January 7, 1915): 2. Mrs. Hetty G. Evans, “Billy Sunday at Columbus,” *United Presbyterian* 71 (January 23, 1913): 9.

<sup>319</sup> Rev. Robert H. Kirk, “Methods in the Sunday Revival,” *Presbyterian Banner* 99 (February 20, 1913): 12. “Mr. Sunday Marching On,” *Presbyterian Banner* 100 (May 7, 1914): 6. “A Specimen of Billy Sunday’s Style,” *Presbyterian Banner* 100 (May 14, 1914): 6;

churches where “preaching and teaching, and personal work can be followed by all of us to great and lasting profit.”<sup>320</sup>

Supporting a figure like Sunday also allowed Presbyterians to continue playing the role of mediator in the Protestant family between the revivalistic evangelicals and proponents of the Social Gospel, who abandoned revivalism after the turn of the century. With prominent progressives like Eugene Debs in 1913 calling Sunday “a vulgar harlequin” who perpetuated “hell on earth” by emphasizing personal salvation at the expense of reform, and Protestant liberals like Bishop Joseph Berry in 1917 calling Sunday’s “hand-shake conversions” nothing less than “superficial and perilous,” Presbyterians’ gentle treatment of Sunday’s approach stands out.<sup>321</sup> It was only after there were no evangelicals defending large-scale revivalism, in 1921, that they and their peers in the Pittsburgh Council of Churches began to express some of their long-held reservations about revivalism, calling it “too high-priced, too much commercialized, obsolete, false in stimulation and ineffective.”<sup>322</sup> And it was only at this point that the *Presbyterian Banner* felt comfortable to point out, “with reluctance,” that “[revivalists’] work is being demoralized by the growing tendency in the direction of religious profiteering” a common accusation against Sunday’s campaigns.<sup>323</sup> This delay was calculated so that Presbyterians ensured that they did not offend the majority of evangelicals, who were now saying similar things critical of mass evangelism.

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<sup>320</sup> Rev. Robert H. Kirk, “Methods in the Sunday Revival,” *Presbyterian Banner* 99 (February 20, 1913): 12. “Billy Sunday,” *Presbyterian Banner* 99 (June 5, 1913): 6-7. Rev. George Edward Hawes, “Billy Sunday at Pennsylvania State College,” *Presbyterian Banner* 100 (April 30, 1914): 10.

<sup>321</sup> Eugene Debs, *The Melting Pot* (St. Louis) 3 (April, 1915): 5-6, quoted in McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 441. Joseph F. Berry, “Criticisms of the Present Day Evangelism,” *Zion’s Herald* (January 19, 1916): 74; a similar critique by the same author appears in the same journal, February 29, 1917, p. 268. Quoted in McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 447-448.

<sup>322</sup> *Pittsburgh Christian Outlook* XVII (November, 1921): 3; quoted in McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 455.

<sup>323</sup> “Religious Profiteering,” *Presbyterian Banner* 108 (November 10, 1921): 5.

**J. Wilbur Chapman:** What also helped Presbyterians to soften their approach to mass revivalism was that the professional revivalists they supported tended to be among the more educated, amenable, and socially-active of their day. At a time when there were evangelists like Sam Jones, Milan B. Williams and Burke Culpepper, none of whom had much in the way of education, and each of whom was aggressive and theatrical, the revivalists who frequented Presbyterian Pittsburgh were mild by comparison. Reuben A. Torrey, despite his militant defense of the fundamentals, for instance, had attended Yale and preached with a scholarly style that limited his appeal with the mainstream, but increased his appeal to educated Presbyterians. Rodney “Gypsy” Smith, despite his lack of religious training, for example, spoke with an Englishman’s characteristic eloquence, was genial, orthodox without being militant, and thus enjoyed broad support from Pittsburgh’s Presbyterians for the full extent of his career, which lasted into the thirties. Even Billy Sunday, despite his confrontational style and vaudevillian technique, endorsed a theology that was generic enough to enjoy broad support even from liberals like Lyman Abbott and John Haynes Holmes, who appreciated not only the ethical pragmatism of his message, but his ability to speak the language of the common man in ways they felt they could not.

Sunday also assumed that saving souls naturally led to civic reform, and before his notorious shift to American jingoism in the twenties, was an outspoken advocate of progressive ideals. He attacked not only “the liquor problem” and the corruption and waste in poor neighborhoods it supposedly caused, but also those “who would not pick the pockets of one man with the fingers of their hand” but would “without hesitation pick the pockets of 80,000,000 people with the fingers of their monopoly or commercial



advantage,” a condemnation of the hypocrisy of some of his wealth backers such as John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and Pittsburgh’s own Henry Clay Frick.<sup>324</sup> At other times he held society, and not the individual, to blame for permitting “any considerable proportion of people to live in foul, unlighted rooms where from eight to ten people live, cook, eat, and sleep, working year in and year out from fourteen to fifteen hours every day.”<sup>325</sup> Though these remarks were in the minority when compared to Sunday’s over-arching individualism, the media publicized them well, which made it all the easier for reform-minded Presbyterians to justify supporting him. Sunday’s 1914 crusade to Pittsburgh was one of his more successful, producing 25,797 converts and seeming to prove his critics in the city, like the Episcopal Diocese which publicly boycotted the campaign, to be in error.<sup>326</sup>

The evangelist who enjoyed the warmest support in Pittsburgh, and who frequented the city more than any other, was J. Wilbur Chapman, ordained Presbyterian minister who had served as pastor at two of the nation’s most prestigious Presbyterian pulpits, in Philadelphia and New York, and who later became the General Assembly’s Secretary of the Committee of Evangelism. Turning to full-time evangelism in 1903, Chapman had close business ties to John Converse and John Wanamaker of the Baldwin Locomotive Works in Philadelphia and was an open advocate of hard work and personal spiritual regeneration as the key to the nation’s progress. Yet even with his individualism, Chapman was among the most socially-active of the modern revivalists because he worked so seriously to apply this individual morality to society. Chapman underscored that his was “the age of social service and it is the time when the church

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<sup>324</sup> Billy Sunday, “Positive and Negative Religion,” *Boston Herald* (December 9, 1916): 3.

<sup>325</sup> Billy Sunday, “Jekyll and Hyde,” *Boston Herald* (January 12, 1917): 5.

<sup>326</sup> Zahniser, *Steel City Gospel*, 214. McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 409, 415.

must be called upon to bear the burden of those who are oppressed,” denouncing “selfishness, greed, avarice,” and “the rich who are so unchristianlike as to pile up fortunes for their own selfish ends while hundreds of men, women, and children are in need.”<sup>327</sup> On countless occasions he led large processions through neighborhoods known for their prostitution and set up Social Gospel preachers in industrial communities during his campaigns, attacking the social “sins” of not only prostitution and alcohol abuse, but gambling, dancing, card-playing, and Sabbath-breaking.<sup>328</sup> This earnest application of Christian virtues, be it a far cry from serious reform, helped Pittsburgh Presbyterians to embrace Chapman, calling him a man with a “deep sense of Christian responsibility” who “never forgets the lowly and fallen.”<sup>329</sup>

It also helped that Chapman was of a mild temperament, avoiding controversy in favor of what Presbyterians in western Pennsylvania described as the “sincere and earnest-minded” temperament of the evangelist, a man of “tenderness.”<sup>330</sup> “To have the gospel given with the authority of a scholar, deeply versed in the truths of the Word of God, with the grace, courtesy and good temper of a Christian gentleman,” they continued, made it all the easier to embrace him as a friend to Protestant unity.<sup>331</sup> He did not cast aspersions at the clergy, they could note, but pointed out that “he never fails to give honor to the pastor” and never assumes that “autocratic intolerance of the opinions of others” so

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<sup>327</sup> J. Wilbur Chapman, *New England Magazine* (Boston) (February, 1909): 756. J. Wilbur Chapman, “The Perils of Riches and Poverty,” *Philadelphia North American* (March 26, 1908): 1; quoted in McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 382-83.

<sup>328</sup> P.C. Wilt, “J(ohn) Wilbur Chapman,” D.G. Hart, ed., *Dictionary of the Presbyterian & Reformed Tradition* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 58-59.

<sup>329</sup> Mrs. M. A. Martin, “The Denver Evangelistic Campaign,” *United Presbyterian* 63 (February 9, 1905): 7. Rev. Wm. H. Roberts, “The World Evangelistic Movement,” *Presbyterian Banner* 96 (January 27, 1910): 23.

<sup>330</sup> M. A. Martin, “Evangelism to the Front in Canada,” *Presbyterian Banner* 94 (July 30, 1908), 2.

<sup>331</sup> W. E. Slemmons, “Chapman and Alexander,” *Presbyterian Banner* 102 (March 30, 1916): 2.

characteristic of many revivalist celebrities of the day.<sup>332</sup> Chapman visited Pittsburgh regularly to speak at events and fill pulpits for pastors who were away, and he conducted two major campaigns in the city, one in 1904 and the second in 1910, the second in which Presbyterians were “well represented” among the “400 churches co-operating;” it involved “12,000 to 18,000 individuals actively connected with the leadership of these meetings.”<sup>333</sup>

**Conclusion: Continued Church Growth into the Twenties:** After the decline of Sunday’s popularity by 1918 and with it, the popularity of large-scale revivalism, evangelicals were still not ready to give up on professional outreach, turning to another approach that, in many ways, was its mirror opposite: door-to-door, personalized evangelism on a city-wide scale, led by nationally-known consultants. Based on reports that St. Louis had won 10,000 to their churches after one of these early 1914 visitation campaigns, and reports of 20,000 now attending Indianapolis churches due a similar venture around the same period, experts like the ordained ministers Guy Black and Earl Kernahan began to develop a system that caught on in the United States during the twenties. Called visitation evangelism, it employed local congregations to simultaneously canvass homes and businesses in their neighborhoods for a period of weeks to win souls for Christ, spurring a short-lived national movement that many hoped would be less expensive and less sensationalist than big revivals and would incorporate local pastors and churches, where revival campaigns had often alienated them.

By 1930 critics were pointing out, and most agreed, that visitation evangelism did not reach the working class population, that it tended to be just as expensive as open-air

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<sup>332</sup> W. E. Slemmons, “Chapman and Alexander,” *Presbyterian Banner* 102 (March 30, 1916): 2.

<sup>333</sup> “Pittsburgh and Vicinity,” *Presbyterian Banner* 97 (October 6, 1910): 26.

revivals, and that it employed sales techniques as programmatic and impersonal as the mass meeting. In Pittsburgh Presbyterians had by 1930 seen many of the fruits of this endeavor, however, much of it because their local congregations had already been conducting a kind of localized outreach similar to what Black and Kernahan had devised. At the invitation of the Pittsburgh Council of Churches in 1920, Black and Kernahan visited the city in 1920 while the new method was still in its early stages and returned at least a dozen times for the rest of the decade, yielding some of the greatest successes that the two could claim. They counted 6,400 conversions from a 1928 Pittsburgh campaign, the P.C.C. noting that the whole decade's efforts had produced 10,000, a noteworthy gain for a city of Pittsburgh's population. Pittsburgh doubled what Boston produced and ranked second of all the major cities that Black and Kernahan conducted these large-scale campaigns in, save but New York, a much larger market to begin with. Charles Zahniser called it "much in excess of what had been enrolled on any preceding effort, including the campaign under Mr. Sunday." Presbyterians particularly experienced this growth, the Pittsburgh Presbytery in 1928-29 retained its status as the largest of any in the United States, claiming 69,537 members, and had grown at a rate of 20% since the start of the decade; the United Presbyterian denomination in Pittsburgh likewise increased by 24% to a total of nearly 40,000. Both had grown at a faster rate than any other Protestant denomination in the city and had matched the rate of growth of Pittsburgh's overall population, a noteworthy statistic given that most of these new residents were Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, or Jewish.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Charles R. Zahniser, *Pittsburgh Council of Churches*, 12. "The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. 1928-29" *Presbyterian Banner* 116 (August 22, 1929): 3; Charles Reed Zahniser, "Drift of Churches in the Pittsburgh District," *Presbyterian Banner* 116 (October 3, 1929): 3.

But even given this success, what stands out in this case of Presbyterian Pittsburgh is the fact that, unlike liberal Protestants, they continued to embrace revivalism even though liberals had largely abandoned it after the turn of the century and certainly by the twenties. Presbyterians in Pittsburgh differed from evangelicals first, in that they continued social reform efforts into the twenties while fundamentalists would have nothing to do with such liberal, and thus theologically suspect, endeavors. And second, Presbyterians never attempted to justify social reform as a subset of the greater task of saving souls, viewing it rather as a worthwhile Christian activity all by itself. The Pittsburgh Council of Churches was the prime vehicle through which Presbyterians advanced this “two-fold” vision in the twenties, evident in the fact that members of both denominations were front and center to the Council’s activism.<sup>335</sup> Through the twenties they continued not only to work through the Council, but to comment on the day’s pressing questions, pondering the future of the League of Nations, the need for city planning to adapt to growing populations, the future of temperance and its apparent failure, the rise in the divorce rate, the ramifications of the First World War on the idea of Christian civilization, Sabbath laws and the nature of commercial amusement, the future of Pennsylvania as well as local and national politics, the state of race relations, Henry Ford’s model of business responsibility and other questions of corporate and business responsibility, just to sample from a few mid-1920s *Presbyterian Banner* and *United Presbyterian* editorials.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> Charles Reed Zahniser, *Pittsburgh Council of Churches: A Historical Interpretation* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Council of Churches, 1943), 15.

<sup>336</sup> This sample from “Editorial Notes,” *Presbyterian Banner* 111 (April 23, 1925): 4-7; “Hon. John S. Fisher,” *United Presbyterian* 84 (November 11, 1926): 1, 3; “Mr. Ford’s Retraction,” *Presbyterian Banner* 114 (July 14, 1927): 9.

Presbyterians' support of the Pittsburgh Association for the Improvement of the Poor further illustrates that they saw reform and evangelism as equally valid and complementary. This organization, they said, served "those who are in dire need" and "met the recent change in the city's life, when colored people came from the South," balancing "Samaritan labors on behalf of the poor" without "neglecting the spiritual welfare of the thousands that it reaches every year."<sup>337</sup> Presbyterian commentary on the excesses of materialism, that "Anything that offers pleasure" in the jazz age twenties, "is a money maker," was very much in the vein of what American commentators like F. Scott Fitzgerald's through his 1925 *The Great Gatsby* were pondering at the time.<sup>338</sup> This was social analysis for its own sake, with the health of American civilization in mind and part of a commentary that the founders like Thomas Jefferson and many a nineteenth-century intellectual had contributed to, exactly what sort of values an American needed to sustain a healthy and vigorous republic. The Presbyterian venture into twentieth-century revivalism revealed their desire to use soul-saving outreach as a means to advance civilization, but also to use service and study of that civilization to enrich the individual convert and the church as a whole. What underlay this was the Calvinist concept that God's works of providence, to paraphrase the Shorter Catechism, preserved and governed all his creatures and their actions. In Presbyterian Pittsburgh, this included both revivalism and the cause of societal improvement irrespective of what other Protestants at the time assumed about their fundamental compatibility.

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<sup>337</sup> "The Pittsburgh Association for the Improvement of the Poor," *Presbyterian Banner* 111 (April 16, 1925): 5.

<sup>338</sup> George McPherson Hunter, "Educating Without Religion," *Presbyterian Banner* 111 (April 23, 1925): 2.

## **Chapter Five: Rethinking Calvinism in Depression-era Pittsburgh**

The Depression caused a general crisis for all Americans, calling into question the public's faith in capitalism and personal responsibility, but also casting doubt about the future much more broadly so that no corner of American life was unaffected. Mainline denominational Protestants were among those who began to rethink some basic assumptions about their relationship to culture, questioning the longstanding liberal optimism about the inevitability of progress. The authors of this Depression-era revision of Protestant liberalism called their new theology Christian realism, or Neo-orthodoxy, calling the churches to stand at a greater critical distance from culture than they had in the progressive era or in the prosperity and optimism of the twenties. In this, Neo-orthodox theologians were deemphasizing the liberal Protestant assertion of the immanence of God in human affairs and re-emphasizing the orthodox doctrine of original sin, especially as sin manifest itself in the shortcomings of the modern economy and in the actions of the business leaders running it. On the opposite end of the theological spectrum, fundamentalist Protestants did not experience the same sense of shock in response to the Depression because they had already concluded before 1930 that civilization was in decline. Their attempt, somewhat in contradiction to this pessimism about the future, to outlaw the teaching of evolutionism in the schools through the 1925 Scopes Trial brought such disgrace and mockery that they further withdrew from society for over a decade to rethink their relationship to the public.

Unlike fundamentalists, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh retained a tempered optimism about the possibility of the churches to influence society and instead of withdrawing from public life as fundamentalists did in the twenties and thirties, did exactly the opposite.

Constantly trying to involve themselves in both mainstream Protestant denominational affairs as well as the social-political life of Pittsburgh, they upheld the Calvinist ideal of a socially active church. But like fundamentalists, and unlike Protestant liberals, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh had already concluded by the early twenties that modern faith in progress, and particularly the secular faith in technology as a cure-all for society's problems, was deeply flawed. Like fundamentalists, they viewed human sinfulness as the great problem not only of recent times, but of all human history. With an interpretation of sin that predicted what Neo-orthodox thinkers would articulate in the thirties in focusing on not only the individual dimension of sin, as fundamentalists were prone to, but the societal, communal, and public, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh even in the midst of the blind prosperity of the twenties began to doubt their own longstanding faith in capitalism. This reassessment of human sinfulness was merely an extension and elaboration of the kind of ethical soul-searching their own Calvinism, and outside pressure from an angry public, had spurred in them during the progressive era. During the twenties, then, these western Pennsylvania Presbyterians began to adopt an ever-more compassionate attitude towards labor.

When the Depression brought a shock to the nation and especially to industrial centers like Pittsburgh where rates of unemployment tended to be higher than in the rest of the country, Presbyterians argued on behalf of familiar principles. They continued their progressive-era belief that the private sector, a relationship between business-community donors and church-led charities like the Salvation Army, could provide relief for the poor until the crisis subsided. When funds for such charities ran out by 1932, and when in the elections between 1932 and 1936 it became evident that the Democratic



party, with strong support from Catholic, immigrant, and pro-labor voices had unseated their century-and-a-quarter hegemony over Pittsburgh's affairs, Calvinists in Pittsburgh responded by merely expanded on their already-evolving understanding of sin. In terms that very much paralleled what Niebuhr and other Christian realists were themselves defining, these Presbyterians presented the Depression as a crisis of human nature, of sin, rather than one of fundamentally economic origins. Through the decade they continued their calls for more responsible business and more church involvement rather than an expanded federal involvement under the New Deal. Their opposition to the New Deal, despite appearances of being just ideological conservatism and an expression of allegiance to the wealthy industrial class, was rather the expression of their Calvinist belief in the capacity of humans to deceive themselves. Their attack of business negligence and greed, then, was an assault on their own failure to see their own self-interest in the preceding decades as they crushed labor strike after labor strike.

**Historiography:** Most scholarship about Protestantism in the thirties has centered on the rise of Neo-orthodoxy, especially due to its influence not only in religious circles but in shaping Cold War liberalism.<sup>339</sup> Historians' adulation for Reinhold Niebuhr and other Neo-orthodox thinkers has been no secret, some going so far to praise the thirties as a "period of rare creativity" in the history of Protestantism and Neo-orthodoxy a "feast for the thoughtful."<sup>340</sup> To complement this perspective has been a body of scholarship about what fundamentalists, on the other end of the spectrum, were

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<sup>339</sup> For coverage of Neo-orthodoxy, see Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 933. Martin Marty, *Modern American Religion Vol. 2: The Noise of Conflict, 1919-1941* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 303-330; Richard Wightman Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985).

<sup>340</sup> Martin Marty, *Modern American Religion Vol. 2*, 303. See also Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 933.

doing during the thirties even though many assumed the movement was dead or dying after 1925. These historians have shown that fundamentalists were also undergoing a period of creativity of their own, seeking again to influence public life and stressing themes of personal salvation and grass roots evangelistic outreach.<sup>341</sup> In neither body of literature, however, is the local story of Presbyterianism in Pittsburgh given more than cursory treatment, even though area ministers such as Hugh Thompson Kerr and Clarence Macartney, as the next chapter will illustrate, were clearly influencing both mainline-liberal and fundamentalist Protestantism. The story in Pittsburgh also matters because of its strong parallels to the rise of Neo-orthodoxy. Just as Calvinism supplied many of the theological tools for Niebuhr and the other architects of Christian realism, it likewise provided Presbyterians in Pittsburgh with the means to wrestle with what the suffering of the Depression meant in ethical and practical terms. Presbyterians in Pittsburgh, however, were not merely following the lead of the Christian realists, but employed themes directly from their own tradition in its fully biblical and genuinely orthodox form that predated the development of Neo-orthodoxy. This phenomenon was conservative theologically, like fundamentalism, but wrestled with sin and public ethics like the Christian realists were, and stands alone as a genuinely orthodox and Calvinist period of ferment in the larger American landscape of the day, well deserving of scholarly treatment.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1987); Rudolph Nelson, *The Making and Unmaking of an Evangelical Mind: The Case of Edward Carnell* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>342</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1932).

Historians writing about Depression-era Pittsburgh have likewise tended to overlook any internal struggle within this community, describing it as little more than withdrawn and defensive as the Scotch-Irish elite bemoaned their loss of hegemony over Pittsburgh's civic life. This perspective was present in Philip Klein's 1938 study of Pittsburgh and has carried through the decades to recent histories of the time, including John Bodnar's work on labor activism and Kenneth Heineman's examination of Catholicism and working class protest.<sup>343</sup> Pittsburgh's Scotch-Irish Presbyterian elite may have been publicly stone-faced in response to these changes but privately had long been pondering, and debating, capitalism and their use of it so that by the late twenties, before the crisis of the Depression made labor a hot issue, there was a clear shift whereby more and more in Presbyterian circles expressed compassion for the plight of workers. It is true, as critics point out, that these Presbyterians never fundamentally questioned capitalism itself and stubbornly remained loyal to the idea of free enterprise in reaction to the New Deal. But their desire for a more humane capitalism, and their attempt to sustain church-led benevolence and reform as an alternative to the New Deal, demonstrate that the picture is more complex than many observers have painted it. The fact that some of the harshest criticisms of this elite came from within their own religious circles, from the ultra-Calvinist and more reformist United Presbyterian denomination, underscores that again that this community was not numb to the pain of the Depression but had already

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<sup>343</sup> Philip Klein, et al; *A Social Study of Pittsburgh: Community Problems and Social Services of Allegheny County* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938): 290, 400, 912-13; Roy Lubove, *Twentieth-Century Pittsburgh: Government, Business, and Environmental Change Vol. 1* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 59; Solon J. Buck & Elizabeth Hawthorn Buck, *The Planting of Civilization in Western Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), 120-24; John Bodnar, *Steeltown: Immigration and Industrialization, 1870-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990), 76-126; Kenneth J. Heineman, *A Catholic New Deal: Religion and Reform in Depression Pittsburgh* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 35-38.

begun to revamp its stances towards labor even before unemployment rates would skyrocket in the thirties.

**Neo-Orthodoxy, Calvinism, and Presbyterians:** Perhaps the paradox of the thirties for these Presbyterians was that their traditionalism, their continued adherence to a fairly orthodox version of Calvinism, should place them at the cutting edge of Protestant theology. Just when it appeared that they, and their Calvinism, were becoming irrelevant as Pittsburgh shifted from an Anglo-Saxon and Protestant power base to a Catholic-immigrant-labor one, an aspect of their thinking suddenly became *en vogue*. Their general realism about modernity, progress, and the incapacity of humans to restrain their baser instincts, even if they made exceptions to when praising aspects of constitutional democracy and free enterprise capitalism, was now the centerpiece of the new theological development of the thirties, Neo-Orthodoxy. Professor Walter Marshall Horton of Oberlin College best summarized the values of this new school with his 1934 publication *Realistic Theology*. In accord with the thinking of Union Seminary's John Bennett, brothers H. Richard and Reinhold Niebuhr, and the German-born Paul Tillich, Horton called liberal Protestants to stand at a critical distance from culture instead of equating the mission and health of the church with that of western civilization. With the First World War as a natural backdrop, these theologians sought to re-infuse a sense of realism into liberal theology and drew on biblical, and often Calvinist, notions of the fallen-ness of the human race in their endeavor. They were reacting to the liberal Protestant perspective that human progress was inevitable, a perspective that flowered during the optimism of the progressive era, survived the First World War in a tempered form, and continued on in the prosperity of the twenties especially through the very this-

worldly thought of liberal Baptist minister Harry Emerson Fosdick. With the onset of the Depression, Christian realists now asserted that God was not among us here and now, immanent in the very affairs of man, but rather transcendent and removed and wholly other, righteous and sublime; the church, furthermore, was to put a distance between itself and the culture. Though they never arrived at a single or unified social platform, all of the realists wished that their theology would have clear public ramifications and were in favor of the New Deal, some even going further to the left. The most outspoken of their ranks was Reinhold Niebuhr and in the early and middle years of the decade he took a radically pro-labor stance that was clearly socialistic, often expressing sympathy with aspects of Marxian thought while he simultaneously lambasted its confident utopianism.<sup>344</sup>

Presbyterians in Pittsburgh, as conservative Calvinists, certainly differed from Niebuhr and the Christian realists on many points: to begin with, Calvinism, as it existed in Pittsburgh in the thirties, was only a modest variant of the theology that had existed in the region's Presbyterian churches since the eighteenth century and hardly represented a self-conscious innovation the way Neo-orthodoxy did. Secondly, the Neo-orthodox theologians were coming directly out of the liberal Protestant tradition, despite the "orthodox" in their name, and shared none of the biblical literalism or supernaturalism that characterized conservative Protestant movements.<sup>345</sup> And finally there was a sharp difference in political temperament: even the more ideologically-reformist clergy and laypersons in Presbyterian Pittsburgh never questioned the validity of capitalism or the

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<sup>344</sup> Martin Marty, *Modern American Religion Vol. 2: The Noise of Conflict, 1919-1941* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 303-330; C. Alexander, *Nationalism in American Thought 1930-1945* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1969), 157-163; Douglas John Hall, "Neo-Orthodoxy," in Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Protestantism Vol. 3* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1378-1383.

<sup>345</sup> Marty, *Modern American Religion Vol. 2*, 304.

class structure to the extent Niebuhr and other Neo-orthodox leaders did in the thirties.<sup>346</sup> Yet setting these differences aside, an examination of theological trends in Pittsburgh during the twenties and thirties still reveals many remarkable parallels. At the most basic level was a shared realism, a preoccupation with human limits that both parties, Calvinists and Neo-orthodox thinkers, were comfortable calling sin. Over a decade before Walter Horton would call for an end to such “lingering romantic illusions,” for instance, Calvinists in western Pennsylvania had already leveled this same critique.<sup>347</sup> In one instance, Clarence Macartney, then a minister at Arch Street Presbyterian church in Philadelphia but writing for Pittsburgh’s *Presbyterian Banner*, argued that “[A]nother Presbyterian teaching has been vindicated by the war,” that “all men are born with a sinful nature.” Modern societies, Macartney continued, had “jumped at the conclusion that they could now solve the enigma of history, of man,” but pointed out that the “ridiculed tenet of Calvinism,” the reality that “our first parents, being tempted, chose evil,” was again relevant. The modern effort to “do away with the accountability of man to God,” he concluded, demonstrated “that the word ‘progress’ does not tell the whole story about man.”<sup>348</sup>

This sober assessment of human nature had a long history preceding the First World War and continued during the twenties when many other western Pennsylvania Calvinists also lamented this “lost sense of sin.” One figure who helped these Presbyterians interpret how sin manifest itself in modern times was Leo Tolstoy, Russian

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<sup>346</sup> The conflict between Niebuhr and the progressive-liberal *Christian Century* well illustrates this point; Martin Marty, *Modern American Religion Vol. 2*, 321, 388-89.

<sup>347</sup> Walter Marshall Horton, *Realistic Theology* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1934), 38; quoted in Marty, *Modern American Religion Vol. 2*, 307.

<sup>348</sup> Rev. Clarence E. Macartney, “Not Only a Christian, But a Presbyterian,” *Presbyterian Banner* 105 (Jan. 23, 1919): 8-9.

novelist, literary realist, and observer of human nature. Though Tolstoy's version of Christianity was a far cry from conventional, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh praised him as both an advocate of Christian idealism and "a voice of judgment to those who [are] in power and [who oppress] the people."<sup>349</sup> In Tolstoy they found a prophetic challenge to the industrialists in their own circles and to the excesses of Pittsburgh's notoriously-lavish *nouveau riche*, a critique that resonated with their understanding of the human capacity for self-deception and hypocrisy. "The prevailing sense of sin" in the jazz age twenties, western Pennsylvania Presbyterians concluded, was "woefully shallow and unreal," the most disturbing development being the assumption that "there are no sinners, at least in respectable circles." This last comment undoubtedly was a reference to the rich and powerful circa the article's publication in 1927, but may also have been a reference to the Protestant liberal tendency to make Christianity thoroughly cultural, and in this sense, respectable in a secularizing society based on a "materialistic philosophy of science." Again quoting Tolstoy, they concluded that "'modern man has lost the sense of God, and, therefore, the statement of the Scriptures that 'God is angry with the sinner every day' does not impress him as it used to.'" This critique was very similar to what Horton, the Niebuhrs, and other Neo-orthodox theologians would issue forth a few years later as they faulted liberals, and modernity itself, for naively overestimating human nature.<sup>350</sup>

To further illustrate these parallels, several years before Reinhold would blast modern faith in technology's ability to usher in an ideal society in his famous 1932 *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh had already reached the same

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<sup>349</sup> "Count Tolstoy's Funeral," *United Presbyterian* 68 (December 1, 1910): 3. "Count Tolstoy," *United Presbyterian* 68 (December 8, 1910): 5.

<sup>350</sup> J. D. R., "The Lost Sense of Sin," *United Presbyterian* 85 (August 4, 1927): 5.

conclusion. In 1928, before the Great Depression could cast a shadow on the exuberance of the twenties, sober Presbyterians warned that the year “2000 A.D.” might bring “airplanes ... filling the air like flies” and a “television” that “will throw on the screen any scene happening anywhere on the earth,” but that “faster travels and more sensational experiences” would never take the place of “richer, stronger [human] character,” as “only better people can make a better world.”<sup>351</sup> Once the stock market crashed in the fall of 1929 and the Great Depression set in, western Pennsylvania Calvinists only intensified this assessment. Self-congratulatory hypocrisy, a “secret and subtle or even unconscious selfishness,” they insisted, was “at the root” of “all our social problems,” and not economic, political, or technological arrangements. The solution was to first “get right with God,” to cast the Depression as a human rather than an industrial or economic problem, and then it would be possible to “see things in a divine light and resolve [social problems] into unity and brotherhood and peace.”<sup>352</sup>

Western Pennsylvania Presbyterians were not alone in reaching this assessment of humanity and the world humans had created in the decade following the First World War. It was certainly the case that fundamentalists, whose movement was anti-modern by definition, raised similar questions, but their tendency was to either target individual sins such as “dancing and theaters,” or to conclude that the First World War, like modernity itself, was a sign that the world would end soon as the Bible predicted.<sup>353</sup> Presbyterians did see sin as beginning with the individual as fundamentalists did, but broadened its

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<sup>351</sup> “2000 A.D.” *Presbyterian Banner* 114 (April 12, 1928): 8.

<sup>352</sup> “Can Christianity Solve Our Social Problems?” *Presbyterian Banner* 118 (February 4, 1932): 7.

<sup>353</sup> Oliver W. Van Osdel, from a sermon, November 27, 1919 *Baptist Temple News* IX (January 3, 1920); quoted in George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 157. Joel Carpenter points out that fundamentalists’ pessimistic assessment of human progress made them suddenly *en vogue* in the thirties, so there certainly were some points of similarity with Calvinists in Pittsburgh and the Neo-orthodox theologians on this point; see *Revive Us Again*, 100.



definition to emphasize more strongly societal problems like excessive nationalism, neglect of the poor, and the corruption of government, for instance. And with regards to biblical prophecies, most Presbyterians simply did not discuss millennial topics, nor did they ever promote interpretations of the Bible that saw worldly affairs fast devolving before Christ would return. Their interpretation of these same scriptures was to assume there was either no millennium to wait for, or that it was nearby and that the destruction of the world described in the Bible would come only after these thousand years of prosperity and peace. Either way, Presbyterians paid little attention to millennial themes, unlike their fundamentalist peers, and assumed that societal improvement was something the churches ought always to work for. And it was also the case that Pittsburgh Presbyterians were far more optimistic about the possibility of social progress, if always limited by human failings, than the majority of fundamentalists who simply did not prioritize reform in nearly the same way that mainline Protestants like the Neo-orthodox thinkers of Presbyterians in Pennsylvania did.<sup>354</sup>

But Presbyterians did share with fundamentalists the conclusion that Neo-orthodoxy was too far a departure from conservative biblical theology. In western Pennsylvania, Calvinists in the region were well aware of Neo-orthodoxy but tended to perceive it as something happening separate and independent of their own tradition. They praised Christian realists for advocating a more thoroughly biblical understanding of the world, agreeing that “modern philosophy and theology,” by which these Presbyterians meant secular thinking and liberal Protestantism, were bankrupt and that the only option was for all Protestants to endorse a return to biblical themes, to “drive our

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<sup>354</sup> James A. De Jong, “Millennialism,” in Donald K. McKim, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 240-41.

generation back to essential [orthodox] theological thinking.” But this renewal of “Barthian” thought, by which these Presbyterians meant Neo-orthodoxy since most then and today believe the movement had its origins in the pre-World War I writings of Swiss theologian Karl Barth, was still not something Presbyterians could claim as their own. These Presbyterians’ admiration for “Mr. Niebuhr” was no secret as they lauded his ability to pinpoint the subtle hypocrisies of the churches and in society, how ministers “exhort[ed] congregations to be true to their highest ideals” while “everyone knows that the world does not live by these ideals” and “everybody knows that the minister himself does not live by them [either].” But in the final analysis, Neo-orthodoxy was not orthodox enough; Calvinists in Pittsburgh diplomatically offered that they appreciated the wit and honesty of the movement, but “may not follow” those Christian realists descended from Karl Barth “in [anything] but his central position” about the inadequacy of liberal Protestant optimism about human nature and the modern world.<sup>355</sup>

**Pittsburgh Presbyterians and the Fundamentalist Movement:** Though Presbyterians in Pittsburgh concluded that Neo-orthodoxy was too theologically liberal to take seriously, it did not mean that they thought of themselves as fundamentalists. For instance, Presbyterians in western Pennsylvania never adopted the typically-militant reaction against modernity in all its forms that fundamentalists did; at the core was a divergence over how to interpret the biblical mandate to “be ye separate.”<sup>356</sup>

Presbyterians in Pittsburgh believed this to mean retaining their role as central players in their denomination and in society, but in a manner that was distinctively Christian,

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<sup>355</sup> “The Revival of Calvinism,” *Presbyterian Banner* 123 (October 15, 1936): 4. See also the *United Presbyterian*’s review of Reinhold Niebuhr’s *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932), which praised an author who “lays bare” the “evils of our present economic situation.” *United Presbyterian* 91 (March 23, 1933): 30.

<sup>356</sup> II Corinthians 6:17, a favorite verse of fundamentalists, quoted in Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 34.

biblically orthodox, and Calvinist. Fundamentalists, in contrast, felt such compromises were impossible and separated themselves from parent denominations, from large universities, from any sort of civil dialogue with Protestant moderates or liberals, or from local and national politics. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that by 1930 contemporary observers like the *Christian Century* and church historian H. Richard Niebuhr assumed fundamentalism was over and done since its activists seemed to be nowhere on the public radar.<sup>357</sup>

There was no such parallel in Presbyterian Pittsburgh, where church members and clergy viewed themselves as much a part of the American establishment as any subculture possibly could. Where fundamentalism tended to draw individuals from a broad range of backgrounds, for instance, including business owners, clerks, farmers, middle class, and a strong representation from the working classes, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh were typical of mainline churches in attracting those in professional careers.<sup>358</sup> The situation in Pittsburgh was exaggerated, furthermore, because Presbyterians and United Presbyterians were a clear ethnic, religious, and economic elite who, quite accurately, viewed themselves as the city's founders.<sup>359</sup> As fundamentalists were blasting the Federal Council of Churches as too liberal in theology and in social views, for instance, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh remained loyal based on the rationale that they were promoting unity, which would better equip them and others in the broader Christian

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<sup>357</sup> "Vanishing Fundamentalism," *Christian Century* (June 24, 1926): 799; H. Richard Niebuhr, "Fundamentalism," *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1931), 525-27; cited in Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 13.

<sup>358</sup> Everett L. Perry, *The Presbyterian Church in Erie, Pennsylvania* (New York: Board of National Missions of the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A., 1948)); cited in Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 10. See also Wallace Jamison, *The United Presbyterian Story: A Centennial Study 1858-1958* (Pittsburgh: The Geneva Press, 1958), 107.

<sup>359</sup> Walter Edmund Warren Ellis, "Social and Religious Factors in the Fundamentalist-Modernist Schisms" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1974), 29-30, 75-82, 116-23, 159-76. Cited in Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 10.

goals of evangelism and social improvement.<sup>360</sup> Similarly, their central role in sustaining the Pittsburgh Council of Churches during its heyday in the progressive era and twenties, sprang from this same belief in the need to position themselves in the centers of American religious and political life. In this way as cultural insiders who used their mainstream position to present a Calvinist vision of justice that contrasted with secular views which they perceived as lacking.<sup>361</sup>

**Testing the Limits of the Progressive-era Model, 1930-32:** Based on the assumption that what made a healthy economy and society was more the quality of the individuals in power than the structures and designs of the economy itself, Presbyterians asserted their progressive-era model of reform and relief in response to the first two years of the Depression. Within these first two years of the Depression, 31 percent of its white population and 48 percent of its African-American population would find themselves unemployed. Of those who were still working, two-thirds were only on the job part-time and just as many saw their wages drop. Much of this was because the steel industry was by the start of 1932 operating at 12 percent of capacity, with U.S. Steel corporation cutting wages by 60 percent. For example, the Braddock plant in the Monongahela river valley south of the city once employed 7,000 steelworkers but now only had 500 working, and most only two days a week.<sup>362</sup> Despite the sense of chaos that violent

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<sup>360</sup> Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 43. Hutchison, "Protestantism as Establishment," in Hutchison, ed., *Between the Times*, 4.

<sup>361</sup> Rev. George Taylor, "The Ideal of Pittsburgh," *Presbyterian Banner* 103 (November 9, 1916): 12. Solon J. Buck and Elizabeth Hawthorn Buck, *The Planting of Civilization in Western Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), 120-24; cited in Kenneth J. Heineman, *A Catholic New Deal: Religion and Reform in Depression Pittsburgh* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 36.

<sup>362</sup> Michael Bernstein, *The Great Depression: Delayed Recovery and Economic Change in America, 1929-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Edward K. Muller, "Metropolis and Region: A Framework for Enquiry into Western Pennsylvania," in Samuel P. Hays, ed., *City at the Point: Essays on the Social History of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), 181-211, cited in

clashes between police authorities and labor-radical agitators in the region caused, Pittsburgh business leaders like Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon tried to assure the public that all would soon return to normal. Though his comment that industry should “liquidate labor, liquidate stocks, liquidate the farmers,” and “liquidate real estate” in an effort to cut costs appeared insensitive, Mellon clearly believed the business community also ought to do its part for the unemployed. Mellon, his brother Richard, and “pickle prince” Howard Heinz together raised \$1 million for area construction projects and Andrew Mellon gave another \$3 million of his own to build a new cathedral for East Liberty Presbyterian church.<sup>363</sup>

Though the Mellon brothers’ investments in area construction projects did little to improve the city’s high rate of unemployment, it and other efforts on the part of the Secretary of the Treasury, like providing free gasoline for Pittsburgh Catholic “labor priest” Father Cox’s 1932 march on Washington, D.C., and giving the Pennsylvania state legislature a loan for \$35 million, reflected Pittsburgh Presbyterians’ general philosophy about how to respond to the Depression at this early stage. It was the firm conviction of most Calvinists in this region that the duty to provide relief fell primarily, if not solely, on the private sector, the businesses, citizen groups, and especially the churches of western Pennsylvania. This was partly for economic reasons, to keep government from regulating business and raise taxes, which they and other ideological conservatives believed would slow efficiency and cut into profits. But another major reason was because they believed it was their duty to assume this task on their own through the churches and other

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Kenneth Heineman, *A Catholic New Deal: Religion and Reform in Depression Pittsburgh* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 11.

<sup>363</sup> Linda K. Prichard, “The Soul of the City: A Social History of Religion in Pittsburgh,” in Hays, ed., *City at the Point*, 327-60.

volunteer organizations funded, of course, by Presbyterian and other Protestant businessmen's generosity. "Every Christian," Pittsburgh Presbyterians declared, even "busy men and women," could "be a good Samaritan to at least some unfortunate life" through "agencies" specializing in "charitable work" in response to the economic crisis.<sup>364</sup> "If people are honest and altruistic," Presbyterians concluded, they "can make almost any social order work."<sup>365</sup>

This relationship between the business community and area churches, of which Presbyterians were foremost, enjoyed its greatest prestige during the progressive era and the flourishing of the Social Gospel in Pittsburgh. It was during these first two decades of the twentieth century that Pittsburgh's Calvinist community had developed a more acute social conscience and managed to improve the lives, to a noticeable if limited degree, of thousands of the city's working class citizens. World War I and the divisions in Pittsburgh that appeared in the years following the war along class, ethnicity, and religious lines certainly dampened progressive-era optimism, but the Protestant churches still invested in the Pittsburgh Council of Churches-supported Morals Court for delinquent youth and supported citywide door-to-door evangelistic campaigns as well. In addition to refining Presbyterian Calvinists' sense of public duty, the progressive era had unified business leaders with the more reformist, and politically progressive, elements of their Calvinist circles behind the common cause of citizen-led reforms. These reforms helped create a more sober and punctual workforce for business leaders, but at the same time evangelized non-Protestants and uplifted working class immigrants, to the satisfaction of Calvinists with the burning passion for social justice. Finally, the

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<sup>364</sup> "Jesus and the Poor," *Presbyterian Banner* 118 (February 25, 1932): 7.

<sup>365</sup> "The Bearing of Religion on the Social Order," *Presbyterian Banner* 116 (April 10, 1930): 9.

progressive-era Social Gospel reforms in Pittsburgh shaped Presbyterian perspective on societal engagement because it affirmed their sense of custodianship over the city's affairs; Presbyterians were most prominent in the leadership of the interdenominational Pittsburgh Council of Churches and, by all measures, predominated in financing its social service initiatives.<sup>366</sup>

Presbyterians and other Protestants during these early years of the Depression supported and sustained relief efforts through “a significant group of social service institutions” including “Homes for the aged, hospitals, orphanages and children’s homes, residences, centers and missions stressing social work,” the “majority [operated] directly under the auspices of denominations or denominational agencies.”<sup>367</sup> One of these agencies was the Salvation Army, which Presbyterians conspicuously supported because of its “wonderful record in Pittsburgh” and lived on because of the “business men downtown” who “call upon men in the same occupation” to raise support and awareness for its cause. They underscored its accomplishments, that in 1929 “7,500 dinners were given away and 1,600 children were made happy with toys and candy,” that “visits were paid to 27,169 families during the hot summer months” and “655 mothers and their children were given 10-day outings at the Army’s Fresh Air Camp.”<sup>368</sup> In August of 1931 Presbyterians could gladly say that volunteers “prominent in the social, civic and religious life of Allegheny county” helped sustained the Salvation Army’s “great philanthropic work.” This work included “seventeen institutions” in Pittsburgh such as “eight Centers for Religious and Relief Activities, three Industrial Homes, a Day

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<sup>366</sup> “Table XII-Congregational Expenditures and Benevolences of Regular Protestant Churches,” in Paul Douglass, *Metropolitan Pittsburgh Church Study*, 77.

<sup>367</sup> “Table XII-Congregational Expenditures and Benevolences of Regular Protestant Churches,” in Paul Douglass, *Metropolitan Pittsburgh Church Study*, 77.

<sup>368</sup> “The Salvation Army,” *Presbyterian Banner* 116 (October 3, 1929): 32.

Nursery, a Slum Settlement” a “Maternity Hospital, the Evangeline Home for Young Women and the Central Relief Department.”<sup>369</sup>

The Pittsburgh Society for the Improvement of the Poor was another agency Presbyterians supported as a principle means of aiding those who were unemployed and hit hard by the Depression. Presbyterians described its relief efforts to be a latter-day manifestation of “The Social Gospel” as a clear reference to the progressive era when such citizen organizations led reform in the city. The Association could boast in 1931 that it provided “3,000 families” with “42,587 quarts of milk, “33,425 bushels of coal,” “3,795 pairs of shoes,” and that “gas, electric and rental bills had been paid for many families and grocer orders amounting to \$18,483 had been issued” because of the “regular contributions” and “great generosity” of individuals in the city. Presbyterians were prominent in the leadership of the Association’s leadership, with ministers such as Hugh Thompson Kerr of Shadyside Presbyterian congregation, Stuart Nye Hutchison of East Liberty Presbyterian, retired First Presbyterian minister Maitland Alexander as well as its current minister Clarence Macartney, and William McEwan of Third Presbyterian sitting on its board of trustees and doing their part, undoubtedly, to help raise support for its cause. Even though giving in 1931 was “greatly reduced” from the level of 1930, the chairman of the Men’s Industrial Work department reported, there was still optimism about the ability of such organizations to sustain welfare for the unemployed, poor, and homeless of Pittsburgh. There was still a “small surplus” even with the drop in revenues and gifts, with the Duquesne Way building counting “68,729 paid lodgings” and a jump in “absolutely free lodgings” from 62,610 in 1930 to 90,469 in 1931, undoubtedly due to the increase in poor and migratory unemployed men. The “Hill branch” of the Industrial

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<sup>369</sup> “Salvation Army’s Annual Inspection Day,” *Presbyterian Banner* 118 (August 13, 1931): 4.



Work department “supplied 85,538 paid lodgings and 24,512 free lodgings” in 1931 and in their “nickel restaurant, 302,605 meals were served.” Presbyterians also pointed out that “many boys, who had run away from good homes, were re-united with their families” through the Association for the Improvement of the Poor.<sup>370</sup>

**A Turning Point in 1932:** But soon it was becoming clear that such individualized efforts were not adequate to meet the problems the Depression thrust on the nation and on the citizens of Pittsburgh. After 1932 Pittsburgh industries experienced continued setbacks; by 1933 40 percent of Pittsburgh’s steelworkers were now unemployed those remaining taking in 60 percent less in wages than they had in 1929. Westinghouse Electric Company was dependent on both the automobile and steel industries and since both were now in decline, this major area employer let go 17,000 of its 50,000 employees by 1933.<sup>371</sup> With personal income dropping not only for workers but for the management level as well, it was only a matter of time before charities like the Salvation Army and the Pittsburgh Association for the Improvement of the Poor would suffer as donations declined. In early 1932 the Association issued a plea to the public and to its Presbyterians supporters, complaining that it was “heavily overburdened” and “urgently in need of financial aid.” At the same time that its financial resources were drying up, the Association reported, the public was bringing great demands to its doorstep so that this charity decided to move one of its offices “closer to the many families of the ‘hill district’” where the need was most acute. Association directors described that their Duquesne way office was overrun so that “during a recent 30-day period” the men’s industrial department “alone supplied 23,000 lodgings and 64,00

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<sup>370</sup> “Pittsburgh Association for the Improvement of the Poor—The Social Gospel,” *Presbyterian Banner* 118 (July 16, 1931): 3.

<sup>371</sup> Heineman, *Catholic New Deal*, 5.

meals,” not to mention that “during the same period 1,261 families were aided, including the paying of \$699 rent and \$155 light and heat bills.”<sup>372</sup> “WE NEED YOUR HELP” read the message of a mid-1932 advertisement from the Association appearing in the *Presbyterian Banner*, beseeching readers to “Send your check to-day” and so that it could continue its “Fifty-six Years of Continuous Service to the Community.”<sup>373</sup> But like so many local and state governmental relief agencies as well as private charities, by 1932 their resources were running out and a sense of desperation began to creep in.

This was also a campaign year and Herbert Hoover’s broad unpopularity virtually guaranteed that Franklin Delano Roosevelt would win. Though long a Republican stronghold, the gradual influx of Catholic eastern European immigrants into Pittsburgh in the preceding half-century had resulted in a 120 percent increase in its voting bloc between 1924 and the mid-thirties would forever change Pittsburgh’s politics. These new voters were mostly immigrant or African-American, were of the working class and naturally sympathized with the unemployed and supported the New Deal because most of them had either been laid off or saw their wages and hours drop dramatically. With a national banking system about to collapse, only a tenth of the \$300 million from president Hoover’s Reconstruction Finance Corporation actually making it to localities, and public protests like Pittsburgh-area Catholic “labor priest” James Cox’s march of 25,000 workers in January of 1932 to Washington, D.C., to clamor for change, the way to the presidency was all but paved for Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In the November election Pittsburgh, for the first time since 1856, voted a majority for the Democratic candidate in a presidential race and in 1934 this pro-labor, Catholic majority in Pittsburgh

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<sup>372</sup> “Need of Poor Still Grows,” *Presbyterian Banner* 118 (March 31, 1932): 7.

<sup>373</sup> *Presbyterian Banner* 118 (May 19, 1932): 59.

would unseat United States Senator David Aiken Reed, who had close ties to the Scotch-Irish Presbyterian elite. From then on Pittsburgh would be a Democratic, pro-labor stronghold and many viewed this political shift as the end of the long Scotch-Irish reign over the city.<sup>374</sup>

In the midst of these momentous shifts in the political climate of Pittsburgh and the nation, Presbyterians began to also come to terms with the fact that their progressive-era model, that of local church-based activism, was failing to provide for the needs of Pittsburgh's hungry and unemployed. They were now well aware, if they had not been before the 1932 election, just how unpopular Herbert Hoover, his Secretary Andrew Mellon, and the whole ideological conservatism of the twenties now were with the public. Yet despite Americans' apparent openness to change, made clear in Roosevelt's landslide presidential victories in both 1932 and later in 1936, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh could not bring themselves to support the New Deal. Part of this naturally came from ideologically conservative-Republican sources, that they knew Roosevelt would raise taxes and would regulate banks and industry more than the Republicans had, and thus regularly talked down Roosevelt and his administration. But there were other reasons they opposed the New Deal, one being their historic distrust of concentrated power stemming from their Scottish forbears experience as subject to the Roman Catholic church and then later the English. Their retelling of the story of centuries of Scottish abuse at the hands of Catholics, the "vengeance of the Roman persecutors," during the very period when many of the region's Calvinists denounced "dictator Roosevelt,"

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<sup>374</sup> Kristi Andersen, *The Creation of a Democratic Majority, 1928-1936* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 19-38; Edgar Eugene Robinson, *They Voted for Roosevelt: The Presidential Vote, 1932-1944* (New York: Octagon, 1970), 147; Leuchtenberg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 17; cited in Heineman, *Catholic New Deal*, 33.

illustrate this longstanding passion to preserve “the representative rights of the people.”<sup>375</sup>

In addition to these reasons behind Pittsburgh Presbyterians’ opposition to Roosevelt and the New Deal was perhaps their strongest opposition on philosophical and theological grounds. The New Deal offended these Presbyterians because they believed the Depression was fundamentally a theological and ethical crisis and Roosevelt and the New Dealers believed it was fundamentally an economic one. Much like Neihbuhr and the Neo-orthodox theologians, these western Pennsylvania Calvinists saw the Depression as evidence of human failing, human sin, and spilt much ink analyzing that rather than attempting to understand why, in technically economic terms, the economy could not revive itself. The Depression, Presbyterians wrote, was a problem ““deeply rooted in human nature”” and not “economic systems” and would thus require the churches, whose expertise was the study of humanity and its ethical potential, to speak out against “our captains of industry” who had apparently let the situation develop to where it was in 1932. Based on this assumption that it was upon “lay and clerical” leaders to identify the moral failing that had led to the Depression, many began to see it as a chance to repent and to cultivate “a greater dependence on God.”<sup>376</sup>

**The Slow Road to a Realist Consensus, 1919-1932:** Though the election of 1932 stunned many Presbyterians with the realization that their hegemony over public affairs in Pittsburgh had most likely ended with the city voting majority Democratic, the

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<sup>375</sup> James D. Rankin, “The Origin of the United Presbyterian Church,” *United Presbyterian* 91 (February 2, 1933): 12-13.

<sup>376</sup> John McDowell, quoted in “Social and Industrial Religious Problems,” H. H. Marlin, *United Presbyterian* 91 (July 6, 1933): 2. Paul Patton Faris, Managing Editor of the *Presbyterian Banner*, “The Crisis and the Church,” *Presbyterian Banner* 119 (August 18, 1932): 6-9; Normal Thomas, Presbyterian, Candidate for U.S. President with the Socialist Party, “Yes, the Church Has Failed,” *Presbyterian Banner* 119 (August 25, 1932): 2. John McDowell, quoted in “Social and Industrial Religious Problems,” H. H. Marlin, *United Presbyterian* 91 (July 6, 1933): 2.

debate about the social duties of the Presbyterian churches had been going on for a long time. For this reason, the 1932 election shift in power more confirmed what an increasing number of Presbyterians were coming to accept was their negligence of the poor and the working class, rather than completely surprising them with a new revelation. Though the election of 1932 and the Depression spurred a more intense period of soul-searching, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh had already largely resolved a debate over competing views of their religious heritage: on one end were those in their circles who saw in Calvinism a command to encourage hard work and personal responsibility with less compassion for labor, and on the other those sympathetic with the plight of labor and who perceived Calvinism as primarily requiring the churches fight on behalf of the dispossessed.

These divisions had first appeared in the progressive era as the reformist contingent pressed their fellow Presbyterians to embrace the Social Gospel movement in Pittsburgh, finally winning a large following in the Presbyterian Church by 1910 and increasing thereafter. Though the carnage of First World War, the failure of president Wilson to persuade Congress to join the League of Nations towards the ideal of international cooperation, and the divisions in American society that appeared during and following the war dampened progressive optimism greatly, there were still those in Presbyterian circle pushing for progressive ideals into the twenties. Their disagreements with the more pro-business Presbyterians in their midst became quite clear during the bloody steel strike in the fall of 1919, a labor conflict that eventually involved 350,000 disgruntled unionized steelworkers from the east coast to Chicago and which failed because employers used nativist and anti-Bolshevik rhetoric to stir the public's passions

against the strikers. As the strike unfolded in Pittsburgh the region's pro-capitalist contingent made its voice heard, calling the agitators a "mobocracy" of "foreigners" who wished to "unionize in order to enslave American citizens." These "selfish" strikers sought little more than "anarchy" and quite possibly worked for "suspected reds" who sought to "capture the civil government of Gary [Indiana] and other steel cities in the strike area."<sup>377</sup> When the Chicago Presbytery, site of much of the steel strike in 1919, pointed out how reactionary many in the Pittsburgh Presbytery were in response to the event, Pittsburgh's Presbyterian Church members shot back that this criticism was "a gross misrepresentation," stating they were both "surprised and annoyed" that such "criticisms concerning Pittsburgh" came from an "irresponsible" Chicago Presbytery that "slanders our city."<sup>378</sup> These Presbyterians defended their pro-business stance by portraying prosperity as a sign of divine favor, that the "only hope" to "save the world from its present chaos" lay in the masses of laborers seeing "the true Christian principles" that "the world owes them nothing without honest days' work and endeavor on their part."<sup>379</sup>

Those Pittsburgh voices more sympathetic with labor, who saw in Calvinism a call to activism and perceived sin in more radically universal terms, spoke out and stressed that sinfulness was present in not only the apparent lawlessness of the strikers, but the management side of the conflict as well. In terms that predicted some of what Niebuhr and later Christian realists would express in the thirties, these Pittsburgh area

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<sup>377</sup> "Disturbance at Clairton," "United States Steel Strike," *Presbyterian Banner* 106 (September 25, 1919): 1; "Mobocracy," *Presbyterian Banner* 106 (October 9, 1919): 1; "Senate Committee in Pittsburgh," *Presbyterian Banner* 106 (October 16, 1919): 1; "Plot to Overthrow Government," *Presbyterian Banner* 106 (October 23, 1919): 1

<sup>378</sup> "A Gross Misrepresentation," *Presbyterian Banner* 108 (October 20, 1921): 7.

<sup>379</sup> Guest editorial of R. E. Olds, President of Reo Motor Co., "Revolution of the World for Good," *Presbyterian Banner* 108 (September 8, 1921): 10.

Calvinists opined in response to the 1919 labor conflict that “no business can be counted a success which pays starvation wages.” Though they viewed strikes unfavorably, too bloody and thus only a “last resort” option, they criticized business leaders as much as they did the strikers at a time when most of the public had clearly turned against these steelworkers and against unionism for the remainder of the decade. True, both sides had committed errors, United Presbyterians submitted, and a “determined attitude” on both sides of the conflict made little room “for the arbitration of reason and justice and good will.” But these Calvinists also ascribed a fair share of the blame to the machinations of Elbert H. Gary, chairman of the board of directors of U. S. Steel corporation for failing “to confer with these leaders of labor,” for “between these two extremes there ought to be a proper level which is fair and just to the employe (sic) and the employer.”<sup>380</sup>

It was more often the case that United Presbyterians expressed this pro-labor view than members of the Presbyterian Church, a divergence dating back to the 1880s when United Presbyterians helped initiate the first Social Gospel reforms of Pittsburgh in their protest of police-tolerated prostitution. United Presbyterians were the smaller and more uniformly-Calvinist denomination, the result of the 1858 merger of two Scottish Calvinist sects both committed to social activism, intensified by the antislavery sentiment in the north in these years preceding the Civil War.<sup>381</sup> With this precedent behind him, in one instance of the expression of this intensely-Reformed understanding of society, Pittsburgh-area United Presbyterian minister H. H. Marlin agreed with John D. Rockefeller, Jr. following the 1919 bloodshed that the strikers sought “recognition as men” when the system tended to treat them like “a cog in the wheel.” Expressing their

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<sup>380</sup> “The Laborer and His Hire,” “The Steel Strike,” *United Presbyterian* 77 (September 22, 1919): 4, 8.

<sup>381</sup> Wallace N. Jamison, *The United Presbyterian Story: A Centennial Study 1858-1958* (Pittsburgh: The Geneva Press, 1958), 96-98.

belief in the pervasiveness of sin in all affairs and including all parties to one degree or another, these United Presbyterians later elaborated that “both business men and working men” had “overreached themselves in their desire for money,” commenting that “it needs no argument to prove that the present age is alarmingly materialistic.” “Out of this extreme materialistic conception of life,” they continued, “have grown the injustice of the industrial world, the violence and lawlessness that are sweeping the social world like a tidal wave.” And the root of the problem, they continued, was a popular denial of the Christian notion that “man was made for God,” that modernity and secularization had obscured the pervasiveness of human sin.<sup>382</sup>

Despite their ascribing blame all around based on the notion of the universality of sin, these United Presbyterian Calvinists made it clear that, in the final analysis, they had “the greatest sympathy with the effort of the laboring people to improve their condition.” Workers, United Presbyterians wrote in 1921, “have the right to organize” because “labor unions have been of the greatest advantage in improving working conditions and wages.” They naturally placed limits on what they thought was the province of the unions, stating “we do not believe that the principle of the closed shop will ever commend itself” to “what is democratic and fair.”<sup>383</sup> Workers lived under the rule of sinners, even well-intentioned Calvinist sinners: “It has not been human nature,” they underscored, “to freely bestow favors on strangers unless the benefactor expects to gain some profit” by “his generosity,” calling their fellow Presbyterians to “open their eyes to their own shortcomings and make an earnest effort to remedy them.”<sup>384</sup> To further illustrate their

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<sup>382</sup> “Gary Speaks on America’s Economic Condition,” “The Preaching Demanded by Present Conditions,” *United Presbyterian* 79 (January 6, 1921): 4, 8.

<sup>383</sup> “The Question of the Open Shop,” *United Presbyterian* 79 (January 13, 1921): 4.

<sup>384</sup> “The Difficulties of Americanization,” *United Presbyterian* 78 (May 6, 1920): 5.



point, they condemned the wave of anti-Semitism washing over the United States and Britain in 1921. Based on the Calvinist assumption that vice nor virtue had a “monopoly in any one class,” that all humans had their faults and their better attributes, United Presbyterians condemned the American and British public for indulging in “inflammatory and abusive articles, pamphlets, and newspapers” about Jews’ apparent quest for “world hegemony.” The U.S. and British governments should work to defend Jews’ “civil and religious liberty,” and the public should acknowledge that “all people” were sinners, “good, bad, or indifferent” and lived at the mercy of the Almighty and thus those in the English-speaking world should demonstrate more humility and stop seeking scapegoats for broader societal problems.<sup>385</sup>

These United Presbyterians voices gradually won over an increasing number in Presbyterian Church circles who shared their Calvinist-based passion for reasoned and balanced advocacy for the powerless, particularly for the plight of workers. Members of the Presbyterian Church, in spite of their earlier harsh anti-labor statements, could comment in 1927 that “labor as an organized class should be held in great respect and sympathy,” a statement they qualified heavily by denouncing violent strikes, but that nonetheless represented this gradual shift towards compassion for the working class.<sup>386</sup> This change of mind was a trend evident as early as 1924, for instance, as those in the Presbyterian Church admitted that labor leaders like Warren S. Stone of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers were correct in declaring that “labor does not think much of the Church, because the Church does not think very much of labor.” This sentiment was, according to the *Presbyterian Banner*, “easily understood” given that “in any

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<sup>385</sup> “Religious and Racial Minorities: Part of a Strong-signed Statement,” *United Presbyterian* 79 (January 6, 1921): 19.

<sup>386</sup> “Labor Sunday,” *Presbyterian Banner* 114 (September 1, 1927): 9.

trouble between capital and labor, the influence of the Church has largely been on the side of capital” with little regard for the “contribution from the workers.”<sup>387</sup> More and more frequently Presbyterians appealed to “the social gospel and practical Christianity” and called for the responsible “Presbyterian elder” to use his position in business to “give employment to as many [deserving unemployed] men as possible.”<sup>388</sup>

As this dialogue between labor-sympathetic Calvinists and more pro-business Calvinists there gradually emerged a consensus that their goal was not to “destroy the profit motive, but to cleanse it.”<sup>389</sup> The way to cleanse the profit motive was for those in power, like Presbyterians themselves, to advance the ethic of the “Good Samaritan.” This outlook was common in the twenties and reflected the so-called “welfare capitalism” of Henry Ford, U.S. Steel, and other corporate leaders who believed if they took the initiative to provide shortened workweeks, raised wages, pensions, better sanitation, and improved safety, their efforts would help avoid labor unrest.<sup>390</sup> But it also reflected a Calvinist realism, even during the ebullient prosperity of the twenties, that humanity was flawed and that industrialists, despite the praise the public heaped on them at this time of unprecedented prosperity, were fallen individuals and could always do more to serve their employees. In 1929 before the Stock Market crash Calvinists in Pittsburgh expressed this view, pointing out that it was often the “professed Christian” who was “hard-hearted, selfishly concerned about his own business, his own family and friends,” and “indifferent” to the “men and women who live in the poorer section of his city” even

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<sup>387</sup> “The Protestant Church and Labor,” *Presbyterian Banner* 110 (May 15, 1924): 12.

<sup>388</sup> “Unemployment,” *Presbyterian Banner* 116 (September 19, 1929): 8.

<sup>389</sup> George N. Luccock, “Christianizing the Profit Motive,” *Presbyterian Banner* 119 (October 13, 1932): 9-10.

<sup>390</sup> Stuart D. Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism, 1880-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

though he might think highly of himself. This attitude was “a failure so far as representing Christ is concerned,” as one Presbyterian clergyman wrote in the fall of 1929.<sup>391</sup>

United Presbyterians, however, were by this point in the late twenties already pushing an even more aggressive pro-labor stance, probably because unemployment in the Pittsburgh area had gradually increased to as high as 10 percent at the end of the decade. This rise in unemployment was tied to the long-term decline of heavy industries like steel in the first quarter of the twentieth century as the demand for steel lessened and the Pittsburgh economy could not diversify fast enough to accommodate for new industries.<sup>392</sup> In response, United Presbyterians intensified their belief that the church ought to stand at a critical distance from culture, much like Reinhold Niebuhr would state a few years later, pointing not as much to the shortcomings of the modern economy, but rather human sin as it shaped and directed the modern economy. Citing the prophetic tradition of the Bible in speaking out against the powers and injustices of one’s time, they underlined that “Jeremiah gave political advice and denounced political sins at the cost of his liberty and the risk of his life” and likewise Daniel “advised Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar and foretold the political overthrow of the nations of antiquity.” Indeed, these Calvinists claimed they followed in the tradition of “John the Baptist,” “and Hosea, Joel, Amos Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Zechariah, Zephania, Haggai and Malachi,” not to mention “Martin Luther and John Calvin and John Knox and Ridley and the Huguenots”

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<sup>391</sup> George E. Bevens, “Why Unemployment?” *Presbyterian Banner* 116 (September 19, 1929): 10.

<sup>392</sup> Roy Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh Vol. I: Government, Business, and Environmental Change* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995).

who all “got into politics” and “denounced the political iniquities of the day, in the strongest terms” and “many of them ‘sealed their faith with their blood.’”<sup>393</sup>

The “iniquities” of their own day, Calvinists of both denominations came to conclude by the early thirties, emanated from a widespread “worship of gold” and a “blind unreasoning superstition in the almightiness of money and money power” that resulted in “bribery, racketeering, deceit, dishonesty, gambling.” Dismissing economic explanations for the Depression in 1931, they stated instead that “our captains of industry” had “failed with the crucial test of their career, namely, the prevention of the current economic downturn.” “It is ridiculous,” they continued, “to speak of unemployment as a necessary condition of human society” since it was “nothing more than a maladjustment of social machinery” and was up to those in power, “the responsible individuals,” to fix it. It was “the church,” in particular, that was positioned to deal with “the problem,” to use its moral weight to demand business leaders make “sacrifice” and encourage “the fraternal spirit,” to “create this sense of individual and corporate responsibility” with the aim of being more “responsive to human suffering.”<sup>394</sup> Others like United Presbyterian H. H. Marlin concurred that the problems causing the Depression were “‘deeply rooted in human nature’” and that the churches could not “‘remain silent.’” “‘If it is not the business of the Church to furnish the world an economic program,’” they stated, “‘it is her business to see that no economic program is permitted to exist under which injustice and oppression find shelter.’” Since “‘all the social and industrial problems of America are problems of human relations’” they were then also “‘religious problems’” and fell under the realm of the church’s expertise and

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<sup>393</sup> T. J. Gillespie, “Should Minister Take an Active Part in Politics,” *United Presbyterian* 86 (September 27, 1928): 14.

<sup>394</sup> John McDowell, “Revolution or Reconstruction?” *Presbyterian Banner* 118 (August 27, 1931): 10.

sphere of influence. The churches should try to influence “leaders in both capital and labor” to “believe that things are for men, not men for things; that industry exists for society, not society for industry.”<sup>395</sup>

**A Consensus is Confirmed, 1932-1938:** With a growing consensus among Calvinists in western Pennsylvania that it was human sin that had caused the Depression and that business leaders and the city’s churches were thus required to take responsibility for the public, the formation of a New Deal labor-Catholic-immigrant coalition in Pittsburgh between 1932 and 1934 to unseat the longstanding Scotch-Irish Presbyterian hegemony did not have the impact it might have. But what ensued instead was a relatively reasoned, if intensified, articulation of the same theological critique that had existed in their circles in some form since the era of the Social Gospel and that became more pronounced and widespread among western Pennsylvania Calvinists during the twenties. Their opposition to the New Deal, for instance, was because they believed that “social salvation,” the end of the Depression, “will naturally follow our salvation as a people.” “Our nation,” they continued, does not need “to be reborn” by “scientists, economists, financiers and political technician” but rather by “the Spirit of God” and a broader assessment of their failings as a church and as part of the business class.<sup>396</sup> Their description of the Depression as a fundamentally human problem paralleled, in many ways, how the *Christian Century*, the liberal Protestant journal with ties to Niebuhr and the Neo-orthodox theologians, perceived the problem. Though the *Christian Century* was more politically liberal than Pittsburgh-area Presbyterians and supported the New Deal, its editors nonetheless saw Roosevelt as fighting greed and overreaching on the part

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<sup>395</sup> John McDowell, quoted in “Social and Industrial Religious Problems,” H. H. Marlin, *United Presbyterian* 91 (July 6, 1933): 2.

<sup>396</sup> H. H. Marlin, “Social Salvation for the United States,” *United Presbyterian* 91 (January 12, 1933): 2.

of business, that he was waging a war on the “private power interests” and “unbridled individualism [and] uncontrolled corporate activity.”<sup>397</sup>

In response to what they saw as the human failures that had led to the Depression, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh still contended that it was upon citizens and the private sector, and not as much the government, to repent of collective greed and insensitivity and work to set the economy back on its feet. It was upon “120,000,000 of us American citizens,” they stated, to choose not to “pass the buck” but rather “to accept the great fact of personal responsibility and faithfully, courageously” meet the challenges of the day.<sup>398</sup>

Presbyterians did initially support conservative early New Deal measures like the National Recovery Act, which aimed to bring business and labor forces together to reduce competition and voluntarily submit to agreed-upon codes. This ill-fated New Deal initiative was “a good conception,” Presbyterians claimed, because it sought to “secure co-operative action within industry with a view of eliminating unfair competitive practices” in order to “reduce unemployment” and to “improve standards of labor.”<sup>399</sup>

And Presbyterians were not beyond praising the “courage,” “hopefulness,” and “Herculean labors of our President,” vowing “to pray for him rather than stone him” and clarifying that they were not “antagonistic” towards “President Roosevelt personally,” but rather stood in “opposition to his program for industrial recovery.”<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> *Christian Century* 50 (March 15, 1933): 351-52; David E. Lilienthal, “The TVA Points Ahead,” *Christian Century* 53 (October 7, 1936): 1318-19; “The Future of the TVA,” *Christian Century* 53 (October 14, 1936): 1350-52.

<sup>398</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Crisis of the Old Order, 1919-1933: The Age of Roosevelt, Vol. 1* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1957); William E. McCullough, “Personal Responsibility,” *United Presbyterian* 91 (April 6, 1933): 5.

<sup>399</sup> H. H. Marlin, “The National Recovery Bill,” *United Presbyterian* 91 (June 1, 1933): 2.

<sup>400</sup> “The Sky Brightens,” *United Presbyterian* 91 (June 1, 1933): 3; “Johnson Defends the Roosevelt Policies,” *United Presbyterian* 91 (December 14, 1933): 4.

But their overriding inclination to place their faith in the private sector, evident in their praise of news that in 1936 U.S. Steel promised \$75,000,000 in pay raises to 500,000 of its employees and General Motors committed a “5 cents an hour” raise totaling \$20,000,000 per year to 200,000 of its employees. Long wishing to see the business world take more aggressive steps to mend fences with labor, to acknowledge their own responsibility in causing labor strikes over several decades, Calvinists in Pittsburgh praised the move as “a Great Sunburst” and a “new light,” a “new joy spreading far and wide” worthy of “thanksgiving and praise to Jesus,” the expression of a “Love” that “broadens human sympathies.” They continued that such actions would aid the “multitudes of tradespeople” and would eventually benefit “homes, churches, hospitals” and “philanthropic agencies of every kind” and the “multitudes of lean and hungry and wistful souls in sordid homes and in sodden streets.”<sup>401</sup> A few months later in March of 1937 when U.S. Steel Corporation surprised observers by agreeing to a labor contract with the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (S.W.O.C.) without a bitter fight, the *Presbyterian Banner* praised the move. “The time has come in our American life,” they said, “when public or private war as a means of settling industrial disputes must be regarded as a relic of barbarism,” that “collective bargaining” was not only “an effective solution of labor problems” but “for many years [has been] one of the principles of our Church.”<sup>402</sup>

As the Depression wore on, Presbyterians and United Presbyterians both reiterated their critique of the Depression as a fundamentally theological, and human, crisis rather than a fundamentally economic one. In agreement with statements from the

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<sup>401</sup> “After the Election a Great Sunburst,” *United Presbyterian* 94 (November 19, 1936): 8.

<sup>402</sup> “The Church and Labor,” *Presbyterian Banner* 124 (September 9, 1937): 7.

Federal Council of Churches, which also adopted much of the Neo-orthodoxy's understanding of sin and the limits of human progress, Presbyterians concurred in 1934 that "America business and industry stand at the judgment seat" and that it should be the goal of the churches to "promote constructive cooperation instead of disastrous competition in business" and "to secure a more just distribution of the wealth of the country" to better meet "human needs."<sup>403</sup> "Capital and labor are complementary," these Calvinists continued, and "must work together" towards "harmony and mutual profit." "The church and the pulpit," they to reiterate their belief that moral responsibility for societal change fell first and foremost on them and not on the federal government, "can and ought to proclaim the spirit of justice and fairness and brotherhood that should pervade and control the situation" regarding "wages and working conditions."<sup>404</sup> Though Pittsburgh Presbyterians remained true to free enterprise, contending that it was "the oldest social order in the world" that "came down to us through thousands of years and was the outgrowth of trial and experience," they also talked openly of its flaws and the need for a heightened sense of business ethics.<sup>405</sup> The "sensitive, intelligent soul," Presbyterians stated, would acknowledge that "the church cannot afford to be indifferent to the business methods of the times" any longer. When "business [seeks] special privilege from the government" and garners "great profits from those unable to pay," they and those who silently condoned their behavior became "the kind of hypocrites about whom Jesus talked so scathingly."<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>403</sup> "Labor Sunday Message, 1934," *Presbyterian Banner* 121 (August 23, 1934): 9.

<sup>404</sup> "Some Implications," *Presbyterian Banner* 121 (September 20, 1934): 4.

<sup>405</sup> "Does Socialism Profit?" *Presbyterian Banner* 121 (September 20, 1934): 4.

<sup>406</sup> Joseph A. Stephenson, "The Profit Motive," *Presbyterian Banner* 121 (October 11, 1934): 7.



Acutely aware of what they believed was, to a large extent, their own moral failure, Presbyterians in 1935 also described the “present world crisis” as akin to “the break-up of the Feudal System and the fall of the Roman Empire,” stating that “our collapse is not primarily economic, but spiritual.” America, they continued, possessed “a surplus of every material factor needed to make a prosperous and happy nation” but instead of seeking “the Kingdom of God,” Americans had pursued “everything else—wealth, security, pleasure and other bubbles and baubles.” The “disease that is destroying civilization,” they concluded, was “selfishness, pride, vanity, self-will, materialism, unbelief, hate and fear.” The ramifications of “transformed individual lives,” they countered, would be “a new economic system, a new efficiency in government, a new system of education, a new science, a new literature” as “God’s will begins to be done on earth as it is done in heaven.”<sup>407</sup> These Calvinists underscored the need for “social cohesion,” stating that “you cannot uproot a flower without breaking up a great community of relations.” “The most troublesome quantity in the social equation,” they articulated, “is the refusal of one section of society to recognize its obligation to another,” underscoring the “obligation of power to weakness, of culture to ignorance, of skill to helplessness.”<sup>408</sup>

In the later years of the Depression, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh continued to stress that it was the human element that had caused the economic crisis, and that it would only be through humans that the economic crisis would someday end. “All human relationships in industry,” these Calvinists underscored in 1936, “should be regulated in

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<sup>407</sup> Carl Vrooman, “The Spiritual Factor in the Present Crisis,” *United Presbyterian* 95 (January 3, 1935): 10.

<sup>408</sup> “Take Heed Unto Others,” *United Presbyterian* 93 (January 3, 1935): 6.

accordance with the supreme moral principle of the Christianity of Christ” to demonstrate “His sovereignty in the economic as in every other sphere of life and labor.” “The Church must everywhere,” they concluded, “contend that human interest comes before financial,” that “character is more important than wealth, that whatever injures the least of Christ’s brethren injures Him.”<sup>409</sup> This reiteration of the broad outlines of the progressive-era Social Gospel, with Calvinist themes of sin and redemption highlighted, led others in 1937 to state again that “the Christian church has a responsibility in and for this industrial crisis” that “cannot be denied or evaded.” In a *mea culpa* that had become almost a ritual since the turn of the century as Presbyterians repeatedly tried to reassess their own role in labor conflicts, they stated that “Christian men and women” now “acknowledge penitently their failures to build the kind of industrial communities that would reflect the peace, the justice, and the brotherhood of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>410</sup> “It is a good time,” others commented, “for the church to take a good look at the world,” one wrote in late 1937, a world that “made colossal preparations for ushering in Utopia” based on its faith in “self-sufficient humanism” via “the scenic route of scientific discovery,” “its hands full of gadgets and grief.” This world, that stood “on the verge of collapse,” needed a church that would revive the prophetic tradition and remember “its supreme mission [which was] not to judge but to redeem.”<sup>411</sup>

**Conclusion:** Though the Depression upset many Presbyterians in Pittsburgh as it demonstrated the weakness of capitalism and the Protestant-Calvinist work ethic and helped bring together forces that would once-and-for-all unseat them as the caretakers of

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<sup>409</sup> Presbyterian Board of National Missions, “Labor Day Message,” *United Presbyterian* 96 (September 3, 1936): 13.

<sup>410</sup> John McDowell, “A Labor Day Message,” *Presbyterian Banner* 124 (August 26, 1937): 3.

<sup>411</sup> William Hiram Foulkes, “The Church Looks At the World,” *Presbyterian Banner* 124 (September 9, 1937): 6.

Pittsburgh, it did not produce nearly the crisis of identity that many critics assumed it would. For three decades Presbyterians in western Pennsylvania had been wrestling with the meaning of sin in light of their own excesses during the Gilded Age and had come to accept by the late twenties that the cause of labor was justified, and that they shared much of the blame for why workers turned to bloody strikes over and over. Their wrestling with the meaning and extent of sin as not merely an individual affair, but one with broad societal ramifications, predated a similar movement among liberal Protestants in the Neo-orthodox school of theology. That Niebuhr and company ended up receiving so much attention for their reinterpretation of orthodox notions of sin and redemption certainly owes much to the brilliance and creativity of these thinkers. But scholars have overlooked the extent to which other Protestants, among them conservatives with ties to the fundamentalist movement, had already begun to work through the same issues well before the thirties when Neo-orthodoxy flowered.

Western Pennsylvania Presbyterians certainly never adopted radical measures in their revived understanding of the scope of human sinfulness, by and large maintaining a faith in capitalism and individual responsibility as the way to curb its potential excesses. There was nothing liberal or even remotely radical in their social-political response to the Depression and they actually maintained the basic ideological conservatism that had defined their community during the prosperity of the Republican- and corporate-dominated twenties. But their rethinking of the meaning of sin, well before the Depression threw the nation into a sense of crisis, and the fact that liberal Protestants like Niebuhr would take the same basic concept and rethink their own tradition, is significant. It demonstrates that within Calvinism, the belief structure that Presbyterians had so

strongly defended and clung to for centuries, was an inherent tension emanating from the basic concept that humanity had a great capacity for self-deception. For colonial Puritans in New England this concept created constant self-doubt and an almost-obsessive introspection, but in the twentieth century both wealthy industrialist Presbyterians in steel-producing Pittsburgh and highbrow Protestant intellectuals in the nascent Neo-orthodox theological movement took this idea to revamp their understanding of the relationship between church and society. The Christian realists like Niebuhr have enjoyed great celebrity among both secular and religious observers who have often stood in awe of their ideas. Scholarship about Calvinism in more conservative denominations, and from less erudite sources, however, might add to this modern appreciation for the concept of human failing and self-deception, providing a more orthodox and biblical template than Neo-orthodoxy which evangelicals and other conservatives might feed upon when considering their own relationship with the larger American public.

## **Chapter Six: Presbyterian Calvinists Embrace the New Evangelicalism, 1941-1980**

If the Depression years heightened Pittsburgh-area Presbyterians' sense of obligation to the disadvantaged in their midst, it also raised new questions about how, exactly, citizens were to go about serving the public. In the first three decades of the century there was still faith that volunteer affiliations like the Pittsburgh Council of Churches could pool the resources of the churches to improve the city's life. But two years after the October 1929 stock market crash the financial resources of area churches were spent and it seemed that local volunteer organizations like the Pittsburgh Council of Churches or the Pittsburgh Association for the Improvement of the Poor were now obsolete. Business leaders could always influence the workplace through what Presbyterians in the thirties termed the "good Samaritan" ethic, and Presbyterians could still influence policy-making in Washington, D.C., through national associations like the Federal Council of Churches. But in local affairs these Calvinists were finding themselves increasingly on the periphery looking in as other actors, the Democratic party, state and federal government, and large corporations, assumed the responsibility of reshaping public life. Presbyterian church leaders, moreover, began to describe what they perceived as a growing sense of despair and frustration among clergy and laity alike. In response a vocal contingent of Presbyterians joined forces with other Protestants in 1948 to publish the Pittsburgh Metropolitan Church Study, a data-gathering sociological survey of the area's churches modeled after the 1917 Challenge of Pittsburgh, which aimed to revive the kind of local religious activism so prominent during the progressive era in Pittsburgh.

Another purpose of the 1948 Church Study was to rally area churches behind a vast new effort to revive Pittsburgh's local economy and its general appearance that supporters would call the Pittsburgh Renaissance. Presbyterians, still easily the city's foremost Protestant denomination, were prominent in the planning and execution of the Renaissance, but this was a largely secular undertaking of enormous infrastructure changes, far beyond the influence of local congregations. In sum, neither the Metropolitan Church Study nor the Pittsburgh Renaissance were able to reposition Presbyterians back to the center of public life and soon despair and a sense of lethargy settled in. A contingent of activist-minded Presbyterians were undeterred, however, and would find a model for re-engaging local affairs in the "neo-evangelical" movement underfoot in the 1940s. Leaders of this new evangelicalism sought to revise and soften fundamentalism so that it retained a commitment to orthodoxy, but would be more ecumenical towards other Protestants and thus more unified to better engage the broader culture. Most Presbyterians in western Pennsylvania had been suspect of fundamentalism in the twenties and thirties because of its divisiveness and separatism, but found in this new evangelicalism two things that were particularly appealing. First was its interest in reviving the pre-fundamentalist tradition of cultural engagement, to which the neo-evangelicals turned to Reformation-era Christianity for inspiration. Second was the neo-evangelicals' energy and organizational adaptability; by 1945 they had already showed the ability to inspire hundreds of thousands to conversion and service through non-denominational outreach organizations they had designed.

Despite all their reservations about mainstream evangelicalism, and especially its most militant phase, fundamentalism, Presbyterians gradually began turning to this new

evangelicalism for guidance on how they might reinvigorate their own churches. When they and other Protestants welcomed evangelist Billy Graham to Pittsburgh in 1952 for what turned out to be one of his more successful crusades it marked a turning point for the development of Calvinism in western Pennsylvania. Up until the mid-twentieth century, it had always been through the Presbyterian churches, colleges, and seminaries that individuals had promoted and developed Calvinist thinking about ethics, government, business, and society. But after this point, the most activist and creative advocates of Reformed thought in western Pennsylvania tended to now work through non-denominational evangelical organizations like high school- and college-aged ministries, theological learning institutes for laypeople, and by the late seventies, community development non-profit organizations serving inner-city neighborhoods in Pittsburgh. It was evangelicals who provided the organizational template and some of the methods of specialized outreach to particular demographics, but it was Calvinists in Pittsburgh, most of them still attending Presbyterian churches, who in these postwar decades infused their own theology into these specialized outreach organizations and used them effectively to once again revive social service and outreach in the Pittsburgh area. The result has been what one historian describes as an “evangelical network” of non-denominational, or “para-church,” organizations in western Pennsylvania; observers also note that this religious subculture has a distinctly Calvinist imprint, evident in their emphasis on intellectual contemplation, social ethics, practical service.<sup>412</sup>

**Historiography:** This shift in activity from the mainline Protestant denominations, which have consistently declined in membership since the 1960s, to non-

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<sup>412</sup> Michael Sider-Rose, *Taking the Gospel to the Point: Evangelicals in Pittsburgh and the Origins of the Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation, 2000).

denominational evangelical organizations, which have consistently grown in the same period, has received scholarly attention as a national phenomenon, but there remains room for research on how it played out on the local level. Robert Wuthnow has described this “restructuring of American religion” and focuses on how Protestants, in particular, designed these “special purpose groups” like Campus Crusade for Christ and later the Moral Majority to adapt to the complexity, and growing secularity, of modern society. As he explains, these organizations allowed Protestants access to American life in a wide variety of contexts ranging from schools and colleges, the military, and the workplace, areas where the large denominations were not structurally capable of influencing without significant conflict.<sup>413</sup> How this postwar phenomenon unfolded in Pittsburgh is significant for two reasons. First, it demonstrates not only how these activist evangelicals coming from the outside influenced affairs in Pittsburgh, but also how local Presbyterians influenced the larger evangelical movement.<sup>414</sup> The second reason is the theological factor; Calvinism and thoughtful societal engagement continue to flourish in Pittsburgh today, largely because of the longstanding presence of Presbyterians in the region for nearly two centuries.<sup>415</sup> That the larger national postwar evangelical movement did not live up to the expectations of its mid-century architects in terms of cultural engagement only further underscores the necessity of understanding

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<sup>413</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988); see also Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972).

<sup>414</sup> For a recent local study illustrating how local Protestants influenced the larger movement, see Margaret L. Bendroth, *Fundamentalism in the City: Conflict and Division in Boston’s Churches, 1885-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); for national studies of postwar evangelicalism that make little mention of Pittsburgh, see William Martin, *A Prophet With Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (New York: Quill, William Morrow, 1991), Martin E. Marty, *Modern American Religion Vol. 3: Under God, Indivisible 1941-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987).

<sup>415</sup> Michael Sider-Rose only surmises that there was a Presbyterian influence on the postwar phenomenon he describes in *Taking the Gospel to the Point*.



why this one locality, Pittsburgh, accomplished this task when most others lacking the Calvinist influence did not.

This study of Pittsburgh also illustrates just how much American Protestantism has been a movement more than a static establishment and confirms the argument of Roger Finke and Rodney Stark that the more activist and conservative groups have been those who have tended to thrive in this competitive “religious marketplace.”<sup>416</sup> Studies of the early Republic demonstrate just how much the disestablishment of American religion, the separation of church and state in the Constitution, made movement, change, and adaptability distinguishing features of American Christianity.<sup>417</sup> Mainline Protestants at mid-century, as William Hutchinson and others have underscored, suffered from an establishment mentality and assumed that they would always remain cultural insiders and that it was primarily upon the laypeople to come to the churches rather than the churches to evangelize and draw in new members.<sup>418</sup> Though Pittsburgh’s Presbyterians had always been quite active in evangelism and social service, many in their circles shared this establishment assumption, even after Catholic-Democratic-pro-labor forces unseated their Scotch-Irish-Presbyterian-Republican hegemony in the mid-thirties. The relationship this strongly activist contingent of Presbyterians formed with the new evangelical organizations springing up in Pittsburgh in the 1960s and 1970s sheds light on why such evangelical ministries have continued to grow while the mainline

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<sup>416</sup> Roger Finke, Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

<sup>417</sup> Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989); Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>418</sup> William R. Hutchinson, ed., *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

denominations have continued to decline and further underscores how much movement and adaptation have been major factors in American religious life.

**Lethargy Among the Presbyterian Churches in the 1940s:** Though in the thirties many Presbyterians expressed a general sense of crisis, it was not until the forties that they began to articulate that their inability to shape local affairs in Pittsburgh was not simply due to Depression and the drying up of funds for Pittsburgh-area charities. More and more western Pennsylvania Calvinists by the early forties began to articulate the sense that modern life itself had passed them by and that it was now upon them to find a way to remain socially relevant in an age when university- and government-trained experts enjoyed growing prestige and religious leaders less and less. Oftentimes Presbyterians described ambivalence, in one turn calling for a “a new intention and determination” to empower “crusaders” for the “Social Gospel” against the fundamental “selfishness and corruption embedded in human nature” evident in the Second World War. Yet in another turn they admitted that the churches often seemed ill-equipped for the task of reviving this Social Gospel, that the “preacher can be rash,” a “greenhorn” who treads “with unwary feet into specialized realms” only to lose himself in the “complexities of sociology, political economy, and the ins and outs of international tie-ups.” It was now clear, these Presbyterians concluded, that the minister “cannot compete with chiefs of state, cabinet officials, parliamentarians, expert publicists,” or “trained specialists in economics” in offering a sophisticated critique of society. Perhaps the only thing the churches could do, they resigned, was to become a “beacon of moral earnestness” and “press home the moralization of public affairs of whatever sort.”<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>419</sup> A. H. Baldinger, “Pittsburgh-Xenia’s Commencement Week: Word of God Contains a Definite Social Message,” *United Presbyterian* 101 (May 17, 1943): 12.

Outside observers likewise detected this ambivalence, almost a paralysis, about how Presbyterians and other Protestants in modern times, and in modern-era Pittsburgh, were to carry out their duty to civic life. This was apparent when in 1944 the Pittsburgh Council of Churches invited Charles Reed Zahniser, western Pennsylvania native, ordained Presbyterian Church minister, and author of the city's progressive-era Social Gospel in the first three decades of the century to reorganize the Council and help restore a common vision to the city's churches. In 1929 Zahniser had left Pittsburgh and his post as head of the Pittsburgh Council of Churches to become professor of social science and applied Christianity at Boston University, where he would continue to exert a broad influence authoring books that promoted a blend of evangelism and social service as he had while a resident of Pittsburgh. But Zahniser had maintained ties with western Pennsylvania and upon his return expressed concern that "the onset of the Depression" and the "resultant curtailment of financial support" flowing to charities and reform organizations during the thirties had "greatly curtailed" Social Gospel-styled local activism in Pittsburgh. The result was a state of affairs that "has not been so encouraging," as Zahniser described it, where "only small parts" of the original "blue print for the project" that Zahniser, Daniel Marsh, and others during the progressive era had authored of unified religious activism and outreach, were actually moving forward.<sup>420</sup>

Zahniser and others perceived the Morals court, whereby in an arrangement with municipal authorities, area churches sent volunteers to mentor delinquent youth rather

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<sup>420</sup> Charles Reed Zahniser, *Pittsburgh Council of Churches: A Historical Interpretation* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Council of Churches, 1944), 32-33; Gary Smith, "Charles Reed Zahniser," in D.G. Hart, ed., *Dictionary of the Presbyterian & Reformed Tradition in America* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 284-85.

than having to serve jail sentences, as “the most significant constructive project undertaken” by the Council of Churches in the twenties. Though it was still in operation in the mid-forties when he was assessing affairs in Pittsburgh, Zahniser lamented that the Morals court was suffering from a lack of support, that “only a small part of what has been envisioned in this service has been attained” and that it was a zealous few who “stayed heroically with the work” and “at times [seemed] to be carrying nearly the whole burden alone.” While these few did most of the volunteer work of the Morals court, Zahniser lamented that “relatively few local churches” and “relatively few pastors” possessed “the outlook or the equipment” to carry out “the kind of follow-up” that this and other endeavors required. There were signs of hope, however, and Zahniser pointed out that with improved “financial conditions” and the “reorganization of the Council” underway, it might be possible to restore the energy that had characterized progressivism in Pittsburgh, that “its larger objective” and vision had “not been lost from sight.” And indeed he was right in identifying a contingent of Pittsburgh Protestants, particularly among its Presbyterian churches, who still believed they could restore a blend of evangelism and social service to effect what Zahniser described as “wholesome social progress” to the benefit of “our entire community life.”<sup>421</sup>

**The Metropolitan Pittsburgh Church Study of 1948:** As Zahniser observed, there were still those in Pittsburgh who believed it was possible to counter the growing alienation of the churches from the mainstream of public life. Presbyterians were the most outspoken of these and pushed the Pittsburgh Council of Churches, which changed its name to the Council of Churches of Christ of Allegheny County in the late forties, to

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<sup>421</sup> Charles Reed Zahniser, *Pittsburgh Council of Churches: A Historical Interpretation* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Council of Churches, 1944), 32-34.

take action towards what would be published in 1948 as the Metropolitan Pittsburgh Church Study. By inviting a well-known Federal Council of Churches sociologist and researcher named H. Paul Douglass to their city, Presbyterians and other Protestants hoped to first identify what denominations and congregations were conducting evangelism and social service, and then communicate that knowledge to all of the religious bodies to coordinate a much broader effort towards the same. In its planning, execution, and themes, this 1948 Church Study mirrored the 1917 Challenge of Pittsburgh because it was the clear hope that this effort would result in the broad and spirited Protestant activism of the earlier era. Just as Presbyterians had been central players in the 1917 survey, they were raising the funds, designing the plans, and setting the tone for this mid-century effort. Hugh Thompson Kerr was the individual most clearly directing the Metropolitan Pittsburgh Church Study, using his influence as minister of the prominent Shadyside Presbyterian congregation, as a nationally-known leader in the Presbyterian Church, and as executive director of the Pitcairn Crabbe Foundation, one of Pittsburgh's most important charitable foundations, to raise the \$15,000 necessary for research and get the project underway.<sup>422</sup>

It was an effort that would fail to make the churches central players again in Pittsburgh affairs, however, and Kerr's death just two years later in 1950 at the age of seventy-nine would seem to signal the end of an era for major denomination as venues for significant activism. Age notwithstanding, Kerr and others gave their best effort, scolding area congregations for not being "prompt in gathering fruits," by which he

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<sup>422</sup> H. Paul Douglass, *The Metropolitan Pittsburgh Church Study* (Pittsburgh: Pitcairn Crabbe Foundation, Council of Churches of Christ of Allegheny County, 1948), iii; Gary Smith, "Hugh Thompson Kerr," in D. G. Hart, ed., *Dictionary of the Presbyterian & Reformed Tradition in America* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 135-36.

meant their failure to evangelize and serve the public with the zeal they once had. During his long career Hugh Thompson Kerr had distinguished himself as one of the nation's outspoken Calvinists through his radio preaching, his fifteen-year tenure as president of the Presbyterian Church's board of Christian education, the lectures he regularly delivered at Western Theological Seminary, Princeton Seminary, and San Francisco Theological Seminary, not to mention the twenty books and hundreds of articles he penned. The model he turned to for inspiration was that of the colonial Puritans, praising their "eloquence concerning the responsibility that rested upon godly men for the reverent control of the social order to which they belonged." These "great principles and convictions" the Puritans upheld as preservers of the "Town Hall," the public realm, gave them "distinction in history" and set the bar high for Presbyterians and other Protestants in Pittsburgh.<sup>423</sup> Kerr himself practiced this social service and evangelistic ideal, holding discussion groups with students at the nearby University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Institute of Technology campuses, serving as a trustee of the Pittsburgh Association for the Improvement of the Poor, and raising millions for his own congregation and the influential Pitcairn Crabbe Foundation.<sup>424</sup>

Kerr believed, along with Charles Zahniser, that it was "the divinely ordained duty of the churches," and not the government, "to work together to make this all effective in our community life" and H. Paul Douglass of the Metropolitan Pittsburgh Church Study certainly agreed.<sup>425</sup> Douglass could point to the work of many activists within the denominations who had kept this vision alive in Pittsburgh, noting that

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<sup>423</sup> Hugh Thompson Kerr, "In the Paths of the Pilgrims," *Presbyterian Banner* 118 (September 17, 1931): 16-17.

<sup>424</sup> Paul Douglass, *Metropolitan Pittsburgh Church Study*, 10, 17; Gary Scott Smith, "Kerr, Hugh Thompson," in D. G. Hart, *Dictionary of the Presbyterian & Reformed Tradition in America*, 135-36.

<sup>425</sup> Zahniser, *Pittsburgh Council of Churches*, 34.

“Protestantism occupies a very conspicuous place in the general social service work of the community through its leadership, influence, and support” and through “a significant group of social service institutions bearing its own [denominational] label.” Presbyterian benevolent giving to these endeavors, as well as educational and mission-oriented efforts, was also substantial in the first half of the century; Paul Douglass found that Presbyterians and United Presbyterians gave nearly two-thirds of all Protestant financial gifts in Pittsburgh in 1946-47, their contributions totaling roughly \$1.5 million.<sup>426</sup> The Pittsburgh Presbytery had also recruited many young ministers dedicated to serving industrial areas, graduates of the denomination’s Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relations. A Western Theological Seminary professor, in conjunction with the Presbytery, helped establish the Council on Industrial and Interracial Relations in 1948 to better equip ministers to serve “the needs of the mixed and changing groups which are within the bounds of the local parish.”<sup>427</sup> In 1950 this Pittsburgh-based Council went so far as to train its new ministerial recruits with summer jobs “in mills and factories” in order “to give them an opportunity to understand problems of the so-called labor group” and won special recognition in 1957 from an area philanthropy.<sup>428</sup>

Despite these efforts, and the best intentions of many area religionists, the Church Study concluded that there still remained much work to do in a city whose infrastructure was disjointed, where working class housing was dilapidated, and where smoke darkened the skies when the mills were running. Furthermore, denominational outlets like homes

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<sup>426</sup> “Table XII-Congregational Expenditures and Benevolences of Regular Protestant Churches,” in Paul Douglass, *Metropolitan Pittsburgh Church Study*, 77.

<sup>427</sup> G. Mason Cochran, head of the Council on Industrial and Interracial Relations, Minutes, Presbytery of Pittsburgh, December 14, 1948; quoted in George F. Swetnam, “All Ye That Labor,” in McKinney, ed., *Presbyterian Valley*, 476.

<sup>428</sup> George F. Swetnam, “All Ye That Labor,” in McKinney, ed., *Presbyterian Valley*, 477.

for the aged, hospitals, and orphanages, were “somewhat dated,” the Church Study wrote, “hold-overs from previous generations” that “do not well express the emphasis of modern concepts of social work,” and tended to serve “their own constituencies” first and foremost. Expressing ambivalence similar to what many in Pittsburgh had already themselves expressed, Douglass and the authors of the Church Study called for more religious cooperation and activism while simultaneously admitting that the problem was of an enormous scope and possibly beyond the influence and reach of the churches. Yes, the churches should work to “give the broadest expression to Christian fellowship at the local level” and reach out to the immigrants in their nearby neighborhoods, but there were “suburban trends” and “decentralizing forces” that were “now dominant in the community” which were drawing resources away from the downtown area, which only intensified poverty and the fragmentation of the larger community. Along with “the broken terrain and other physical barriers of Allegheny county,” the growth of the suburbs had led to a disjointedness that depopulated “the central area of the city” so that Pittsburgh was among the most decentralized major city in the nation.<sup>429</sup>

**Pittsburgh Renaissance and the Decline of Denominational Activism:** The Church Study, in the final analysis, confirmed what many Presbyterians had already concluded about the difficulties of conducting effective social service in modern times and following events would clarify this even more. The secularity and enormous scope of the Pittsburgh Renaissance, which began in the late forties and continued for the next two decades, would illustrate once and for all what serious reform in modern times did require, an enormous investment of resources and extensive financial assistance from the federal government and cooperating corporate interests. This comprehensive

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<sup>429</sup> Douglass, *Metropolitan Pittsburgh Church Study*, 3, 4, 6, 29.



government-assisted, corporate-led venture called the Pittsburgh Renaissance began with Richard King Mellon, heir to the family financial empire since the death of his father Richard B. Mellon and his uncle Andrew W. Mellon in the early thirties. Richard Mellon used his financial-corporate influence and a strategic alliance with Pittsburgh mayor David Lawrence to consolidate the corporate and governmental forces necessary to integrate the city's industrial and civic life.<sup>430</sup> With a broad consensus in the community supporting them, a consensus that included the city's Protestant churches, Mellon and the other civic leaders working through an organization they had created in 1943 to coordinate this undertaking called the Allegheny Conference on Community Development (A.C.C.D.) oversaw three major achievements in getting the Renaissance underway. The first was to convert the industrial downtown sector known as the Point into corporate offices and open civic space, the second was to reduce smoke pollution, and the third to convince the federal government to aid in building upriver dams to prevent periodic flooding in Pittsburgh.<sup>431</sup> In each of these the Renaissance was a success and could also count among its accomplishments the construction of two hospitals between 1953 and 1963, the flowering of downtown cultural districts, the construction of bridges and highways, improvement of traffic congestion, and a general transition to green grass, healthy trees, and cleaner air.<sup>432</sup>

It was the case that many Presbyterians were active in the Renaissance, which undoubtedly gave heart to some of the city's Calvinists hoping to reposition themselves

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<sup>430</sup> Roy Lubove, *Twentieth-Century Pittsburgh: Government, Business, and Environmental Change Vol. 1* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 106-110.

<sup>431</sup> David L. Lawrence (as told to John P. Robin and Stefan Lorant), "Rebirth," in Stefan Lorant, *Pittsburgh: The Story of an American City* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), 386; cited in Roy Lubove, *Twentieth-Century Pittsburgh*, 116.

<sup>432</sup> Roy Lubove, *Twentieth-Century Pittsburgh*, 111-142; John Hinshaw, *Steel and Steelworkers: Race and Class Struggle in Twentieth-Century Pittsburgh* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 160.

in the center of local public activity. Like most members of his family, R. K. Mellon belonged to the East Liberty Presbyterian church, by the mid-forties a towering cathedral built from funds his father had donated a decade earlier. Mellon declared matter-of-factly that he was “a Republican and a Presbyterian” but followed that he was “not fanatic about either,” a telling indication of how secular this reform initiative was.<sup>433</sup> Mellon was a man with a clear sense of duty, but by all apparent measures was not driven by the sense of religious conviction of a Hugh Thompson Kerr or other devout Calvinists in the region. In the Second World War he had served as a major in the U.S. Army establishing banks for the armed services in Washington, D.C., oversaw the administration of the draft system, served as a well-touted business leader on the national scale after the war, and donated generously from \$4.5 million of his own resources to the Renaissance itself, not to mention establishing the R.K. Mellon foundation in 1947 that complemented existing family foundations like the A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trusts.<sup>434</sup> But in none of these acts of public service was there any evidence of a religious sense of duty to God so common among more ardent Presbyterians in the region.

Presbyterians were also present in the leadership of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, with nearly half of its corporate representatives coming from businesses like Westinghouse Electric or the Mellon National Bank & Trust that were run, owned, or had been founded by Presbyterians. Furthermore, several families with names like Burchfield, Rhea, Heinz, Hunt, Lockhart, McDonald, McKean, Reed, and Scaife were both major benefactors of Presbyterian causes and participants in the

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<sup>433</sup> Burton Hersh, *The Mellon Family*, 368.

<sup>434</sup> David Lawrence, “Rebirth,” cited in Lubove, *Twentieth-Century Pittsburgh*, 110; Burton Hersh, *The Mellon Family*, 365-68; David Koskoff, *The Mellons*, 453; Walter Moser, “Gifts and Givers,” in McKinney, ed., *Presbyterian Valley*, 526.

A.C.C.D.<sup>435</sup> Yet even if Presbyterian individuals were present in the work of the Renaissance, the churches themselves had little say in these matters, which partly grew out of philosophical differences. During the progressive era and since, Presbyterians and other Protestants in Pittsburgh had asserted that human nature was fundamentally to blame for society's ills and not as much economic or political designs and systems. As a result, Presbyterians tended to focus their efforts at reform more on the people in government, business, and in the neighborhoods of Pittsburgh and less on policy issues in government or business practices. The Pittsburgh Renaissance, in contrast, primarily operated from the assumption that it was, in fact, economic and infrastructure-related concerns at the heart of the city's problems. Therefore, the leaders of the Renaissance invested their resources in cleaning up its rivers and hillsides, constructing better roads and bridges, and drawing more non-steel-related industries to the region. As a result, the Presbyterians and other Protestants of western Pennsylvania found themselves in the role of moral cheerleaders on the sidelines of the great reform undertaking of their day, a reality that did not rest well with them given their long history as central players in the industrial and social life of western Pennsylvania.

**Pittsburgh Presbyterians and Mainstream Evangelicalism:** At this critical juncture in the late forties when Presbyterians realized they were apparently out of options with regards to influencing civic affairs in Pittsburgh, they became more open than ever to receiving outside help. It was just at this time that evangelical public rallies were drawing hundreds of thousands in cities like Chicago and Los Angeles and Presbyterians in Pittsburgh, like all Americans, were taking note. For these Calvinists the

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<sup>435</sup> *President's Office Records*, David J. McDonald, Box 5, Files 5, 10, United States Steelworkers of America Archive, Historical Collections and Labor Archives, Penn State University; Walter L. Moser, "Gifts and Givers," in McKinney, ed., *Presbyterian Valley*, 521-23.

appeal of the new evangelicalism went further than its ability to win new converts and stir excitement in religious circles, however. It extended particularly to neo-evangelicals' rhetoric about the need to reform fundamentalism, to jettison its anti-intellectual, socially-reactive tendencies, and to restore historic Reformation thinking in American Protestantism. Though most Presbyterians at this time in the late forties were unaware of it, this Reformation-styled, even Calvinist, message of the new evangelicalism had origins from within their own subculture through the influence of Clarence Macartney on one of the new evangelicalism's principle architects, Harold John Ockenga.

It is true that there were many individuals from many Protestant traditions who shaped the new evangelicalism beyond western Pennsylvania, and it is also true that Ockenga developed some of his views while a seminary student at Princeton and a disciple of J. Gresham Machen, the conservative Presbyterian who eventually left Princeton to found his own seminary and later denomination. But the Pittsburgh connection is worth studying because first, the evidence suggests that Ockenga refined his broadly Calvinist outlook while in Pittsburgh, perhaps gleaning some of the western Pennsylvania community's moderate-ecumenical as well as socially-reformist dimensions, two aspects which Machen himself had drifted from by the time he knew Ockenga. Second, this connection underscores how Calvinism, so strong in Presbyterian churches in Pittsburgh, allowed western Pennsylvania Protestants to embrace this notion of a culturally-engaged church in following decades while Ockenga and the other neo-evangelical leaders could not convince the majority of American evangelicals to do the same.<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>436</sup> J. A. Carpenter, "Harold John Ockenga," in Hart, *Dictionary of the Presbyterian & Reformed Tradition*, 180.

A decade before Harold John Ockenga would help establish the National Association of Evangelicals and use it as a platform to reform fundamentalism to become more ecumenical and socially-engaged, he served as assistant minister at First Presbyterian in Pittsburgh under Clarence Macartney from 1930-31. After this brief tenure, Ockenga took a pastorate at the Pittsburgh-area Point Breeze congregation until 1936 when he left for Boston to assume the pulpit of the well-known Park Street Congregational church where he would continue his activism for the new evangelical cause. Though Ockenga's tenure under Macartney was not long, his time in Pittsburgh was formative; the two maintained communications until Macartney's death in 1957 and Ockenga's graduate studies in philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh between 1930 until 1939, at which time he received his doctorate, kept him close to the city as well. Soon after leaving Pittsburgh Ockenga would not only oversee the formation of the ecumenical National Association of Evangelicals but in 1947 would be one of a handful of individuals helping to found Fuller Theological Seminary, which Ockenga and others hoped would become a forum to revive evangelical intellectual ferment and scholarly activity.

But perhaps more important than Ockenga's institutional connections was that he was positioned, more than any single person, to influence the tone of the new evangelicalism and worked tirelessly in the postwar years towards that goal. Ockenga and another key figure in this effort, theologian Carl F. H. Henry, described their vision of restoring "a spirit of cooperation" that would unify conservative Protestants of all types behind the common vision of "ethical responsibility" in what Henry and Ockenga

viewed as “an hour of crying social problems.”<sup>437</sup> The neo-evangelicals were keenly aware of fundamentalism’s shortcomings as a separatist and anti-intellectual movement and wished to unify a broad coalition of conservatives who also bemoaned this “disintegration of Christianity” and who wished to restore “those great Christian principles” that would bolster “the moral fiber of the American people.”<sup>438</sup> Achieving this task would require new directions in “theological and ecclesiastical thinking,” they concluded, that affirmed the “infinite value of individual man.” Furthermore, in modern times the value of the individual was “being battered about in these days by men who do not believe in the principles which underlie it,” those principles “born out of the Hebrew-Christian tradition.”<sup>439</sup> Carl Henry, who assumed a post as professor of theology at Fuller, complained of “the awful sickness and disease of modern culture” that stemmed from a false faith in “man’s inherent goodness.”<sup>440</sup> Illustrating their desire to see conservatives once again become a force for societal reform, Ockenga asked in the preface to Carl Henry’s often-scathing 1947 critique of fundamentalist indifference why “the Bible-believing Christian” had to be “on the wrong side of every major social issue” ranging from “war, race, class, labor, liquor, imperialism.” He concluded that

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<sup>437</sup> Harold J. Ockenga, “Can Fundamentalism Win America?” *Christian Life and Times* (June 1947): 13-15; cited in Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 187.

<sup>438</sup> Harold J. Ockenga, “The Unvoiced Multitudes,” *Evangelical Action!*, 19-46; 29, 38; cited in Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 147.

<sup>439</sup> George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1987). Harold J. Ockenga, “The Challenge to the Christian Culture of the West,” *Convocation Address, Fuller Theological Seminary*, 1947, quoted in Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 53.

<sup>440</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing, 1946), 265.

“it is time to get over the fence to the right side” and to reverse the “apparent lack of any social passion” among their conservative peers.<sup>441</sup>

Among the factors that influenced Ockenga to express these aims was undoubtedly his time in Pittsburgh, especially when one considers how similar these were to the type of Christianity that the region’s Calvinists had long upheld. Later in life Ockenga made no secret about his debt to Macartney, praising his “orthodoxy that can never be questioned” but clarifying that his contributions ran deeper than merely defending the fundamentals of the faith. Macartney’s “historical works are packed with moral content,” Ockenga continued, and to sit through one of his sermons was “to be taken through literature, history and current events” and to be “left standing with bowed head, grateful heart and submissive will at the foot of the Cross,” as all individuals were “half-men, struggling” who “lack the ability” or “the spark” to accomplish what duty requires. This assessment of human limitations had not led to despair, Ockenga concluded, but produced in Macartney a man “fertile in imagination” whose telling of history and understanding of theology brought out the “forgotten chords of human life” in a “profound” manner.<sup>442</sup>

Ockenga encountered a combination of orthodoxy and a Calvinist emphasis on sin and redemption while serving under Macartney, but he also saw a congregation at First Presbyterian that developed the Calvinist themes of learning, service, and engagement with the mainstream of public life; these would each become themes that Ockenga and others tried to bring to the new evangelicalism in the forties. First Presbyterians’ Sunday

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<sup>441</sup> Harold Ockenga, Foreword, in Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1947); Carl Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind*, 17-18, 265; Carl F. H. Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian: An Autobiography* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1986).

<sup>442</sup> “Tributes to Dr. Clarence Edward Macartney,” H. J. Ockenga, *First Church Life* (Pittsburgh: First Presbyterian Church, 1947), 4-5.

school classes were well-attended with over a thousand present regularly and it employed more than three dozen volunteer teachers; its mid-week adult services entertained substantive sermon and discussion topics such as “The Life of St. Paul,” “The Life of St. Peter,” “Christ in the Psalms,” “Major Lessons from the Minor Prophets,” and “The Bible and Great Books.”<sup>443</sup> The Woman’s Home and Foreign Missionary Society promoted benevolence and charity with the expressed purpose to “guide and bless [our] society,” and other ventures sought to keep the church as much in “the business and traffic of the great city” as possible. First Presbyterian church also sustained a “street pulpit” that overlooked the sidewalk of Smithfield street and Sunday morning passersby could hear sermons through a loudspeaker. On notable civic occasions like “D’ Day in June of 1944” or “V’ Day in May 8, 1945” Macartney’s public addresses drew “thousands of people crowded Sixth Avenue in front of the church” who “stood listening on Smithfield Street and Wood Street.”<sup>444</sup>

Another ministry of First Presbyterian that illustrated the Calvinist ideal of engagement with the public was the Tuesday Noon Club for Business Men, a weekly lunch meeting in the basement of the church that drew hundreds from a wide variety of downtown Pittsburgh businesses. Organized in the fall of 1930 when Ockenga first arrived, it would grow to “a membership of 1700” over the next two decades and sought to instill a vision of the “Kingdom of God” in what was arguably an audience of some of the city’s most wealthy and influential business leaders. These included at the high point of the Tuesday Noon Club in the late forties “87 from Carnegie Illinois Steel Company,” “68 from Gulf Oil Corporation,” “84 working for the railroads,” “29 from independent

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<sup>443</sup> “The Sunday School,” *First Church Life*, 11, 17, 19, 33.

<sup>444</sup> “Tuesday Noon Club for Business Men,” in file “Tuesday Noon Club,” Marartney Archives.



steel companies,” and “24 from Westinghouse General Electric,” not to mention “24 doctors and 38 attorneys” by a count in the late forties.<sup>445</sup> The Tuesday Noon Club meetings were also highly ecumenical events, with “31 ministers” in regular attendance and “Thirty-one denominations, Five hundred and forty-four churches” represented that included not only Presbyterians and United Presbyterians, but such a diverse lot as “Episcopalians,” “Baptists,” “Catholics,” “Church of God,” “Christian Missionary and Alliance,” “Swedenborgian,” “Quakers,” “Jewish,” “Christian Scientists,” and “Church of the Strangers.”<sup>446</sup>

Macartney explained on numerous occasions that he valued this broader dialogue with the public and between those of a variety of Christian traditions, explaining that his radio ministry, which carried his sermons through one of the nation’s more prominent commercial stations, K.D.K.A. Pittsburgh, was to foster “a bond of church unity, that goal for which all true Christians labor and pray” out of “obedience” to the “spirit of our Lord.” Ever aware of the advantages of ecumenism, and always expressing his belief in the value of diplomacy with the broader society, Macartney recounted that he heard “from many Catholics expressing their appreciation of [radio] sermons defending such cardinal facts of Christ’s life as the virgin birth,” adding that “One priest was kind enough to commend to his congregation something that I had said about the glory of Him who is the Saviour of Catholic and Protestant like.” Macartney also hoped his radio preaching might influence “the invisible congregation” of Jews who, “through a veil of misunderstanding” stemming from “prejudices for which the Christian Church is herself in no small part to blame,” ought to hear a description of “New Testament Christianity in

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<sup>445</sup> “Tuesday Noon Club for Business Men,” in file “Tuesday Noon Club,” Marartney Archives.

<sup>446</sup> “Tuesday Noon Club for Business Men,” in file “Tuesday Noon Club,” Marartney Archives.

its purity and majesty” that was not distorted by anti-Semitism.<sup>447</sup> Owing at least some debt to his experience with this open-door congregation, Ockenga would go on to use the National Association of Evangelicals to reach out to a wide range of conservative Protestants who fell under the broad category of “evangelical,” meaning orthodox, and Fuller Seminary would also welcome the same range of like-minded Protestants to its classrooms.

This influence of Macartney and the Calvinists of western Pennsylvania on the larger evangelical movement also found channels through other assistant ministers who also sat under Macartney at First Presbyterian. This included four who went on to serve in western Pennsylvania Presbyterian congregations and ten others scattered from Patterson, New Jersey, to Grand Rapids, Michigan, and two California congregations. Macartney kept in touch with these individuals, reporting with pride and delight to his congregation in Pittsburgh their accomplishments, such as when Ockenga wrote in the late forties that his Park Street church had raised \$90,000 “for [their] missionary program for the coming year,” Ockenga adding “this surpasses anything we have had before.”<sup>448</sup> Macartney’s influence also extended to his radio audience, members of which thanked him for instilling in them a well-balanced understanding of not only the basic conservative concerns about the “reality of God or the validity of our Lord’s claims,” but more specifically Calvinist ideas about “the Lord’s earthly,” as opposed to merely spiritual, “kingdom.”<sup>449</sup> Macartney also had ties to other Calvinist subcultures that

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<sup>447</sup> Clarence Edward Macartney, *Preaching By Radio*, originally published in *Ladies Home Journal*, 1924 (New York City: Department of Recruiting, Board of Christian Education), 10-11.

<sup>448</sup> Letter from Harold Ockenga to Clarence Macartney,” dated May 6, 1947, in “20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Letters” file, Macartney Archive.

<sup>449</sup> Letter from W. R. McKim to Clarence Macartney,” dated April 22, 1947, in “20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Letters” file, Macartney Archive.

would, in their own way and time, shape the broader evangelical culture in encouraging higher learning and social service themes, subcultures like the Dutch Calvinist denominations Reformed Church of America and Christian Reformed Church in western Michigan.<sup>450</sup>

Macartney, along with other western Pennsylvania Calvinists, also undoubtedly influenced evangelicals like Ockenga in demonstrating how conservative Protestants might entertain a discussion about the church's influence in preserving civilization. Macartney was more the theological thinker and preacher, and less the social commentator, but one of his ongoing interests was temperance, which he viewed as central to freeing the innocent from a trap that often led them to crime. The "legalized liquor traffic" along with "legalized gambling and prostitution" would "bring national impoverishment, general criminality, wide spread disease" and "wholesale political corruption" to the nation, Macartney concurred with other traditionalists at the time. Though alarmist in tone in agreeing that "The Almighty" judged "every man who builds a town with blood and establisheth a city by iniquity," Macartney was not a mere reactionary.<sup>451</sup> He often lobbied public officials, for instance, on behalf of young people tempted by alcohol, quoting statistics he obtained from the Superintendent of Police in Pittsburgh that there were "37, 375 arrests in 1948," "18,585" of which were "for drunkenness" and "6,073" for alcohol-related violations such as "disorderly conduct." What was worse to Macartney was that "by far the largest number of those arrested" were

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<sup>450</sup> James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1984).

<sup>451</sup> "Bartering Away the Public Morals," *Christian Statesman* LXX (March, 1936): 1; in "America and God" file, Macartney Archives.

“from the age of under fifteen years up to the age of twenty years.”<sup>452</sup> As Ockenga led the new evangelical movement in the forties and lamented that conservative Protestants needed to develop a keener sense of social ethics in “an hour of crying social problems,” it seems likely that not only was Macartney an influence, but the larger Calvinist subculture, too. This seems especially the case given the intensity of the Depression-era debate among Pittsburgh Calvinists about the meaning of sin and their responsibility to the disadvantaged, not to mention Macartney’s recurring pleas on their behalf.

**Presbyterian versus Evangelical Social Thought 1941-1950:** Yet for all of these parallels between the Calvinist subculture in western Pennsylvania and the stated goals of evangelical leaders like Ockenga in the forties, there were differences apparent even at this early stage that help explain why the social-service ideal remained so much stronger in Pittsburgh than among evangelicals at large. One must note that it was certainly not due to a lack of effort on the part of leaders like Ockenga; he and dozens of others shared the desire to reform fundamentalism and particularly to move it past its anti-intellectual and separatist tendencies. And it has also been the case that their venture did succeed in some ways; just as Pittsburgh has sustained this Reformation tradition through its Presbyterian-Calvinist heritage, the culturally-engaged undercurrent has flourished in select pockets of this broader conservative Protestant world in particular denominations, seminaries, colleges, and in geographical regions. But by and large, the majority of American evangelicals in the decades since the Second World War have remained captive to their anti-intellectual fundamentalist past. This tendency, and particularly that of perceiving social activism as somehow tied to the liberal, and thus to

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<sup>452</sup> “Excerpt of sermon preached by Dr. Clarence Edward Macartney, Sunday evening, Dec. 4, 1949,” in “America and God” file, Macartney Archives; Bradley Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, & Moderates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 118-25.

fundamentalists apostate, Social Gospel, was evident in the ambivalent and often-contradictory manner in which many evangelicals in the 1940s responded to political events. In contrast, Calvinists in western Pennsylvania, as had always been the case, never thought twice about the merit or intrinsic worth of social activism or commentary in and of itself, viewing it as the natural outgrowth of what they perceived was the biblical mandate to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth.<sup>453</sup>

To their credit there certainly were times when evangelicals, along with other Protestants, spoke in a concerted voice against injustice, as when Protestant conservatives and liberals both denounced the internment of 70,000 Japanese-Americans and the persecution of millions of Jews in Europe, this at a time when the majority of Americans expressed apathy on these matters.<sup>454</sup> But, by and large, mid-century evangelicals, despite their leaders' expressed desire to have more cultural influence, came out of a revivalist tradition in the spirit of a Dwight L. Moody that assumed the best way to change society was individual-by-individual; the effect was that evangelicals never approached social issues with the same focus, energy, or effectiveness as they did when engaged in the project of winning souls.<sup>455</sup> As individuals like Carl Henry pushed and prodded mainstream evangelicals to develop their own critique of society to little avail, Calvinists in western Pennsylvania, despite feeling sidelined in local affairs, continued their comprehensive social-political commentary of national and international events without pause. They agreed with Ockenga and the other neo-evangelical leaders in the

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<sup>453</sup> Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 159-75; western Michigan where the Christian Reformed denomination is centered, the Presbyterian Church in America, the Center for Public Justice think tank in Washington, D.C., and dozens of Christian colleges all employ Calvinist theology to justify and sustain their public engagement.

<sup>454</sup> Martin Marty, *Modern American Religion Vol. 3*, 59, 83.

<sup>455</sup> A good primary source on this is Judson E. Conant, *The Growing Menace of the Social Gospel* (Chicago: Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1937), 60, cited in Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 100, 118, 167-68.

forties that “Christians seem to exhibit a callousness with regard to social reform” and decried that too many “insist on clinging to points of doctrine or ecclesiastical organization as if these were more vital than presenting an organized, united front against the enemy.”<sup>456</sup>

But Presbyterians tried to model the exact opposite and did so with gusto and with none of the wrangling and insecurity about the merit of societal engagement itself that most evangelicals at the time and since have expressed. Presbyterians’ Calvinist theology, and particularly its emphasis on the human capacity for self-deception, continued to shape how they perceived social events, evident as they called for unity among the churches and denominations to better combat the evils of human nature manifest in the Second World War. As “Prime Minister Churchill and President Roosevelt” met to try to determine the proper course to take in early 1942, these Presbyterians recounted, the nations of “Great Britain, Russia, China, the Dominions and the United States” together were offering a “rebuke and a suggestion to the church of Christ.” If the Allied nations could set aside their differences for the sake of a secular war, these Presbyterians continued, then the very least the churches could do was to emulate the same, set aside petty disputes and confront those “forces of evil” at home that had “grown with modern progress.” “Modern knowledge, modern inventions, and modern organizing methods have increased” the “destructive power” of “human sin,” they pointed out, so that “the greedy and unscrupulous man of today can exploit more people” due to better technologies of communication “than his brother of the last generation” possessed. In sum, these Calvinists concluded that the modern era had not

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<sup>456</sup> John T. Brownlee, “Is There A Spirit of Pessimism Abroad Religion?” *United Presbyterian* 100 (March 5, 1942): 18; “Political and Christian Unity,” *United Presbyterian* 100 (January 8, 1942): 5.

lessened the need for a vigilant church that would bring a biblically orthodox critique to bear on social problems.<sup>457</sup>

Further evidence of this Calvinist critique of society, and particularly Presbyterians' belief in the capacity of humans for self-deception and hypocrisy, was in their description of the nature of American and British power. It was true, Pittsburgh Presbyterians admitted soon after the United States entered the war in December of 1941, that the Second World War was a clash between "two national systems, two ways of life," one that was "satanic" and "monstrous" and that "has put race and blood, the rule of the superman" ahead of "righteousness and justice," and the "American and the British" way that aimed to contend for "righteousness and justice." But these Calvinists warned that Americans should not become self-righteous and pointed out that the war was not just evidence of German hatred, but was "a judgment upon [all] the nations" and America was a great offender. "Our sin," they wrote, "is that we as a nation in this generation have all too often only paid a lip service to righteousness and truth" while in "our religious, business, political and personal life" we have "despised and rejected the word of God." They concluded that they and their fellow citizens must, as a nation, "be chastened" and "disciplined" and "pass through the fires of suffering" because "God has given to us a great and sacred system of human life," constitutional democracy, which Americans were "desecrating."<sup>458</sup> Americans and the Allied forces were also to blame, they pointed out, because "for a long time the white man has been swaggering through the East with an attitude of arrogant superiority" that suggested to "the colored races" that "they were little better than dirt under his feet." This "record of exploitation" by "the

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<sup>457</sup> John T. Brownlee, "Is There A Spirit of Pessimism Abroad Religion?" *United Presbyterian* 100 (March 5, 1942): 18; "Political and Christian Unity," *United Presbyterian* 100 (January 8, 1942): 5.

<sup>458</sup> "God's Call to National Repentance," *United Presbyterian* 100 (January 8, 1942): 6.

white man who has gone into the Orient” for little more than “his own profit” revealed a homegrown hypocrisy of the United States, the poor treatment of African-Americans. In the words of this *United Presbyterian* editorial that revealed these Calvinists’ historic abolitionism, “it would not be surprising if there were a good deal of sympathy among our Negroes with [Japan],” concluding that “it might also help if at home we practiced what we preach in our treatment of the Negro.”<sup>459</sup>

In contrast with this Calvinist understanding of world events during the war that was, one might note, exactly the kind of thoughtful reflection neo-evangelical leaders like Carl Henry and Harold Ockenga wished to see in the evangelical mainstream, was the ambivalent manner in which most evangelicals responded. This ambivalence about social improvement was apparent, for instance, when evangelicals spoke out against the persecution of European Jews. For those fundamentalists who denounced anti-Semitism in the thirties and forties, and there were a large number, there was no single rationale. Some did so on the basis of a generic concern for the suffering of others, others found parallels between fundamentalist and Orthodox Jewish anticipation for a messiah, many of the same also emphasized biblical prophecies of the restoration of the nation of Israel in the land of Palestine, and others talked of the Pauline command that the evangelism ought to extend to the Jew first and the Gentile second.<sup>460</sup> Perhaps it was for this reason that the Baptist *Watchman-Examiner* strangely commented just months after the war ended, despite their record of compassion on the topic during the war, that “Jewish sufferings of the past few years will in the end prove divine compulsions driving an

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<sup>459</sup> “Asia for the Asians,” *United Presbyterian* 100 (February 19, 1942): 5.

<sup>460</sup> Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 97, 244.



apostate people out of their ghettos” to assimilate culturally and religiously to the mainstream.<sup>461</sup>

Presbyterians in Pittsburgh, in contrast, defended Jews and other minorities on the basis of a clear and unchanging rationale, that it was a violation of the biblical command to love one’s neighbor and to value the world as the creation of God. In denouncing national enmity, for instance, Calvinists in Pittsburgh stressed the simple notion that “we are neighbors with the whole human race,” and that “race prejudice is a disease” that offends the Christian notion that “God is the father of all.”<sup>462</sup> There was little more than this principle that led them to report and denounce with regularity “Hitler’s oft-repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe.”<sup>463</sup> This rationale carried over directly to American treatment of its black citizens, who Presbyterians in Pittsburgh asserted were “victims of untold injustices” not only in the south, but “particularly in the slums of our northern cities.”<sup>464</sup> Though the African-American heroes they upheld tended to be as industrious and God-fearing as they themselves were, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh stated flatly that “race discrimination must be stopped” without having to justify this position in terms of soul-saving or biblical prophecies about a future spiritual kingdom.<sup>465</sup> The Bible made clear, they pointed out, that “There is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” and thus it was wrong to demean or enslave another of God’s creatures. “The Negro,” they concluded,

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<sup>461</sup> “The Jewish Problem,” *The Watchman-Examiner* 33 (November 8, 1945), 1080; quoted in Martin Marty, *Modern American Religion Vol. 3*, 63.

<sup>462</sup> Raymond Hudson, “True Christians Will Not Hate the Japanese,” *United Presbyterian* 100 (May 28, 1942): 17; “Race Prejudice is a Disease,” *United Presbyterian* 101 (February 1, 1943): 4; Martin Marty, *Modern American Religion Vol. 3*, 83.

<sup>463</sup> Henry W. Temple, “Is Germany Trying To Exterminate ‘Inferior’ Races?” *United Presbyterian* 101 (January 25, 1943): 7.

<sup>464</sup> McClean Work, “A Savings Fund Of Practical Good Will,” *United Presbyterian* 101 (October 25, 1943): 10.

<sup>465</sup> S. E. Irvine, “The Race Relations Situation,” *United Presbyterian* 101 (May 10, 1943): 6.

“must be guaranteed equal educational, recreational, traveling and eating facilities,” for “the democracy that does not give a man equal rights, irrespective of race or color, is a travesty.”<sup>466</sup>

### **John Gerstner, Calvinism, and the New Evangelicalism, 1945-50:**

Presbyterians in Pittsburgh were well aware of these differences between themselves and most evangelicals just as they had been in earlier decades when they positioned themselves between warring liberal and conservative Protestant factions. Thus, these Calvinists remained wary of the new evangelicalism into the late forties, even though many in their circles were growing desperate about how, and if, they would ever reinvigorate their churches and once again influence local affairs in a positive manner. To convince Presbyterians to embrace the new evangelicalism would take an individual who shared their Calvinist interest in thoughtful social engagement, but who was familiar enough with the evangelical movement to persuade these Calvinists that embracing it would not mean trading away the particularities of their Reformed tradition. This individual was John Gerstner, United Presbyterian minister and later professor of church history at the Pittsburgh-Xenia seminary in Pittsburgh; Gerstner was born and raised in Philadelphia but attended Westminster College, a United Presbyterian institution located north of Pittsburgh where he not only solidified his ties to the region, but discovered what he would later describe as the “symmetry, cogency, and sweetness of the sovereign activity of God in history.”<sup>467</sup> Equipped with this newfound enthusiasm for Calvinism, after college near Pittsburgh Gerstner attended J. Gresham Machen’s Westminster

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<sup>466</sup> “The Fundamental Principle in Race Relationships,” *United Presbyterian* 102 (February 7, 1944): 6.

<sup>467</sup> R. C. Sproul, "Preface," *Soli Deo Gloria: Essays in Reformed Theology: Festschrift for John H. Gerstner* (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1976), ix-x.

Theological Seminary in Philadelphia where he developed an expertise on the life and theology of Jonathan Edwards, after which he attended Harvard Divinity School in 1945 to earn his Ph.D. From 1945 to 1950 Gerstner served as a minister at two different congregations in the Pittsburgh-area community of Wilkinsburg before accepting a professorship in church history at Pittsburgh-Xenia seminary where he would remain for the next three decades.

As he developed this knowledge and appreciation for Calvinism, Gerstner also was encountering other young conservatives like himself who sought to reform fundamentalism, individuals who shared his belief that it was necessary to remind fundamentalists of their Reformation-era heritage. Through this discovery fundamentalists would then come to realize, Gerstner and his peers hoped, that the life of the mind was not inimical to Protestant orthodoxy but rather the natural outgrowth of it. In Boston Gerstner met others studying at Harvard Divinity School as well as at Boston University who, despite coming from a diversity of backgrounds, each believed orthodox Protestants ought to take greater steps to understand secular culture to open up the conservative churches to the outside world. It was for this reason that these theology students, who included such soon-to-be evangelical luminaries as Carl Henry, Edward Carnell, George Ladd, and Kenneth Kantzer, wished to supplement their conservative religious backgrounds with the “soul-searching and mind-stretching” that graduate studies at the “ultra-liberal” institution presented them.<sup>468</sup> Harold Ockenga, then pastor at the Congregationalist Park Street Church in Boston, took notice of this congregating of young theologians-in-training in his own back yard and invited some to speak from his

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<sup>468</sup> Quote from Kenneth Kantzer, “Carl Ferdinand Howard Henry: An Appreciation,” in *God and Culture: Essays in Honor of Carl F. H. Henry*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 371; cited in Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 192.

pulpit and others to take up posts at Fuller Seminary in California to further this attempt to revive Reformation-era Christianity.<sup>469</sup>

By all measures, Gerstner was never particularly close to Ockenga, but would soon become the most visible orthodox Calvinist in western Pennsylvania at a time when Ockenga's one-time mentor, Clarence Macartney, would soon bow out of public life. Gerstner shared with his conservative peers the desire to reform fundamentalism, but Gerstner himself stood out among these others in that he was the most ardently-Calvinist of them all. This made him more than a promoter of Calvinism to the larger evangelical movement, but also the ideal diplomat to Presbyterian Calvinists in Pittsburgh fearful of the new evangelicalism, but curious about its possible benefits to them and their dilemma. Aware of the sense of powerlessness that had overtaken many in western Pennsylvania in the wake of the disconcerting findings of the Metropolitan Pittsburgh Church Study, Gerstner's first prescription was to do what many other activist Calvinists had and would continue to, remind the laity of the resources of their own tradition. Joining others who believed that activism always had to spring from the right kind of theological thinking, Gerstner stated in 1946 that the churches should embrace in a new way the study of "Church History, of Presbyterianism or Reformed doctrine and government, and of the history and practices of the United Presbyterian Church."<sup>470</sup>

As a regular contributor to the *United Presbyterian* and a speaker at events around the city, Gerstner continued to articulate this need for a revival of earnest theological study. Jonathan Edwards, Gerstner expounded, was one Calvinist to whom area Calvinists ought to turn given his role in spurring the greatest revival in American

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<sup>469</sup> George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 37; Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 194.

<sup>470</sup> John Gerstner, "What Every Adult Church Member Should Know," *United Presbyterian* 104 (February 11, 1946): 11.

history, the Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s. Edwards was not merely an evangelist, Gerstner continued, but a great Calvinist intellectual who understood the necessity of a balanced outlook on life springing from a balanced and whole theology. Edwards, Gerstner wrote, “preached every doctrine that he found in the Bible,” lecturing “about sovereignty” and “about responsibility ... about hell and about heaven; he preached about grace and about law ... individual piety and social obligations ... about terror and about comfort.”<sup>471</sup> Understanding both the need for inward piety as well as the life of the mind was necessary for Pittsburgh-area Presbyterians, and all Americans Gerstner hoped, to regain the confidence necessary to confront a “sinful civilization” that, despite its shortcomings, was still “worth keeping.”<sup>472</sup>

Conservative Protestants, he continued, need not be pessimistic about reform, but ought to believe that through faith “man can begin again to build a new civilization of which God will be the Alpha and the Omega.” The modern world was not something to lament over, Gerstner elaborated, but was even “better than medieval civilization,” a time when religion held much higher prestige than it did in the twentieth century when technology and science seemed to have displaced the church. Modernity, for all its faults, Gerstner stated, “permits the human spirit [to attain] freedom as well as the assets thereof.” In modern America, for instance, “freedom has been extended to the citizen, to the woman, to the child, to the Negro, and at the very moment a great conflict [the Second World War] is being waged to extend it to the world.”<sup>473</sup> Though any reformer might question his youthful assessment of just how far society had moved towards the ideal of universal justice, Gerstner’s statement to both his Calvinist peers in Pittsburgh as

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<sup>471</sup> John Gerstner, *Steps to Salvation*, 189-90.

<sup>472</sup> John Gerstner, “Is Our Civilization Worth Keeping?” *United Presbyterian* 103 (February 5, 1945): 25.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*

well as to participants of the larger evangelical revival was one of optimism. Just as he himself, through study of Calvinist writings in his early college years, had experienced a religious awakening that led to faith that the churches could contribute to societal progress, the churches of western Pennsylvania could do the same and discover their lost sense of purpose.

An aging Clarence Macartney shared Gerstner's desire to see the churches assume a more activist stance, but rather than pointing to the positive achievements of modern society to convince them it was worth saving took the more pessimistic approach. Macartney, employing some hyperbole that probably reflected both his sentiment about the shortcomings of his fellow Protestants and the realization that his health was gradually failing, pointed to the failure of the churches to influence modern society with effectiveness and faithfulness. In 1945 while addressing the "ministers and Christian workers of Allegheny county" at Trinity Episcopal church located next to his own First Presbyterian, Macartney blasted what he saw as "an ever rising tide of ritualism, the increasing display of the Cross in the furniture and the architecture of the Church." This respectable yet substance-less Christianity came at the expense of, he continued, "a living message about ... God" that promoted "personal, doctrinal, and redemptive preaching and teaching." The effect of this was a state of affairs where "the Protestant churches," especially the "older and larger," over "a period of years" showed little growth with many showing "an appalling decrease" in numbers. Disunity and the absence of theological substance, Macartney claimed, created disastrous results; the International Sunday School Council counting "losses of 1,000,000" between 1933-1943 and "in Allegheny County for 1944 there were 9,981 marriages and in the same year 3,837

applications for divorce.” And “from these broken homes,” Macartney lamented, “came the majority of our juvenile criminals.” America was a nation, he concluded, where “100,000 American citizens have been murdered” in the “last 10 years” where “an army of 4,300,000 active criminals” cost taxpayers “\$15,000,000 every year, or \$111.10 for every man, woman and child in the country.” America was quite possibly on the “road to ruin,” Macartney concluded, a “nation losing its soul” while “its youth are sinking into crime.”<sup>474</sup>

Other Calvinists in Pittsburgh shared this great concern over the impotence of the churches and pointed to a society fracturing because believers were paralyzed by a lack of confidence and thus could not deliver their message of healing and justice. Echoing Gerstner’s call for a revival of earnest Calvinism that would equip them with the theological tools to affirm the “integral wholeness of life,” these Presbyterians challenged their peers to use the Reformed tradition to fight the “factitious, emasculated,” and “dehumanizing materialism” of the modern world.<sup>475</sup> Others dreaming of a church that once again could significantly influence Pittsburgh’s affairs through both spiritual renewal and social service, decrying the “menace of indifference” in the churches where members “were neither cold nor hot” but rather “lukewarm” so that God would be forced to, as they said quoting scripture, “spew thee out of [his] mouth.” “Thirty percent of our church members do 90 per cent of the work,” these Calvinists bemoaned, “and give 90 per cent of its contributions” and “the rest are merely in the road” and blocked the way to religious and societal renewal.<sup>476</sup> Still others were also explicit in

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<sup>474</sup> Clarence Edward Macartney, “Is America on the Road to Ruin?” *United Presbyterian* 103 (February 19, 1945): 11.

<sup>475</sup> Arthur W. Calhoun, “Evangelical Economics,” *United Presbyterian* 103 (March 5, 1945): 6.

<sup>476</sup> J. D. Rankin, “The Menace of Indifference,” *United Presbyterian* 105 (March 10, 1947): 2.

their outrage over their peers' lack of enthusiasm for social concerns, stating that "there is too much 'politeness' and too little passionate protest when wrong is present." These voices, expressing the cries for social justice that they had in the thirties, called their Presbyterians to recover a "burning indignation against the sins of modern life"; complacent Christians, they continued, must remember that "beyond church life there stretches the business, political and social life" where "the agents of 'interests'" haunt "every legislature" and corruption goes unchallenged. It was now time, they concluded, for Presbyterians to recover their activist heritage, set aside the "mediocre purity" that had infected their circles, and create a new way to once again influence public affairs in Pittsburgh.<sup>477</sup>

**Pittsburgh Presbyterians Embrace the New Evangelicalism, 1950-1980:** In response to this sense of desperation among those Calvinists in the Presbyterian churches eager to restore their activist heritage, John Gerstner began to openly promote the idea of reaching out to evangelicals. Even before Gerstner arrived in Pittsburgh in 1945 there had been discussions among United Presbyterians about possibly joining the National Association of Evangelicals instead of remaining in the often-liberal Federal Council of Churches, but many expressed fears that the N.A.E. was "marked" by the "'anti' spirit" that "has done untold harm to Protestantism." Worrying that the evangelical association was separatist in its mentality and thus merely an extension of fundamentalist militancy, United Presbyterians concluded that "to withdraw and separate" from major ecumenical bodies like the F.C.C. was "not biblical" and would further divide Protestants from each

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<sup>477</sup> J. D. Rankin, "'Magnificent Hate,'" *United Presbyterian* 106 (May 24, 1948): 3.



other.<sup>478</sup> Gerstner was aware of these and other concerns and began to actively play the role of diplomat between his fellow Presbyterians and the larger evangelical movement. When the Youth for Christ teen ministry movement was at its strongest point mid-year 1945, for instance, drawing totals of 300,000-400,000 to its weekly meetings in cities across the United States, Gerstner defended it from critics. To the Unitarians who said “it is all the work of some business men who wish to preserve the status quo and prevent social reforms,” Gerstner offered a frank admission that it was true, “the movement had an under-developed social consciousness.” This, however, did not make it “fundamentally defective,” and neither did “the effervescence of the movement,” particularly its heavy use of entertainment and charisma to gain momentum.<sup>479</sup>

It certainly helped Gerstner’s cause when the Council of Churches of Christ of Allegheny County, of which Presbyterians and United Presbyterians were the foremost members, reported that the city’s Protestant churches were just barely “holding their own” in drawing new members.<sup>480</sup> Many Presbyterians showed evidence of softening their attitudes towards evangelicalism, concluding that “the heresy of indifferentism,” the lethargy in Pittsburgh-area churches during the forties, was “worse than fanatical fundamentalism,” by which they were probably referring to neo-evangelicalism as they mistook it for something more separatist than it actually was. The time was now, many Presbyterians concluded, to rediscover “the significance of the term, ‘Church militant’” to “continue the fight” to “gain in numbers and influence.”<sup>481</sup> With the spectacular

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<sup>478</sup> “Federal Council Fosters Bigotry!” *United Presbyterian* 103 (January 29, 1945): 5.; “A Fair Attitude Toward The Federal Council of Churches,” *United Presbyterian* 106 (February 2, 1948): 13.

<sup>479</sup> Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 166-67; John Gerstner, “‘Youth For Christ’—Or Against Christ, Which?: An Evaluation of the ‘Youth for Christ’ Movement,” *United Presbyterian* 103 (October 8, 1945): 8.

<sup>480</sup> Paul Douglass, *Metropolitan Pittsburgh Church Study*, 12-13.

<sup>481</sup> S. R. Dodds, Bible Teacher, Second United Presbyterian Church, Wilksburg, Pa., “With the Point of a Diamond: A Setting Forth of America’s Salient Sins,” *United Presbyterian* 106 (April 12, 1948): 12.

success of the Los Angeles Billy Graham crusade in early 1950, Calvinists in Pittsburgh soon were admitting that “mass evangelism” had now had “a come-back” and began to contemplate establishing formal ties with the broader evangelical movement. As an outgrowth of this shift in their relationship to evangelicalism, in 1952 Presbyterians joined the city’s other Protestants to enthusiastically invite Graham to Pittsburgh to conduct a crusade that eventually drew over 250,000 to Forbes Field and Hunt Armory, winning over 5,000 converts, and enjoying favorable press coverage.<sup>482</sup>

Gerstner was undoubtedly pleased with this shift in opinion in Pittsburgh and worked to assure his fellow Calvinists that welcoming Graham did not mean they had to trade away their theological distinctiveness. On one occasion Gerstner went to lengths to make an obscure point about predestination in Edwardsean terms, that it was a “human response” to “divine initiative” and that regeneration “consists of the divine infusion of a new nature” under the “absolute sovereignty of God.”<sup>483</sup> There were few Presbyterian Calvinists in Pittsburgh who were as strict in their views of predestination as Gerstner, but his peers, especially those in the Presbyterian churches who were committed to some sort of local activism, nonetheless continued to stand by their Calvinism. This was evident when they clarified that they would only accept the new evangelicalism on the condition that the churches follow up in “instructing and confirming in the faith any who may have accepted the gospel invitation.”<sup>484</sup> This would require “greater activism of laymen, especially in visitation evangelism” in order to, as Gerstner said, protect Calvinism from “homogenous doctrinal thinking” that many saw in the civil religion of

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<sup>482</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Cold War At Home: The Red Scare in Pennsylvania, 1945-1960* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 182.

<sup>483</sup> John Gerstner, *Steps to Salvation*, 13, 128.

<sup>484</sup> James A. Pollock, “About Mechanics in Evangelism,” *United Presbyterian* 103 (January 8, 1945): 9.

the fifties, what he termed the “ecumenical movement” in “its present trend.”<sup>485</sup> The idea, from start to finish, was to embrace the revival of evangelicalism if, and only if, the Presbyterian churches could nurture the new believers in a version of evangelicalism that stressed strong Calvinist themes.

To a large extent the region’s welcoming of Graham was a continuation of longstanding insistence that local congregations, and not interdenominational groups or non-Presbyterian revivalists, oversee the nurturing of new converts to the faith. It helped that Billy Graham went out of his way to coordinate his crusades with local religious bodies based on the assumption that his big-media events would be fruitless if there were not local congregations to follow up on the recent converts in the long-term.<sup>486</sup> By all measures, every indication is that the Presbyterian churches in Pittsburgh, and after 1958 there would now be only one Presbyterian Church rather than two since the United Presbyterian denomination merged with the Presbyterian Church in that year, continued modest outreach and social service efforts in the 1950s. Yet this decade marked a shift in their attitude towards evangelicalism and also marked the beginning of an influx of well-known evangelical leaders who began to sell Calvinists on the idea that the best means for them to influence local affairs was not through the denominations, as had been the case to this point. This did not mean an end to the Presbyterian Church or to its outreach efforts, and it was true that many individuals supporting and involved with these new evangelical organizations in the years to come continued to attend Presbyterian and other mainline Protestant congregations while also participating in these non-denominational efforts. But more and more it was evident that the most direct contact between Calvinists

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<sup>485</sup> “Visitation Evangelism is Stressed,” *United Presbyterian* 108 (June 19, 1950): 12; John Gerstner, *Calvinism Four Hundred Years After*, 11.

<sup>486</sup> William Martin, *A Prophet With Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (New York: William Morrow, 1991).

and the public was through these specialized organizations that evangelicals had begun to bring to Pittsburgh and not through the Presbyterian Church.

Before Calvinists in the Presbyterian churches would adapt these organizations to their own uses, however, they had to witness how outsiders converging on Pittsburgh employed them. The first individual to do so was a nationally-known Episcopal minister named Sam Shoemaker who left his New York City congregation while in his sixties to assume the pastorate at Calvary Episcopal in East Liberty. Shoemaker had learned how to bring religion out of the churches and to the workplace, the college dormitory, or the athletic field, while a tutor under Frank Buchman of the Oxford Group, a non-denominational evangelical ministry greatly popular during the twenties and thirties.<sup>487</sup> With this template in mind, he used his post at Calvary Episcopal as a springboard to build individual relationships with Pittsburgh businessmen; Shoemaker established groups who met before work or in private homes and stressed both the message of personal salvation and the expectation that Christianity had the potential to improve the material conditions of society.<sup>488</sup> Eventually this evolved into an organization Shoemaker named the Pittsburgh Experiment, which he used not only to attract converts but also to help resolve labor disputes, speak out against communism, and to, in Shoemaker's words, make Pittsburgh "as famous for God as for steel." Other evangelicals admiring Shoemaker's success would descend on Pittsburgh in the late 1950s and early 1960s and establish their own specialized ministries targeting alienated

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<sup>487</sup> Tyler Flynn, "Moral Rearmament," in Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *Encyclopedia of Protestantism Vol. 3* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1307-08. ☺

<sup>488</sup> Samuel Shoemaker, *With the Holy Spirit and With Fire* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), 10, 19, 32; cited in Michael Sider-Rose, *Taking the Gospel to the Point: Evangelicals in Pittsburgh and the Origins of the Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation, 2000), 16.

youth, the poor and disadvantaged, and others who might not normally enter a church building but nonetheless expressed interest in Christianity.<sup>489</sup>

Presbyterians witnessed the energy and success of these evangelical organizations and, having been conditioned by individuals like Gerstner on the merits of the evangelical movement, concluded that they ought to create their own Calvinist versions of the same. It was one of John Gerstner's theology students at the Pittsburgh-Xenia seminary in the early 1960s named Robert C. Sproul who would first accomplish this; Sproul was a Pittsburgh native who had attended Westminster College, Gerstner's United Presbyterian *alma mater*, and then came to the Pittsburgh-Xenia seminary where Gerstner was a professor of church history. After ordination in the Presbyterian Church in 1964, Sproul traveled to the Netherlands for theological studies under Dutch Calvinists, returned to Westminster College to teach philosophy and theology a few years later, then moved to Boston to teach at explicitly-evangelical Gordon College. In 1971 Sproul established a learning institute in Ligonier, Pennsylvania, sixty miles southeast of Pittsburgh that in the following decades would educate thousands of laypeople on the relevance of Calvinism to both higher learning and public affairs. Though never a direct subsidiary of the Presbyterian Church, many of those who visited the Ligonier Study Center came from Presbyterian congregations in western Pennsylvania. Even so, it was now the case that these types of evangelical organizations, Calvinist or otherwise, were by the early 1970s the prime vehicle for new ideas about theology and its implications in public affairs in Pittsburgh.

Gerstner counted Sproul one of his direct protégés and dozens of titles Sproul published, along with Gerstner's own scholarship in these years, helped to endear

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<sup>489</sup> Michael Sider-Rose, *Taking the Gospel to the Point*, 37.

Presbyterians to this emerging evangelical subculture. This push towards Calvinist activity in non-denominational organizations helped give rise to another ministry called the Coalition for Christian Outreach (C.C.O.), established in 1971 to serve college students in western Pennsylvania. As with the Ligonier Valley Study Center, much of the financial support for this collegiate ministry came from Presbyterian congregations, and many of these churches employed a C.C.O. campus minister part-time while he or she used the local church as a home base for their evangelism on the college campus. But these Presbyterian churches hired Coalition for Christian Outreach campus ministers because they themselves were unsuccessful at making lasting contact with those local college students. In contrast with the awkwardness of the denominations at evangelism, ministers for the C.C.O. were tremendously successful in winning converts, boasting 2,000 in attendance at its annual conference in 1976 and watching its staff grow from four individuals in 1971 to over one hundred by 1978.

The Coalition for Christian Outreach, like the Ligonier Study Center, illustrated not only the shift in Protestant activism from established denominations to specialized organizations targeting specific populations, but also how they provided a context in which Calvinists could develop their thought. For instance, individuals joined the C.C.O. staff who began to promote the ideas of Calvinist Abraham Kuyper, Dutch statesman and theologian from the turn of the century, and also the ideas of mid-century Dutch Calvinist Herman Dooyewerd. This discourse helped foster the Dutch Calvinist notion of spheres of life, each with its own normative principles, spurring Coalition campus ministers to push their students to consider how Christian principles bore upon their various fields of study. In the late seventies the C.C.O. held its first Jubilee conference in downtown

Pittsburgh which brought together educators, clergymen, and college students to discuss how, exactly, believers ought to approach one discipline or the other in light of this orthodox Protestant belief. The C.C.O. would garner national attention as the only distinctly Calvinist college ministry in the North America and used this attention not only to underscore its self-conscious attempt to foster higher learning, but for social service in the disadvantaged neighborhoods of western Pennsylvania and the nation.<sup>490</sup>

Despite the thousands of individuals these two Calvinist non-denominational organizations influenced, by far the most influential of the Pittsburgh-area groups has been the Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation (P.L.F.), established in 1978 to serve poorer communities in the Pittsburgh area. The P.L.F. won gifts from old Presbyterian-run corporations like Westinghouse Electric, Heinz Condiments, and Gulf Oil Corporation, and Presbyterian-founded philanthropies like the Sarah Mellon Scaife foundation and the Richard King Mellon foundation. Its influence twenty years after its founding was significant, boasting \$25 million raised for this venture and becoming the model for other service foundations across the United States. But besides these institutional ties to its Pittsburgh's earlier Calvinist heritage of social service, what made the Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation distinctive was that the community development non-profits it supported were explicitly Protestant and contended that religion, even in its most orthodox form, ought to be a tool for basic service to nearby neighborhoods. In contrast with so many lobbying organizations like the Moral Majority with ties to evangelical churches that attempted to shape the civic arena by fighting for legislation involving controversial issues such as abortion or gay rights, the Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation has made service to one's local community its only task.

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<sup>490</sup> Michael Sider-Rose, *Taking the Gospel to the Point*, 42.

This ideal of service to Pittsburgh-area communities suffering from high rates of crime, poverty, and neglect, and all under the banner of conservative Protestantism, is the direct expression of the progressive-era model that Presbyterians sought to revive at mid-century. Its director John Stahl-Wert today describes the mission of the P.L.F. as ecumenical, involving “Protestant and Catholic, Orthodox and Evangelical, Pentecostal” and “Independent” expressions of Christian faith around the common belief that “Poverty is morally intolerable.” The strategy of the P.L.F. is to combine evangelism and social service on the model that Presbyterian minister Charles Reed Zahniser first envisioned in the early twentieth century; P.L.F. director John Stahl-Wert contends for the same, expressing the aspiration that “Broken, suffering, and sinful people” should be able to find “the healing and transformative grace of Christ” through the two-dozen specialized community organizations the P.L.F. sustains in the Pittsburgh area. These include training programs for local churches in the heavily-minority communities of Braddock, Rankin, and Swissvale, summer camps that link troubled youth with evangelical college students, many of them coming directly from the Calvinist-inspired Coalition for Christian Outreach ministries as well as Presbyterian-affiliated college campuses, to work at six-week summer camps located in Pittsburgh’s urban communities. There are hiking and rock-climbing ministries for urban middle-school and high-school students, organizations that bring together professional athletes with inner city youth, and several organizations for young people that together draw in over twenty thousand per year. Very much in the spirit of the progressive-era Pittsburgh Council of Churches, the P.L.F.’s City as Parish organization coordinates service efforts of suburban and urban congregations to facilitate communication and ensure no resources are wasted or efforts



overlap. The P.L.F. also holds regular conferences and meetings for “professional counselors, clergy, educators, health care professionals, law enforcement officers” and others committed to helping those fighting substance addictions.<sup>491</sup>

**Conclusion:** In 1950 with the failure of the Metropolitan Pittsburgh Church Study to come up with a clear solution for how the churches were to re-engage local affairs through evangelism and social service, it appeared to many Presbyterians in Pittsburgh that all hope was lost. The degree of exasperation that individuals like Clarence Macartney and many other area Presbyterians expressed at the lethargy in the churches and the seeming decline of social conditions as a result illustrate just how great the impasse seemed to them. If the 1930s and the Depression had helped Presbyterian Calvinists come to terms with their responsibilities to those in their midst, neither that decade nor the one that followed would provide for them a clear answer to the question of how they might act upon this heightened sense of duty. John Gerstner and others worked to convince their fellow Presbyterians that the evangelical movement of the forties and fifties possessed the energy and adaptability they needed for their own communities, but the arrival of Sam Shoemaker in 1955 gave them a local example to observe. Shoemaker was famous enough that his Pittsburgh Experiment attracted a wave of other evangelicals coming from outside Pittsburgh who each tried to make the city more famous for God than for steel in response to Shoemaker’s expressed vision. By the early sixties there were several of these specialized evangelical organizations targeting segments of the Pittsburgh population who might not normally enter a church building, but would talk to someone in their workplace or on the sidewalk who showed interest in their life.

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<sup>491</sup> *Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation* (Pittsburgh: P.L.F., 100 Ross Street, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Pittsburgh, PA 15219, [www.plf.org](http://www.plf.org)).

That Presbyterians began to design their own specialized outreach organizations with specifically Calvinist themes in the 1970s was not because they were just imitating evangelicals from outside the city. Rather it was the result of a much longer effort stretching back to the early twentieth century when Pittsburgh's Scotch-Irish Presbyterians began to rethink their own theological tradition. Wrestling with the meaning of sin and their duty to the public as not merely promoters of capitalism, but protectors of civic welfare, these Presbyterians concluded that it was the responsibility of the areas churches, first and foremost, to serve the public in practical ways. Evangelicals would eventually furnish the mechanism by which western Pennsylvania Calvinists would resume this task, but the desire for an activist church had been there since the early part of the century. The Calvinist tone of the region's current-day specialized organizations, particularly the theological ferment of the C.C.O. and the service focus of the P.L.F., illustrate how ideas have a way of traveling and evolving as different generations find new uses for them. Calvinism had a long life preceding the early twentieth century and might easily have died off had it not been for its ability to compel individuals and communities to ponder their own capacity for self-deception. This theme of sin and the redemption that accompanied it, coupled with the confidence that a sovereign God providentially oversees the unfolding of history, has spurred four Pittsburgh-area generations in the twentieth century to public service and may yet do the same in the future if history repeats itself.

## Conclusion

In summary, this story of Presbyterians in western Pennsylvania during the first half of the twentieth century illustrates that there are more than two types of ways that Americans have engaged in public life. Just as Americans' political behavior is far more complex than the two-party Democrat versus Republican system would suggest, Americans' religious behavior is more complex than simple conservative-liberal divides imply. In the religious realm, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh occupied a middle ground between the extremes of their day in a manner that defies easy categorization. Presbyterians in Pittsburgh were neither clearly of the conservative-evangelical, nor the liberal-mainline, bent and instead promoted a Calvinist outlook with qualities that both fundamentalists and modernists shared. With fundamentalists, western Pennsylvania Calvinists shared a devout respect for the authority of the Bible just as their forbears had, dating back to John Calvin. Yet with liberals they shared a deep appreciation for thoughtful cultural engagement and therefore would sustain an active role in the Social Gospel as it unfolded in Pittsburgh in the early decades of the twentieth century. Presbyterians' hearty embrace of both orthodoxy and social reform was a rare combination at the time, a distinction made even more unusual given the fact that they did not take clear sides in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the 1920s. Instead, Presbyterians in Pittsburgh appealed to what they believed was the better attributes of either opposing camp with the hopes of luring fundamentalists and modernists alike to some kind of common ground. This common ground was, Pittsburgh Calvinists believed, to use biblical ideas about sin and redemption as the basis for social

reform; this was, in effect, Presbyterians attempt to correct the heterodoxy of the liberals and the separatism of the fundamentalists.

This story of Pittsburgh Presbyterianism in the first half of the twentieth century also serves to illustrate how varied and complex American political behavior has been. By all outward appearances Pittsburgh Presbyterians of the Scotch-Irish lineage might seem to be nothing more than robber barons, denouncing radicalism of all kinds and ruthlessly crushing strikes. Critics furthermore pointed to the Scotch-Irish Presbyterian elite's rhetoric against labor unions, socialism, and communism, as well as their open support of Republican party candidates, as evidence that they represented a pure and uncomplicated form of pro-business ideology. There is certainly much evidence to support these claims, but there was a whole other side to this community that critics did not see, or chose to ignore. Ample evidence demonstrates that Pittsburgh's Presbyterians were more than just self-interested capitalists. The outrage of Presbyterian Oliver McClintock and the United Presbyterian Ministerial Association in the 1880s and 1890s against municipal corruption in Pittsburgh was an early indicator of a social conscience among these industrialists. The Social Gospel activism of the United Presbyterian church in the first decade of the twentieth century, Pittsburgh's most intensely Calvinist denomination, further illustrates their sense of public duty. The shift in perspective that pro-business Presbyterian Church members made beginning in 1910, their support of the Social Gospel in Pittsburgh thereafter, and the expansion of this social service ethic in the following decades all illustrate that these ideological conservatives also had a keen sense of responsibility. In sum, the social activism of this pro-capitalist, industrial elite

demonstrates again that the American political and ideological spectrum is far more complex and variegated than the two-party model suggests.

Evidence today also suggests that the culture wars thesis has its limitations and particularly shows how Calvinism has continued to inspire conservative Protestants to engage culture in thoughtful ways. The Calvinist subculture in western Pennsylvania today certainly is evidence that some conservative evangelicals do not conform to the populist, anti-intellectual political style of the religious right. The Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation, for instance, oversees non-profit organizations in western Pennsylvania that are explicitly conservative and Protestant in their theology, but which also provide practical service to the region's most vulnerable residents. This foundation, one should note, does not invest its resources into lobbying Congressional lawmakers and does not issue inflammatory statements about controversial topics such as gay marriage, abortion, or stem cell research. In contrast with traditionalists in the culture wars, Calvinists in western Pennsylvania today consciously avoid cultural politics and instead seek to serve the public on a local level and in practical ways. This type of service benefits Pittsburgh's civic life in tangible ways and stands in contrast to typical evangelical right-leaning politics, but the media overlooks such initiatives and gives attention to more controversial, and extreme, evangelicals on the political right.

Calvinism today also has influenced the manner by which other conservative Protestants beyond western Pennsylvania approach civic life in a non-controversial, service-oriented, manner. For instance, the Center for Public Justice in Washington, D.C., is a religious-based policy-forming institution which owes a clear debt to Dutch statesman and Calvinist theologian from the late nineteenth century, Abraham Kuyper.

With ties to conservative Calvinists in western Pennsylvania and to Dutch-descended Calvinists in western Michigan, the Center for Public Justice promotes policies that reflect a similar Calvinist outlook that that which has prevailed in Pittsburgh for over a century. This think tank has no clear ideological perspective that easily aligns it with either major political party, but instead promotes a distinctly Calvinist understanding of government and society. This agenda advocates limited government, but a government that nonetheless referees the various “mediating institutions” in society, such as the churches, community groups, and educational institutions, so that each can best serve the public’s needs on a local level without infringing on the rights of others.<sup>492</sup> James Skillen, the Center for Public Justice’s director, has built his approach to public life along with others who likewise base their thinking on Abraham Kuyper’s Calvinism.<sup>493</sup>

Besides these specifically political forms of activism among conservative Protestants today, Calvinism has also provided the theological and philosophical foundations by which most of the nation’s conservative evangelical colleges approach teaching and scholarship. Educators in these colleges, of which there are 102 in the United States belonging to the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, describe the goal of the Christian liberal arts college as to “integrate faith and learning.” The underpinnings of this “integration model” are decidedly Calvinist, assuming that Providence is leading history towards the “ultimate restoration of all things.” Therefore,

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<sup>492</sup> James W. Skillen, *In Pursuit of Justice: Christian-Democratic Explorations* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004); Daniel R. Coats, Glenn C. Loury, James W. Skillen, *Mending Fences: Renewing Justice Between Government and Civil Society*, Kuyper Lecture Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Publishing, 1998); Rockne McCarthy, James Skillen, and William A. Harper, *Disestablishment a Second Time: Genuine Pluralism for American Schools* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982).

<sup>493</sup> Richard Mouw, *Political Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1973); Richard Mouw, *Politics and the Biblical Drama* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1976), Richard Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: 1983); cited in Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994).

educators in the Christian colleges today attempt to apply biblical principles to each of their academic disciplines.<sup>494</sup> The influence of this Calvinist model of learning has been significant and journalists have begun to take note. In an *Atlantic Monthly* article published in 2000, professor of political science at Boston College Alan Wolfe wrote about how evangelical colleges are helping to bring about what he calls “the opening of the evangelical mind.” Wolfe observed students at several Christian colleges and concluded that their discussion of political and social issues was “vigorous, intelligent, and informed” and therefore not what he expected. Furthermore, Wolfe noticed that these students were not the advocates of a Christian America that he assumed they would be, but rather believed that pluralism, a respect for all religious faiths in the public square, was the most ethical and prudent approach.<sup>495</sup>

Wolfe described this push by evangelical-Christian institutions to “create a life of the mind” as significant because, according to a 1996 survey, 29 percent of Americans could be described as conservative Protestants. “Even if a relatively small number of them” attend evangelical colleges, Wolfe concluded, “the rest of America cannot continue to write off conservative Christians as hopelessly out of touch with modern American values.”<sup>496</sup> More recently, journalists have noticed how evangelical college students from both religious and secular colleges and universities have begun to embrace what some have called “a new social gospel.” In the November 13, 2006, issue of *Newsweek*, former speechwriter and adviser to president Bush Michael Gerson describes how “young evangelicals on campuses from Wheaton to Harvard” view Bono, singer for

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<sup>494</sup> Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen, *Scholarship and Christian Faith: Enlarging the Conversation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 15-29.

<sup>495</sup> Alan Wolfe, “The Opening of the Evangelical Mind,” *Atlantic Monthly* 286 (October, 2000): 55-72.

<sup>496</sup> Alan Wolfe, “The Opening of the Evangelical Mind,” 55-72.

the rock band U2 and prominent activist on behalf of those suffering from AIDS in Africa, as their “model of Christian activism.” “Many evangelicals,” Gerson writes, “have begun elbowing against the narrowness of the religious right” in a trend that he and others view as a sign of “political maturity.” Gerson goes on to predict that a new faith-based agenda for evangelicals will more likely involve issues such as global health, and race and poverty at home.<sup>497</sup> Lisa Miller also contributed to this issue of *Newsweek* and cites statistics that 37 percent of Americans still believe the religion plays too small a role in public life, but that an increasing number of evangelicals, who comprise a high percentage of that 37 percent, are “exhausted by divisive wedge politics.” These evangelicals, she notes, are “embracing a wider-ranging agenda, one that emphasizes reaching out to the poor and disenfranchised.”<sup>498</sup>

Even if it should take several decades for evangelicals to embrace these trends, it is significant that conservative Protestants are beginning to recover, as Miller describes it, the agenda of “the great [evangelical] political activists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the abolitionists, the suffragists, and the advocates of prison reform.”<sup>499</sup> Presbyterians and Calvinists in western Pennsylvania have shared many of these same priorities in their efforts throughout the twentieth century, and have based their activism on an explicitly Reformed model. Conservative evangelicals today who are beginning to leave behind the populist, anti-intellectual political style they inherited from the militancy of the fundamentalist movement in favor of a more service-oriented agenda owe a debt to

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<sup>497</sup> Former Bush speechwriter and adviser Michael Gerson, “A New Social Gospel,” *Newsweek* (November 13, 2006), 40-43.

<sup>498</sup> Lisa Miller, “An Evangelical Identity Crisis: Sex or Social Justice? The war between the religious right and believers who want to go further,” *Newsweek* (November 13, 2006), 30-37

<sup>499</sup> Miller, “An Evangelical Identity Crisis,” 34.



Calvinism; and there certainly are other Protestant traditions that have influenced this shift in evangelical thinking about public life. But the larger significance of these changes is that conservative evangelicals do not, nor have they ever, been of one political disposition. Even though the religious right has been powerful in recent decades and reflects the views of a large segment of the evangelical population, the religious right and its leaders do not speak for all evangelicals.

It is too often the case that these dissenting voices, in this case conservative Protestants who may be centrist or left-leaning in their politics, do not receive media attention. This oversight is because these moderate and liberal evangelicals do not conform to the two-party oppositional culture wars model that so many Americans assume accurately depicts the full range of political and religious behavior. Just as it was the case in the early decades of the twentieth century as Presbyterian moderates did not conform to either the image of the fundamentalist or the modernist, the standard robber baron or liberal reformer, so it is the case today that many do not fit into neat categories of “red state” and “blue state.” Coming to terms with the great variety and complexity of Americans religious and political expressions will help historians correct their understanding of the past. But perhaps more importantly, it will help Americans today come to a better understanding those they differ from on cultural and social issues. From this more informed understanding of those on the opposite side of the ideological or religious spectrum, it may be then possible for Americans to find ways to promote the kind of practical service to the poor and disadvantaged that all ethical citizens can agree is of value to the nation.

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