THE EMBATTLED LENS:
LOOKING FOR PERSPECTIVE IN EVANGELICAL SUBCULTURAL IDENTITY NARRATIVES

by

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ABSTRACT

STEPHEN VINCENT BOAZ. The Embattled Lens:
Looking for Perspective in Evangelical Subcultural Identity Narratives.
(Under the direction of DR. KENT BRINTNALL)

This paper primarily examines how white conservative Evangelicals engage narrative constructions of identity through the use an embattled lens. The paper does also consider two other Evangelical groups (black Evangelicals—largely civil rights leaders—as well as white Emergent Evangelicals) both of whom could be understood as positioning themselves *against* conservative white Evangelical narrative identity stories in their own delineations to determine whether the hallmarks of the embattled lens may manifest outside conservative subculture. The paper expounds upon sociologist Christian Smith's field-defining understanding of American Evangelicalism's embattlement with the nonevangelical world wherein he described Evangelicals as thriving due to a sense of engaged conflict, distinction, tension, and threat with the wider populace. This paper establishes a narrative depiction of embattlement which privileges a literary analysis of Evangelical rhetorical strategies and storytelling mechanisms to determine a subcultural tradition of non-scriptural embattled narrative arcs. This embattled narrative is heavily reliant upon and implicitly reproduced through three recurrent motifs: the *reclamation* of a deeply mythologized America which they see founded as a Christian nation, the *authenticity* of Evangelical Christianity as opposed to either other Christianities or the false teachings of a secular world, and lastly, a quixotic version of *liberty*, especially where it pertains to the free exercise of Evangelicals at the concurrent expense of other identity groups.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to the love of my life, partner, and beautiful wife: Ashley. You supported a chef who suddenly had the crazy idea for a career change, put me through undergrad and graduate school consecutively, and gave me children all along the way. I never imagined I would be here, and I know I would not be without you. Thank you for believing in me.

To my children, Emery, Iris, and Noah: Daddy appreciates your patience. I love you, and I dedicate a large part of this project to each of you as well. I wish Daddy had spent far fewer late nights in the office with his nose in a book. I can only hope that this education gives me an opportunity to give all of you a better life than I otherwise could have. That was ultimately the point of this whole endeavor.

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Part I: Introduction and Methodology

Who is an Evangelical?

This project is ultimately about Evangelicals and their narrative engagement with the outside world, but before we can begin to understand its purpose or depth, we must first ask a seemingly innocuous question, one which is actually loaded with complications: precisely who are we talking about? Who is an Evangelical? The answer is rather amorphous as the Evangelical term encompasses beneath its umbrella a wealth of Protestant traditions including various Baptists, Presbyterians, Pentecostals, Methodists, Charismatics, and many others—all "contained" within this single, trans-denominational subcultural identity.[1] The reality is, there are a plethora of groups whom scholars of Religious Studies might potentially define as Evangelical, and even Evangelicals themselves dedicate significant narrative resources to this formative exercise.[2] Perhaps even more intriguing, however, is the fact that despite this seeming diversity of opinion and heterogeneity amongst its divergent traditions, Evangelicals tend toward an almost singular "subcultural construction of identity."[3] According to sociologist of religion Christian Smith, despite potential deviances in marginal practices, these groups banded together on cornerstone issues to form morally orienting subcultures by which to organize their identities against larger societal foils utilizing the cultural tools of their constructed categories and distinctive frameworks.[4] Effectively they find the ties that bind them against "the other" far more significant than those which drive them apart.

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[1] Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*, (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1-15.
[2] Ibid., 15-19.
[3] Ibid., 89-119.
[4] Ibid., 120.

To further complicate our quandary of "who is an Evangelical?," however, we turn to scholar Kristin Kobes Du Mez who has observed that, within the context of subcultural identity, "'Evangelicalism can mean many things, including a 'theological category,' a 'consumer culture,' a 'white religious brand,' and 'a diverse global movement.'"[5] For the purposes of my project (and perhaps the larger field of Religious Studies), I propose that this list should be amended to include Evangelicalism as a "narrative practice" (or perhaps more accurately a narrative genre). I suggest this because I have observed that Evangelicalism as a subcultural identity demonstrates a penchant for specific storytelling maneuvers that rely substantially on subcultural understandings of metanarratives (that are implicitly understood and reproduced by its audience). What struck me as even more peculiar was that these subcultural narratives tended to reach far beyond the bounds of their ordinary scriptural arcs.[6] So, while one might expect Evangelicals to implicitly interpret and reproduce metanarratives that relied upon scriptural constructions such as Adam's fall from Grace (as contained in the Genesis story of the garden of Eden),[7] I observed that Evangelicals were constructing and disseminating an extracanonical body of stories that were certainly informed by the Bible, and yet did not inherently depend upon its narrative arcs.

To that end, rather than focus on a strictly definitional approach to Evangelicalism, my project instead borrows from James Bielo's dialogical approach to the subject whereby we focus less on compartmentalizing the groups that make up Evangelicalism, preferring to center our attention more upon the shared dialogs that engage them.[8] I found this approach incredibly

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[5] (Quoted in) Lauren Kerby, *Saving History: How White Evangelicals Tour the Nation's Capital and Redeem a Christian America*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 9-10.
[6] Ibid., 16-20.
[7] Ibid.
[8] James Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity*, (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 197-202.

valuable in my work as particular oratories were so frequently *recurrent* regardless of geographic proximity for the case study participants. While I share Bielo's fascination with language and dialog, I structure my preoccupation slightly askew; I am more interested in the *stories* shared by Evangelical communities. This is not to say that these stories are not centered in Evangelical dialogs or even that such discourses do not form the crux of their narrative composition, but rather that I am merely more focused upon *narrative elements* as opposed to the discursive subjects. For me, the preoccupation is less *what* are Evangelicals talking about and more *how* are they saying it? What are the thematic elements in Evangelical narratives, and how did they become so pervasive? How did stories beyond the Bible itself seemingly become so prolifically understood? Is there something inherent in the language? Is it the subculture itself? I am uncertain whether my research can provide such insights, but I believe it opens the floor for such potentially important dialogs in future projects, provided we can of course create a meaningful picture of at least one of these deterministic Evangelical narrative typologies.

As such, while there are a number of significant stories and story types which feature heavily in Evangelical narratives—with arguably the most well researched being the Testimonial (or conversion narrative)—for the purposes, of this project, what really intrigued me was the Evangelical delineation of embattlement. What does *their* vision of the contemporary persecuted Christian look like in the modern world? How do they present this tale and why? Smith first described embattlement in his foundational work as a social mechanism that allows Evangelicals to thrive in modernity through a their sense of direct, oppositional engagement with the secular and nonevangelical worlds vis-à-vis distinction, conflict, tension, and threat.[9] Scholars have heavily relied on Smith's understanding of embattlement since his work's inception, and while I

[9] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 121

make use of it as a building block of my own analysis, his work was insufficient for what I ultimately desired. I wanted to know more: what does embattlement actually look like? What are its key features? And perhaps most importantly, how does it manifest *for the embattled* (i.e., how do Evangelicals narrate their own claims to and positionality within this framework of oppression)? What's *their* story?

With this purpose in mind, I began an investigation of six case studies, each of which engaged a particular point of tension between Evangelical subculture and the broader American mainstream. The case studies themselves served to delimit the sample size and create a more concrete definition for the functional purpose of homogeneity in comparative analysis (as much as one can achieve with Evangelical groups anyhow). Five of the case studies focus primarily on white Evangelicals who label themselves as "theologically conservative," meaning they display tendencies towards Bibliocentrism especially supporting inerrancy, a Christocentric eschatology, a significant emphasis on activism, and a particular reverence for conversion (being "born again").[10] However, also prevalent amongst these theological conservatives are narrative dialogs revolving around gender roles, sexuality, education, public schools, race, environmentalism, politics, cultural critique, and abortion increasingly, among others.[11] In this sense, when I use the term *Evangelical* throughout the project, I am primarily referencing the particular groups for whom these above features comprise both the locus of their ideological structures as well as the focus of their specific narrative preoccupations. Although I cannot necessarily address or touch upon all of these discourses within the scope of this project, I do thematize many of these elements throughout this project as part of an Evangelical narrative dialog. I will draw attention

[10] Kerby, *Saving History*, 9; Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, 197-202.
[11] Susan Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics*, (Princeton University Press, 2000), 17-24; Jessica Johnson *Biblical Porn: Affect, Labor, and Pastor Mark Driscoll's Evangelical Empire*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 27; Kerby, *Saving History*, 9-14.

to these discursive elements as we move throughout our case studies in crafting the embattled lens, a narrative point of contact through which these conservative white Evangelicals engage contentious (for them) aspects of outlying American culture.

My sixth case study offers something of a caveat. James Bielo's *Emerging Evangelicals* presents a group of white Evangelicals who specifically construct their identity narratives in *diametric opposition* to conservative Evangelicalism.[12] My purpose in including this group in my project was to discover if my suppositions were located entirely within *conservative* white Evangelical identity subculture, or did an embattled lens have something to offer an analysis of other groups? Do the features of embattlement manifest in other narratives, perhaps even those of a group that does not present itself as so readily embroiled in conflict, and in fact expresses explicit disdain for that very named facet of conservative Evangelical subculture? Is there something about embattlement that is, or perhaps *has become*, intrinsic to white Evangelical identity narrative? In that same vein of reasoning, Ansley Quiros' *God with Us* provides a brief glimpse into black Evangelicals' narratives and the rhetoric of civil rights leaders.[13] Although the brevity of such a sample size admittedly makes for a somewhat problematic analysis, Quiros' inclusion of said narratives as a juxtaposition against racist and segregationist theology to which she devotes most of her analysis of a post Reconstruction South provides too good an opportunity for some comparative investigation, however brief. We shall likewise examine in this case (and at least begin to speculate) whether any features of the embattled lens, as I shall outline it, might manifest *outside* of white Evangelical communities as well.

[12] Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, 5-16.
[13] Ansley Quiros, *God with Us: Lived Theology and the Freedom Struggle in Americus, Georgia, 1942–1976*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

Thus, bearing all this in mind, we finally come to the crux of the project: what, then, is the embattled lens? As I delved into my six case studies, initially relying primarily upon Smith's basic understanding of Evangelical embattlement with the larger American culture as an engaged air of distinction, conflict, tension, and threat, I noticed peculiar patterns emerging across my case studies. These unexpected patterns lifted the veil off embattlement as it were, illuminating an overarching narrative presentation of recurrent rhetoric, motifs, story elements, and narrative themes that were surprisingly congruous, and more importantly, almost implicitly *understood* throughout the Evangelical subculture, seemingly regardless of any potential localized divides. Evangelicals *knew* both how to craft these embattled narratives and how to interpret them.[14] So, the focus for our project then becomes threefold: what is this embattled narrative, what are its key features, and how is it utilized? None of the answers are discrete, but instead each relies on an informs the others.

Firstly, I propose that embattlement narratives are ultimately *reclamation* stories. They presuppose America as a Christian nation, but more specifically, a conservative white Evangelical Christian nation. This trend held consistently throughout the case studies I examined and seemed to not only cause significant tension and abrasiveness for the Evangelicals who felt as though "their country" had been stolen from them, but also aided in cohesively bonding the conservative white Evangelical subculture around this idea of reclamation. This narrative aspect manifests particularly strongly through their use of language surrounding the ongoing "culture wars" and their tensions with the "mainstream," be it in the form of liberals, secular elites, or any of their host of other narrative boogeymen. Consider the following example from one Smith's informants (simply credited as "a Baptist man"):

[14] Kerby, *Saving History*, 16-19.

> America was founded on Christian principles. Some of our Founding Fathers were maybe immoral in some of their lifestyles, but they as a whole founded our nation on "one nation under God." They believed in a supreme being, in God Almighty, and they wanted our nation to espouse those values and beliefs. They put it into our Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and on the currency. They made it an indelible imprint on our society.[15]

This informant has blended multiple historical assertions into a seamless singular narrative that all assure him that the Founding Fathers desired America to construct and maintain *his* version of Christianity from its onset, and he feels a sense of loss because that does not seem to be the case. This bereavement permeates white Evangelical's sense of embattlement, creating a sort of longing that sees them consistently frame themselves as having been stripped of a birthright. As we move through the case studies, I will argue that this longing and desire for reclamation of a Christian America is intrinsic to an embattled perspective.

Secondly, I contend that *authenticity* is a key component to the structures of embattled subcultures. Across my cases studies, dialogs of authenticity emerged with as much frequency as those of "displaced heritage." Based upon observations within my case studies, I argue that white Evangelicals employ authenticity in either one of two ways: as a nearly synonymous stand-in for orthodoxy *or* as a linguistic surrogate for "Truth" as they envision it. Although it might appear that these two conceptual apparatuses are similar enough at first glance, and they certainly share a degree of overlap to be sure, the critical difference in their functionality arises from an inspection of their application vis-à-vis in-group vs outgroup dynamics. When conservative white Evangelicals employ authenticity narratives as a determinant of orthodoxy, they are

[15] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 137.

positioning themselves and their identity subculture *against nonevangelicals* as much as they are the broader secular American culture or any otherwise competing religious institutions. Smith notes that

> indeed, when evangelicals use the word "Christian," most likely they are instinctively meaning *Evangelical* Christian—or some approximation thereof, such as "real," "born again," or "genuine" Christian, as they might alternatively say. Generally, all of the others, including liberal and mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and various participants in what some evangelicals call "cultural Christianity" are spoken of as Christian only as a broad religious classification (as opposed to Muslims or secularists, for example). But they are usually not what Evangelicals are talking about when they say "Christian" in ordinary parlance. For well-known boundaries distinguish, in their own minds, Evangelicals as the real or most faith kind of Christians from all the rest.[16]

Smith's observation demonstrates a clear attempt from Evangelicals to demarcate themselves from "other Christians" through acts of tension and embattlement. However, this contention is not merely limited to Smith's analytical or secondary juxtaposition of Evangelicals as framing themselves against the rest of Christianity; authenticity as orthodoxy likewise manifests in the language and narrative constructions of the embattled narratives which white conservative Evangelicals consistently expressed as part of their boundary delineations throughout my case studies. Consider the following from an unnamed Presbyterian man:

> There is a distinction between what I would call mainstream Christianity—many of the larger mainline denomination—and an Evangelical church. One of those distinctions

[16] Ibid., 124.

> would be that Evangelicals try to maintain a Biblical worldview following the inerrant scriptures. But other churches sometimes ordain clergy who are clearly practicing what scripture calls sin and have no remorse or intention of stopping. First thing I look for in a church is their stand on scripture. Do they see scripture as God's word? Does the preaching follow that example?[17]

The conflict herein, as this Evangelical adherent constructs it, is an issue of orthodoxy, in this case the inerrancy of scriptures and the legitimacy of church leadership. Such narratives emerged time and again throughout the various cases studies; some, like the above, seemed to indicate moderate levels of tension and engagement with outside forces while others (as we shall see later on) professed an overt vitriol and desire to outright attack those who dared question the "proper" authenticity of orthodox Evangelical interpretation and ergo subcultural identity. In these cases, to question their authenticity on such matters was tantamount to questioning "who they are" and perhaps their validity as people.

Authenticity as "Truth" presents an entirely different sort of engagement for white conservative Evangelicals. This dialog is less concerned with how Evangelical subculture understands its place within the broader spectrum of Christianities and more with how it conceives of itself in the context of American culture, especially mainstream secular America as they perceive it. In this context, secular American culture is living a lie, lost in an illusion, and is otherwise detached from "reality." Only Evangelicals know and possess the absolute "Truth," as to the natural order of things, and it is their duty to affirm and fight for this Truth regardless of potential resistance.[18] Smith maintains that Evangelicals are particularly opposed to modernism, post-modernism, and relativism precisely because these philosophies almost diametrically

[17] Ibid., 125.
[18] Ibid., 126.

oppose the possibility of an objective or absolute Truth.[19] Consider the following from one of Smith's Pentecostal informants:

> Relativism is a problem, where everyone does their own thing and makes up their own rules, and there are no absolute truths or values, and it is thought anti-intellectual to be otherwise. Christians need to be equipped to have answers to that, to learn, to study the issues, to know God's word, to be bold and speak out, and not be intimidated and impact the culture. Because we have the Truth.[20]

Not only do we see Evangelicals constructing their narrative identity in direct opposition to secular culture, utilizing key language of conflict (such as "intimidation"), but the adherent also focuses heavily on this idea of Truth, of an objective and absolute reality. However, this is not simply a matter of imagining persecution; this is an instance of living side-by-side while inhabiting entirely different worlds. Evangelicals cannot fathom a world devoid of an objective Truth, and they appear genuinely incredulous that the larger American culture is somehow casting *them* as the anti-intellectual demographic when, as they see it, it is everyone outside who their ranks who live in active denial of objective reality. As we move through our case studies, I shall argue that white conservative Evangelicals alternatively construct their group image through embattled engagements with broader Christian culture and American culture as either authenticity as orthodoxy or authenticity as Truth dependent upon whom it is they are distinguishing themselves against. However, in either case, the overarching theme of maintaining an "authentic" Evangelical self always emerges as a narrative priority.

Finally, the last key feature which undergirds all embattlement narratives is *liberty*. Conservative white Evangelicals showcase a particular preoccupation with expressions of

[19] Ibid., 126-127.
[20] Ibid., 127.

religious freedom, one which typically shares significant overlap with their motifs of authenticity as Truth (as well as those reclamation). However, liberty maintains a distinct thematic place in their narrative identity hierarchy due to its application structure. As above where Smith observed that Evangelicals tend to implicitly refer to members of *their* identity group when using the identifier "Christian," I intend to argue that when they indicate desires for religious freedom and expression, it is relegated almost exclusively to members of that constituency (i.e., *their* in-group). Competing expressions (or alternatively disavowals) of Evangelicalism in the American public sphere are in their view then direct attacks upon their subcultural identity and even their individual liberties. One of Smith's Presbyterian consultants offers a glimpse into this modality of thinking with the following:

> There are two opposing views: a Christian worldview and a secular worldview. And one is going to be crowded out and denied their freedom to live by the standards they hold to. They might say "well just leave us alone," but the thing is they won't leave the Christian community alone. They are impinging on us. There is a war going on, and when you're in warfare, you battle to take ground, not just hold it. They're not just trying to hold ground; they are trying to take ground, which is our right to live in a Christian society. There are a lot of people that would deny us any rights. They aren't passive, they are active.[21]

Notice the informant claims his identity group is being "crowded out," "impinged on," and "denied freedoms," as well as claiming that an ambiguous "many" would like to see his group deprived of "any rights." This narrative framework much parallels the devices utilized by persecuted or marginalized minority groups in their struggles for freedom, and as we move into our case studies, we shall see more direct evidence of how conservative white evangelicals co-

[21] Ibid., 143.

opted such narrative strategies to reframe themselves as victims and exiles in pursuit of a liberty they believe is afforded the broader American culture but denied them.[22] Although the chief concern of this narrative presentation appears to be religious and personal liberty, we still see evidence of both the reclamation narrative ("our right to live in a Christian society") and the authenticity narrative ("live by the standards they hold to") in its telling with each simply reframed ever so slightly from the context of persecution and resisting oppression so as to better suit their accompanying of the liberty motif.

With this theoretical framework in mind, we shall move into the case studies. I will move linearly through six case studies involving Evangelicalism's dynamic and somewhat tenuous engagement with various aspects of modern American culture including but not limited to: environmentalism/climate change, politics/language, race, sexuality/gender roles, and Christian nationalism/heritage. Five of my six case studies primarily focus on conservative white Evangelicals and their construction of embattled narratives; however, my examination will also explore two caveats in the form of black Evangelical civil rights leaders and Emergent Evangelicals. Lastly, it is important to bear in mind that these narrative depictions, the thematic constructs which comprise embattlement are hardly discrete categories, but rather quite often function as merged motifs which inform each other and outright blur their boundaries. Narratives of religious liberty are intimately related to an understanding of the reclamation (a Christian nation is one free from outside oppression, i.e., Evangelicals rule). Authenticity is likewise profoundly vital for liberty constructs for the Evangelical can never be free if they are denied proper expression. Each of these narrative combinations are intricate, virtually seamless, and often occurring simultaneously to the effect that I will not necessarily address every instance in

[22] Ibid., 140-143; Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 23-24; Kerby, *Saving History*, 66.

all of our examples, nor could I without greatly exceeding the bounds of this project's time and scope. However, I would venture a guess that close readers, upon grasping the embattled lens, may well encounter new iterations upon each rereading of an informant's dialog or narrative discourses. Such is the nature of literary analysis. That all being said, we shall now move into our first case study: Robin Veldman's *The Gospel of Climate Skepticism.*[23]

[23] Robin Globus Veldman, *The Gospel of Climate Skepticism: Why Evangelical Christians Oppose Action on Climate Change*, (University of California Press, 2019).

Part II: Case Studies

Embattled with Climate Change

In this study, scholar Robin Veldman actually relies on Smith to argue that Evangelicals position themselves against climate action due to embattled perspectives.[24] Veldman's central argument begins with some historical perspective on the embattled mentality within Evangelical subculture. She notes that from the Evangelical community's perspective, one of secular American culture's most egregious offenses originally stemmed from the 1925 Scopes Trial, a highly publicized court case that tested the law against teaching evolution in public schools.[25] The Scopes Trial was just the beginning, however, as in the 1960s, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Engel v. Vitale* against state sanctioned prayers in schools before then barring compulsory Bible reading in *Abington School District v. Schempp*.[26] Evangelicals' worst fears were gradually being realized, beginning with Scopes. A broader secular culture was progressively taking over their public institutions and literally removing the centerpiece of their faith, the cornerstone of their identity. These rulings not only caused Evangelicals to eye secular culture with suspicion and derision, but to then equate education itself, which was now devoid of their chief metric of absolute Truth and only connection to objective reality, with extreme distrust. Furthermore, they held academics, the secular elites as they called them, as almost wholly responsible for this predicament as they were the ones who purported these Darwinian, anti-Christian views that were ultimately ruining education and America.[27]

What does this have to do with climate change? The reductionist answer is that effectively, removing prayer, the Bible, and ergo God from schools fostered a mindset within the

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[24] Ibid., 86-113; Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 61-75.
[25] Veldman, *The Gospel of Climate Skepticism*, 92.
[26] Ibid., 94; Quiros, *God with Us*, 136-138.
[27] Ibid., 91-95.

conservative white Evangelical community that those in education were A) against them and seeking to undermine the Christian worldview, and B) completely and utterly farcical in their contentions. How could they possibly be trusted with anything if they believed in *evolution* and taking God out of schools? Since climate change was being advanced by the same minds and community, in their view the secular, scientific, and academic elite, Evangelicals naturally came to view it and environmentalists with much cynicism.[28] But what does this actually look like? How does this embattlement narrative manifest in terms of authenticity, liberty, and reclamation? One of Veldman's informants, a Pastor Richard from a Southern Baptist church has this to say on the matter:

> You'll have an idea come out of Hollywood or out of the world, and it'll be so far to the left, that we [Christians] jerk to the right. . . . So, there are people who don't have our leanings or our beliefs in who God is and morality, and they seem to be the ones who champion this who idea of the stewardship of the earth.[29]

Pastor Richard utilizes two different Evangelical colloquial stand-ins for secular American culture: first Hollywood and second "the world." The latter tends to suffice as the Evangelical theological term for secular culture, usually in a capacity that connotes antagonism or direct opposition to their own subcultural identity. The former term seems to imply that Evangelicals conceive widespread popular culture as portrayed in film, television, etc. as indicative of a larger cultural homogeny and consensus. In either case, what is apparent is that Pastor Richard unequivocally associates environmentalism with a secular worldview, and therefore in direct confrontation with his own sentiments. Secondly, Pastor Richard seems to suggest that these

[28] Ibid., 97-113; Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 142-143.
[29] Veldman, *The Gospel of Climate Skepticism*, 99 (ellipsis in original).

environmental leanings are a result of those secular proponents lacking Evangelical beliefs and morality structures.

This is a prime example of the authenticity as Truth narrative. Pastor Richard does not occupy the same space as those he positions himself against, and no amount of "evidence" can change that, especially when to his view, the evidence would be suspect. Pastor Richard envisions environmentalism not simply in terms of conflict and tension, but of ethical morality. The secular stewards of the earth cannot possibly be correct because they are championing the wrong causes and not living in an objective reality. As Pastor Richard, and other conservative white Evangelicals see it, only they hold the keys to the authentic Truth, and thus, when he conceptualizes climate change as nonthreatening, it becomes so; however, in the same narrative move, those who insist the opposite then position themselves as *the threat* because they oppose Truth and objective reality; the opposition *creates* "the jerk to the right" through *their actions*. The Evangelical response is almost autonomic.

In another Pastor's testimony, authenticity as Truth blurs the boundaries of authenticity as orthodoxy. Dixon from a nondenominational Evangelical church offers the following:

> I'm not a scientist, but I do know this: I know that going back to the scripture, I know that God promises He's never going to flood the earth again and destroy it. The next time He comes it'll be different. . . . I know how the story ends. It doesn't end with us drowning in glaciers or anything like that.[30]

In this case, the embattled perspective against climate change still presents in authenticity as Truth. Dixon is committed to distinguishing himself from the secular world with his knowledge, and furthermore his *certainty* in the constructions of the Evangelical identity. However,

[30] Ibid., 102 (ellipsis in original).

authenticity as orthodoxy begins to surface in Dixon's narrative construction as well. Dixon affirms concepts of Bibliocentric inerrancy in his claim that strategically position his identity subculture in a dialog of wider Evangelical discourse. Not only is Dixon certain that he has the Truth of how this world's story ends, and ergo no need to worry, but he also shores up his theological contentions with the moves "God promises He's never going to flood the earth again and destroy it." Dixon is not only demarcating his group from secular culture, but he is also drawing lines in the sand for those inauthentic Christians who might stand with the nonbelievers whilst using clear and concise storytelling maneuvers to showcase precisely how his version is authentically viable when juxtaposed against competing entities.

Although the majority of Veldman's informants focus on constructing environmentalists and climate change in an "us vs them" narrative that lends itself quite easily to Smith's interpretive mechanisms of conflict, tension, and engagement, many of their contributions lean more toward the authenticity end of my theoretical paradigm. That being said, I would like to devote some attention to the other schematics within my framework as well. To that end, let us examine the following from Kenneth, a member of an Independent Baptist church:

> Global warming is an ideology to control you and me. It's really not anything to do with the environment. It is an ideology, a way of thinking that says: there's a way to live that's better than the way we're living now. . . . I believe it's an idea that's a dangerous idea, that will take us further from God and further from the way America has been in the past.[31]

Kenneth's assertion offers us a glimpse at two simultaneous features of embattlement narratives. The first is liberty. Note that Kenneth claims that global warming is a mechanism designed

[31] Ibid., 108 (ellipsis in original).

primarily to control "you and me." Kenneth's misgivings regarding this perceived usurper of control encroaching from the outside are particularly poignant since, as discussed earlier, conservative white Evangelicals display a peculiar aversion to any entity which they determine to be infringing upon their individual freedoms. In this particular case, because Kenneth identifies global warming as an instrument for disseminating ideological control, accepting its tenets is tantamount to restricting his religious liberty to practice Christianity. In the embattled perspective, the two concepts are mutually exclusive. Freedom can only then be successfully attained or exhibited by confirmation of the Truth of a conservative Evangelical worldview; acknowledging any other viewpoint then effectively requires *submission* to a partisan entity or agency who wishes to subvert and undermine the conservative Evangelical worldview. To submit to this outside authority is to forego ideological control, thereby simultaneously restricting their religious liberty whilst likewise committing the far more egregious sin of diminishing their authenticity, effectively denying the Bible and therefore God himself. Veldman seems to partially confirm this analysis, noting the inherent *wrongness* with which Evangelicals tend to regard climate change, and more importantly climate change *activists*, observing that some conservative white Evangelicals even equate submitting to this environmentalist control as commensurate with converting to paganism and worshipping the earth.[32]

Kenneth's final line warrants attention as well where he claims that this "dangerous idea" will "take us further from God and further from the way America has been in the past." Here we see the reclamation narrative in action. Kenneth is drawing on white Evangelical subculture's sense of displaced heritage that undergirds its image of embattled identity. Not only is America moving further from God, in part due to the advent or proliferation of cultural reforms such as

[32] Ibid., 120-122.

climate change, but this movement is a drastic difference from the American past as Kenneth and the broader Evangelical subculture envisions it. The idea is dangerous not simply for what it removes from the American culture (God, Christianity), but because of what it *takes* from Kenneth and his conservative white Evangelical brethren: ownership of a Christian America. Part of the intrinsic narrative resistance relies implicitly on this deeply felt desire within the subculture to return to this idealized to past, to reclaim this lost territory which they delineate as rightfully theirs.

Reclamation, authenticity, and liberty combine in narrative moves of conflict, tension, and engagement to ultimately create a picture of white conservative Evangelical identity, helping scholars to better understand how they position themselves in and against the broader cultural world. These devices allow conservative white Evangelicals to construct their identities through direct engagement with those cultural apparatuses which cause them the most significant points of dynamic tension and threat. Let us consider the following example from another of Veldman's informants, a husband-and-wife duo:

> Peter: Christians typically believe that God is in control, whereas somebody that I would label an extremist, an environmental extremist, would say that "I'm in control of what happens, and we've got to save the earth because God doesn't have the power to." And therefore, if you unite that with the fact that if they've got the power to do it, then they also believe in the whole evolution thing. And so, then you start taking God out of the equation completely!
>
> Michelle: And if I take Him out of that equation, I take Him out of other equations. And that's not an option for me. It's not going to be an option in my home.[33]

[33] Ibid., 110.

There are a few points of note within Peter and Michelle's testimonies. First, Peter uses the terminology "extremist" when referring to environmentalists, lending further credence to our earlier assertions that conservative white Evangelicals understand these identity outliers as potential affective competitors within a socio-religious marketplace. Second, as we noted in our opening overview of Veldman's historical analysis on embattled perspectives within the Evangelical community, members of this subculture have tended to conflate all secular and academic advancements or theories as wholly emergent from an aggregate anti-Christian directive ever since the Scopes Trial and *Abington School District v. Schempp.* We can see this convergence here in real time as Peter proclaims that if an individual presumes to have the power to alter the environment, then not only must they operate on a completely disparate intellectual spectrum from his own, but they *must* also be an evolutionist! To Peter and Michelle's conceptualization of reality, utilizing authenticity as a mechanism for Truth, it is especially telling that there is no eventuality in their consideration wherein a potential evolutionist could possibly be one of them, a believer of God, or a proper "orthodox" Christian as they would employ the term.[34] The two ideas are simply incompatible with their vision of reality.

Perhaps most interesting from a discursive standpoint, however, is the couple's assertion on "God being taken out of the equation," which carries all manner of loaded subtext. The implication that God *should* be in the equation, and that his being taken out is unfathomable, is in fact, integral to the reclamation narrative. It showcases further attempts by what they see as opposing secular forces to drown out and displace the otherwise natural order. Furthermore, they confirm their authenticity as Truth by maintaining the reality that God *is* the distinguishing factor of their equation, and that the environmental destiny of the world is wholly reliant upon his will.

[34] Smith, *American Evangelicalism,* 124.

Any other conceivable narrative is an *extremist* plot not rooted in reality, attempting to disparage their authentic Truth based worldview. Additionally, Michelle's matter of fact response to this suggestion that outside force might be trying to remove God (and ergo effectively remove one of the cornerstones of Evangelical identity): "That's not an option for me. It's not going to be an option in my home." Here we see the embattled narrative manifest as liberty. This is not merely a project of reclamation and authenticity; Michelle and Peter are unwilling to cede ground, to offer any sort of compromise. To do so would subjugate their integrity and their identity. Michelle is asserting her dominant intention and will: God will *not* be removed from the equation, no matter how others may see the world or even wish to practice. Liberty, in the conservative white Evangelical envisioning of it, implies a Founding Fathers mimesis of revolutionary spirit whereby no one will tell them how to calculate their moral equations; *they* will do the telling.[35] "Not in my home," indeed.

Lastly, the couple's reference to "God being taken out of the equation" belies a recurrent theme embroiled within all three aspects of the embattled lens which conservative Evangelical narratives regularly revisit regarding the skepticism of science as it dates back to the Scope Trial and ensuing Supreme Court cases regarding prayer and Bible readings in public schools. Veldman admittedly observes that conservative Evangelicals do not inherently object to *all* science; just specifically to that science which they see as Biblically threatening (i.e., that which contradicts Evangelical authenticity as either orthodoxy or Truth).[36] Authenticity then becomes a chief locator of the narrative struggle for American cultural identity in this light; however, reclamation still features prominently as conservative Evangelicals seek to restore a pre-Scopes trial status and regalia for their public perception as well as their dominion over educational

[35] Kerby, *Saving History*, 26-52, 105-129.
[36] Veldman, *The Gospel of Climate Skepticism*, 109-111.

policies. Liberty remains yet a constant motif as well in their narrative depictions as conservative white Evangelicals consistently frame opposing viewpoints as being thrust upon them by an increasingly hostile secularized outsider culture that has done little to hide its mirth and systemic, aggressive oppression since the Scopes ruling.[37] To this end, while conservative Evangelicals certainly make much use of the narrative devices of reclamation, authenticity, and liberty, these each rely on a much larger implicitly understood metanarrative of a culture war which began with the Scopes Trial and persisted through purportedly anti-Christian Supreme Court rulings. This led to an overall conservative Evangelical distrust of secular culture, and more importantly public education and academia, from which they felt their voices had been removed. As conservative Evangelicals understand education and academia to be nearly synonymous with the espousal of popular "science," at least from a cultural narrative perspective, they likewise developed an intense mistrust of science which stemmed from Darwin's theory of evolution.[38] All this to say that although reclamation, authenticity, and liberty are the mechanisms, American culture is the setting, but *science and education* are very much the integral battlegrounds, the metaphorical arenas for much of the embattled perspective. In Veldman's study, we can see how these elements weave together to result in conservative white Evangelicals' collective resistance to climate change science, but in other applications, we might easily lay the groundwork for how this understanding contributes to their subcultural resistance to Critical Race Theory, LGBTQ+ rights, and even sex education. We shall examine some of these features further as move forward into our other case studies.

[37] Ibid., 91-97; Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 61-75; Quiros, *God with Us*, 49-50.
[38] Veldman, *The Gospel of Climate Skepticism*, 109-111.

Embattled Heritage, Law, and Christian Nationalism

Moving onto our second case study, we shall now probe Lauren Kerby's *Saving History* wherein the author interrogates how conservative white Evangelicals make use of Christian tourism in America's capital to aid in the construction of their displaced heritage narrative arcs while simultaneously reinforcing their images of Christian nationalism. I will establish throughout my analysis how the embattled lens is intrinsic to these narrative constructions while arguing that the key features which underly these narratives continue to emerge through thematic emphasis Evangelicals' conflict, tension, and engagement with elements of reclamation, liberty, and authenticity.

We begin our analysis with an inspection of an opening dialog from Mark a guide on one such Christian heritage tour in Washington D.C. Mark's exposition as follows is provided in answer to his posing the rhetorical question as to what motivated Christopher Columbus to sail to the Americas:

> "We're taught that it was greed or glory," he continued, "but really it was his desire to propagate the gospel." According to Columbus's own Book of Prophecies, written after his third voyage to the New World, he was divinely inspired by God to sail in order to fulfill prophecies in Isaiah. These were Columbus's own words, Mark told us, not the distortions of biased historians. He waited a moment while the amazed tourists digested this bit of information and then delivered his punch line: "Now, were you ever taught that in American history class at school?" "No!" shouted most of the bus. "Well, you've been robbed! Someone has stolen from you the truths you need to know," Mark declared.[39]

[39] Kerby, *Saving History*, *60.*

Mark situates the reclamation narrative even further in the colonial past than is typical; not only did the Founding Fathers preordain a Christian nation for their inheritors, but their heritage can be traced back to the original expeditioners who intended to claim this land for God. Mark's exchange offers further insight into embattled perspectives when he queries his audience "Were you ever taught that in American history class at school?" The resounding "No!" is both a simultaneous indictment and also a raucous affirmation of the increasingly cavernous divide between conservative white Evangelical subculture and that of the American secular mainstream. Particularly prominent here is the identarian display of suspicion of public education which stems back to the Scopes Trial, and subsequent Supreme Court cases on school prayer and Bible readings.[40]

However, this exchange serves a twofold narrative function. Besides locating the reclamation plot of the embattled perspective even further in the American historical past, this repartee also works to create authenticity as Truth. It is not simply the Bible, but the reality of the world, their Evangelical mission, their *identity*, and their very history that is authentic and True. Their narrative constructions arrange a secular world where even, and perhaps especially, academic history is to be mistrusted. Only those within their ranks hold the authentic vision of the "real." After all, what could be more authentic than history? And since their embattled lens allows them to cast secular versions of history as a fallacy intentionally maligned to disrupt the reality of Christian heritage and Truth, conservative white Evangelicals are able to easily dismiss such reckonings and counterclaims as nothing more than mere propaganda.[41]

[40] Ibid., 60; Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 61-75; Veldman, *The Gospel of Climate Skepticism*, 91-97; Quiros, *God with Us*, 49-50.
[41] Kerby, *Saving History*, 29-52, 55-60, 74-75.

The reclamation narrative continues with Mark's arraignment of American history, inflaming his Evangelical audience with the assertion that they have "been robbed," and that "someone has stolen from you the truths you need to know." This presentation of history as embattled solidifies the conservative white Evangelical subcultural identity in a powerful socially constructive move. It creates an immediate threat for the present moment and group while also placing the onus of conflict and engagement on their heritage as well. With this rhetorical move, Mark creates an embattled narrative that suggests that it is not just *we* (i.e., members of their current identity group) who are under attack, but rather their entire history that faces extinction. As the Evangelicals imagine it then, the broader secular American culture seemingly displays designs on *erasing* who they are.[42] However, this move also functions within the liberty narrative, for their "stolen truths" operate within the paradigm of secular forces which they have imagined as arrayed against them beginning with the Scopes Trial.[43] America must be reclaimed to be sure, but more pressingly, conservative white Evangelicals perceived their very freedoms to be at stake. The arena for this mistrust *is* public education, history, science, and the veritable battlegrounds of secular academia whom they no longer trust and perhaps outright despise (thanks to Darwin).[44] As such, a "stolen truth" is particularly understood within their subcultural narratives to be a slight on their religious liberties far beyond a nation lost; rather the anti-Christian elites (as they see them) are purposely jading the broader cultural narrative to the effect of undermining and discrediting the Christian worldview. In this light, when conservative Evangelical's historical truths are "stolen" and locked away, especially in lieu of what they perceive as a readily propagated secular agenda within the public sphere (and especially public

[42] Ibid., 69-72.
[43] Ibid., 60; Veldman, *The Gospel of Climate Skepticism*, 91-97; Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 61-75; Quiros, *God with Us*, 49-50.
[44] "

schools), it becomes tantamount to shackling a piece of their identity *and* to denying their right to free exercise, both egregious offences in an ever-widening chasm of engaged conflict and distinction with a secular world they already greatly mistrust. Conservative white evangelicals use the liberty narrative to navigate a special niche reality whereby all other social positions are somehow allowed an equally tolerated and recognized space within the broader American cultural melting pot *except* for that of the conservative white Christian. They alone, on the other hand, are envisioned as derided, dismissed, and otherwise deprived of the same rights and recognition as their fellow Americans, having their history stolen and their views expunged from the public eye.[45]

Although we could easily devote a significant portion of our analysis on Kerby to the embattled motifs of authenticity and reclamation, I propose instead to shift our gaze even further toward liberty for a moment as it takes a most compelling place in Kerby's argumentative staging. Let us begin with an investigation into the story of Kim Davis, a Kentucky County clerk of court who went to jail for refusing to sign same-sex marriage certificates in the wake of same-sex marriage legalization.[46]

> After she lost in district court and the Supreme Court refused to hear her case, Davis issued a statement positioning herself as the wronged party: "I never imagined a day like this would come, where I would be asked to violate a central teaching of Scripture and of Jesus Himself regarding marriage. To issue a marriage license which conflicts with God's definition of marriage, with my name affixed to the certificate, would violate my conscience." She called the matter "a Heaven or Hell decision" and claimed that she had

[45] Ibid., 88-89; Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 140-142; Veldman, *The Gospel of Climate Skepticism*, 88-91.
[46] Ibid., 88-89.

no animosity toward gays or lesbians. What she wanted, she said, was "what our Founders envisioned—that conscience and religious freedom would be protected."[47] Davis's framing here is particularly poignant. She is careful to position herself not as a bigot, but rather as persecuted minority. Davis's narrative construction hits all the embattled hallmarks: authenticity, reclamation, and liberty. She "never imagined this day would come," a key indicator that she mourns an America which she now sees as lost or strayed from its original path. Additionally, Davis assures her spectators that she only wants "what our Founders envisioned—that conscience and religious freedom would be protected." This oratorical move creates a sort of double play; in one part, it taps into the idealized image of the Founders and the romanticized notions of freedom, resistance, and displaced heritage that their conjuration so readily evokes. Is Davis not simply trying to live as *they intended*? In the second part, this phrasing marks Davis as a victim, a persecuted minority being unfairly impinged upon by having the views of others forced upon her; she is only seeking those same rights which she sees as afforded to others and, more importantly, enshrouded by the Constitution.[48] Davis's embattled narration then allows her to reframe her case as one where (at least for the members of the conservative white Evangelical subcultural identity) the issue at stake is not the infringement of the same-sex couples' rights to marry, but rather *her* individual liberty as a right to religious observation and freedom of expression.[49]

But precisely how does Davis justify ignoring the various couples' rights? At what points do their rights end and hers begin? The answer to this lies within conservative white Evangelicals' construction of the authenticity narrative. In this case, authenticity as Truth bumps

[47] Ibid., 88-89.
[48] Ibid., 88-89.
[49] Ibid., 88-89.

up against and melds into authenticity as orthodoxy. For Davis and many others within the conservative white Evangelical community, the dialog surrounding homosexuality almost universally centers on dynamic opposition. Consider the following example from the guide of another group touring the National Cathedral in Washington D.C.:

> We're basically a conservative group of people, and the National Cathedral started marrying homosexuals. And so, they're an active Episcopal church. They made the decision to do that, so we just made the decision not to support that, you know. As soon as I tell our people that reason, they fully understand, because they're not supportive of that either.[50]

Kerby observes of this derision that one might think that these Evangelicals would be pleased with the existence of a National Cathedral as it would substantiate their claims toward a nationally institutionalized Christianity; however, to the contrary, they were actively displeased as this entity represented for them the *wrong* kind of Christianity, one compromised by secular culture.[51] As evidenced by Dan's and Davis's proclamations, Evangelicals demarcate themselves from other "cultural Christians" by a strict adherence to an authentic orthodoxy as they envision it.[52] In addition, authenticity as Truth emerges as Davis locates her narrative on an entirely different moral plane; it is not simply a matter of delimiting boundaries (though that work is certainly being done to be sure). Rather, as a conservative white Evangelical, Davis proclaims an absolute moral reality which she perceives as both infallible and uncompromisable; she is literally inhabiting a phenomenologically different world.[53] As Davis conceives it, it is the broader American culture who is simply seeing things incorrectly because they are not living in

[50] Ibid., 79.
[51] Ibid., 80.
[52] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 124-126.
[53] Ibid., 126-131.

the real world since they cannot claim to be the possessors and caretakers of the objective and authentic Truth. It is no coincidence given this fact then that Smith observes that Evangelicals are "much more likely than any other group to believe Christian morality should be the law of the land" regardless of adherents' affiliate status or whether they hold any other moral inclinations.[54]

Having devoted significant attention now to authenticity and liberty in our analysis of Kerby undertaking, let us now turn our attention to the reclamation narrative's role within the Congressional Prayer Caucus. The Congressional Prayer Caucus was founded in 2005 by Representative Randy Forbes of Virginia to both pray for the nation on a weekly basis and to attempt to influence more legislation to accommodate Christian values.[55] During one group's tour of Capitol Hill, they met with an unnamed congressman from the caucus who spoke to them on the potential omission and removal of the phrase "In God We Trust" from official public spaces:

> "We need to put God back up on our walls—people are ripping him down from the walls and out of history," the congressman said. So, the caucus sent signs to most members of Congress, and its members were delighted when many recipients actually put the signs up. "If we can put it back in the U.S. Capitol," the congressman concluded, "we can put it back in the minds and hearts of Americans."[56]

The embattled lens is hard at work in the generative process of group cohesion here. The congressman erupts from the gate with the inflammatory allegation that people are ripping God down from the walls and exiling him from history. Kerby observes that this rhetorical move

[54] Ibid., 129.
[55] Kerby, *Saving History*, 115.
[56] Ibid., 116.

allows conservative white evangelicals to cast themselves as outsiders, effectively remaining embattled, even as they engage with a tour designed to demonstrate their supposed insider legacy of a Christian heritage replete with imagery and iconography etched into the literal face and stonework of D.C.[57]

The congressman's final line, however, is even more indicative of the embattled lens and the current of reclamation that underscores its narrative tendencies. "If we can put it [In God We Trust] back in the U.S. Capitol. . . we can put it back in the minds and hearts of Americans." The insinuation then is that both God and perhaps trust in him have been divested from the larger American populace. Evangelicals place a particular weight on what they emphasize as a personal relationship with God.[58] As a central pillar of their distinction from the nonevangelical world, it functions not only intrinsically in defining their authenticity mechanisms, but in this case as elucidating the necessity of the reclamation narrative. Not only has America indeed become lost, for surely such must be the case if God is actively being banished from institutional halls, but *trust* is being lost! This takes the embattled reclamation narrative to a terminal conclusion where secular Americans are so far engaged with the sins of modernity as to have utterly forgotten their roots and no longer even bear God mind, let alone demonstrate the capacity for a personal relationship within their hearts. This postulation is absolutely antithetical to one of the central pillars of conservative Evangelicalism, thus reframing reclamation narrative as not only a matter of taking back an established land and renationalizing its institutions, but also restructuring an entire cultural identity such that the embattled ultimately become conquerors, restore the faith, and fulfill the dream that Columbus began. [59]

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[57] Ibid., 69-72, 101-104.
[58] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 124-25.
[59] Kerby, *Saving History*, 60-67, 128-129.

Embattled in Politics and Culture

Our next case study is Susan Harding's *The Book of Jerry Falwell*. Harding examines how Falwell, a self-described fundamentalist turned Evangelical, who did not precisely abandon all his most strident previous observances, with the aid of other major Evangelical players, utilized specific language and rhetorical strategies to motivate white conservative Evangelicals to coalesce under a cohesive subcultural identity.[60] Harding gives considerable treatment to Evangelical narrative typologies as well, though her focus is located somewhat differently from my own; Harding is primarily concerned with how contemporary conservative Evangelicalism "evolved" from Fundamentalism through the composite usage of "born-again" terminology and the associated narrative arcs.[61] Additionally, Harding's interest in Evangelical narratives is grounded primarily in Bible-based arcs and the applications of their lenses into the contexts of the modern day as phenomenological encounters with the world, as a means of understanding the lives of their apostolic leaders, and as a mechanism for mobilizing subcultural identity.[62] While I share Harding's narrative preoccupation and concern for subcultural identity, my thematic emphasis is decidedly distinct as I am more interested in how Falwell's rhetorical strategies (and those of his cohorts) make implicit use of *non-Biblical* cultural narratives to construct an embattled lens through mechanisms of authenticity, liberty, and reclamation. To that end, let us begin our analysis with the following excerpt from one of Jerry Falwell's sermons:

> Many of these people are in liberal churches where nothing is being said or done of any scriptural worth on Sunday or any other time. Some of these people are in no church at all. Many millions of them are in fundamental churches. All I am saying to you, and what

[60] Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 3-29.
[61] Ibid., 28.
[62] Ibid.

> I continually say to our preacher boys at Liberty Baptist College is, they are out there. We have an obligation not only to hear them say that they are born again, that they believe in the Bible, and that they share their faith, but we have an obligation to get them into good Bible-believing, soul-winning churches. . . . Those 75 million Americans, adult and below, are a mighty force of God in this generation if properly taught, trained, and disciplined. I look on us preachers as that army of mobilizers and spiritual organizers who have to go out like the labor union and find them and bring them into our camp, teach them the Word of God, train them in the way of God, and set their souls on fire.[63]

The first of our paradigms which emerges is authenticity as orthodoxy. Falwell specifically positions his group identity against "liberal churches" where "nothing is being said or done of any scriptural worth." For a subculture whose membership status and dialogs revolve so heavily around the seriousness with which to treat the Bible, this accusation is a grievous one indeed. Falwell denotes rhetorically that his group, conservative white Evangelicals are *the* Christian group of merit, and that even if others are utilizing the same Bible, they are doing it *wrong*. Crafting an identity culture of authenticity that places conservative white Evangelicals at the top of all narrative hierarchies is integral to their identity moves, not just juxtaposing them against the secular world, but demonstrating that they see themselves as equally embattled with nonevangelicals as well.

Also of note, authenticity as orthodoxy blurs the lines with reclamation in the sense that Falwell does not simply want bodies in churches. They must be in the *right* churches or else America will remain as lost as if controlled by secular forces. Falwell's language is poignant on this matter. Note that he describes preachers as "an army of mobilizers" whose job it is to corral

[63] Ibid., 126.

this “mighty force of God” (75 million self-proclaimed Christians) and “bring them into *our camp* [emphasis added].” The militant language is deliberate and precise. Armies conquer, and Falwell meticulously instills very specific imagery within the hearts and minds of his congregants with this rhetorical move in ascribing to his fellow preachers the symbolic status of an “army.” His language seamlessly asserts the cohesiveness of the Evangelical subcultural identity as that of a “unit,” embattled in the trenches, fighting for the very soul of America while also leaning heavily on the notion of a conquering force from whom one would not want to find themselves suddenly displaced. The message is clear to Falwell’s listeners: if you are not with us, you are against us, and we are coming for what is ours. Additionally, it is not only Falwell’s declaration of militant conquest that invokes the reclamation narrative, but also his suggestion that these Christians must be brought into “our camp,” regardless of what religious institutions that they might currently call home. This diction further showcases how conservative white Evangelicals construct their sense of embattlement often in terms of the reclamation of American culture. It does not matter for Falwell and his followers then that there are 75 million supposed Christians out there in America; rather, what matters is that those false Christians need to be brought into the conservative Evangelical fold in order to help reclaim America, establish their authenticity, and ultimately preserve true religious liberty.

These themes of militant reclamation feature heavily throughout Falwell’s sermons. Consider here an excerpt from another of his deliveries:

> For too long, we have sat back and said politics are for the people in Washington, business is for those on Wall Street, and religion is our business. But the fact is, you cannot separate the sacred and the secular. We need to train men of God in our schools who can go on to Congress, can go on to be directors in the largest corporations, who can

> become the lawyers and the businessmen and those important people in tomorrow's United States. If we are going to turn this country around, we have to get God's people mobilized in the right direction, and we must do it quickly. Did you know that the largest single minority block in the United States that has never been capitalized on by anybody is the fundamentalist movement? If all the fundamentalists knew who to vote for and did it together, we could elect anybody. If every one of these people could be intelligently taught and mobilized, brother, we could turn this nation upside down for God! We preachers have to teach some Solomons how to build a new national house. This nation has to be rebuilt. It has gone to pot; it is literally falling apart at the seams. And our young people, and thousands like them, can do something about it, if there are some men of war [Davids], like us, behind them who maybe have shed a little blood along the way, who will teach them how to do it, who will pay the price and make the sacrifice to see that they know how to do it.[64]

Again, we see the militarized rhetoric with Falwell referring to church leaders as "men of war" who need to stand behind young Christians as they reclaim the nation. Falwell specifically goes on to denote that America "has to be rebuilt," that it has "gone to pot," and that it is "literally falling apart at the seams." Much of Falwell's delivery evokes an American heritage that he sees as tragically lost and displaced whilst also rhetorically casting this would-be youthful generation of white conservative reclaimers in the role of the Biblical Solomon, tasking them to "build a new national house." The implication here seems clear; the national house, much like the one built by their allegorical counterpart, should be none other than temple to God, dedicated in an act of reclamation to set America back upon its proper path of Evangelical Christian heritage. It

[64] Ibid., 127.

cannot be overstated enough, however; if Falwell envisions younger conservative Evangelicals as the reclaimers restoring a Solomonic house to America, he even more so conceives of their fathers as the Davidic heirs who must be equally prepared to fight a literal battle to ensure said house can become a reality, even by conquest if necessary.

Interestingly, despite the militant aspects (and implied conquest) pervading Falwell's speech, the liberty motif undergirds Falwell's message here as well. This is hardly surprising given that Falwell actually consistently mimics the oratorical moves and rhetorical strategies of civil rights leaders as he was well known to do so on several occasions.[65] Falwell pointedly indicts his audiences' own liberty with a single, seemingly innocuous question: "Did you know that the largest single minority block in the United States that has never been capitalized on by anybody is the fundamentalist movement?" In one move, Falwell paradoxically asserts that his group is the "largest," and therefore the most deserving of the cultural consensus or hegemonic dominance that they so ardently believe themselves displaced from, whilst also managing to still invoke and retain "minority status." Additionally, his clever word play in "largest minority" creates a conundrum that reads completely differently to those within the embattled context of the conservative white Evangelical subcultural identity; whereas outsiders might see the "largest minority group" as an oxymoronic label that effectively defines a majority (if in fact all other group memberships are smaller), the conservative Evangelical reads *largest minority* as *the most marginalized* due to the compounding narrative structures of the embattled perspective. Furthermore, Falwell's contention that this group "has never been capitalized on by anybody" is not an escape from exploitation, but rather further proof that their identity group and subculture have been strategically and routinely ignored by those in power. Falwell is invoking a singular

[65] Ibid., 23-25.

fear: persecution, making his followers believe that their rights, values, and *who they are* face an ever-looming sense of obsolescence and oblivion in which they will no longer be free.[66] He relegates them to minority status both because he has witnessed its usefulness as a rhetorical tool for mobilization in the arsenals of his opposition[67] and because it is what conservative white Evangelicals ultimately fear most: the loss of liberty, a loss that would eliminate their distinction and place them on even grounds with other minority groups.[68]

I would be remiss to overlook another particularly poignant line in this excerpt where liberty meets reclamation. After Falwell assures his group that they are indeed a collective, a constructed and largely ignored minority deprived of many of the same rights which they see as being flaunted by the broader American culture, he contends that *they* have the power to change said fate. "If all the fundamentalists[69] knew who to vote for and did it together, we could elect anybody." Here Falwell affirms conservative white Evangelicals' cohesiveness as an identity group whilst also asserting the subtext of the reclamation project with overt tones of liberty. If Evangelicals mobilize as a voting bloc, they can exercise and confirm their liberty, guaranteeing their rights through a candidate who actively supports their agenda while at the same time instilling a public official in office who could then begin the transformation process of actually codifying the Evangelical value system into law, thereby reclaiming the country's Christian heritage. Embattled narratives become then not only a process of stabilizing and constructing an identity subculture, but a methodology for harnessing and mobilizing that very subcultural identity. Because conservative white Evangelicals inherently thrive on modalities of distinction,

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[66] Ibid., 9-11, 20, 23-25.
[67] Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 9.
[68] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 124-127, 131-132, 140-143.
[69] Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 16-17; Falwell blurred the lines between Fundamentalists and Evangelicals, and part of his ministry project during the 70s and 80s focused on uniting the two. He often self-identified as both, and by the 80s was often time applying the terms interchangeably to his audiences. He once defined the distinction as "A fundamentalist is an evangelical who is mad about something."

conflict, and engagement, Falwell is able to rhetorically organize embattlement narratives around motifs of authenticity, reclamation, and liberty to motivate and mobilize his followers as a voting demographic, relying on their innate "us vs them" mentality.[70]

One of Falwell's contemporaries, Franky Schaeffer, mirrored this militant approach to reclamation narratives. We shall examine an excerpt from a guest sermon Schaeffer delivered to students and congregants during Monday morning chapel services at Liberty Baptist College (founded by Jerry Falwell):

> We sit, and we complain about the Supreme Court. Well, I'll tell you something: if thirty years ago, Christian, parents had been saying, hey, if my son has a talent for law, then for him, his Christian ministry is the law, then maybe we'd have a majority on the Supreme Court, and back in '73 when the abortion decision came out, we wouldn't have to be picketing because our men would have been there. [Applause] The point is we have to fight a kind of guerrilla warfare here. And that is we have to infiltrate; we have to infiltrate the enemy camp. And you're not going to infiltrate anything by standing up saying, "Okay, here I am, shoot at me."[71]

Shaeffer specifically positions outgroups, that is to say, *anyone* not belonging to the conservative white Evangelical identity category as an "enemy camp." Shaeffer's diction is especially revealing of the embattled lens here in that he not only proclaims potential outliers as enemies but more importantly as enemy combatants whose infrastructure must be "infiltrated," even calling for "guerilla warfare." Schaeffer demonstrates the embattled reclamation narrative in which conservative white Evangelical subculture is besieged by external threats and asserts that they must retake the nation from this "enemy camp" through any means possible. At the same

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[70] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 120-143.
[71] Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 143.

time, however, Schaeffer draws romantic connections to the Founding Fathers and Revolutionary War imagery through narrative subtexts invoking the use of "guerilla warfare" as a heavily idealized connection between conservative Evangelicals' resistance to the secular forces they see arrayed against them and those tactics employed by the Founders in resisting the British.[72] This imagery also plays upon the liberty narrative whereby conservative white Evangelicals can cast themselves as an underdog fighting the tyranny of a greater authoritarian power (secular American culture).

Shaeffer also makes use of reclamation and liberty narratives in his strategic application of the U.S. Supreme Court. Although school prayer and evolution were driving forces of Evangelical embattlement with secular culture, abortion likewise became a hot button issue for their subcultural demographic.[73] Shaeffer coaxes this tension with the promise that had *our people* been the ones holding power, "maybe we'd have a majority on the Supreme Court, and back in '73 when the abortion decision came out, we wouldn't have to be picketing because our men would have been there [Applause]." Not only does Shaeffer insinuate the tactical need to reclaim American culture, in this case with the explicitly enumerated goal of overturning *Roe v. Wade*, but he undergirds the message with thematic ciphers for liberty. Conservative white Evangelicals should not be picketing the establishment; they should *be* the establishment. The implication is that members of their identity group should be the ones in power, making the system work for them, codifying their values and beliefs into laws that preserve and enforce their version of liberty, whether the rest of American culture likes it or not.[74]

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[72] Kerby, *Saving America*, 26-52.
[73] Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 190-194.
[74] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 128-130. Smith found that "Evangelicals are much more likely than any other group to believe that Christian morality should be the law of the land."

Embattled Gender Roles and Sexuality

Our fourth case study is Jessica Johnson's *Biblical Porn,* which explores how affective labor contributed to the shape of Pastor Mark Driscoll's Evangelical empire. While Johnson's analysis is quite thought provoking, its focal points trend toward an entirely different diagnostic lens than is befitting the aims of this project. Although I do not intend to necessarily ignore Johnson per se, I will be primarily devoting my attention to the investigation of how embattled features manifest within the language and narrative delineations of Mark Driscoll and his congregants while specifically looking for evidence of reclamation, authenticity, and liberty. To that end, I will begin with an examination of a post Driscoll made during one of his first forays into online ministry. Posing under the pseudonym William Wallace II (the eponymous hero from *Braveheart*), Driscoll unleashed a scathing indictment of emerging church type liberals and feminists:

> We live in a completely pussified [sic] nation. We could get every man, real man, as opposed to pussified, James Dobson knock-off, crying, Promise Keeping, homoerotic, worship-loving mama's boy, sensitive, emasculated, neutered, exact male replica, evangellyfish [sic], and have a conference in a phone booth. It all began with Adam, the first of the pussified nation, who kept his mouth shut and watched everything fall headlong down the slippery slide of hell/feminism when he shut his mouth and listened to his wife who thought Satan was a good theologian when he should have led her and exercised his delegated authority as king of the planet. As a result, he was cursed for listening to his wife, and every man since has been pussified, sit[ting] quietly by and watch[ing] a nation of men be raised by bitter, penis-envying, burned, feministed [sic],

> single mothers who make sure that Johnny grows up to be a very nice woman who sits down to pee.[75]

Before we even get into Driscoll's direct quote, we have two things to unpack. First, Driscoll targeted this tirade, specifically at members of the emerging church[76] movement who he viewed as "liberals and feminists."[77] This points to the conservative white Evangelical distinction of narrative engagement of authenticity as orthodoxy. Driscoll here is not in the business of either winning souls or soliciting converts (albeit such potentialities are yet a possibility with this rhetorical strategy). Instead, Driscoll is specifically zeroing in his crosshairs through the usage of this brief yet crass digital jeremiad to create direct tension with precisely who his followers do not want to be: inauthentic Christians.[78]

Secondly, Driscoll's elected pseudonym is hardly coincidental. The film *Braveheart* depicts William Wallace II as a bastion of masculinity, zealously resisting the British invasion of Scotland after the death of his beloved.[79] Perhaps one of the most memorable lines in the film comes in Wallace's iconic roar (and emphatic) declaration that "the enemy may take our lives, but they may never take our FREEDOM!" whilst triumphantly sauntering on his steed and hoisting his fist on high.[80] In light of the liberty narrative's prominent center place in embattled constructions of identity, I propose that it is hardly an accident that Mark Driscoll chose William Wallace II of all the possible pseudonyms he could have selected for his online diatribe. Rather, Driscoll's choice was deliberately informed by the embattled lens and Wallace's embodiment of

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[75] Johnson, *Biblical Porn*, 51-52.
[76] As mentioned in my introduction, the emerging church defines itself in part through opposition to conservative Evangelicalism, though they share many of the same dialogical concerns. We shall more precisely enumerate their distinctions in our final case study.
[77] Johnson, *Biblical Porn*, 51, 90.
[78] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 124-126; Kerby, *Saving History*, 11; Johnson, *Biblical Porn*, 90.
[79] *Braveheart*, directed by Mel Gibson (1995; Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2000), DVD.
[80] Ibid.

resistance to tyranny and oppression. Driscoll envisioned himself in like fashion, crusading against morally bankrupt expressions of inauthentic Christianity and preserving the proper place of Christian heritage. Driscoll's masquerade then becomes the pièce de resistance whereby he preserves and protects Evangelical liberty whilst simultaneously defending orthodox authenticity and denouncing a repressive broader American culture that is now cast in the role of the colonial British empire, an interloper he is ready to resist at all costs in order to reclaim America's proper Christian heritage *and* ensure his people's free reign.

Now, allow us to turn our attention to Driscoll's actual words. Driscoll levies a myriad of hard-language accusations in his crusade. He opens his caustic charge with the denouncement of America as a "pussified nation," before shifting his ire to focus on Adam and Eve, the first of this egregious nation gone errant. Driscoll lays the blame squarely at Adam's feet for keeping his "mouth shut" during the slippery slide to "Hell/feminism" rather than exercising his dominion as "king of the planet," and perhaps more importantly, as an implicit authority over *her*. The results are clear, Driscoll chides; every man of Christian heritage has been cursed to instead be subjugated by the feminist agenda ever since their forebearer refused his Godly calling to *do* the subjugating. But how do we understand these oratorical moves in the context of embattled narratives?

The charge becomes clearer, then, when we interpret Driscoll's language through the mechanisms of authenticity, reclamation, and liberty. Driscoll positions himself as a staunch Biblical literalist.[81] As such, his proclamations can be read as extensions of authenticity as orthodoxy, particularly in light of his claims regarding Adam and Eve. Since Driscoll is likewise a member of a group who clings to a subcultural identity narrative of displaced heritage, who

[81] Johnson, *Biblical Porn*, 24, 90.

quite literally interprets America as being a shining city on a hill founded and ordained by God, then his contention that the men of America (God's nation) have inherited a curse for failing to bring Eve to heel can be understood as literal.[82] All this to say that Driscoll is specifically employing inflammatory language to draw conflict and tension, demarcating conservative white Evangelical boundaries using their embattled resistance to secular modernity and desire to preserve authentic, orthodox gender roles. Furthermore, Driscoll asserts that if America does not affirm this brand of conservative white authenticity, they are yet doomed to repeat Adam's fall from grace, veritably equating Hell with feminism in his harangue. The ramification therein seems to imply that the current state social reform within the broader American culture is in fact Hell on earth, and Evangelicals must fight with renewed vigor to reclaim the Biblical place assigned them by God, both in terms of their proper roles regarding gender and sexuality as well as their national birthright.

However, it is not simply authenticity and reclamation which suffice to carry Driscoll's narrative motifs in this instance alone. Liberty is equally prominent; Driscoll's emphasis on subjugation is telling, whether in his contemporary assertion of a demasculinized Christianity which he envisions as bent to kneel before an antagonistic liberal feminist culture, or in his countercharge that said bondage may well have been avoided if Eve (read: women) had first been brought to *heel*. Driscoll's usage of the liberty narrative pulls double duty here. At once, he manages to assure his audience that conservative white Evangelicals are victims beholden to the feminist chains of a broader, oppressive American culture from whom they must be liberated, and yet through his use of gendered language, he simultaneously relegates a significant portion of his listeners to a place of peonage. Driscoll's rhetorical implication of "bringing women to

[82] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 136-140; Kerby, *Saving History*, 40; Johnson, *Biblical Porn*, 90.

heel" through the phrase "he should have led her and exercised his delegated right as king of the planet" is especially enlightening in consideration of the liberty narratives which undergird Evangelical discourses. This terminology suggests that Driscoll perceives women (and wives) as property in way that both relies and subsists upon the Biblical literalism we see present in authenticity as orthodoxy narratives, while firmly ensconcing these themes within an overarching narrative structure surrounding liberty as Driscoll positions his female listeners as mere workhorses. Furthermore, this "bringing to heel" implied in male dominion connotes specifically that these particular livestock (as Driscoll frames them) are unruly and need to be broken, a poignant realization in light of Driscoll's allegorical claim regarding the American Christian heirship to Adam and the latter's failing for having ever yielded ground to his wife. Effectively, Driscoll's language herein, through clever manipulation of both the liberty and authenticity narratives, consigns women to the level of plants and *animals* during God's bequeathing Adam dominion over the earth. As such, Driscoll intimately ties conservative (male) Evangelical liberty with exerting and owning this dominion even as his female congregants suddenly find their liberties called into question.[83]

Although I could perhaps too easily devote the remainder of my available resources to the above quoted section alone, I would like to turn our investigative lens to another of Driscoll's pontifications: "Our world assaults men with images of beautiful women. Male brains house an ever-growing repository of lustful snapshots always on random shuffle. . . . The temptation to sin by viewing porn and other visual lures is an everyday war."[84] Despite the brevity of Driscoll's

[83] I am aware of scholarship on the nature of submission in religious studies, and it is not my intention to question such scholarship here. Evangelical women could perhaps be compared in some light to more traditionally "restrictive" religions (Hasidism, the Amish, certain schools of Islam, etc.); however, I am much more interested, here, especially in light of the specifically anti-feminist language, in examining how narrative themes of liberty manifest rather than asking whether or not these women might be actively exhibiting agency through the submissive calls of their religious life, practices, and storytelling.

[84] Johnson, *Biblical Porn*, 7 (ellipsis in original).

musings, it is rife with nuanced semiotics that register readily to members familiar with the conservative Evangelical subcultural identity narrative. For instance, the diction of "everyday war" is not insignificant, particularly given Driscoll's earlier penchant for idolizing William Wallace and his peculiar proclivity for preaching militant masculinity along with frequent referrals to congregants (especially *male* congregants) as citizen-soldiers, an aspect which is not insignificant given our earlier analysis of Falwell and his contemporaries.[85]

However, I would argue that what makes Driscoll's remark most striking is the way he positions conservative Evangelicalism's embattled tension with sexual discourse. Here he shifts his focus from gender roles (albeit their underpinnings are certainly still present) to situate his ire more centrally upon sexuality itself. Although we could once more investigate authenticity as orthodoxy regarding Driscoll's claims here, I propose instead to regard his critique through the lens of the reclamation narrative. The key feature, however subversive, emerges in Driscoll's opening maneuver: "Our world assaults men with images of beautiful women." The move accomplishes a twofold application. First, it casts men in the roles of victims, and by implication of the subject matter, as victim of sexual assault. Second, if we read Driscoll's usage of "our world" to understand him as saying mainstream America, or more pointedly, the nonevangelical world, then the engaged tension of this conflict becomes all the more apparent.[86] Driscoll delineates a narrative formulation in which conservative white Evangelicals are beleaguered by secular sexual advances they do not want. As such, the problem then becomes that secular America is once again impinging upon conservative Evangelicals' liberties by incessantly flaunting an antithetical set of sexual mores which Evangelicals frame as tantamount to abuse. Additionally, it refashions the discourse for the conservative Evangelical audience in such a way

[85] Ibid., 1, 52-63.
[86] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 124-126; Johnson, *Biblical Porn*, 33.

as to presuppose America as a broken nation (i.e., one in *need* of reclamation). Driscoll weaves several facets of the embattled identity perspective together, utilizing subtle narrative manipulations to position the broader American culture as inauthentic, morally bankrupt (cue the slideshow of nice Christian men terrorized by images of lust and depravity), and in dire need of proper conservative reclamation.

Let us consider now one final excerpt from another of Driscoll's sermons dealing with sexuality:

> What I'm talking about is the common situation, where one person in the marriage wants to be intimate more often than the other, and they're rejected, and they become bitter. Satan comes in and feeds that bitterness, baits the hook of their flesh with the temptation to the world, and all the sudden, Satan puts before them images and people and opportunities to lead them astray, and to destroy everything. . . . It does give Satan under conviction the opportunity to sleep between you and your spouse. I want to just burn that image in your mind. . . . I tell this to couples when I meet with them, husband, wife, are you having sex enough? What's your sexual relationship like? . . . I want you to have that image, that a couple that is not having free and frequent intimacy, when they go to bed, just, just think of Satan lying in bed between the two of them . . . this is demonic. This is demonic.[87]

Fear permeates this message and underscores the overall themes which bind the conservative white Evangelical subcultural identity together.[88] Driscoll openly proclaims that he wishes to burn the image of Satan, the literal Evangelical incarnation of evil, into the minds of couples whom he deems as not having enough sex (and more importantly, not fulfilling his interpretation

[87] Johnson, *Biblical Porn*, 106-107.
[88] Ibid., 80-109.

of authentic orthodoxy). Furthermore, he insinuates that this demonic intrusion is almost certainly the result of an unwilling female partner, since he has already informed us that men are naturally lecherous and under constant threat from an overly sexualized world, thus lending even more credence to his threat that any failure on the part of wives to submit to their husbands' or just submit sexually opens room for temptation and sin. We see the liberty narrative hard at work here, drawing boundaries on "proper" Evangelical sexual discourse with the nonevangelical world even as Driscoll acknowledges a sort of inevitability to human sexual desire that actively erases those boundaries, liberating male sexual performativity even as it maintains restrictive ideological pillars in its simultaneous cajoling of its female congregants.

Authenticity as orthodoxy becomes key to understanding Driscoll's rhetorical framing as well as the embattled perspectives that shape the narrative constructions of his congregants' lives. Fear serves as an incredibly powerful motivator for maintaining a cohesive congregational identity and preventing heresy.[89] While Smith observed that "evangelicals are, among Protestant groups, the most prepared to exert an influence in a way they know may cause tension and conflict," as well as "the least likely to try hard to not offend others with their Christian views," Driscoll takes this vision to an extreme in what he dubs "riot evangelism."[90] Driscoll is purposely abrasive, and he is well aware that his oratory sets people on edge precisely because he *seeks* to do so, playing on the performative dependency of conservative white Evangelical subculture which thrives expressly *because* of its distinctions and engaged conflict, tension, and threat from the nonevangelical world.[91] Driscoll's narrative work here functions first and foremost to maintain authenticity by acting as a containment strategy, burning hostile images into the minds

[89] Ibid., 53-54, 80-109.
[90] Ibid., 53-54; Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 133.
[91] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 120-126.

of potential dissenters in an attempt to reign in deviance before it even begins. As Johnson notes, Driscoll is "throwing bombs to avoid stepping on landmines."[92]

[92] Johnson, *Biblical Porn*, 54.

Embattled Race Relations and Segregationist Theology

The penultimate case study up for our consideration is Ansley Quiros' *God with Us*. Quiros investigates how race relations, white supremacy, and segregationist theologies deeply shaped both the religious and public institutions of a (post) Reconstruction-era American South. Although Quiros devotes some attention to other protestant denominations in her study, particularly as a means of developing contrast with that of the opposing Evangelical viewpoints, I am primarily interested in her understanding and presentation of conservative white Evangelical narrative constructions as well as their stories on race as those informants present them. To that end, I will argue that Evangelical identity manifests in Quiros' formulations as rallied around racial narratives that center on themes of authenticity, liberty, and reclamation.

Let us begin with the following remarks from Reverend Carey Daniel, a Southern Baptist and President of the White Citizens Church Council:

> [The Creator] separated the black race from the white and lighter skinned races. He did not just put them in different parts of town . . . he put the black race on a huge continent to themselves, segregated from the other races by oceans of water to the west, south and east, and by the vast stretches of the almost impassable Sahara Desert to the north.[93]

Quiros notes that Daniel is a proponent of the Hamitic hypothesis, and though she does not offer a direct quote, claims that he had espoused such prior to the above.[94] The Hamitic hypothesis was a popular antebellum-era theology that maintained traction well into the Reconstruction era; effectively, its chief contention relies on the Biblical story of Noah's three sons and the "curse" laid upon Ham for "seeing his father's nakedness" condemning his descendants to the perpetual

[93] Quiros, *God with Us*, 47.
[94] Ibid.

servitude of those of his two brothers.[95] From this brief story, racially motivated theologians, and especially those who characterized themselves as biblical literalists, contrived an entire theology to support slavery and eventually segregation.[96] In their view, then, preserving segregation became less about racialized bigotry than it was maintaining the Evangelical sense of authenticity as orthodoxy.[97] It was not a matter of racism, or whether slavery was right or wrong, but rather, it became a matter of defending the Bible itself.

Bearing this background analysis in mind, we can reframe Reverend Daniel's comments as not purely a struggle for orthodoxy, but also as a matter of Truth. When he asserts that God "put the black race on a huge continent to themselves, segregated from the other races," he is not simply asserting a theological position, but a Truth position. Daniel conceives these issues as a matter of a concrete observable reality that relies on the construction of several objectively observable (to his group) racial metanarratives, each of which is integral to the identity formation of their subculture. Case in point, conservative white Evangelicals intimately *know* and understand that God had ordered the Israelites to "remain separate and holy," that Paul ordained "a bounds of habitation for all people," that the Tower of Babel had resulted in a scattered populace, and that the Bible offered numerous prescriptions regarding the proper treatment of slaves.[98] To question slavery or segregation was to interrogate both the authenticity of the Bible (orthodoxy) and to question the authenticity of the world (Truth).

However, it would be a mistake to attempt an understanding of conservative white Evangelical subcultural positions and embattled tensions with race as being wholly constitutive from a narrative engagement with authenticity as either orthodoxy or Truth. Since we have

[95] Ibid., 45-46.
[96] Ibid., 45-46.
[97] Ibid., 5.
[98] Ibid., 45-48.

established that conservative white Evangelicals have nearly always juxtaposed their identities against what they see as an assault by modernity, racial segregation was simply one more social issue to rend this chasm all the more apparent.[99] In the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*, conservative white Evangelicals offered staunch opposition to school integration, particularly as public school already represented an institution of which they were particularly suspicious.[100] Scopes had rendered schools suspect, *Brown* was even further ignoring orthodox theology with its forced integrationist practices that clearly (to the conservative Evangelical mindset) went against a literalist defense of the Bible, and then *Engel* v. *Vitale* fully indulged the unthinkable: it rendered prayer in schools unconstitutional.[101] This resulted in a crux in the racial embattlement narrative, a solidifying of all three motifs: authenticity, reclamation, and liberty. If conservative white Evangelicals were going to reclaim America from these ever-encroaching and increasingly misguided secular forces that they saw arrayed against them, then they were going to have fight back against this tyranny to preserve their freedom by establishing authentic Christian educational institutions. Thus, the American private school was born, colloquially referred to by outsiders as "segregationist academies."[102]

These institutions served to strengthen the Evangelical sense of embattlement and further incorporate the narrative elements of authenticity, reclamation, and liberty into the larger subcultural identity structure. Let us consider the capacity in which these features accomplished this task by examining the following statement from Harry Entrekin (Chairman) and his accompanying Board regarding Southland Academy (a Christian school in Americus, Georgia) during its alleged struggle to receive tax-exempt status, which the Board suggests arises from "a

[99] Ibid., 10.
[100] Ibid., 130-138.
[101] Ibid., 136-138.
[102] Ibid., 130-138.

desire on the part of the Justice Department and the Internal Revenue Service to impose their desires . . . rather than to administer the law as it is written . . . arbitrary government at its worst," before lamenting their "concern over the loss of local control over public schools, over the Supreme Court decision concerning prayer in schools, and over the use of schools as tools to bring about social revolution, rather than the purpose for which they were created—education."[103] The immediate tension with the broader American culture is both palpable and explicitly named: the Justice Department and the IRS. Entrekin and the Board grieve the loss of Evangelical cultural control over these institutions as a matter of displaced heritage; to suggest that these national houses are imposing desires of their own design—and pointedly *not* the law as Entrekin understands it—are clear indicators of a subcultural identity struggling against both narrative formulations of social change and idealized models of liberty. The subtext is then that Entrekin mourns for a world where these artifices of the government are, and naturally should be, on his side.[104] Furthermore, their imposition of nonevangelical values is a distinctly unamerican practice in that it deprives Evangelicals of their religious liberty, a liberty the Founding Fathers envisioned, the freedom to recognize the authenticity of scriptural segregation and principles of conscience.[105]

Although the reclamation of government institutions is implicitly implied, Entrekin's remarks belie yet another theme. While we discussed connotations of liberty undergirding the reclamation narrative throughout the Board's opening assertions, their concluding concerns reframe liberty as a primary ideological motivator for their embattled constructions. Note that the group expressly evinces the "loss of control over public schools" as a chief concern, particularly

[103] Ibid., 136.
[104] Ibid., 50-52; Kerby, *Saving History*, 51-52, 88-89.
[105] Ibid., 88-89; Quiros, *God with Us*, 136-38.

in regard to "school prayer." The diction here is incredibly important; a "loss of control" demonstrates a clear ideological crisis for conservative white Evangelicals. They cannot imagine a world without control. Although conservative white Evangelicals were increasingly growing to delineate their arguments in terms of mirroring the language of civil rights leaders, perhaps their greatest fear is having "control" actively stripped from them, leaving them devoid of distinction and just like everyone else.[106] Conversely, to bemoan a "loss of control" is to admit, at least subtly, that one has held it, which is irrelevant in light of the reclamation narrative (conservative white Evangelicals are quite sure they *did* in fact once wield such sway); more importantly, however, this admission reveals *desire*. It is an open profession that what the conservative white Evangelical subculture desires above all else is not to be a *sub*culture at all, but rather to reassert control as the definitive formulation of American culture. While they may hinge their arguments on the notion of liberty in fighting for the free exercise of religious expression and the right to practice as they see fit, their ultimate goal is still reclamation of a Christian nation, and liberty as they envision entails the curtailing of nonevangelical expressions of identity.[107]

The Board's final proclamation, however, yields the most ideological weight; not only were they disgruntled over the "loss of control" in public schools, but they also expressed dismay at "the use of schools as tools to bring about social revolution" This last claim hits each of the embattled notes in turn: reclamation, authenticity, and liberty, and furthermore, it allowed conservative white Evangelicals to position this cause as one of religious freedom rather than an issue of racial segregation.[108] Conservative white Evangelicals maintained their sense of dynamic engagement with and resistance to the broader American culture through this dialog surrounding

[106] Ibid., 50-52, 130-38; Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 9; Kerby, *Saving History*, 66; Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 120-126,129.
[107] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 1124-126; Quiros, *God with Us*, 136-38; Kerby, *Saving History*, 88-89.
[108] Quiros, *God with Us*, 130-138.

social revolution (integration, prayer in schools, evolution). They crafted an image of defiance in the face of modernity, one in which "denial" of the former became nearly synonymous with a "proper interpretation" of the Letter of the Law (Biblically speaking), especially in the South.[109] Conservative white Evangelicals simply *had* to uphold the Bible because, as the centerpiece of their faith and ergo a foundational aspect of their identity narrative, any unmaking of the Bible would effectively result in an even further unraveling of what they already saw as their tenuous grip on power (as had been demonstrated by the disastrous results of the Scopes Trial).[110] In this case, conservative white Evangelicals utilized authenticity as orthodoxy to navigate authenticity as Truth, delineating the boundaries between not only themselves and those liberal nonevangelicals who only followed the "spirit" of the Bible, but also those social institutions who were deviating from a path that, to their minds, they could not possibly follow.[111]

Liberty, of course, is present in this embattlement narrative because of the ways in which conservative white Evangelicals frame their opposition to "social revolution" (read: racial integration). Since Evangelicals are structuring their opposition as a matter of personal autonomy and a desire to adhere to principles of conscience and religious practice, they are able to restructure the narrative from one in which they are denying integration (or even the rights of others) and instead segue into a much more palatable story in which they are in fact the persecuted victim, bereft of their constitutionally enumerated right to the free exercise of religion without government interference.[112] They accomplish this feat by mirroring the same sorts of rhetorical strategies employed by the very civil rights leaders (and feminist activists) whom they so ardently oppose, navigating their arguments in such a way that any attempt to invalidate their

[109] Ibid., 46.
[110] Ibid., 130-138; Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 61-81.
[111] Quiros, God with Us, 46; Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 124-126.
[112] Quiros, *God with Us, 136-38*, Kerby, *Saving History*, 88-89.

propositions would thereby create substantial problems for their opponents' own discursive maneuvers.[113] This allows conservative white Evangelicals to advocate for their own liberties while surreptitiously undermining that of their opposition; if those they find themselves embattled with attack their polemic, then their persecution narratives appear all the more valid. If the opposition attacks the rhetorical application itself (i.e., the victimization narrative), then those social reformers risk sabotaging the impetus of their own political strategy; either way, conservative white Evangelicals seem assured of both managing their own liberty *and* delimiting their opposition.

All of this coalesces ultimately within the overarching theme of the reclamation narrative. Although conservative white Evangelicals certainly narrate and shape their sense of embattlement through critical interpretations of authenticity and liberty, both are heavily rooted in their deep-seated ambition to reclaim America as a Christian nation. "Social revolution" is purely a dog whistle for modernity, and particularly in the case of Quiros' study, segregationist theology and white supremacy. As Smith noted earlier, when Evangelicals use the word Christian, they are most likely instinctively meaning *Evangelical Christian*. I would then suggest that we interpret this in light of Lauren Kerby's understanding that conservative white Evangelicals intuitively understand the metanarratives of America as a Christian nation to which *they* are the inheritors.[114] Understanding the embattled lens through the reclamation narrative then becomes about realizing that it is not simply conservative white Evangelicals' collective resistance to changing American cultural mores and norms, but rather an active engagement with ensuring that what they ostensibly envision as *their* country does not fall into the hands of *those people*, a distinct and racialized ethnic minority and "other."

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114 Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 124; Kerby, *Saving History*, 4-7, 11.

Embattled Narratives in Black Evangelical Communities?

I would be remiss, however, to neglect a unique opportunity that Quiros' case study affords us in the form of an additional caveat group. Although Quiros spends much of her time dealing with conservative white Evangelical responses to integration in the post-Reconstruction South, she does offer some treatment of black Evangelicals and civil rights leaders during the period. Given that we have established how Jerry Falwell and others made significant use of the liberty narrative whilst specifically acknowledging their emulation of feminist and civil rights leaderships' oratorical strategies, what might we then understand about embattled positions of *those* groups? Are embattled lenses a uniquely white Evangelical narrative presentation, or do we see manifestations of liberty, reclamation, and authenticity within black Evangelical discourses as well? As we attempt to understand this question, let us begin by analyzing the following directive from Baptist minister Benjamin Mays, widely regarded as having laid the intellectual groundwork for the civil rights movement:

> If black ministers were "prepared theologically" to lead, if they "would envisage God as one who required them to battle Jim Crow with a moral methodology consistent with justice and love," Mays continued, they could lead the black faithful in redeeming America and achieving racial parity.[115]

If Mays is one of the proto-leaders of the nascent civil rights movement, then his language becomes all the more significant. It is especially noteworthy that he utilizes the militant language of requiring black ministers to "battle Jim Crow," an oratorical move that would later be capitalized upon by Falwell and his brethren. Furthermore, the indictment that it is not Mays, but pointedly *God* who commands black ministers to battle with the narrative opposition (herein

[115] Quiros, *God with Us*, 63.

being Jim Crow who serves as both an allegory for legalism and the secular world of their time), we could very much understand this narration then as black Evangelicals' engagement of the embattled perspective employing the liberty narrative. This is particularly insightful as the liberty narrative becomes perhaps the primary coopted device which conservative white Evangelicals would later purloin in their own parlances.[116] However, to only examine black theology as it is connected with motifs of liberty in the context of the civil rights movement seems somewhat apparent and rather low-hanging fruit; thus, I would turn our attention instead to the reclamation narrative.

When Mays speaks of *redeeming* America through achieving racial parity, he is invoking a similar narrative arc to that of conservative white Evangelicals in their reclamation stories. The ends and origins are by no means the same, nor the designs to be sure, but the idea of an America *lost*, and specifically, a Christian America that must be found once more lies at the heart of this narrative construction. For conservative white Evangelicals, this redemption occurs in the form of a restorative, an America effectively reclaimed by the heirs of a hegemonic, typically masculine, and heavily racialized Christian past. Black Evangelicals, on the other hand, invoke this redemption arc through contemporary means as there is no idyllic past to which they can return; instead, their reclamation story relies upon blending their version of the liberty narrative (an idealized version of what America could be) with their delineation of authenticity as orthodoxy in which they construct segregation as a Biblically errant sin.[117] Black Evangelicals still seek to invoke a return to an authentically realized Christian nation, but because their lived experience is drastically different from that of conservative white Evangelicals, they frame this reclamation arc from a profoundly different vantage point, one that makes implicit use of their

[116] Kerby, *Saving History*, 88-89; Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 9-11, 20, 23-25.
[117] Quiros, *God with Us*, 58-73.

racialized history of discrimination. This allows black Evangelicals to navigate reclamation narratives from a perspective that invalidates both segregation and systemic racial practices through rhetorical moves which emphasize America's need to return to its Christian origins, one wherein *all* God's children are equally recognized and respected. In their view then, if America was living as a restored Christian nation, their racialized plight and systemic issues would be abolished; ergo, reclaiming or *redeeming* this system is an absolute priority.

To better consider how authenticity as orthodoxy affects black Evangelicals' narrative constructions, we will now turn to another of Mays' proclamations: "No group is good enough, wise enough, to restrict the mind, circumscribe the soul, and to limit the physical movement of another group. To do this is blasphemy. It is a usurpation of the role of God."[118] Mays levels his charge quite succinctly: "blasphemy." For a group whose identity narrative relies so heavily on Bibliocentric claims of authenticity, Mays' accusation is most dire, a literal crime against God. Mays bypasses conservative white Evangelicals' interpretations of the Hamitic hypothesis as a Biblically sanctified justification for racialized discrimination and instead counters with his own orthodox interpretation. Mays contends that, regardless of other readings, racism effectively elevates the "superior race" to equal status with God, thereby rendering them guilty of idolatry as they subjugate others beneath them rather than God.[119] This powerful rhetorical maneuver positions Mays as both an astute exegete of the literal Bible, but also crafts a narrative that assures his listeners (both black and white) that his supreme desire lies beyond racialized motivations and is above all else dedicated to authentic scriptural understanding, a position with which even the most staunch white conservative Evangelical would find difficult to disagree. Potential white listeners may not necessarily agree with Mays' hermeneutics, but they would be

[118] Ibid., 67.
[119] Ibid., 66-67.

hard pressed to disagree that blasphemy is a most grievous sin, and as such, Mays centers his discourse as authentically viable and marginally unassailable within the Evangelical narrative culture.

Lastly, as one of the most prominent, if arguably not the most recognizable, names in civil rights history and leadership, we must turn our attention to an excerpt from Martin Luther King Jr:

> Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our community at the midnight hour and beat us and we shall still love you. But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom, but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory.[120]

King's rhetoric makes obvious use of the liberty narrative as he asserts that "one day we shall win freedom," but again, liberty perhaps most thoroughly pervades civil rights discourses, which is precisely why later conservative white Evangelicals would appropriate this oratory. However, what is particularly striking here is that the King insists that black Evangelicals will not only win freedom for themselves, but also for their antagonists (in this case white oppositionists and perhaps the larger secular world). Here then we see the liberty narrative stretching its bounds as it becomes the reclamation narrative. By "winning" their opposition and ensuring their freedom as well as that of the black (Evangelical) community, King is once again invoking the idealized version of an America restored. The implication herein is that not even conservative white Evangelicals are currently "free," and based upon their own embattled utilization of the liberty narrative, they would be somewhat begrudgingly forced to agree. King envisions an America

[120] Ibid., 73.

wherein everyone is then free, and this liberty seemingly results from the authentic application of black Evangelical principles and Biblical understanding. As such, although the framing is certainly distinct from that of conservative white Evangelicals, King is indubitably engaging the reclamation narrative in his delineation of an idealized America, one restored to proper authentic Christian understanding wherein *everyone* is actively free. King's reclamation arc does not rely upon the same framework an idealized heritage and glorified past that serves as the hallmarks of conservative white Evangelicals' narrative structure, but rather looks instead to an idealized future reality. In this way, black Evangelicals' reclamation narrative becomes one of restorative redemption wherein authenticity and liberty are affirmed as a priori cornerstones vital to the construction of a coming utopic Christian America. This potential Evangelical Kingdom Come must be fought for, reclaimed from the deniers who have led the country so far astray, and ultimately restored to its proper place and status.

Thus, we see that while their employment and framework is decidedly different due to their divergent historical points of contact (i.e., their points of conflict, tension, engagement, and distinction) with the broader American culture, black Evangelicals do indeed utilize embattled artifices of authenticity, liberty, and reclamation in their narrative constructions of self and their relationship to outliers. The effect is not inherently the same, but the apparatuses operate similarly, and it appears that black Evangelicals manipulate these rhetorical means to analogous narrative affect and purpose if not precisely in application and motivation. Although my sample size in Quiros' case study is significantly smaller than that of my larger swath of conservative white Evangelicals, my purpose in this analysis was both to A) afford this community who the author devoted some treatment to a perspective analysis (and thus it would be hard to discuss racialized embattlement amongst conservative white Evangelicals without offering due course to

those they position themselves against) and B) to open up a dialog on whether or not these features of embattlement as I have expounded upon them: authenticity, liberty, and reclamation are an inherently *white* construction or do they show up in other Evangelical communities? Further research into Evangelical communities of color is necessary to draw certain conclusions, but I suspect that these embattled features may well surface across racialized lines. Does that imply that embattlement is inherently Evangelical? American? What precisely then might we say its origins are? I shall theorize more on these aspects in my conclusion. For now, this alternative perspective from black Evangelicals juxtaposed against white segregationist theology shall make for an excellent segue into our final case study: our caveat group, Bielo's Emergents, Evangelicals who specifically construct their narrative identities in diametric opposition to those of conservative Evangelicals.

Embattled Critique

We come at last to our final case study: James Bielo's *Emerging Evangelicals*. Although I opened with the assertion that I was more concerned with a dialogical approach to the term Evangelical rather than a definitional one (an approach Bielo himself advocates for in his study no less), I would offer some contextual distinctions. I offer this in the interest of better understanding both why I am positioning Emergents against conservative Evangelical subculture as I argue that the embattled lens is pervasive (or *becoming such*) throughout Evangelical dialogs, and, more importantly, because Emergents themselves delineate their boundaries in direct opposition to conservative Evangelicalism.[121]

Although Bielo observes that Evangelicals (in this case as a general term) effectively share a central series of dialogs with various levels of disagreement (or harmony) as to how they should live these subject matters, he notes the following as consistently ensuing features of Emergent dialogs:

> First, they voiced an adamant critique of conservative Evangelicalism, evincing frustration with politics, theology, worship, evangelism, ecclesiology, and capitalist-consumer impulses. Second, they diagnosed what they considered a detrimental problem facing the future of American Christianity: a cultural dissonance between Gen-Xers and Millennials and the organization, style, priorities, and assumptions of twentieth-century Evangelicals. Third, they were convinced that American society had shifted from being "modern" to "postmodern." They defined postmodernism largely in epistemological terms, asserting that America's youngest generations doubt the human ability to know absolute truth with absolute certainty.[122]

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[121] Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, 5-8.
[122] Ibid., 8.

I intend to argue that these distinctive aspects of Emergent identity contain all the key features of embattled narratives that I have previously, with the exception of my brief foray into probing black Evangelicals' discursive narrative elements, primarily suggested serve as the hallmarks of conservative white Evangelicals' narrative identity constructions. That is, despite Emergents specifically positioning their brand of Evangelicalism as a nearly diametric counterpoint to the conservative white Evangelical subculture, I will contend that their identity narratives still heavily rely on deeply pervasive cultural constructions of distinction, conflict, engagement, and threat, but more importantly, that those subtexts are understood through a larger overarching discourse on reclamation, authenticity, and liberty.[123]

Rather than break down Bielo's above dialogical framework using our analytical lens of embattlement (which could potentially be fruitful, but would provide a somewhat secondary insight), I shall instead devote our primary attention to the rhetorical mechanisms and narratives as employed by the Emergents directly. To that end, I endeavor to begin with the following excerpt from the blog of an Emergent church planter named Glen:

> What the modern 20th century *churchianity* experiment has left us with is nothing short of a rebellion—or better—a pilgrimage of the rejected masses to fend for themselves in the dark woods. The Jesus that the feral culture sees (when it looks) is a carnival mirror distortion of another bygone reflection—an echo of an echo. We obviously no longer live in a churched culture (if we ever did) and emerging cultures have little or no authentic Christian "memory."[124]

[123] Ibid., 23. For proper comparative purposes, it is important to note that despite "diametric opposition," when discussing Bielo's Emergents, we are still discussing a majority white population, at least in his ethnography and this project. 88 of his 90 consultants hailed from solidly middle-class white backgrounds.
[124] Ibid., 54.

Glen's embattlement with authenticity immediately manifests in his diction. Mirroring the rhetorical constructions whereby conservative white Evangelicals appear to instinctively indicate members of *their* identity group when they employ the generic terminology "Christian," Glen seems likewise loathe to include non-Emergents within the label of "Christianity."[125] Glen's narrative construction of authenticity as orthodoxy creates a similar picture of embattlement that positions him as so engaged with this tension as to inflect an entirely distinct label on these oppositional boundary outliers, designating them as "rebellious" (read: heretical) adherents of "churchianity" rather than fellow keepers of authentic Christian faith.

Furthermore, Glen continues, "We obviously no longer live in a churched culture," derisively adding "(if we ever did)." Although much of Emergent cultural critique is directed against conservative Evangelicalism, Glen's contempt here on the other hand is entirely indicative of the embattled reclamation narrative; in fact, it presupposes it. The implication in Glen's disdain is that America *should* live in a churched culture but does not due to conservative white Evangelicals' failings in authenticity/orthodoxy as Glen sees them as dominating America's spiritual sphere.[126] In addition, Glen's oratorical use of "no longer live" belies his true suppositions, that America *did* in fact once live in a churched culture. Glen's framing alongside clear markers of disdain such as the skeptical "if we ever did," and "obviously" (indicating a blatant distancing from this once apparent fact indicate that Glen both believes America to have been a Christian nation and to be veritably certain it no longer maintains such status. These assertions are both hallmarks of an embattled perspective, and when evaluated along with Glen's ardent desire to re-church the nation, affirm Emergents' use of both authenticity narratives and reclamation narratives as integral to their identity making processes.

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[125] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 124.
[126] Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, 55.

Now we shall shift our investigation to another of Bielo's consultants, an Emergent named Virgil. Virgil practices what Bielo describes as New Monasticism, a trend within the Emerging Church whereby adherents attempt to revitalize modern Christianity by injecting ancient practices into its formulations that they believe will return them to a "simpler time, and ergo, closer to God.[127] Virgil's case is interesting because he sells his home and most of his worldly possessions to buy a plot of land to start a blueberry farm.[128] Although Bielo interprets Virgil's actions and motivations in terms of Emergent values of simplicity and in scholarly understandings of New Monasticism (which I think are meritorious), I propose that we should look at Virgil's story from another angel: through understanding embattlement via narrative delineations of liberty.

Virgil offers a few key points to help support such an analysis. First Virgil explicitly confirms that his monastic journey started as a means of his family seeking to "escape from the world of corporate consumerism."[129] Second, he professes a desire to live "free from the system," while teaching his daughters values like "hard work and responsibility" and living "the way people used to do."[130] Of course, the implication for Bielo is that Virgil interprets this simpler way of living as one which brings Emergents authentically closer to God, and I would tend to at least partially agree with Bielo on this matter; however, I would offer a caveat to this analysis and suggest these claims are worth further investigation as Bielo goes on to contend that Virgil holds no inclinations toward a romanticized American past but purely towards a romanticized Christian one.[131] I do not find this to be the case. Virgil specifically positions

[127] Ibid., 99-109.
[128] Ibid., 105-109.
[129] Ibid., 105.
[130] Ibid., 106.
[131] Ibid., 106, 108.

himself as not interested in "the extreme of complete removal from society, like some Amish."[132] Virgil's focus on engagement with a broader oppositional American culture even as he removes himself from it is a distinctly Evangelical embattlement marker.[133] Even as Virgil seeks to return to the roots of Christian practice, he does not desire to abandon social engagements as those he envisions as reclusive might; to do so would effectively render him nonevangelical. Furthermore, as we saw in Glen's narrative structure, there is most certainly a subtext of reclamation that undergirds Emergent discourse; Virgil would certainly be aware of this metanarrative in his own thought communities.[134]

Virgil's language is even more telling, however. His fervent desire to "escape from the world of corporate world of consumerism," reveals the subtext within his motivations: Evangelical embattlement constructed as a liberty narrative. Virgil cannot thrive if he is forcibly bound to secular American culture. Since Emergents effectively equate consumer capitalism as synonymous with both conservative Evangelicals *and* the broader American culture, to chain oneself to said system is to condemn oneself to slavery.[135] In Virgil's view, living with corporate culture invalidates his authenticity *and* deprives him of his religious liberty as well as his personal autonomy. This becomes more apparent as he continues his explication, noting that he wishes to live "*free* [emphasis added] from the system, the way people used to do." When we interrogate Virgil's diction, his peculiar stresses on words like "free" and "escape," and consider that he positions all of his oratory in light of not wanting to emulate the Amish (who are in fact modeling a historical version of Christianity), it becomes clear then that he is not simply idealizing a Christian history as Bielo claims. Rather, Virgil's narrative structures are employing

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[132] Ibid., 108.
[133] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 120-126.
[134] Veldman, *The Gospel of Climate Skepticism*, 115-116.
[135] Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, 99-109.

subtexts of a glamorized American past that undergird white Evangelical dialogs and discourses, a past which relies upon embattled constructions of liberty and reclamation while also serving to serving to denote distinctions in authenticity.

But how did this happen? If, as Bielo observes, Emergents seemingly narrate their own identity through verbalized opposition to conservative white Evangelical subculture, then how do we understand the features of embattlement as they seem to underscore Emergent language? I have a theory. Bielo observes that for conservative Evangelicals their formative identity event is almost always a conversion story: a testimonial of how they came to occupy and then reside in their current new subcultural space; Emergents on the other hand, typically frame their formative event as a moment of *deconversion*, one in which they realize conservative Evangelicalism no longer works for them and begin looking for alternative expressions of Evangelism.[136] The crux of my theory relies on the fact that Emergents (or at least those Bielo examines here and as he defines them in this case) all seem to be *former conservative white Evangelicals*. As such, even if these Emergents have now distanced themselves from the subcultural identity to which they once adhered, it is well known to them, so intimately in fact that they frame their identity in critique of it.[137] As former members of the conservative Evangelical thought community, they were conditioned to look for and listen to certain cultural signs and mechanism; effectively, they were taught what to heed and what to ignore.[138] Thus, even having moved away from these groups, their narrative memory remains, subtly influencing and inevitably shaping the ways in which they frame and delineate their new discursive methods and shared dialogs. Embattled perspectives resurface and underpin their identity stories, even if they do not intentionally narrate

[136] Ibid., 29-46.
[137] Ibid., 5-8.
[138] Veldman, *The Gospel of Climate Skepticism*, 115-116.

themselves as persecuted in the same overt fashions as conservative Evangelicals, precisely because of their origins. These stories are familiar to them. Though they may try to reframe their dialog to position their cultural critiques as entirely distinct from their conservative counterparts, Emergents instinctively draw upon common subcultural constructions of displaced heritage, reclamation, authenticity, and liberty which otherwise pervade white Evangelical dialogs.

I would like to offer a caveat to this analysis. I am not sure what to do with "second" or "third generation" Emergents. By that I mean those adherents who may never have been a conservative Evangelical. Bielo offers no treatment of such folk in his study, but given the Emergent focus on missional activity, church planting, and a dedication to "place" (i.e., establishing a permanent home and presence in their community of work), it seems likely that such converts must exist.[139] Susan Harding argues that Evangelicals "catch each other's language," effectively learning to reproduce and imitate linguistic (and thereby narrative) formulations as part of the discovery process during the journey from outsiders to insiders.[140] While I ordinarily agree, I wonder here again if these second and third generation Emergents might be far enough removed from conservative language to catch it at all? Would they simply hear a focus on missional activity or a dedication cultural critique that somehow lacks the underscoring of reclamation, authenticity, and liberty if they had never been subject to those firsthand narratives in the first place? I can only speculate, and do not have the data to draw such conclusions in any case, but such a project would perhaps make excellent research for future scholars looking to expand my own analysis.

[139] Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, 10-14.
[140] Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 59-60.

Conclusion

Christian Smith has previously served as perhaps the guiding light for formulating an understanding of Evangelical identity, particularly as it is related to embattlement. Smith's foundational, field-defining work asserts that the Evangelical subcultural identity thrives first and foremost because it finds itself embattled with the nonevangelical world, a concept he defines as reliant upon engaged conflict, tension, distinction, and threat.[141] However, I have endeavored to ask, how do we understand Smith's description of embattlement in practical applications? What are embattlement's key features? How does it manifest? What does it look like when Evangelicals engage this tension with the nonevangelical world? How do *they* narrate and define it? What does it mean to them? How do these tensions shape their identities? How does it shape the stories they tell about themselves and about those they position themselves against?

To that end, I have argued across six case studies of Evangelical engagement with larger American culture for a broader understanding of embattlement as one which privileges narrative depictions of engagement utilizing Evangelicals' own delineations. I maintain that these narrative depictions of embattlement, this *embattled lens* consistently employs three preeminent themes in its developmental constructions, each relying on an innate understanding of subtexts and metanarratives that implicitly understood and reproduced within the conservative white Evangelical subculture (and perhaps the larger Evangelicalism beyond). Those three narrative features are the reclamation of a Christian America, the authenticity of Evangelicalism (alternatively defined through either its distinction with nonevangelicals—orthodoxy, or its distinction with a secular culture—Truth), and the fight for liberty, an excessively romanticized conceptualization of religious expression where Evangelicals blur the lines with reclamation in

[141] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 121.

their view of an idyllic Christian past, one which also highlights the ways in which they employ rhetorical strategies of minority mimesis to position themselves as persecuted bodies fighting tyranny and oppression.[142] The liberty motif suggests that Evangelicals envision themselves as a marginalized force having once been *free*, casting themselves in the roles of revolutionaries even as they lobby for control to enforce their morality, which they deem as *the* exclusively authentic and objective Truth, upon a broader American populace.[143] None of these embattled narratives, however—authenticity, liberty, or reclamation—exist as a discrete or disparate category. Each of these narrative constructions intrinsically depends upon and informs the other. Furthermore, Evangelical embattled narrative presentations often deploy multiple motifs simultaneously while also displaying the capability to transition seamlessly between thematic elements as their rhetorical needs and narrative content might require, generating tremendous affective labor and social cohesion in the process.[144]

Although the embattled lens seems most prominent in conservative white Evangelical subculture, that is likewise where the most significant bulk of my dataset is concentrated. However, both of our caveat explorations into Emergents and black Evangelicals have yielded potentially fruitful insights which seem to indicate that elements of the embattled lens (authenticity, liberty, and reclamation) may yet manifest within other Evangelical communities. That being said, further study is necessary to confirm consistent manifestations in nonwhite groups. If such a project could be engaged, I am curious, what would that extrapolation then represent? Is there something inherently embattled in Evangelical narratives? How do these narratives spread? How does my theory on transmission within the Emergent community factor

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[142] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 136-143; Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 9; Kerby, *Saving History*, 88-89, 111-129.
[143] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 126-129; Kerby, *Saving History*, 88-89, 111-129.
[144] Johnson, *Biblical Porn*, 53, 60-62.

in for black Evangelicals? Could we understand the narrative transmissions as a product of cultural transmission (perhaps like the Biblical flood story itself was borrowed from Mesopotamian myth)? Is it perhaps that embattlement *is* a conservative white construction, but it has become such a prolific narrative due to processes of reproduction and cultural transmission both within the larger Evangelical community and within the confines of the America zeitgeist itself? Additionally, what would be the results if we were to examine a nonevangelical group of liberal Protestants (like those who practice Muscular Christianity)? Might any of these features occur? What is the terminal point of narrative transmission, especially given the operative term "Evangelism" in "Evangelicalism?" These are all questions for another project and future research, all of which I hope can benefit from a narrative approach to Religious Studies and a better understanding of the embattled lens.

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