

Liberty University School of Divinity

**The American UnReformation: The Undoing of American Evangelical Prominence and the
Rise of the Religiously Unaffiliated Nones**

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by

H. G. Walker

Lynchburg, Virginia

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DEDICATION

This is for you Papaw. Your words of encouragement to get a good education walked with me after you were gone and saw me through to completion.

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ecclesia reformata sed semper reformanda—“a church reformed but always needing reformation.”

“And the Church must be forever building and always decaying, and always being restored.”
T.S. Elliot

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

As this project is being written, the third largest “religion” in the world has become no religion at all. More importantly, the most recent national survey reports suggest the largest religious category in the United States is now the religion of Nones, those that identify as having no religious affiliation.¹ The number of those who self-identify as having no religious affiliation has hit an all-time high in America since Pew Research Center has been measuring this metric. The recent rapid increase of those who have been called religious “Nones” in America has been consistently evidenced in data in all major national polls. In a nation that has for so long self-identified as a “Christian” society, this seismic shift in the American religious landscape has been called by Time Magazine one of the ten most significant trends changing American society.²

Some contend America is on the same trajectory of religious decline as major European countries.³ The 1960s and 1970s was a moment, especially in Europe where there was an

¹ “The 2017 study, polling 3,000 Americans, found that 34 percent of Americans now identify as ‘nones’: atheists, agnostics or ‘nothing in particular’, overtaking Protestants (33 per cent) and Catholics (21 per cent) as a social group.” See Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy at Brigham Young University. “National Survey Examines Marriage, Family, Immigration, Health care and Technology in the Age of Trump,” *Deseret News*, 2017. <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/national-survey-examines-marriage-family-immigration-health-care-and-technology-in-the-age-of-trump-300557068.html> (Accessed February 25, 2019).

² Amy Sullivan, “The Rise of the Nones,” in 10 Ideas That Are Changing Your Life, *Time Magazine*, March 12, 2012. <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2108054,00.html> Accessed February 20, 2019).

³ Simon Brauer, “The Surprising Predictable Decline of Religion in the United States.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (2018): 0:1–22.

acceleration of the numbers of people choosing to disaffiliate from religion. This is significant given the latest survey data in the UK suggesting a less than one percent religious service attendance in the Church of England and a greater than fifty percent of the population self-identifying as religiously unaffiliated.⁴ The religiously unaffiliated population in the UK has surpassed the population that identifies as Christian to become the majority religious identity in the country.

Overall, global levels of religious affiliation declined during the Twentieth Century,⁵ with some suggesting this trend appears to be slowing and global religion is experiencing a significant season of growth.⁶ Though it can be argued there is a global resurgence of Christianity specifically⁷ and a resurgence of Evangelical expressions of Christianity is certainly not the case in the United States. As such, this project focuses entirely on the American religious context.

Currently, there are a handful of countries where religiously unaffiliated are the majority “religion.”⁸ China has the largest population, per capita, of religious Nones. Britain is not far

⁴ Now, the Church of England churches are no longer required to hold religious services on Sunday. Commenting on the change of the over 400 year old law, the Reverend Rose Hudson-Wilkin stated, “Times are changing- it is not just about a shortage of clergy but also the fact that people work on Sunday.” See, “Churches no longer have to hold Sunday services,” *BBC News*, February 22, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-47326993> (Accessed February 27, 2019).

⁵ According to the World Christian Database, nearly one hundred percent of the global population identified with a religion in 1910. This number has fallen to eighty seven percent in 2010.

⁶ Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project, “The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections 2010-2050,” April 2, 2015. http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2015/03/PF_15.04.02_ProjectionsFullReport.pdf (Accessed January 2, 2019).

⁷ The World Christian Database reports the global population of those identifying with no religion declining by three percent by 2050 and the global population of those identifying as Christian as growing by approximately three percent by 2050. <https://www.worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd/#/results/1747> (Accessed February 20, 2019).

⁸ See “The Global Religious Landscape,” *Pew Research Center* December 18, 2012, <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-unaffiliated/> (Accessed August 29, 2019). “The largest populations of the religiously unaffiliated outside China are in Japan (6% of all unaffiliated), the United States (5%), Vietnam (2%) and Russia (2%). There are six countries where the religiously unaffiliated make up a

behind with half of the nation's population identifying as religiously unaffiliated. Importantly now, thirty four percent of Americans reported no religious affiliation⁹ in the 2017 American Family Value Survey and only twenty eight percent reported being "born again" Evangelical Christian.¹⁰ Pew Research reports that the number of unaffiliated totaled 36 million adults in 2007 and grew to 47 million in 2012.¹¹ General Social Survey data from 1972–2008 showed an increase in the percentages of Americans who never attend religious services from about thirteen percent in the early 1990s to twenty two percent in 2008.

Regarding traditional religious beliefs, currently, about one-third of Americans strongly believes churches "have their best interest at heart," and one in four (twenty five percent) are not confident in pastors' insights on the issues of the day.¹² Only fourteen percent of Americans report using the Bible on a daily basis and thirty five percent of Americans admit to never picking up a Bible.¹³ Most Americans claim some belief in God; however, fewer Americans than in the past are certain about their belief. Those who are absolutely sure God exists dropped from sixty six percent of adults in 2003 to fifty four percent in 2013 in Harris Poll surveys.¹⁴ These

majority of the population: the Czech Republic (76% are religiously unaffiliated), North Korea (71%), Estonia (60%), Japan (57%), Hong Kong (56%) and China (52%)."

⁹ Defined as Atheistic, Agnostic, or Nothing in particular.

¹⁰ Christopher F. Karpowitz & Jeremy C. Pope. The American Family Values Survey: 2017 Summary Report: Marriage and Family in the Age of Trump. 2017, 46-47. http://csed.byu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/AFS-Report-2017_Full_Embargoed.pdf (Accessed January 29, 2019).

¹¹ Pew Research Center, Polling and Analysis, "Nones on the Rise." October 9, 2012. <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/> (Accessed January 29, 2019).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ LifeWay Research: Americans Are Fond of the Bible, Don't Actually Read It. April 25, 2017. <https://lifewayresearch.com/2017/04/25/lifeway-research-americans-are-fond-of-the-bible-dont-actually-read-it/> (Accessed on January 16, 2019).

¹⁴ "What do Americans Believe?" *The Harris Poll*, November 2013.

statistics highlight a shift toward less religious activity and belief in the past two decades. These churchless people becoming the nation's largest "faith" category leads Simon Brauer to state,

The United States and Europe appear to be on a similar trajectory of religious decline, with some variation in the rate and expected maximum size of the fuzzy middle. While the United States has traditionally been thought of as an exception to this process, it might better be described as being comparatively early in it. Despite its placement relative to European countries, the United States appears to be in a transitional state in which the fuzzy population has reached a critical mass. It is ultimately unknown whether these majority-fuzzy cohorts will change this trend. But if in the 21st century, the United States experiences the same changes that majority-fuzzy European nations did during the 20th century, the United States will be decidedly more secular by its close.¹⁵

The fuzzy middle comprised of the moderately religious is not only shrinking, but the vortex-like decline is also draining the number of intensely religious. Brauer's fuzzy middle is a synonymous concept with what Pew has identified as the "spiritual but not religious" population, the majority of who are more closely mirroring the beliefs and actions of those who confidently identify as Nones.¹⁶ The spiritual but not religious are more highly educated and lean Democrat more than Republican, politically. Moreover, this religious middle ground has been shrinking over the recent decades providing further evidence for the widening gap between the devout and spiritually indifferent where it is clear empirically that "the religious beliefs and practices of the affiliated and unaffiliated have become more dissimilar since 2000."¹⁷

¹⁵ Simon Brauer, "The Surprising Predictable Decline of Religion in the United States," 20.

¹⁶ Religious service attendance is lower among this group compared to the general population with many of the spiritual but not religious, saying religion is not too or not at all important in their lives. Of note here, GSS data shows that only 8.1% of Americans attended a religious service more than once a week. That has dropped to 6.6% in 2016, see Voas and Chaves. "Even Intense Religiosity is Declining in the United States," *Sociological Science*, (November 15, 2018), 698.

¹⁷ Aaron Gullickson, "The Diverging Beliefs and Practices of the Religiously Affiliated and Unaffiliated in the United States," *Sociological Science* 5 (06, 2018): 362.

Typically, patience is required when analyzing and measuring these changes in religious belief as shifts in primary beliefs and practices take time and are frequently quite minimal.¹⁸ That is, unless one is examining recent shifts in religious affiliation in the west. Even until the early '90s, trends in religious affiliation were relatively stable and predictable, evidencing minimal change. Since 1991, the population of those identifying as religiously unaffiliated has dramatically increased.¹⁹ Because a primary concern of this project is the decline in Evangelical affiliation, it is significant to note that though Evangelicalism experienced a surge of growth in the '80s it has experienced a steady decline since as has the population of those who hold what Voas and Chaves term “intensely religious”²⁰ beliefs such as viewing the Bible as the literal word of God and frequent church attendance.²¹

While some argue that the general population of Protestants is getting smaller, others argue the core, represented by those who attend religious services regularly and hold what can be

¹⁸ Voas and Chaves. “Even Intense Religiosity is Declining in the United States,” *Sociological Science*, (November 15, 2018), 5:969.

¹⁹ Gallup, “Religion”, Gallup.Com, Last modified 2019, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx>. Accessed January 20, 2019. See also, Frank Newport, “5 Things to know about Evangelicals in America,” *Gallup*, May 31, 2018. See also, ARIS, “Americans Who Don’t Identify with a Religion No Longer a Fringe Group,” American Religion Survey (ARIS) in the Media, September 22, 2009. “The 1990s was the decade when the “secular boom” occurred – each year 1.3 million more adult Americans joined the ranks of the Nones. Since 2001 the annual increase has halved to 660,000 a year.”

²⁰ Voas and Chaves define intense religiosity as identifying as strongly religiously affiliated, frequent prayer, biblical literalism, and frequent church attendance. Voas and Chaves. *Even Intense Religiosity*. 695. However, religious service attendance is a less reliable metric for determining religious affiliation as it does not necessarily reflect religious belief(s) or lack thereof. With the “unchurched” being defined as Pasquale does provides a much higher percentage of the American population as, “all who report that they do not affiliate with religious institutions or have not regularly attended formal services for a period of time (such as six months or a year), regardless of beliefs. The category is therefore quite broad, including both religious believers and unbelievers. Depending upon definitions, year of study, and sampling techniques, estimates of the unchurched range from 35 to 50 percent of the US population.” See, *Empirical Study and Neglect of Unbelief and Irreligion*. Excerpted from *The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief*, Tom Flynn (Ed.) Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007. Pages 760-766. Entry by Frank L. Pasquale. 762. A substantial majority of the unchurched in the United States, for example, pray, believe that Jesus Christ was the son of God, and desire religious training for their children. 762.

²¹ Voas and Chaves. “Even Intense Religiosity is declining in the United States,” 697.

considered traditional Evangelical beliefs, is getting stronger;²² however, research from Barna Group reveals that paralleling the rise of the Nones is a diminishing popularity of traditional Evangelical faith values and beliefs among those that might identify as Evangelical. Where Barna research reveals more than half of American Christians embrace at least one foundational element of the postmodern epistemology regarding the relativity of truth and the percentage of Americans that described themselves as Christian fell eight percentage points from 2007 to 2014.²³

The relatively recent interest with Nones has led to studies on the genesis of unbelief, disbelief, and misbelief in attempts to identify not only sociological causes but also formulations useful for predicting unbelief.²⁴ Identifying as unaffiliated could be just more about identity than beliefs since a majority of the unaffiliated still report having religious beliefs in general and some traditional Christian beliefs in particular. This could indicate Nones simply prefer to cease identifying with an established religion rather than cease believing in God or some form of higher power. Although the number of atheists and agnostics are growing, they do not make up a substantial number of the None population.²⁵ Instead of completely renouncing belief in a

²² Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, "Protestant and Catholic Distinctions in Secularization," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, (2016) 31:2, 165.

²³ "Competing Worldviews Influence Today's Christians," *Barna Research Group*, May 9, 2017. <https://www.barna.com/research/competing-worldviews-influence-todays-christians/> (Accessed December 18, 2018).

²⁴ G. Pennycook, *et al.* "Analytic cognitive style predicts religious and paranormal belief" *Cognition*, 123 (2012), pp. 335-346. See also, Will M. Gervais and Ara Norenzayan. "Analytic Thinking Promotes Religious Disbelief." *Science* 336, no. 6080 (2012): 493-96. See also, Shenhav, Amitai, Rand, David G., Greene, Joshua D. "Divine intuition: Cognitive style influences belief in God." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, Vol 141(3), Aug 2012, 423-428.

²⁵ Thirteen percent of religiously unaffiliated Americans claim the label "atheist"; fourteen percent define themselves as "agnostic." Jones, Cox, Cooper, and Lienesch. "Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion— and Why They're Unlikely to Come Back," *Public Religion Research Institute*, September 22, 2019, 11. See also Will Gervais who suggests the number of atheists in America could be as high as twenty six percent of the population. Some would suggest the significantly lower number of reported atheists in America is due to the still-present social

higher power, religious Nones still hold beliefs regarding a higher power with varying degrees of personability.²⁶ Those that have left the church (disaffiliated) have not inoculated the beliefs of the Nones, instead there is a quickly growing gap between the beliefs in God, belief in the afterlife, and frequency of prayer where these beliefs are strengthening in the declining population of the affiliated and quickly weakening amongst the growing number of Nones.

The recent tipping point for the widening chasm in beliefs between the affiliated and unaffiliated appears to have occurred around the turn of the millennium. With, the affiliated and unaffiliated becoming “more like each other in beliefs and practices before 2000. After 2000, the affiliated and unaffiliated became less like each other in beliefs and practices.”²⁷

It is not just the general population that is becoming less religious, the share of those who used to be considered to be intensely religious is also declining. As mentioned, some would argue that the increasing distance in similarity of beliefs between the religious and unaffiliated is a consequence of the lessening of belief among the unaffiliated and a strengthening of belief among the intensely religious; that religiosity as a whole is not in decline in America but rather “only moderate religion is on the decline in the United States;”²⁸ however, Voas and Chaves

stigmatism surrounding the general, negative opinion of atheists; a perpetual cycle where poor/inaccurate perceptions of atheists is caused by the relatively low number of atheists in a population. When, conversely, the more prevalent atheism is the more favorable perception of atheism in general. Will M. Gervais. “Finding the Faithless: Perceived Atheist Prevalence Reduces Anti-Atheist Prejudice.” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 37(4) 543–556. Atheists are included in Nones data but are more accurately defined as irreligious. Pasquale delineates the definition of Nones vs Nots by stating, “In other words, “nones” include, but are not equivalent to, “nots” (the affirmatively irreligious).” See, Frank L. Pasquale, “Empirical Study and Neglect of Unbelief and Irreligion,” Excerpted from *The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief*, Tom Flynn (Ed.) Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007, 765.

²⁶ Robert P. Jones, Daniel Cox, Betsy Cooper, and Rachel Lienesch. “Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion— and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back,” 11. has fifty nine percent of unaffiliated believing in a personal God (twenty two percent) or impersonal force (thirty seven percent).

²⁷ Gullickson, “The Diverging Beliefs and practices of the religiously unaffiliated in the United States,” 367.

²⁸ Schnabel, Landon, and Sean Bock. 2017. “The Persistent and Exceptional Intensity of American Religion: A Response to Recent Research.” *Sociological Science* 4:686.

provide conclusive evidence that a characteristic of the None population is their rapid conversion rates from affiliated to unaffiliated,

In 1983, 67% of Britons identified as some kind of Christian. In 2015, it was 43%. Over the same period, members of Non-Christian religions have more than quadrupled. In the UK, conversion rate of nones from Christianity is astonishingly greater than the conversion rate of Nones to Christianity with “every one person brought up with No religion who has become a Christian, twenty-six people brought up as Christians now identify as Nones.”²⁹

This appears to be the case in America as well. The conversion rates of “Nonverts” as Stephen Bullivant calls them, are significantly greater than conversions from the None population to Christianity in general and Evangelical expressions of faith in particular. A point Bullivant confirms in stating, “for every person brought up in a non-religious household who becomes religious, 26 people raised as Christians became non-religious.”³⁰

So, it is not that Nones never had religion or were raised without religion. In fact, many were raised in religiously affiliated homes, but they later chose to de-convert and some argue convincingly that these deconverts are “unlikely to come back.”³¹ Interestingly, not only is the population of Nonverts increasing, but there is also a corresponding increase in the retention rate of the None population. Nones appear to stay Nones longer than deconverts raised in Evangelical homes. Pew admits that the retention rate is still lower than other major world religions, with the majority of Nones raised in unaffiliated households still identify as Nones. Additionally, the retention rate is even greater among Millennials compared to all other religions listed on the

²⁹ Stephen Bullivant. “The No Religion Population of Britain.” Recent data from the British Social Attitudes Survey (2015) and the European Social Survey (2014) Catholic Research Forum Reports, 3.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Robert P. Jones, Daniel Cox, Betsy Cooper, and Rachel Lienesch. *Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion— and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back*. Washington D.C.: Public Religion Research Institute September 22, 2019.

survey.³² “Nearly one in five Americans switched from their childhood religious identity to become unaffiliated as adults, and only three percent of Americans who were raised unaffiliated are joining a religious tradition. This dynamic has resulted in a dramatic net gain—16 percentage points— for the religiously unaffiliated.”³³ This is “one important reason,” according to the Public Religion Research Institute, “why the unaffiliated are experiencing rising retention rates is because younger Americans raised in nonreligious homes are less apt to join a religious tradition or denomination than young adults in previous eras.”³⁴ Furthermore, this phenomenon is growing most immediately by conversion rather than biological growth due to religiously unaffiliated individuals having fewer children than those who identify with a religion.³⁵ In addition, conversion processes are often a symptom, and a function of the public resurgence of religion.

As has been seen thus far, sociologists have been unable to agree upon a single, significant cause for the rapid increase of Nones in America. Historically, attributing secularism as the primary catalyst for the significant growth in the population of those identifying as religiously unaffiliated has been a common argument among sociologists. This is why Berger, in a 1968 interview in the *New York Times*, confidently predicted that, by “the twenty-first century, religious believers are likely to be found only in small sects, huddled together to resist a world-

³² Pew Forum. America’s Changing Religious Landscape. <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>. Accessed January 16, 2019.

³³ Jones, Cox, Cooper, and Lienesch. “Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion— and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back,” *Public Religion Research Institute*, September 22, 2019, 4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁵ See Michael Lipka and David McClendon, “Why people with no religion are projected to decline as a share of the world’s population,” *Pew Research Center*, April 7, 2017 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/07/why-people-with-no-religion-are-projected-to-decline-as-a-share-of-the-worlds-population/> (accessed January 20, 2019) “This relative decline is largely attributable to the fact that religious “nones” are, on average, older and have fewer children than people who are affiliated with a religion.”

wide secular culture.”³⁶ Nearly thirty years later, Berger redacted his proclaimed certainty as a result of the global religious landscape he saw before him and stated, “the world today ... is as furiously religious as it ever was ... the body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labelled ‘secularization theory’ is essentially mistaken.”³⁷

It is the newness of this phenomenon that has posed a precarious question which has been hard to answer with any significant amount of forceful significance, namely, what is causing such a rapid increase of Americans choosing to not identify with any religion? One might assume recent sexual scandal within the Catholic church would be a significant contributing factor for the surge in religious unaffiliation but this only accounts for a relatively small number of those.³⁸ According to Public Religion Research Institute, the top two reasons that young adults list for leaving the church is that “they stopped believing in the religion’s teachings (60 percent)” and their families were “never that religious when they were growing up (32 percent).”³⁹ In the Public Religion Research Institute survey, which mirrored the most recent Pew research,⁴⁰ among the reasons Americans identified as important motivations in leaving their childhood

³⁶ Peter Berger, “A Bleak Outlook is Seen for Religion,” *New York Times*, 25 February 1968. <https://www.nytimes.com/1968/02/25/archives/a-bleak-outlook-is-seen-for-religion.html> (Accessed January 2, 2019.)

³⁷ Peter L. Berger, “Secularism in Retreat” *The National Interest*. 46 (Winter 1996): p3.

³⁸ Worth noting here, the Catholic church is also experiencing a significant decline in those that identify as Catholic. With “Catholics suffering the largest decline among major religious groups: a 10-percentage point loss overall.” Where thirty one percent of Americans report a childhood Catholic affiliation thirteen percent of those leave by switching to another religion or report no current religious affiliation. See Jones, Cox, Cooper, and Lienesch. “Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion— and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back,” *Public Religion Research Institute*, September 22, 2019, for full report on retention rates of major religious categories in America.

³⁹ Jones, Cox, Cooper, and Lienesch. “Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion— and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back,” 6.

⁴⁰ Becka Alper, “Why America’s Nones do not identify with religion,” *Pew Research Center*, August 8, 2018. Accessed January 29, 2019.

religion are: they stopped believing in the religion's teachings, their family was never that religious when they were growing up, and their experience of negative religious teachings about or treatment of gay and lesbian people.⁴¹ The Nones' experience of negative religious teachings about the treatment of LGBTQ people is a relatively new phenomena. Interestingly, this latter reason was cited as a much more important factor for disaffiliation than the clergy sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic church.

Need and Purpose of this Study

This study is needed as there exists no investigation of the current rapid rise in religious unaffiliation while comparing it to past major historical periods of American religion for the focused purpose of identifying those mechanisms that sparked periods of resurgence of interest in Evangelical-esque expressions of Christianity out of periods of significant religious disinterest.

Greg Smith, Associate Director of the Pew Research Center, removes doubt concerning the significance of a shifting tide in religious affiliation by certainly stating, "I think it goes without saying these are pretty significant changes in the American religious landscape."⁴² The Nones phenomenon in the U.S. has gone from two percent of adult Americans in 1950 to twenty one percent, 2014, according to Pew Research and some surveys put one in five adults as having left the church and one in three Millennials have self-identify as unaffiliated. As alarms are sounding for the Evangelical church due to the rapid increase of religious unaffiliation there is a

⁴¹ Jones, Cox, Cooper, and Lienesch. "Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion— and Why They're Unlikely to Come Back," 6.

⁴² Daniel Burke, "Religious leaders respond to the rise of the 'Nones'," *Religion News Service*, October 10, 2012, <https://religionnews.com/2012/10/10/religious-leaders-react-to-the-rise-of-the-nones/> (Accessed January 16, 2019).

glint of hope for the church in understanding “people stop being religious more quickly than they start being wholly secular.”⁴³ This means the total abandonment of religion is not imminent and the Evangelical church still has time to respond, albeit, how much time is not clear since religious decline has been at play throughout much of the 20th century; however, to be clear, something is evolving in America's perception of religion generally and Evangelicalism specifically and there are significant cultural consequences.

As households are becoming increasingly unaffiliated the youth of America are losing their religion and identifying as Nones at a much faster rate than their elders.⁴⁴ Every generation is becoming more religiously unaffiliated with a majority of those who leave their childhood faith do so before their eighteenth birthday.⁴⁵ A staggering ninety percent of those who leave their childhood faith do so before their 30th birthday putting these individuals squarely in the Millennial demographic.⁴⁶ Nearly half (forty six percent) of teens, on par with Millennials, say “I need factual evidence to support my beliefs”⁴⁷ The 2016 Cooperative Institutional Research Program Freshman⁴⁸ survey revealed the number of college freshmen with no religious

⁴³ David Voas, "The Rise and Fall of Fuzzy Fidelity in Europe." *European Sociological Review* 25, no. 2 (2009): 155-68.

⁴⁴ Jones, Cox, Cooper, and Lienesch. “Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion— and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back,” *Public Religion Research Institute*, September 22, 2019, 9.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁷ David Kinnaman, Roxy Lee Stone, and Brook Hempell, “Atheism Doubles Among Generation Z,” *Barna Group*, January 24, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/> (Accessed January 16, 2019).

⁴⁸ “The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) is a national longitudinal study of the American higher education system. It is regarded as the most comprehensive source of information on college students.” See, “About HERI,” <https://heri.ucla.edu/about-heri/> (Accessed January 27, 2019).

affiliation more than tripled since 1986, up thirty one percent from ten percent.⁴⁹ The most recent survey thirty five percent of the incoming freshmen in the United States picked atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular. The percentage of college graduates who identify with Christianity has declined by nine percentage points since 2007 with twenty four percent of all college graduates identifying as Nones.⁵⁰ With atheists making up the fastest growing population within the Nones; the number nearly doubling from 2007 to 2014.⁵¹ More than double the population identified as Gen Z⁵² self-identify as atheist compared to 6% of the general US adult population.⁵³

Significance Of Study

The number of those that identify as Christian is quickly shrinking in the United States with the religiously unaffiliated making up nearly a third of the population in the country.⁵⁴ The population of those who do not identify with any religious category being the primary or second largest religion in seventy six percent of the 50 states in America, with the religiously unaffiliated becoming the largest group in forty six percent of the nation's states.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Kevin Eagan, Ellen Bara Stolzenberg, Hillary B. Zimmerman, Melissa C. Aragon, Hannah Whang Sayson, and Cecilia Rios-Aguilar, *The National American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2016*, Higher Education Research Institute, May 2017.

⁵⁰ Pew Forum. America's Changing Religious Landscape. Accessed January 16, 2019.

⁵¹ In 2007, only 1.6% of Nones identified as Atheists, that number jumped to 3.1% in 2014. Pew

⁵² Born after 1996.

⁵³ Barna Group, "Atheism Doubles Among Generation Z," <https://www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/> Accessed January 16, 2019.

⁵⁴ Robert P. Jones, Daniel Cox, Betsy Cooper, and Rachel Lienesch, "Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion and Why They're Unlikely to Come Back", *Public Religion Research Institute*, .

⁵⁵ Antonia Blumberg, "This is the Biggest Religious Group in Each U.S. State," *HuffPost* February 25, 2015 https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/25/states-biggest-religious-group_n_6745314.html Accessed January 17, 2019.

This is a monumental shift in the religious landscape of a country that has been considered a “Christian” nation for nearly two and a half centuries and it is possible that this national identity could cease to exist in the lifetime of those reading this project. Several in the fields of sociology and religion are studying this religious de-evolution and the most recent reports indicate a budding but dramatic increase in the number of individuals who are comfortable with not identifying with any particular religion. The consequences of this massive shift have yet to be fully explored in the social sciences and it is a huge shift which has not been fully realized yet. Nonetheless, there are significant identifiable cultural consequences resulting from a rapid decrease in religiosity in general and American Evangelical identification specifically.

Beyond the immediate impact on religious institutions, religious affiliation has significant individual and societal impact through the influence of politics, the economic impact of religious establishments,⁵⁶ and the relationship between religious affiliation, and mental health consequences. PRRI’s Director of Research Dan Cox is quoted as saying, “The U.S. religious landscape is undergoing a dramatic transformation that is fundamentally reshaping American politics and culture.”⁵⁷ Religion is woven into the founding fabric of the American nation.

⁵⁶ See Aaron Earls, “Evangelicals Are Passionate About Politics, But Mostly Open to Opinions of Others,” *Lifeway Research*, October 23, 2018, “Evangelicals by belief (62 percent) and self-identified Evangelicals (59 percent) were most likely to say one of the reasons for their 2016 vote was choosing the candidate with the ability to improve the economy.” See also, Michelle Boorstein in “Does a religious community need its own building to flourish?” *Washington Post*, November 23, 2018, “Often cited is research done in the 1990s by the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Social Policy and Practice and a nonprofit group called Partners for Sacred Places. It found that an average urban congregation creates more than \$140,000 per year in value through the contribution of volunteer time; rental space at below market rates; and cash and in-kind donations. In 2016, the two groups teamed up again to create a metric that also includes the housing of schools and day-care centers as well as increased foot traffic and argues that each congregation generates \$1.7 million annually, on average, for the wider community. A faith-based group in Toronto used the previous research to create a calculator it says shows every dollar a congregation spends could create \$4.77 a city doesn’t have to invest.”

⁵⁷ Antonia Blumberg, “This is the Biggest Religious Group in Each U.S. State,” *HuffPost*, February 25, 2015. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/25/states-biggest-religious-group_n_6745314.html (Accessed January 17, 2019).

Addressed in the First and Fourteenth Amendments and in Article 6, the nation and its leaders cannot impose any particular form or preference of religion on the American people;⁵⁸ the government cannot interfere with anyone's religion,⁵⁹ nor can it require a religious test of any sort as a prerequisite for holding public office. With Pasquale arguing, "'Rational choice' and economic or market theories of religion stress the prevalence and benefits of religious belief and affiliation,"⁶⁰ the strong relationship between religion and a nation's policy begins to become evident.

Politics determines policy and as voters determine politicians, with "the role of political authorities in supporting/discouraging religion is a significant factor in the flourishing of a religion."⁶¹ As such, religiously affiliated and unaffiliated voters significantly determine national policy and the trajectory of a nation, religiously and politically. If this is true, the rise of the Nones has political, policy, and cultural implications.⁶² With religious resurgence illustrated by

⁵⁸ Establishment Clause.

⁵⁹ Free Exercise Clause was clarified in the *Reynolds vs United States* (1878) case by delineating between government interference with religious beliefs and religious actions.

⁶⁰ Frank L. Pasquale, "Empirical Study and Neglect of Unbelief and Irreligion," Excerpted from *The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief*, Tom Flynn (Ed.) Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007, 764.

⁶¹ Lily Kong and Seeta Nair. *Geographies of Religious Conversion* in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian eds. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 74.

⁶² Elizabeth P. Scuiapac and Gregory A. Smith. "How Religious Groups voted in the midterm elections." *Pew Research Center*. November 7, 2018. See also Betsy Woodruff. "The Nones and the GOP." *National Review*, December 7, 2012. <https://www.nationalreview.com/2012/12/nones-and-gop-betsy-woodruff/> See also, Liz Halloran. "Add This Group To Obama's Winning Coalition: 'Religiously Unaffiliated.'" *It's All Politics*, NPR, December 9, 2012.: <https://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/2012/12/09/166753248/add-this-group-to-obamas-winning-coalition-religiously-unaffiliated> See also, Michelle Borstein, "Meet the Nones, the Democratic Party's Biggest Faith Constituency." *The Washington Post*, February 29, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/meet-the-nones-the-democratic-partys-biggest-faith-constituency/2016/02/28/85e5b68e-d588-11e5-b195-2e29a4e13425_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.b34fe4e9b0a4 See also, Steven Barrie-Anthony, "'Spiritual but Not Religious': A Rising, Misunderstood Voting Bloc" *The Atlantic*, January 14, 2014. : <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/01/spiritual-but-not-religious-a-rising-misunderstood-voting-bloc/283000/> See also, Religious 'Nones' Multiply in Both U.S. Political Parties (article in Drive) See also, Juhem Navarro-Rivera, "The Evolution of the Religiously Unaffiliated Vote, 1980-

the Moral Majority in the 1980's shaping national policy and politics, so too do current surges in religious unaffiliation have the potential to significantly influence public policy that has far reaching consequences for those that hold traditional Evangelical beliefs. A great majority of Americans hold the opinion that if more Americans were religious it would be positive for American society;⁶³ however, only a slim majority still believe religion can answer most of life's problems.⁶⁴ As Chaves highlights,

Actively religious Americans are more politically and socially conservative than less religious Americans. Active participants support more restrictions on legal abortion, endorse more traditional gender roles, and vote Republican more often than less religious people. These differences have existed at least since the 1970s, but some of them have increased since then, creating a tighter link between religiosity and some kinds of political and social conservatism.⁶⁵

Writing for the Guardian, Jason Wilson speaks to the potentially dire implications of an ever shrinking Christian majority in stating, "After accounting for eight out of 10 Americans in 1976, white Christians are now a minority...The political implications could be profound."⁶⁶

2008" *PRRI*, October 26, 2012. <https://www.prrri.org/spotlight/the-evolution-of-the-religiously-unaffiliated-vote-1980-2008/> See also, Jaweed Kaleem, "Religious Vote Data Show Shifts In Obama's Faith-Based Support" Huffington Post, November 7, 2012. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/07/obama-religion-voters-2012_n_2090258.html See also, "Evangelicals Rally to Trump, Religious 'Nones' Back Clinton." Pew Research Center, July 13, 2016.

<http://www.pewforum.org/2016/07/13/Evangelicals-rally-to-trump-religious-nones-back-clinton/> See also Rizvi, Mohd Ahsan Kabir and Mohammad Zakir Hossain. Relationship Between Religious Belief and Happiness: A Systematic Literature Review regarding the political implications in outlined in various geographical contexts, "more often than not religious conversion has political and symbolic ramifications that extend beyond the reorientation of individual belief."

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/april/defining-Evangelicals-in-election-year.html>

⁶³ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx>. Seventy five percent responded positively when asked the question, "If more Americans were religious, would that be positive or negative for American society?"

⁶⁴ Down from eighty five percent in 1957 to fifty five percent of Americans. The most recent Gallup poll (June 2017) shows a slight increase from the all-time low of fifty one percent in May 2015.

⁶⁵ Mark Chaves, *American Religion: Contemporary Trends*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011, 101.

⁶⁶ Jason Wilson, "We're at the end of white Christian America. What will that mean?" *The Guardian*, September 20, 2017.

These implications are compounded when one realizes the college educated, white, male is the fastest growing demographic in the American None population.⁶⁷ Add to this general profile of the American None the political profile is Independent or Democrat⁶⁸ and twice as likely to be politically liberal (forty one percent) as they are to be conservative (twenty one percent).⁶⁹

CEO of the Public Religion Research Institute, Robert P. Jones recently wrote regarding the declining trajectory of a diminishing white Christian America saying it is “remarkable how fast” the trend is moving. In 2008, “white Christians were still 50% of the population, so that there’s been an 11-point shift since Barack Obama’s election.”⁷⁰ According to Jones, there is an obvious reason for this shift, namely, “the disaffiliation of young people in particular from Christian churches.”⁷¹ That is, especially among the young, there are proportionally fewer Christians. If this trends continue, that means that there will be fewer and fewer Christians⁷² and the political implications are revealed in a recent presidential election.

⁶⁷ See Barry Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, *Religion in a Free Market: Religious and Non-Religious Americans*. Ithica: Paramount Market Publishing, Inc. 2006. See also Joseph O. Baker and Buster G. Smith, “The Nones: Social Characteristics of the Religiously Unaffiliated.” *Social Forces*, Volume 87, Issue 3, 1 March 2009, 1251–1263.

⁶⁸ Jones, Cox, Cooper, and Lienesch. “Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion— and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back,” 23.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷⁰ Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Jones cites the 2012 Pew and ARIS data that respectively found that thirty two percent of young Americans have no religious affiliation, while the 2008 ARIS survey revealed twenty nine percent of Americans 18–29 years old professed no religion. See Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017. ARIS consists of a nationally representative sample of adults. See Kosmin, Barry and Ariela Keysar with Ryan Cragen and Juhem Navarro-Rivera. 2008. *American Nones: The profile of the no religion population*. Available at <http://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/files/2011/08/NONES_08.pdf>. The 2008 ARIS survey had a representative sample of 54,461 adults with specific focus on the nones. “Of those, 7,047 are Nones, or individuals who responded to the question: What is your religion, if any? with “none,” “atheist,” “agnostic,” “secular,” or “humanist.” For these 7,047 people, basic socio-demographic information was collected (e.g., age, sex, etc.). A randomly selected, nationally representative subset of those 7,047 cases, 1,106 people, was asked an

According to the Pew Research Center, on election day, 2012 exit polls conducted by the National Election Poll found that seventy nine percent of white Evangelical Protestants voted for Romney over Obama.⁷³ Conversely, the same exit poll found that, “that 70% of religious “nones” voted for Obama over Romney.”⁷⁴ Prior to the 2016 election, “more than one-quarter (26%) of unaffiliated Americans report they were not registered to vote, a significantly higher rate than among white Evangelical Protestants (10%).”⁷⁵ With the a strong majority of Nones strongly favoring Hillary Clinton (sixty two percent) over Donald Trump (twenty one percent), the Nones were a significant, and perhaps underrated, voting coalition for Clinton compared to Trump’s (thirty percent vs thirteen percent).⁷⁶ This underutilized voting block will most likely be a much more significant influence in the 2020 election. Compare this to those with Evangelical beliefs, “among Evangelicals who voted, more than half of Evangelicals by belief (58 percent) and self-identified Evangelicals (53 percent) cast their ballot for Trump,”⁷⁷ and, “a majority of non-Evangelical voters (53 percent) voted for Clinton, while 36 percent voted for Trump.”⁷⁸

additional series of questions on behaviors and opinions that provide further insights into the profile of Nones. The subset is a nationally representative “silo” of Nones. Additionally, a random subset of the overall 54,461 participants totaling 1,015 individuals were asked some of the same questions as the None silo. This “national silo” is a random subsample and is representative of the general U.S. adult population. The 1990 data in this report are from the National Survey of Religious Identification; a nationally representative sample of 113,713 adults among whom 9,899 self-identified with one of the above None categories.

⁷³ The Pew Research Center, “How the Faithful Voted: 2012 Preliminary Analysis,” November 7, 2012.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ ARIS Ibid., 18.

⁷⁶ Jones, Cox, Cooper, and Lienesch. “Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion— and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back,” 20.

⁷⁷ Aaron Earls, “Evangelicals Are Passionate About Politics, But Mostly Open to Opinions of Others,” *Lifeway Research*, October 23, 2018.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

However, more than religious beliefs alone appear to influence political affiliation. It is possible race and generational cohort significantly influences how those with Evangelical beliefs vote. Lifeway Research contrasts the vast differences in how those who hold Evangelical beliefs vote based on their race and generational cohort identification:

African-American voters with Evangelical beliefs overwhelmingly voted for Clinton (86 percent), while more than three-quarters of white voters with Evangelical beliefs voted for Trump (77 percent). Around half of younger voters with Evangelical beliefs cast their ballot for Clinton—47 percent of those 18 to 49. A majority of voters 65 and over who have Evangelical beliefs voted for Trump (72 percent).⁷⁹

As there are political implications of religious affiliation there are, conversely, influential ramifications of unbelief regarding morality and beliefs concerning basic human rights. With those considered to be more religiously conservative being “especially concerned about the ungodliness and moral decay of U.S. society and its alleged abandonment of family values.”⁸⁰ “The issue of abortion has been the most pivotal political issue mobilizing religious constituencies to political action in the United States during the four decades since the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision which legalized abortion in 1973.”⁸¹ Religious Nones are significantly less likely to hold that belief in God is necessary for morality and good values, or their own moral decision making.⁸² An interesting position given the views of Nones concerning

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Robert Wuthnow, “Restructuring American Religion Further Evidence,” 319. With his study suggesting “religious conservatives are more likely than are religious liberals to express concern about five of the seven problems listed: people turning away from God, moral corruption, family breakdown.” 318.

⁸¹ Darren E. Sherkat, *Changing Faith: The Dynamics and Consequences of Americans’ Shifting Religious Identities*, (New York: NYU Press, 2014), 151.

⁸² PRRI Exodus, 12. Seventy seven percent of Nones reject the idea that belief in God is required for morality or good values compared to seventy eight percent of black Protestants and fifty nine percent of white Protestants. See also, Pew Research Center, “A growing share of Americans say it’s not necessary to believe in God to be moral,” October 16, 2016. See Darren E. Sherkat, *Changing Faith: The Dynamics and Consequences of Americans’ Shifting Religious Identities*, (New York: NYU Press, 2014) for a more detailed discussion of the “relationship between ethnicity and religious identification and their impact on political values and commitments.”

LGBTQ equality stemming from arguments for basic human rights. Perhaps even more alarming is the only slight majority (fifty nine percent) of white Protestants who hold that belief in God is a precondition for moral behavior.⁸³

There is also a growing body of research addressing the coadjutant relationship between levels of religiosity and corresponding impacts on mental health. Religious beliefs and practices are related to greater life satisfaction, positive affect and higher morale.⁸⁴ Specifically, belief in God, but not religious affiliation, has been associated with better psychiatric treatment outcomes.⁸⁵ Individuals with a positive and accepting image of God demonstrate fewer anxiety and depressive symptoms.⁸⁶ Similarly, belief in a benevolent God is associated with less social anxiety, paranoia, obsession, and compulsion.⁸⁷ Some argue that religious beliefs affect individual and societal happiness.⁸⁸ Of the thirty five studies in the past two decades that have

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Abu-Raiya H. "On the links between religion, mental health and inter-religious conflict: a brief summary of empirical research." *The Israel Journal of Psychiatry and Related Sciences*. 2013; 50:130–139.

⁸⁵ D.H. Rosmarin, J.S. Bigda-Peyton, S.J. Kertz, et al. "A test of faith in God and treatment: the relationship of belief in God to psychiatric treatment outcomes." *Journal of Affective Disorders*. 2013; 146:441–446.

⁸⁶ Ali Akbar Haddadi Koohsar and Bagher G. Bonab, "Relation between quality of image of God with anxiety and depression in college students," *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences* (2011): 29:252–256.

⁸⁷ Nava R. Silton, Kevin J. Flannelly, Kathleen Galek and Christopher G. Ellison. "Beliefs About God and Mental Health Among American Adults." *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 53, No. 5 (October 2014), 1285–1296.

⁸⁸ Rizvi, Mohd Ahsan Kabir and Mohammad Zakir Hossain. Relationship Between Religious Belief and Happiness: A Systematic Literature Review. *Journal of Religion and Health* (2017) 56:1561–1582 DOI 10.1007/s10943-016-0332-6 See also Lelkes "Tasting Freedom," which using a large sample size of 9167 adults, compared the relationship between economic freedom and religiousness with happiness. The study indicated a strong correlation between religiosity and happiness and a negative correlation between economic freedom and happiness. For additional supporting studies as the thesis relates specifically to the American context see: Compton, W. C. (2001). "Toward a tripartite factor structure of mental health: Subjective well-being, personal growth, and religiosity." *The Journal of Psychology*, 135(5), 486–500., Ferriss, A. L. (2002). "Religion and the quality of life." *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 3(3), 199–215., Francis, L. J., & Lester, D. (1997). "Religion, personality and happiness." *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 12(1), 81–86., Idler, E. L., McLaughlin, J., & Kasl, S. (2009). "Religion and the quality of life in the last year of life." *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 64(4), 528–537., Levin, J. S., & Chatters, L. M. (1998). "Religion, health, and

investigating the relationship between Christian affiliation and levels of happiness there is a more than sixty five percent positive correlation⁸⁹ providing strong evidence that religious affiliation positively affects the quality of one's life. Additionally, the data seem to indicate that those that are unaffiliated are nearly as happy as those that identify with a Christian religion. A Canadian survey provided a very clear correlation between religiosity and happiness suggesting spirituality forms the strongest predictor of happiness.⁹⁰

While the majority of correlation studies regarding Christian affiliation and happiness have been positive, studies investigating Muslim affiliation have been overwhelmingly positive,⁹¹ but, this could be attributed to what Opfinger and Gundlach found that individuals that were either highly or unremarkably religious reported higher levels of happiness. Whereas those who were identified to be moderately religious were the ones self-reporting the lowest levels of happiness.⁹² And self-reporting Muslims were “more religious and happier compared to believers of other religions.”⁹³

psychological well-being in older adults findings from three national surveys.” *Journal of Aging and Health*, 10(4), 504–531.

⁸⁹ Mohd Ahsan Kabir Rizvi and Mohammad Zakir Hossain, “Relationship Between Religious Belief and Happiness: A Systematic Literature Review.” *Journal of Religion and Health* (2017) 56:1561–1582.

⁹⁰ Mark D. Holder, Ben Coleman, and Judi M. Wallace, “Spirituality, religiousness, and happiness in children aged 8–12 years,” *Journal of Happiness Studies* (2010): 11, 131–150.

⁹¹ Ahmed M. Abdel-Khalek and David Lester, “Religiosity, health, and psychopathology in two cultures: Kuwait and USA,” *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* (2007): 10(5), 537–550. See also, Ahmed Abdel-Khalek and David Lester, “A significant association between religiosity and happiness in a sample of Kuwaiti students,” *Psychological Reports* (2009): 105(2), 381–382.

⁹² Erich Gundlach and Matthias Opfinger, “Religiosity as a determinant of happiness,” *Review of Development Economics*, (July 2013): 17(3), 523–539.

⁹³ Mohd Ahsan Kabir Rizvi and Mohammad Zakir Hossain. “Relationship Between Religious Belief and Happiness: A Systematic Literature Review,” 1573.

Additionally, the relatively recent increase in acceptance of full-normalcy of homosexuality has produced research that suggests sexual minority individuals who are affiliated with a gay-affirming, Christian denominations experience less perceived discrimination and overall lower levels of depression compared to their peers that identified as secular, and those sexual-minorities who are affiliated with denominations that oppose homosexuality. This research indicates religious affiliation for sexual minorities can be a risk factor or protective factor regarding mental health in general and discrimination and depression in particular.⁹⁴

Interestingly, committed atheists are found to enjoy the best mental health among the Nones population similar to those possessing strong religious beliefs.⁹⁵ In fact, “convinced atheists may derive consolation from a certainty of belief in their own solidly-held worldview, leading to similar mental health to the highly-religious.”⁹⁶ The spiritual but not religious population generally has greater numbers of depression and substance abuse. With one English study concluding, “People who have a spiritual understanding of life in the absence of a religious framework are vulnerable to mental disorder.”⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Gattis, M.N., Woodford, M.R. & Han, Y. “Discrimination and Depressive Symptoms Among Sexual Minority Youth: Is Gay-Affirming Religious Affiliation a Protective Factor?” *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. (2014) 43: 1589.

⁹⁵ Joseph O. Baker and Samuel Stroope and Mark H. Walker, “Secularity, religiosity, and health: Physical and mental health differences between atheists, agnostics, and nonaffiliated theists compared to religiously affiliated individuals,” *Social Science Research* 75, (September 2018): 44-57.

⁹⁶ Rob Whitley, The Mental Health of Atheists and the Nones, *Psychology Today*, December 4, 2018. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/talking-about-men/201812/the-mental-health-atheists-and-the-nones>, Accessed January 14, 2019.

⁹⁷ Michael King, Louise Marston, Sally McManus, Terry Brugha, Howard Meltzer, and Paul Bebbington. “Religion, Spirituality and Mental Health: Results from a National Study of English Households,” *British Journal of Psychiatry* 202, no. 1 (2013): 68–73.

Contrarily, Speed and Fowler argue for a cessation of overgeneralization regarding the positive corollary relationship between religion and mental health and happiness. Focusing exclusively on how church attendance affects mental health of the religiously unaffiliated, their results suggest, “the religiously unaffiliated experienced attending church less positively than Christians; when compared at the highest level of attendance, the religiously unaffiliated were less healthy than Christians.”⁹⁸ In only investigating categorical behavioral activities, Speed’s and Fowler’s research highlights the fact that activities such as religious service attendance and prayer/meditation do not significantly correlate to higher levels of life satisfaction, happiness, or better states of mental health for the religiously unaffiliated. This ignores the positive effects associated with belonging (socialization/identifying with) and beliefs.

When compared to lowest levels of attendance, there were no differences between Christians and the unaffiliated in levels of self-rated health or overall satisfaction with life; however, more frequent attendance increased self-rated health and satisfaction with life among Christians whereas high levels of attendance had a subsequent negative effect on self-rated health and satisfaction with life among the religiously unaffiliated. When attending church at the higher frequency (once a week), those identifying as Christian experienced higher levels of self-rated health and satisfaction with life than those that identified as unaffiliated.⁹⁹ This further indicates religious affiliation influences one's quality of life, negatively or positively.

Nonetheless, this subsequently could negate the assumption that attracting the unaffiliated to religious events and services is the answer to the current rise of the Nones since a

⁹⁸ David Speed and Ken Fowler. “Good for All? Hardly! Attending church does not benefit religiously unaffiliated,” *Journal of Religion and Health* (2017) 56: 986.

⁹⁹ Speed and Fowler, “Good for All?” 995-997.

large number of Nones report their last experience in a religious service, not including wedding or funeral services, was largely positive.¹⁰⁰ In fact, contrary to the “seeker” movement of the late Twentieth Century, it is important to note that religious Nones are in fact not seeking to join a religious organization. The overwhelming majority, 93%, report they are not actively seeking or interested in joining a religious organization or church that would be right for them.¹⁰¹ Even among those Nones to whom religion is still important in their lives very few are actively interested in seeking to find a religious organization or church that is right for them.¹⁰²

Interestingly, a higher level of certainty in one's belief system is associated with greater psychological health.¹⁰³ A claim that is also supported by Baylor's 2011 Values and Beliefs survey where it was shown that what individuals believe affects mental health more than religious activity and affiliation (Behaving and Belonging). Though, those respondents that attended religious services multiple times each week had the fewest number of mental health issues,¹⁰⁴ supporting the hypothesis illustrating a possible correlation that certainty of belief increases religious affiliation via religious socialization (attendance).

¹⁰⁰ Jones, Cox, Cooper, and Lienesch. “Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion— and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back,” *Public Religion Research Institute*, September 22, 2019, 7, 15. PRRI asks two questions regarding affiliation and importance of religion which allows for the developing of three sub-categories within the None population. Of the total None population 70% reported a positive experience the last time they attended a religious service. This number is significantly greater (80% and 89%) among Apatheist, those that “say religion is not personally important to them, but believe it generally is more socially helpful than harmful,” and Unattached Believers, those Nones that still hold religion as being important in their lives.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 11.

¹⁰² Ibid. 16.

¹⁰³ Samuel R. Weber, Kenneth I. Pargament, Mark E. Kunik, James Lomax, and Melinda A. Stanley, “Psychological distress among religious non-believers: a systematic review,” *Journal of Religion and Health*, (2012): 51:72–86.

¹⁰⁴ “The Values and Beliefs of the American Public,” Baylor University, 2011. <https://www.deseretnews.com/media/pdf/601234.pdf> Accessed January 19, 2019.

Research Problem and Thesis

Johnson provides a simplistic formula for calculating and predicting religious affiliation locally and globally. By suggesting the measures of births minus deaths, converts minus defectors, and immigrants minus emigrants, he relies heavily on the supposition that the causes of current and future populations of religious and irreligious communities can be determined by measuring empirical population data.¹⁰⁵ In other words, he suggests changes over time in religious affiliation can be measured by examining the empirical data sets just mentioned; however, this does not provide a satisfactory explanation of the rapid increase in the number of religiously unaffiliated among Americans 30 years old and younger as this population is having fewer children than those generational cohorts before them.

Each successive birth cohort is less intensely religious than the one before, and there is little sign of people becoming more intensely religious with age or over time.¹⁰⁶ Brauer suggests the reason for a lessening religiosity from one generational cohort to the next is, “not primarily the result of the diminishing size of the moderately religious...Rather, the highly religious make up increasingly small proportions of each subsequent cohort, while the proportion that is moderately religious has actually increased substantially across cohorts.”¹⁰⁷

Voas and Chaves also argue the rising numbers of religiously unaffiliated result from younger generations replacing older, more traditionally religious ones; however, that is not the entire story. The data suggest that Americans are becoming less religious across generations.

¹⁰⁵ Todd M. Johnson. “Demographics of Religious Conversion” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 52.

¹⁰⁶ David Voas, and Mark Chaves. 2016. “Is the United States a Counterexample to the Secularization Thesis?” *American Journal of Sociology* 121:1517–56.

¹⁰⁷ Simon Brauer, “The Surprising Predictable Decline of Religion in the United States,” 17.

Something more than cohort change is responsible for the overall trend leading others to return the very important question,

Is religious decline inevitable and irreversible? If there is no expectation that the process and the mechanisms underlying it will be disrupted, further religious decline is not only theoretically possible but highly plausible. However, the existence of processes that slowly weaken religious convictions does not preclude the possibility of strong counteracting forces. Certainly, U.S. history provides many examples of religious revivals and mobilization.¹⁰⁸

So, for example, even if the conditions that enable religious decline remain (making decline inevitable), religious revivals may effectively undo many decades of slow decline. In contrast, Voas and Chaves provide a helpful metaphor comparing the current decline of religion in America to a cooling bathtub. While one may continue to add hot water, and while the water may get warmer, those efforts do not curb the cooling process.¹⁰⁹ What is important for the Evangelical Church in particular, if it is to have any hope of existing (minimally) or thriving (ideally) in America, Brauer urges that unless “we understand the nature of the water heater and the person turning on the faucet, we are left with significant unknowns about how long the bath will remain comfortable.”¹¹⁰

With over sixty percent of Protestant churches in America experiencing either plateaued or declining numbers, the ineffectiveness or outright inattention to evangelistic efforts is magnified by the aggressive growth of the Nones population;¹¹¹ therefore, this dissertation

¹⁰⁸ Jon Butler, Grant Wacker, and Randall Balmer, *Religion in American Life: A Short History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁹ David Voas and Mark Chaves, “Is the United States a counterexample to the secularization thesis?” *American Journal of Sociology* (2016): 121(5):1546–47.

¹¹⁰ Brauer, “The Surprising Predictable Decline of Religion in the United States,” 19.

¹¹¹ Aaron Earls “Small, Struggling Congregations Fill U.S. Church Landscape,” *Lifeway Research*, March 6, 2019. <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/03/06/small-struggling-congregations-fill-u-s-church-landscape/>, Accessed January 19, 2019.

project seeks to answer one central question related to the current increase in the number of Americans identifying as religiously unaffiliated: Are there identifiable religious resurgence mechanisms in American religious history that address the current rise of the Nones and if initiated would facilitate future religious resurgence?

Research Gap

Perhaps the most significant research currently underway regarding understanding unbelief and religious unaffiliation is being conducted by the John Templeton Foundation. From January 2017 to September 2019 a research team is completing a nearly \$2.9 million grant investigating the causes of unbelief and atheism around the world aiming to better understand the phenomenon that is associated with the word un-belief whether that's atheism, agnosticism, the religious Nones; those individuals without religious identification. The project is less about what these individuals believe in particular. Instead, the project is aimed at providing an analysis of the current None population, globally.¹¹² It is clear Nones are a heterogeneous group consisting of nuances that have yet to be identified and researched. While some research exists that provides broad sub-categories of religious identifiers and degrees of affiliation such as PRRI's Rejectionist, Apatheist, and Unattached believers to more general classifications of agnostic, weak and strong atheists, etc. The lack of granular-level research into the nuances in causes of belief, or lack thereof, is a primary impetus for the currently underway Templeton project on Understanding Unbelief. The research will culminate in September 2019 for the 50th anniversary of the Vatican's 1969 conference, Culture of Unbelief.

¹¹² Working with at least 15 other research teams, however the primary grantees are researching four primary global locations. Jonathan Lanman in Japan, Michel Farias in Brazil, Stephen Bullivant in the United States, and Lois Lee in Denmark. See The John Templeton Foundation, "Understanding Unbelief" Templeton.org <https://www.templeton.org/grant/understanding-unbelief> Accessed January 19, 2019.

Prior to the current research project on *Understanding Unbelief*, The Templeton Foundation initiated a yearlong study from October 2015 to December 2016 to conduct the Scientific Study of Non-Religious Belief to map non-religious belief. This global research project had as its aim to establish the study of ‘non-religion’ as a major sub-field in the psychological and social sciences.” However, in investigating how belief and unbelief is psychologically structured, the Scientific Study of Non-Religious Belief project has not provided insight nor direction for what is needed for a future resurgence of religion.¹¹³

The recent focus on the rise of the Nones has led to coining new categories of religious identification such as spiritual but not religious, committed atheists, disaffiliated, nonverts, etc. providing a host of newly coined identifiers for a sociological phenomenon. But, most reporting and texts regarding religious affiliation and the rise of the Nones discuss the current state of affairs regarding the decline of religion in America in general and the rapid decline of mainline and Evangelical Christianity in America specifically. Little-to-no space has been devoted to comparing and contrasting the causes of the current surge of religious unaffiliation and comparing those with potentially similar causes throughout the history of American Evangelical expressions of Christianity for the expressed purpose of identifying common causes for a surge in religious unaffiliation and the mechanisms that inaugurate a resurgence of belief in Christianity among the American population. It is the lack of scholarly investigation regarding the causes of previous periods of religious disinterest/unaffiliation and comparing those with the current American religious situation that magnifies the need for this dissertation project.

The lack of academic treatments produces a specific set of research questions that can be addressed and a treatment provided by weaving a hypothesis together from seeking the discovery

¹¹³ See The John Templeton Foundation, “The Scientific Study of Non-Religious Belief,” Templeton.org. <https://www.templeton.org/grant/scientific-study-of-non-religious-belief>, Accessed January 20, 2019.

of mechanisms that can facilitate future religious resurgence in America. The primary hypothesis of this project suggests there are identifiable markers in the history of the American church regarding primacy of prayer, sermon content, evangelistic focus, intentional discipleship, etc. and surrounding culture regarding secularism, economy, politics, etc. that caused both periods of disinterest in religion and precipitated surges in interest in Evangelical expressions of Christianity. Have those identifiable mechanisms preceded the current rise of the Nones and how present are those mechanisms of resurgence in the American Evangelical church today?

Statement of Limitations

Due to the relative recency of the Nones phenomenon there have been few academic treatments which provides the most significant limitation of this project. The resulting lack of substantial, academic treatment of the phenomenon requires this project to draw from, incorporate, and supplement existing sources with news articles, surveys, polls, etc. to illustrate the recent evolution of religious adherence while consulting historical works of the religious history of the American people for the prospect of highlighting the potential cyclical nature of American religiosity.

Moreover, this project does not investigate a comparison of the rapid religious decline of the United Kingdom to what is occurring in the United States. As briefly discussed above, there are several that suggest America is following a similar trajectory as that of the United Kingdom, suggesting there could be the potential for significant predictions for the future religious landscape of the US and insights regarding the causes and remedies for the current rapid decline in those who identify as Christian.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ See Brauer, "The Surprising Predictable Decline of Religion in the United States."

Certainly there are socio-economic and psychological factors that significantly influence the causes of unbelief; however, the scope and aim of this project prevents the implications of these influences from being fully investigated apart from the brief discussion of socio-economic theories influencing the rise of the Nones in the United States in Chapter 4.

Review Of Relevant Research

Robert Wuthnow's *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II*¹¹⁵ is first in a four-volume treatment by Princeton that addresses the relationship between church and state. Though the work was published before there was a recognizable increase in religious unaffiliation in America, the work still provides substantial insights regarding the already-present shifts occurring in the religious landscape. This work consistently confirms throughout that religion in America is persistent, and though it is being restructured to be experienced in a more privatized instead of corporate context, it will not soon disappear.

Importantly, *Restructuring* addresses what Wuthnow calls the “education gap” between religious conservatives and liberals that began to appear during the 60s “as a result of baby boomers' experiences with higher education during the counterculture unrest; however, it also traced the rising levels of education of Evangelicals and suggested that the ‘education gap’ might be of limited duration.”¹¹⁶ Something Wuthnow further confirms from his research in *Further Evidence*, specifically that the “educational differences between religious liberals and conservatives appear to have diminished during the late 1980s.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

¹¹⁶ Robert Wuthnow, “Restructuring American Religion Further Evidence,” *Sociological inquiry*, 1996, Vol.66(3), 323.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

Wuthnow provides an update to his 1988 text in his Sociological Inquiry article¹¹⁸ where he provides updated empirical evidence that further substantiates his primary arguments in *Restructuring American Religion*. In his interest to “see whether the main arguments advanced in *Restructuring* need to be modified or whether they are still supported by the evidence,”¹¹⁹ he concludes that the primary arguments that religion was positioned “to be deeply influenced by changes in its social environment” in a post-World War II America still hold true and are supported by the dramatically changing political and social context.

The concept of religious socialization was not addressed in *Restructuring* but Wuthnow’s updated research in *Further Evidence* purposefully investigated the statistical significance of the familial influence on one’s religious affiliation and beliefs. Wuthnow’s analysis led him to confidently conclude that “one important way in which religious orientations have become institutionalized is family.”¹²⁰

Part two of the Princeton Church-State series is provided by Robert T. Handy aptly titled *Undermined Establishment: Church-State Relations in America, 1880-1920*¹²¹ describes this as the period where the “informal” establishment of Protestantism began to markedly decline in the American context. In purposefully employing the term “establishment” as that entity that executes the leading role in determining and controlling the public agenda Handy is able to hint at the force with which mainstream Protestantism was able to influence the American public

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 303.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 324.

¹²¹ Robert T. Handy, *Undermined Establishment: Church-State Relations in America, 1880-1920*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

agenda; the term as a nod to the force with which the State Church of England was able to shape a nation.

Handy provides useful markers for possible causations of the decline of Protestantism during this time, which can inform and guide the investigation of previous periods of American religious history. Citing significant population growth, an increasing religious pluralism, the growth of the Catholic Church, and the development of schisms within Protestantism as possible fault lines within the religious landscape that would only continue to widen. Prior to the 60s and the election of Kennedy, what Handy concludes was the final end to the Protestant establishment, the majority of Protestant leaders had a favorable opinion of the state with the three Presidents Handy discusses (McKinley, Roosevelt, Harrison) approving of Protestant activities and beliefs.¹²²

Mark Chaves, in his *American Religion: Contemporary Trends*,¹²³ traces changes occurring in religion in the United States between 1972 and 2008 primarily leveraging General Social Survey data and National Congregations Study (NCS) data secondarily. Chaves suggests the results do strike a balance between “the twin dangers of overstating and understating recent changes.”¹²⁴ He quickly acknowledges that the process of cultural change is very slow and as such sociologists of religion and those that would study the American religious landscape are best served by taking the “longer view” where more significant change(s) can be observed and

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Mark Chaves, *American Religion: Contemporary Trends*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

¹²⁴ Ibid., 3.

identified. His primary argument for the rapid increase of Nones being a “backlash to the religious right's rising visibility in the 1980s.”¹²⁵ will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Chaves outlines his examination of religion (primarily Christianity) in American life in several significant areas¹²⁶ with the primary aim being to describe the American religious trends in these areas over the past several decades with no purpose to explain these for the reader. Largely, Chaves’ findings illustrate an American religious landscape that has fluctuated, positively or negatively, very little since the earliest 1972 General Social Survey data, but his conclusion points “to a straightforward general conclusion: *American religiosity has been declining for decades.*”¹²⁷ With every indicator of traditional religious belief is either stable or declining, and most are declining. The trend is toward less religion.”¹²⁸ Though the decline is very slow;¹²⁹ however, the decline has been so slow that it is necessary for the researcher to examine larger periods of history and data to be able to perceive fluctuations in the ebb and flow of American religiosity. Launching from this point, and what is of great relevance to this study is leveraging the descriptive outlines Chaves provides from data as recent as 2008 and what has happened since regarding the more rapid increase of those identifying as religiously unaffiliated.

Seeking to dismiss the secular vs religious dichotomy that has for so long existed, Baker and Smith argue in their *American Secularism: Cultural Contours of Nonreligious Belief*

¹²⁵ Ibid., 20.

¹²⁶ Racial, ethnic, and religious diversity among religious affiliates and within congregations, changes in religious beliefs, public religious involvement, congregational demographics, beliefs regarding religious leaders, the declining membership of liberal Protestant denominations, and political and religious polarization in the American public.

¹²⁷ Chaves, *American Religion: Contemporary Trends*, 117.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 117-118.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 118.

*Systems*¹³⁰ that there are several different types and shades of secularity and each has a nuanced relationship with religion.¹³¹ By leveraging GSS data from 1972 to 2012 and 2007 Pew Research data as a quantitative foundation, the text is able to establish the complexity of American secularity by providing three useful dimensions of secularity (affiliation, belief, and practices) that serve as delimiting scope for providing four categories of the non-religious (atheists, agnostics, non-religious believers, and culturally religious). The incorporation of both survey and interview data provides this treatment of the current state of American secularity a more qualitative feel. Regarding potential causes for the current state of nonreligious belief in America, Baker and Smith attribute this change in the American religious landscape to shifts in the political meanings of religion in American culture; arguing that the rate of secularity has increased since the 1970s due to changes in the family structure and due to the politics of religion.

Locating Self As Researcher

An imperative step in the qualitative phenomenological approach to research is bracketing out or identifying the researchers presuppositions and bias regarding the phenomenon being research.¹³² To explicate the significance of identifying and acknowledging the researcher's bias, Wendy Sword outlines that "In a qualitative study, the researcher's curiosity,

¹³⁰ Joseph O. Baker and Buster G. Smith, *American Secularism: Cultural Contours of Nonreligious Belief Systems*, (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

¹³¹ Ibid., 93.

¹³² See "Phenomenology Methods and Data Collection," Grand Canyon University's Center for Innovation and Research in Teaching. https://cirt.gcu.edu/research/developmentresources/research_ready/phenomenology/methods_data, Accessed February 13, 2019. For a detailed definition of "bracketing" as "The process of identifying, and keeping in check, any preconceived beliefs, opinions or notions about the phenomenon being researched. In this process, the researcher 'brackets out' any presuppositions in an effect to approach the study of the phenomenon from an unbiased perspective."

relationships with participants, and conceptual lenses through which data are gathered and interpreted have significant bearing on the research.” and “Reflection on the influence of self not only creates personal awareness of how the research is shaped by one’s own biography but also provides a context within which audiences can more fully understand the researcher’s interpretation of text data.”¹³³

Starbuck advocates that researchers “should both challenge their own thinking by disrupting their preconceptions and try to demonstrate the validity of their knowledge by observing natural experiments and by displacing situations from equilibria.”¹³⁴

As this project examines the religiously unaffiliated, who largely are highly educated, white, male, and votes Democrat,¹³⁵ this researcher can similarly be considered as a highly educated, white, male, albeit more conservative and voting Republican. Political affiliation is of little interest to this author as the conviction exists that the Church is the medium of hope for humanity rather than a robust support and relief system developed and provided by a national governmental structure.

Concerning those who have disaffiliated from their childhood faith due to negative experiences with the church, this author can also empathize. Being initially reared in a secular home during early childhood then experiencing a familial conversion to a fundamentalist expression of Christianity in the southern United States, this experience encouraged the author to

¹³³ Wendy Sword, “Pearls, Pith, and Provocation, Accounting for Presence of Self: Reflections on Doing Qualitative Research,” *Qualitative Health Research* vol. 9, no.2 (1999). 270.

¹³⁴ W.H. Starbuck, *The Production of Knowledge: The Challenge of Social Science Research*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 153.

¹³⁵ Frank L. Pasquale, “Empirical Study and Neglect of Unbelief and Irreligion,” Excerpted from *The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief*, Tom Flynn (Ed.) (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2007), 763. “In general, such individuals tend to be more often male than female, young, unmarried, well educated, and morally or politically liberal.”

be dedicated to the pursuit of Christian ministry in late 1999. These experiences have provided this author with a valuable familiarity that will assist in the interpretation of the material being presented in the research.

The theories that are generated regarding the mechanisms of resurgence will be allowed to emerge, as naturally as possible, from the research. As Sword agrees, this familiarity not only provides the researcher “a priori familiarity with relevant issues but also,” enhances the researcher’s “ability to make sense of the data.”¹³⁶

What has it been, precisely, that has prevented persistence in that childhood faith, and perhaps more importantly for this study, what needs to happen with(in) the American church to prevent further apostasy and initiate a period of resurgence of Evangelical American Christian affiliation?

In looking to accomplish this qualitative endeavor, this author is seeking to collect and interpret data, (both qualitative and quantitative), and evaluate prominent periods of American Christianity for the aim of confirming or disproving that there are identifiable mechanisms in significant periods of the history of American Christianity that have sparked resurgence of Christian affiliation and commitment out of periods of languishing unbelief.

Research Approach

As it is detailed in the Research Gap section above, there are several substantial published works and global research projects currently underway that are purposefully aimed at illustrating the reason(s) why individuals (Americans specifically) are choosing to select “None of the above” on national surveys. This project intends to investigate and analyze the ebb and

¹³⁶ Wendy Sword, “Pearls, Pith, and Provocation, Accounting for Presence of Self: Reflections on Doing Qualitative Research,” 275.

flow of religious affiliation throughout significant periods of American religious history. Those periods that could be considered to be characterized by significantly high and low levels of Christian affiliation will be evaluated for the purpose of identifying mechanisms that may have instigated periods of unaffiliation and sparked periods of religious resurgence. Comparing and contrasting historical mechanisms for resurgence can assist in highlighting and outlining certain cultural continuities that may help the Twenty-first Century church strategically implement these mechanisms in their respective demographic and geographical contexts.

This necessitates a primarily phenomenological assessment. As such this project does not focus extensively on answering the “why” of the recent surge in religious unaffiliation. The aim of this dissertation is to provide a robust qualitative treatment of a recent American religious phenomenon. To accomplish this aim, the research that follows will make use of data which are drawn from several national surveys.¹³⁷ Additionally, historical material supplied by surveys and reports which provide the most recent quantitative statistics regarding American religious beliefs, affiliation, etc. Works of history which outline the ebbs and flows of American religiosity will also be highly utilized to identify those apparent periods of high and low religious affiliation, interest, and belief.

Writing before the invention of the internet but reflecting the necessity of evolving approaches to scholarship concerning the study of religion, Wuthnow states to accurately “understand the active role of religion in the culture...requires the insights not only of historians...but also of sociologists and anthropologists.”¹³⁸ Thus, this project will rely heavily

¹³⁷ Pew Research, American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), General Social Survey (GSS), Gallup Inc., Baylor Religion Survey, American Family Survey, LifeWay Research.

¹³⁸ Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, ix.

and draw upon historical studies, empirical data, and sociological publications that illustrate the nuances of the current religious landscape in America.

The resulting analysis derived from this investigative approach provides the comprehensive descriptions, which then provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis to portray the essence of the American Christian affiliation as it has been experienced historically, contrasted with how it is currently being experienced. This historical comparative analysis provides the insights that will inform the conclusions and recommendations for the contemporary American Christian church.

Research Method

The majority of research that has been conducted recently regarding religious affiliation and the shifting landscape of American religiosity primarily employs quantitative methodologies. Therefore, to assist in filling a gap in the current research, this study will consider and incorporate quantitative conclusions in order to provide a more robust qualitative phenomenological approach aimed at analyzing the narrative of American religion generally and the recent surge in religious unaffiliation as it affects American Christianity particularly. As detailed above, this narrative of the landscape of Christianity in America will be built from investigation and analysis of quantitative survey data as well as works of history, sociology, anthropology, and psychology.

Yin substantiates the value of a qualitative methodology allowing the method to more effectively provide needed insights into particular phenomena:

By now, qualitative research has become an acceptable, if not mainstream, form of research in many different academic and professional fields. As a result, the large number of students and scholars who conduct qualitative studies may be part of different social science disciplines (e.g., sociology, anthropology, political science, or psychology) or different professions (e.g., education, management, nursing, urban planning, and program

evaluation). In any of these fields, qualitative research represents an attractive and fruitful way of doing research.¹³⁹

Since the investigation of possible mechanisms of religious affiliation involves analysis of beliefs and experiences, a phenomenological approach ensures the aim of this project is met. Smith provides a useful definition that illustrates the relevance of this approach by explaining phenomenology as, “the study of structures of experience.... Literally, phenomenology is the study of “phenomena”: appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience.”¹⁴⁰ The phenomenological methodology is especially “powerful for understanding subjective experience, gaining insights into people’s motivations and actions, and cutting through the clutter of taken-for-granted assumptions and conventional wisdom.”¹⁴¹ A “pure phenomenological research seeks essentially to describe rather than explain, and to start from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions.”¹⁴² More specifically, “Phenomenology searches for the meaning or essence of an experience rather than measurements or explanations.”¹⁴³ Since qualitative phenomenology searches for the meaning or essence of an experience rather than measurements or explanations, leveraging this method will allow the research to focus more holistically on what is experienced

¹³⁹ Robert K. Yin. *Case Study Research: Design and Method*, (Los Angeles: SAGE Publishing, 2014), 6.

¹⁴⁰ Smith, David Woodruff, "Phenomenology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Summer, 2018 Edition, Edward N. Zalta (ed.).

¹⁴¹ Stan Lester, “An introduction to phenomenological research” *Royal Geographical Society*, (January 1999): 1. available at <https://www.rgs.org/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?nodeguid=7ad9b8d4-6a93-4269-94d2-585983364b51&lang=en-GB> Accessed January 30, 2019. 1

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ “Phenomenology Methods and Data Collection,” Grand Canyon University’s Center for Innovation and Research in Teaching. https://cirt.gcu.edu/research/developmentresources/research_ready/phenomenology/methods_data, Accessed January 30, 2019.

as it relates to religious affiliation. This type of research necessarily approaches the experience(s) holistically instead of limiting the focus to examining individual nuances.

To assist in safeguarding the integrity of the conclusions provided in this project, four phenomenological method steps will be followed throughout the study. Bracketing, or *epoche*,¹⁴⁴ “is important to phenomenological reduction, which is the process of isolating the phenomenon being researched and separating it from what is already known about it.”¹⁴⁵ All judgments are to be suspended and the only thing to be considered is how people, cultures, etc., are experiencing the phenomenon in their individual or collective consciousness(es). Next, the researcher is required to fully immerse themselves in the study of the phenomenon so the meaning(s) of the phenomenon can be mined to achieve the third guiding principle of analysis for the purpose of categorizing and defining common themes. The final step of describing, or concluding, allows the researcher to assimilate his or her research findings into definitions of the phenomenon that allow for an intuitive recommendation for a better way forward.

Lester proposes the inclusion of three sections, which will be incorporated below, for substantially reporting findings in a phenomenological approach to aid in providing applicable recommendations for responding to the continuing increase in religious unaffiliation and the American Evangelical church incorporating and/or initiating the mechanisms of a new religious resurgence. Chapter 3 and Chapter 5 will rely on these three sections by following the proposed

¹⁴⁴ *Epoche* means ‘to pocket’. A researcher, while exercising *epoche*, holds back, or pockets or brackets all judgments about the physical nature. See Khalid Jamil Rawat, “Phenomenological Research Method,” *Method Space* by SAGE Publishing. <https://www.methodspace.com/phenomenological-research-method/>, Accessed January 29, 2019.

¹⁴⁵ “Phenomenology Methods and Data Collection,” Grand Canyon University’s Center for Innovation and Research in Teaching. https://cirt.gcu.edu/research/developmentresources/research_ready/phenomenology/methods_data, Accessed January 30, 2019.

structure of providing a summary of the findings in the previous Chapter, e.g., Chapter 3 will identify and summarize the findings or mechanisms ascertained from the historical survey provided in Chapter 2. Then a discussion for the purpose of “relating the findings to previous research or commentary, to personal experience or even to common-sense opinions, and developing tentative theories.”¹⁴⁶ will be provided. Finally, the implications or recommendations will be established which are birthed from the previous two steps. This final section will allow the author to identify significant implications and provide useful recommendations on a way forward for the American Evangelical church in light of the current cultural/religious context.¹⁴⁷

In each chapter, this project capitalizes on the benefits of qualitative research Yin outlines regarding qualitative research methodology by first, studying the meaning of people’s lives under real-world conditions. Second, representing the views and perspectives of the people in the study. Third, covering the contextual conditions within which people live. Fourth, contributing insights into existing or emerging concepts that may help to explain human social behavior. Finally, striving to use multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source alone.¹⁴⁸

As with any research method, this approach is not without potential concern which this heed and navigates. In discussing potential concerns with a phenomenological approach, Lester compares a potential obstacle with a contrasting value in stating:

Phenomenological approaches are good at surfacing deep issues and making voices heard. This is not always comfortable for clients or funders, particularly when the research exposes taken-for-granted assumptions or challenges a comfortable status quo. On the other hand, many organisations value the insights which a phenomenological

¹⁴⁶ Lester, “An introduction to Phenomenological Research,” 3.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 3.

¹⁴⁸ Robert K. Yin. *Case Study Research: Design and Method*, (Los Angeles: SAGE Publishing, 2014), 7.

approach can bring in terms of cutting through taken-for-granted assumptions, prompting action or challenging complacency.¹⁴⁹

It is the latter, potential value, for which this current work aims. Specifically, Chapter 5 will be devoted to sewing together the mechanisms of religious resurgence identified in Chapter 3 with a comparison of the current dire religious landscape in order to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions with the hope of prompting action and challenging, with heartbreaking immediacy, the current ineffectiveness of the American church. An additional characteristic of a phenomenological methodology that may be perceived as a weakness is that it “differs from other research in that it does not test a hypothesis, nor is there an expectation that the results predictive or reproducible,” which calls into question the strength of the conclusions provided, but the apparent value of this lack of expectation of finality as it relates to the topic leverages the approach to serve as a launching point for further discussion, investigation, discussion, and action for the American Evangelical church.

This method will be executed in the following manner throughout the following dissertation. This work will consist of five chapters aimed at analyzing the current rapid increase in religious unaffiliation among American Christians in general and American Evangelical Christians specifically and comparing and contrasting it with other periods of religious flux throughout American history.

To provide this analysis, Chapter 1 will serve as an intensive introduction to the project’s topic and will consist of the project proposal components providing the thesis, review of relevant literature, criteria, research approach and methods, limitations, and conclusion. Resultantly, the absence of a thorough comparison of the current American religious landscape to other periods

¹⁴⁹ Lester, “An Introduction to Phenomenological Research,” 4.

in the history of the American church where there may have been similar, if not greater, periods of religious unaffiliation has created a ripe environment for this project to accomplish much in the way of correcting a The end goal of this work is to initiate the discussion regarding the mechanisms that have caused surges in unbelief historically and resurgence of religiosity historically and how those mechanisms can be employed by the contemporary American Evangelical church.

After 2000, data from the General Social Survey suggest that the prior trends of converging beliefs between Nones and the affiliated began to “reverse or stagnate”¹⁵⁰ History indicates an individual’s relationship with religion evolves over time and does not necessarily change in an instant.¹⁵¹ Therefore, and logically following from this introduction to and an outline of the research problem, Chapter 2 will provide a survey of the history of American religiosity for the purpose of highlighting in Chapter 3 those mechanisms that have caused the intense pendulum swinging from ardent religious belief and apathetic religious indifference. It has been stated that the lack of affiliation with organized religion may ultimately have led to a loss of faith among the unaffiliated.¹⁵² Therefore it is assumed there are identifiable mechanisms that have triggered religious affiliation, positively and negatively, and the historical examination provided in Chapter 2 will feed the analysis conducted in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 will have as its goal to identify the historical causes of disaffiliation and causes of resurgence in American Christianity for the purpose of extrapolating principles from these

¹⁵⁰ Gullickson, “The diverging beliefs and practices of the religiously unaffiliated,” 373.

¹⁵¹ Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, “Protestant and Catholic Distinctions in Secularization,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, (2016) 31:2, 166.

¹⁵² Aaron Gullickson, "The Diverging Beliefs and Practices of the Religiously Affiliated and Unaffiliated in the United States," *Sociological Science* 5 (06, 2018): 362, 376.

causes of resurgence uncovered in Chapter 2. The goal of Chapter 3 is to identify common themes in the lived experience of American religious affiliation.

Following the discussion regarding historical religious affiliation in America, Chapter 4 turns to provide a thorough inquiry into the specific peculiarities of the current state of American Christianity. There will be a qualifying of popular theories regarding the causes of the current rise of the Nones to further remove chaff and specifically highlight those features that relate to similar historical characteristics of the religiously unaffiliated.

Through providing a thorough investigation of the current American religious landscape, Chapter 4 sets the stage for an identification of significant implications mined from Chapter 3 and provide useful recommendations on a way forward for the American Evangelical church in light of the current cultural/religious context provided in Chapter 4.¹⁵³

Chapter 5 is concerned with the possibilities of American Evangelical churches initiating the historical mechanisms that have birthed periods of religious resurgence. How these mechanisms were executed in the past and how they might be adapted and employed in the current American religious context are the primary questions answered in the final chapter of this project.

Criteria And Definition Of Terms

Unaffiliated vs None - Throughout this project the term “None” will be employed to indicate those who self-identify as having no religious identification. After evaluating American Religious Identification Survey data, Barry Kosmin, founding director of the Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and a professor at Trinity College, coined the term to serve as a

¹⁵³ Ibid., 3.

less offensive identifier than what this population had for so long been known by, “the others.”¹⁵⁴ The term Nones typically refers to those who do not affiliate with a religion on social surveys but within the religious concept of Nones there are two primary categories. Within the population of those that identify as having no religion exists those who have no religious identification and as a result they choose “none” or “none of the above” on social surveys. These are referred to as non-affiliates. The second subgroup are those who choose to not identify with a religion are doing so to make a statement of sorts.

It is important to note within this definition of Nones that neither the term nor their choice to not identify does not necessarily reflect on their religious beliefs, theistic views, etc. It is imperative to avoid the assumption that Nones are unbelievers; simply agnostic or atheist. Though there is a growing number of agnostics and atheists in the Nones category they still comprise a significantly small number of the Nones population. As outlined below, Chapter 3 will provide an investigation into the similarities of historical periods of fluctuation in religious affiliation.

Spiritual but not Religious - While Nones and those that have been identified as “spiritual but not religious” are occasionally referred to as being synonymous, the two populations are similar yet very distinct in that the Nones are identified as those individuals who have chosen “none of the above” or “nothing in particular” in religious identification surveys. The spiritual but not religious population consists of those individuals who, according to Pew Research, were asked

¹⁵⁴ Barna Research Group defines those indicating no faith or nones as “individuals who describe themselves as atheist or agnostic, or who indicate that they do not believe in the existence of God or have no faith-related ties or interests.” See also, Hemant Mehta, “Where did the term ‘Nones’ come from?” Patheos, January 11, 2013. <https://friendlyatheist.patheos.com/2013/01/11/where-did-the-term-nones-come-from/>, Access January 21, 2019. See also, Wendy Thomas Russell, “An interview with the guy who named the Nones,” January 10, 2013. <https://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/files/2013/11/An-Interview-with-the-Guy-Who-Named-the-%e2%80%98Nones%e2%80%99-Wendy-Thomas-Russell.pdf>, Accessed January 21, 2019.

separate questions concerning their self-perception of their being a religious person and whether or not they considered themselves to be a spiritual person. The individuals who answered affirmatively to both questions are identified as the spiritual but not religious, a population that has dramatically grown to twenty seven percent of Americans.¹⁵⁵

Some research hints at demarcations within the None population that can potentially be used to categorize the whole. The phrase “spiritual but not religious” has been used to identify varying population ranges within the None’s population. It will be beneficial to utilize the insightful delineations provided by the most recent definitions of these sub-categories within the Nones population provided by the Public Religion Research Institute where the survey found very “little evidence of a separate mode of ‘spirituality’ distinct from ‘religiosity.’”¹⁵⁶ The Public Religion Research Institute indicates roughly forty percent of Nones consider themselves very or moderately spiritual. Insightful and relevant for the purpose of this project is the finding that those Nones categorized as Unattached Believers seventy one percent moderately spiritual.¹⁵⁷ Unless otherwise noted, throughout this study the generalization “spiritual but not religious” will be used to indicate the sub-category of Nones who are defined as Unattached Believers and hold similar beliefs as those who are affiliated but do not identify with a religion.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Michael Lipka and Claire Gecewicz, “More Americans now say they are spiritual but not religious,” Pew Research Center, September 6, 2017. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/06/more-americans-now-say-theyre-spiritual-but-not-religious/>, Accessed January 21, 2019.

¹⁵⁶ Jones, Cox, Cooper, and Lienesch. “Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion— and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back,” *Public Religion Research Institute*, September 22, 2019, 17.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁵⁸ “Nones’ on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation,” Pew Research Center on Religion & Public Life, October 9, 2012. <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>, Accessed January 27, 2019.

To clearly illustrate the concepts of religiously unaffiliated and spiritual, but not religious are not synonymous but not entirely divorced from one another, only thirty seven percent of those identifying as spiritual but not religious are Nones.¹⁵⁹

Disaffiliation, Deconversion/Nonversion and Never Affiliated - Deconverts and Nonverts¹⁶⁰ are identified as those individuals who were raised in a household characterized by religious affiliation or were religiously affiliated at one time and chose to no longer identify with that religion. It be beneficial to delineate the unaffiliated into those who disaffiliated from a religious background and those who were never affiliated in the first place. What seems to differentiate these groups is not belief but rather a taste for certain religious practices. Unsurprisingly, those raised in a religious home have a greater taste for continuing their religious practices even after disaffiliation.¹⁶¹ As the term nonvert signifies those that were brought up in a religious tradition but drifted away, similarly nonversion is synonymous with deconversion and disaffiliation which describes the process of apostatizing from that religious tradition.¹⁶²

Secularism and Secularization Theory - In its most basic form, the secularization thesis posits “the idea that modernization tends to undermine religious belief and activity.”¹⁶³ In arguing for

¹⁵⁹ Lipka and Gecewicz, “More Americans now say they are spiritual but not religious,” September 6, 2017. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/06/more-americans-now-say-theyre-spiritual-but-not-religious/>, Accessed January 28, 2019. In fact, most of those identifying as spiritual but not religious are religiously affiliated with 35% identifying as Protestant.

¹⁶⁰ A term coined by Stephen Bullivant, professor of theology and the sociology of religion at St Mary’s University in Britain. See *The Oxford Dictionary of Atheism* Lois Lee and Stephen Bullivant eds., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁶¹ Gullickson, “The diverging beliefs of the religiously unaffiliated,” 372.

¹⁶² Interestingly, in describing the nonvert population of Britain, Stephen Bullivant points out that over 60% of the nonverts were brought up as Christians. See, Stephen Bullivant. “The No Religion Population of Britain.” Recent data from the British Social Attitudes Survey (2015) and the European Social Survey (2014) Catholic Research Forum Reports, 8.

¹⁶³ David Voas and Mark Chaves, “Is the United States a counterexample to the secularization thesis?” *American Journal of Sociology* (2016): 121(5): 1518.

the positive influence of modernization on individual's converting to Christianity in the majority world context, Rizvi and Hossain suggest, "theories point to the consequences of modernization in initiating processes of religious conversion." A thesis that is directly contrary to traditional secularization theory, especially as it relates to religious affiliation in America, which fundamentally proposes the process of modernization/secularization directly correlates to a decline in religious affiliation; however, Voas and Chaves suggest,

the United States should not be considered a counterexample for two straightforward empirical reasons. First, American religiosity has in fact been declining for decades, and second, that decline has been produced by the same generational patterns that lie behind religious decline elsewhere in the West where each successive cohort is less religious than the preceding one.¹⁶⁴

Therefore, the concept of secularism and secularization theory will assume the idea of modernization of a society necessarily leads to a lessening value of religion in that society.

Church - Christianity is not dying, but it is experiencing a seismic shift in how it is expressed.

One major redefinition occurring is regarding where, or what, the church is. With churches closing at record pace,¹⁶⁵ American Christianity appears to be departing from traditional notions of the church being intimately associated with a building, property, and the accompanying overhead is now being perceived as an unnecessary anchor that has been and is preventing the world from seeing the relevancy of the Christian faith.

There is great power in the grassroots nature of early Christendom when churches met from house to house and in public spaces. It is when churches became established institutions

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 1517.

¹⁶⁵ Michelle Boorstein in "Does a religious community need its own building to flourish?" *Washington Post* November 23, 2018 provides substantial insight into the rate at which church buildings are closing in the D.C. metro area and being converted into community centers, bars, housing, etc. hinting that the growing number of closed church buildings is primarily a result of shifting demographics and not necessarily a reflection of a diminished presence of Christianity in the D.C. area. See, Thom S. Rainer in "Hope for dying churches" *LifeWay* January 16, 2018, "Between 6,000 and 10,000 churches in the U.S. are dying each year."

that their effectiveness dwindled and confined within the four walls.¹⁶⁶ Therefore for clarity, the term “church” will be used to reflect the definition of church as defined by the Augsburg Confession as the “assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments¹⁶⁷ are administered according to the gospel.” and as not referring to a building, physical location of gathering, etc. unless otherwise noted.

Protestant - a demarcation indicating those churches and Christian believers identifying with the rich heritage of the Sixteenth Century Protestant Reformation which holds “Protestantism is an appeal to God in Christ, to Holy Scripture and to the primitive Church, against all degeneration and apostasy.”¹⁶⁸

Evangelical - With growing religious pluralism, denominational disaffiliation, and a decline in those that identify as Evangelical a standard definition of what serves as demarcations of an Evangelical expressions of Christianity can still be established on the grounds of a few integral beliefs. It is imperative this term and the beliefs associated with it be clearly defined at the outset of this project as it will serve as the lense through which suggestions for future resurgence will be proposed. As such, throughout this project “Evangelical” is defined using the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) LifeWay Research Evangelical Beliefs Research Definition based on respondent beliefs. To be considered Evangelical by the NAE LifeWay Research

¹⁶⁶ Contrarily, Dan Claire, pastor of the Church of the Resurrection, on why so many churches are closing in the D.C. area suggests, “...there is a lack of appreciation at the same time for the difference that institutions make. I think this is the Achilles’ heel of Evangelicalism. If it’s only at the heart level, then institutions are undervalued.” See, “Does a religious community need its own building to flourish?” *The Washington Post*, November 23, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/does-a-religious-community-need-its-own-building-to-flourish/2018/11/23/d350ca6c-ed1d-11e8-baac-2a674e91502b_story.html, Accessed January 30, 2019.

¹⁶⁷ There are only two recognized sacraments in the Protestant tradition; The Lord’s Supper and Baptism.

¹⁶⁸ R. N. Flew; R. E. Davies, eds., *Catholicity of Protestantism*, (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1950), 15.

standard, individuals must respond as strongly agreeing with the following four questions. 1) The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe. 2) It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior. 3) Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin. 4) Only those who trust Jesus Christ alone as Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation.¹⁶⁹

Evangelical churches and those that identify as Evangelical are traditionally viewed as significantly more conservative than those Christians that identify with mainline denominations.¹⁷⁰

Resurgence vs Revival - Though the two terms, resurgence and revival, are oftentimes used synonymously, this project will employ the term resurgence to indicate an increase of religious affiliation in a society that is not necessarily marked by the characteristic emotionalism

¹⁶⁹ NAE LifeWay Research Evangelical Beliefs Research Definition adopted by the National Association of Evangelicals on October 15, 2015. David Bebbington also provides helpful distinctives that define Evangelicals that mirror the NAE definition. Bebbington's four Evangelical distinctives are 1) Conversionism: the belief that lives need to be transformed through a "born-again" experience and a lifelong process of following Jesus. 2) Activism: the expression and demonstration of the gospel in missionary and social reform efforts. 3) Biblicism: a high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority. 4) Crucicentrism: a stress on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as making possible the redemption of humanity. For Bebbington's robust treatment of Evangelicalism see David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1930s*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989). Leith Anderson and Ed Stetzer also rely upon the NAE definition of Evangelical offer a definition for Evangelicals, as those who are recognizable from their belief in the following four ideals outlined by the NAE LifeWay Research Definition. Leith Anderson and Ed Stetzer, "A New Way to Define Evangelicals." *Christianity Today*, April 2016, 52-55. See also Eddie Gibb's definition of Evangelical in *ChurchNext: Quantum Changes In How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 54.

¹⁷⁰ David Haskell explained in *The Washington Post*, "We found 93 percent of clergy members and 83 percent of worshipers from growing churches agreed with the statement 'Jesus rose from the dead with a real flesh-and-blood body leaving behind an empty tomb.' This compared with 67 percent of worshipers and 56 percent of clergy members from declining churches." See also, Dean Kelly, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing: A study in sociology of religion*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1972) for an often-cited work detailing the conservative, robust beliefs of growing churches in America. Describing those in a "strong" or conservative religious group, "we could expect such firm adherence of members to the group's beliefs that they would be willing to suffer persecution, to sacrifice status, possessions, safety, and life itself for the organization, its convictions, its goals. We would see wholehearted commitment on the part of its members, each individual's goals being highly or wholly identified with---or derived from---those of the group, so that a shoulder-to-shoulder solidarity would enable it to withstand all onslaughts from without and avoid betrayal from within. Moreover, members would willingly and fully submit themselves to the discipline of the group... Lastly, [it] would be marked by an irrepressible missionary zeal, an eagerness to tell the Good News to others." 57-58.

associated with revivalism. And while revival can be identically synonymous with resurgence to mean the renewal or restoration of vitality after a state of depression. The intentional use of resurgence is important so as to not create confusion regarding any bias related to the topic of revival, revivalism, or even fundamentalism.

To assist in delineating between the two similar terms, An increase or revival after a period of little activity, popularity, or occurrence. Since Christianity in America is not dead, resurgence is employed to illustrate revitalization not necessarily resuscitation or resurrection from death. While revival is the act of or occurrence of reviving, resurgence is an instance of something resurging. It is a renewal of vigor, force, and effectiveness.

Mainline Denomination - an inclusive term used to describe religious groups primarily with an European background and having been present in the United States since its colonial history. Once contributing to the American form of Christianity, they are now characterized as a declining element with little influence on society or culture.

Chapter Summary

Lower levels of religious affiliation reveal a weakening of the heart of the Evangelical position on evangelization and carrying out the Great Commission.¹⁷¹ The strength of the religiously unaffiliated conversion and retention rates further highlights the increasing ineffectiveness of Evangelical efforts to engage a culture that is becoming altogether disinterested in organized religion, exclusive truth claims, and the faith of their forefathers (parents).

¹⁷¹ Matthew 28:18-20, “Then Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Throughout this project, all Scripture is taken from the Holman Christian Standard interpretation unless otherwise noted.

As Chaves concludes, “It is difficult to see how the trends I have described could amount to good news for American religious institutions...” However, it is “good news for our increasingly pluralistic society.”¹⁷² Given the current decline of Evangelical influence and the “bad news for religious institutions” one might conclude that efforts to reverse the rapid moving away from and privatization of religious beliefs are simply hoping against hope. Nonetheless, the confident expectation of this project is to confirm Rodney Stark’s and William Bainbridge’s hopeful prediction from three decades ago: “The vision of a religionless future is but illusion.”¹⁷³ The cultural context and what has transpired regarding religious affiliation and the strength of Evangelicalism is undoubtedly very different from when Stark and Bainbridge offered their conclusion. May what follows in each chapter of this project continue to confirm the accuracy of their conclusion and illuminate a principled way for the Evangelical church, with precise intentionality, dedicate time, energy, and resources to those activities, attitudes, and approaches that generated religious resurgence in other significant periods of American religious history.

¹⁷² Mark Chaves, *American Religion: Contemporary Trends*, 119.

¹⁷³ Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge, eds., *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

CHAPTER 2 - SIGNIFICANT PERIODS OF BELIEF AND UNBELIEF IN AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY

Introduction

The national share of those that identify with a Protestant denomination has steadily declined, year over year, since Gallup began polling denominational preferences of Americans in 1948. While those that identify with a form of Protestantism has continued to decline from 69% in 1948 to 35% in 2018, the share of those that identify with no religion (Nones) has steadily increased from 2% in 1948 to over 20% in 2017, with the sharpest increase developing during 2005 to 2017; an increase of over 10% during that time period.¹⁷⁴ These two religious categories show the sharpest decline (Protestants) and the most significant growth among all possible religious categories listed in the Gallup survey. Additionally, significant are the 76% of all survey respondents concluding that religion is losing its influence in America; an all-time high, and an increase from 39% in 2001.¹⁷⁵

This chapter will provide a summative survey of the major religious periods in American history. While there is an intersect with the mutual influence between religion and politics, the purpose of this chapter is not to provide an examination of that relationship nor for discussing the how or why of the relationship. It is clear in every period of American history, the presence or absence of Christian influence has had direct effect, positive and negative, on the trajectory of American culture. This fact led historian William Sweet to assert, “The attempt to appraise American culture apart from religion is a contradiction in itself, for culture has to do with the

¹⁷⁴ Gallup, Inc. “Religion.” <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx> Accessed July 17, 2019. The share of Nones increased only 6% from 1948 to 2005 going from 2% in 1948 to 8% in 2005.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

moral and religious as well as the intellectual life of a society.”¹⁷⁶ Just as the increase in Nones has a direct correlation to the diminishing share of the influence of Christianity upon current American culture (and politics), it is clear, however, that religion in general and the Christian faith specifically played an integral role in the early formation of the new American nation. “The missionary and religious purposes are obvious”¹⁷⁷ in many of the earliest state constitutions which predate the signing of the Constitution of the United States on September 17, 1787. The importance of religious freedom from an established church is couched in language that is preferential to Protestant forms of Christianity in these statements from early state constitutions:¹⁷⁸

Table 2.1 Founding State Constitutional Statements Regarding Religion

State	Statement	Year
Connecticut	“It being the duty of all men to worship the Supreme Being, the great Creator and Preserver of the Universe... No person shall, by law, be compelled to join or support, nor be classed with any association to any congregation church or religious institution.”	1776
Delaware	“Every citizen who should be chosen a member of either house of the legislature... Should be required to subscribe to the following declaration: – I do profess faith in God the father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ his only son, and in the Holy Ghost, one God and blessed forever more...”	1776
Georgia	“All the members of the legislature shall be of the protestant religion.”	1777
Maryland	“It is the duty of every man to worship God in such manner as he thinks most acceptable to him, all persons professing the Christian religion are equally entitled to protection in the religious liberty.”	1776
New Hampshire	“That morality and piety, rightly grounded on evangelical principles, would give the best and greatest security to government, and would lay	1784

¹⁷⁶ William W. Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1943), Vii.

¹⁷⁷ Robert T. Miller "Religious Conscience in Colonial New England." *Journal of Church and State*, Autumn 2008, 663.

¹⁷⁸ Compiled from Dreisbach and Hall, *The Sacred Rights of Conscience*, 257–265.

	in the hearts of men the strongest obligation to do subjection...”	
New Jersey	“That all persons professing a belief in the faith of any Protestant sect, and who should demean himself peaceably under the government, should be capable of being elected into any office a profit or trust, or of being a member of either branch of the legislature.”	1776
New York	“This convention doth further, in the name and by the authority of the good people of the state, ordain, determine, and declare that the free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship without discrimination or preference shall forever hereafter be allowed within the state to all mankind.”	1777
North Carolina	“No person who denying the being of a God was the truth of the protestant religion, or the divine authority of either the Old or New Testaments... should be capable of holding any office or place of trust in the civil government of the state.”	1776
Pennsylvania	“every member of the legislature shall subscribe to the following declaration: I do believe in one God, the creator and governor of the universe the rewarder of the good, and the punisher of the wicked; and acknowledge the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament is to be given by inspiration.”	1776

Instead of explicating the seemingly inseparable relationship and influence between American politics and religion (church and state), the aim in what follows is to build a framework of the periods of American history that showed evidence of significant interest in Christianity. The content of this chapter will serve as the foundation upon which chapter 3 will build, and from which the principles regarding the rise and decline of interest in Evangelical forms of Christianity can be extracted.

It is because religion has been woven into the fabric of the American nation that is what allows it to be traced as a steady undercurrent that has ebbed and flowed with each cultural turn. Guastad echoes the formative nature of religion evidenced from the very beginning of the nation and more recently an experience of increasing cultural disrepute in stating, “Religion was a powerful motive in exploration, a significant causal factor in much colonization, a partner in

territorial expansion and national cohesion...a veritable whirlwind of energies and contrary forces in the latter half of the twentieth century.”¹⁷⁹

Colonial America

It was not yet a century after the Reformation, while the religious fervor produced therein was still hot, that England had set its heart on launching a successful colony in the New World.¹⁸⁰ The London Company launched for the coast of Virginia at the beginning of 1607. It was a voyage with a heartfelt objective of the “propagation of the Christian religion” in the New World to those who “as yet live in darkness and miserable ignorance of the true knowledge and worship of God.”¹⁸¹

Though the Jamestown settlement attempted to transplant and establish the Church of England into the infant colony, the progressive establishment of the King’s Church was as fragmented as the general health of the population.¹⁸² The interest in religion was high but the

¹⁷⁹ Edwin S. Gaustad, *A Religious History of America*, New Revised Edition, (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990), ix.

¹⁸⁰ Justo Gonzalez suggests, “Later immigrants regarded the United States as a promised land of freedom and abundance.” See Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: Volume 2 – The Reformation to the Present Day*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1985), 246. McGrath also supports this concept stating “England was the land in which they struggled... America would be the land in which they found freedom... expelled from their Egypt by a cruel Pharaoh, they had settled in the promised land flowing with milk and honey.” See McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution - A history from the sixteenth century to the twenty-first*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 153. See also Robert Miller where he adds, “The Europe on which the colonists turned their backs did not believe even in religious toleration, much less religious liberty;” It was nothing more than “the dream of a few persecuted sectaries or deep private thinkers.” Robert T. Miller. “Religious Conscience in Colonial New England,” *Journal of Church and State*, Autumn 2008, 661-676.

¹⁸¹ The First Charter of Virginia, April 10, 1606. See also, Robert T. Miller, “Religious Conscience in Colonial New England,” *Journal of Church and State*, Autumn 2008, 663... for clarification of competing claims regarding the most significant motive(s) for settlers desiring to colonize the new world where he argues, “If there exists any doubt as to the importance of the religious motive, one has to but examine the documents of the day...In practically every statement of purpose or plan drawn up and in every charter issued...the missionary and religious purposes are obvious.”

¹⁸² Gaustad reveals the anemic population growth of the early colony as there were only a little more than one hundred settlers in May of 1607,” and “had by the following September been reduced by half.” By 1622 the population had reached approximately two thousand but had then been reduced by about one-fifth due to “an Indian counteroffensive.” See Gaustad, *A Religious History*, 40.

lack of clergy that could effectively engage the large parishes along the James, York, and Rappahannock rivers relegated the parish churches to “both literally and figuratively at the edge rather than the center of community life in the seventeenth century.”¹⁸³ The lacking number of clergy paired with poor wages and living conditions resulted in many clergy leaving the motherland for the New World as a means to escape “bad debts, unhappy marriages, unsavory reputations.”¹⁸⁴ The severity of the increase in disreputable clergy was not only noticed but the ministerial debauchery caused the Virginia House of Burgess to decree in 1632:

Ministers shall not give themselves to excess in drinking, or riot, spending their time idly by day or night playing dice, cards, or any other unlawful game; but they shall...occupy themselves with some honest study or exercise, always doing the things which shall appertain to honesty, and endeavor to profit the Church of God.¹⁸⁵

It wasn't long after John Hammond lamented that the new colony of Virginia could only attract clergy who could “babble in a pulpit, roar in a tavern, exact from their parishioners, and by their dissoluteness destroy rather than feed their flocks,”¹⁸⁶ that Roger Green in 1662 offered the idea of “Virginia Fellowships.”¹⁸⁷ These fellowships would encourage the education of upstanding men in exchange for spending at least seven years in the new colony to positively affect the population. An idea that never fully caught on until England began sending literature and clergy through the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and the Society for the

¹⁸³ Ibid., 43.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 41.

¹⁸⁵ John B. Dillon, *Oddities of Colonial Legislation in America*, (Sydney: Wentworth Press, 2016, 26.

¹⁸⁶ Gaustad, *A religious History of America*, 41.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 42.

Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, respectively.¹⁸⁸ The result of targeted efforts to educate qualified clergy and implant them in Virginia was a fruitful endeavor with the number of Anglican parishes increasing from thirty by the mid-seventeenth century to more than one hundred parishes by the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁸⁹ The targeted efforts of educating worthy men to propagate the gospel was achieving the desired results in the New World.

Although, at the time, Anglicanism was the state-protected religion there existed other young churches that were at odds with the formal liturgy of the Anglican Church and these churches were growing in influence due to their affinity for more Evangelical tendencies that encouraged a personal and passionate faith. The seventeenth century Puritans and Quakers gave way to the growing influence of Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists who expanded westward and settled in the foothills of Virginia and prepared the way for the First Great Awakening.¹⁹⁰

Presbyterians through the efforts of Samuel Davies led the efforts to spread Evangelicalism and saw significant success in reaching the African American population. Gaustad recounts a key to Davies' success was that "Evangelical religion...made the gospel appear more accessible, more comprehensible, more emotionally satisfying."¹⁹¹ When John Leland arrived in Virginia in 1776 he began work immediately in expanding the Baptist

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 44-45, 71. Gaustad outlines the purpose of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in that it would "hire ministers, send them as missionaries where they were most needed, continue to support them financially as long as necessary, and continue to give them all the encouragement possible from home (England)."

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 45.

¹⁹⁰ Initiated in the 1730's and lasting until approximately 1740. The initiation of the Great Awakening is typically attributed to Edwards and his 1734 sermon series on justification by faith. See Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 282. It was Whitefield, oft referred to as the Grand Itinerant, that arrived in the latter timeframe, Georgia in 1738 and traveling through New England in 1740. See also Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2007).

¹⁹¹ Gaustad, *The Religious History of America*, 45.

denomination, and to the Anglican's horror, many churches were established quickly where many women were assuming prominent leadership roles.¹⁹²

It was the rise of the Presbyterians and Baptists that fueled the push for legislation for religious freedom in the second half of the eighteenth century. The constant targeted persecution of Presbyterian and Baptist ministers by the oppressive laws that favored Anglicanism that resulted in the jailing of several men is what spurred James Madison's political career in promulgating religious freedom. According to Gaustad, "Madison was ready to make common cause with them and other dissenters who found themselves arrested and jailed for no reason other than the assertion of their religious opinions."¹⁹³

On the heels of Baptists and Presbyterians, Methodists made the transition from England to the new nation and began to see equal success as a dissenting church. The movement birthed in England by brothers John and Charles Wesley, began as an effort to engage the laity to spread its message of improving personal piety and to reach that class of people who were "abandoning the National Church in ever larger numbers."¹⁹⁴ Once Methodism gained a foothold in Virginia, its Evangelical force led to its official break from the Church of England just a decade before the dawn of the nineteenth century.

It was the gross, heavy-handed involvement of the English governmental system in the religious structure of the land which led to the eventual emigration of many seeking religious sanctuary in a new world. This led to the establishment and rapid growth of dissenting denominations in the young colonies, which continued to seek ways to build credibility through

¹⁹² Ibid., 48.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 48.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 49.

establishing institutions of higher learning for the rigorous training in critical thinking and religion and further distancing from any influence or support from the Church of England. Education was viewed as integral for the establishment of an enduring nation and for the vitality of a purer faith. The founding of institutions such as Harvard, Yale, and William and Mary further established these young colonies as viable and reputable with increasing independence of religious and educational influences from the Mother Country. The Anglican church that remained faithful to the Church of England experienced a sharp decline in influence and its evangelistic effectiveness waned as those dissenting denominations witnessed a continued rapid growth throughout the establishment of each new colony.¹⁹⁵

First Great Awakening¹⁹⁶ 1730-1745

Chronologically, the first Great Awakening occurred prior to and stimulated the growth outlined in the preceding section, but it was the Great Awakening that not only ignited denominational growth, but the religious fervor ignited therein also fed the political agenda that contributed to the discussions which initiated the War for Independence from England.

As Sweet notes, the Great Awakening not only added to church membership¹⁹⁷ and increased the “practical influence” throughout the affected colonial regions, it “also sowed the seed of dissention and controversy,”¹⁹⁸ which facilitated the war. There were varying degrees of

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 49-73.

¹⁹⁶ The label “Great Awakening” is employed as Maxson refers to the period “as an appropriate designation of the whole evangelical quickening in the colonies” with the movement reaching a climax in 1740. See Charles H. Maxon, *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1923), 1.

¹⁹⁷ Ahlstrom suggests that “in spite of far more demanding requirements” for church membership, membership increased by an estimated twenty to fifty thousand as a result of the revival. See Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 287.

¹⁹⁸ Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America*, 311.

division that resulted in the Presbyterian church, divisions between the Regular and Separate Baptists, there was the Dutch Reformed controversy and differences that spawned as a result of the conflict between Arminian and Calvinistic ideas. Even within Calvinistic schools of thought there were divisions between the Old Calvinists and the Edwardians. As a result of these internal schisms, Sweet writes, “Congregationalism was in a turmoil for more than a half century,”¹⁹⁹ following the Great Awakening.

Formal education was a natural outgrowth of the Great Awakening for Protestant denominations since the three colleges (Harvard, William and Mary, Yale) that existed prior to the movement did not reflect the dissenting denominations’ orthopraxy. It was during Whitefield’s 1740 tour that he lamented that at both Harvard and Yale “their light is now become darkness - darkness that may be felt; and is complained of by the most godly ministers.”²⁰⁰ Simply due to a lack of strength to support such an endeavor these denominations (Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterians) were unable to establish colleges to train their ministers for the furtherance of the gospel; however, the Great Awakening provided the capital necessary to begin launching institutions of higher education for the formal training of individuals to be sent out as teachers and preachers for the purpose of spreading “the revival into new communities.”²⁰¹ These denominations increased their strength by capitalizing on the fruits of the revived evangelistic interest by focusing time and energy on educational endeavors. As Sweet highlights, “Nowhere

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 313.

²⁰⁰ Whitefield’s notes upon leaving New England as quoted by Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A history of the revival of religion in the time of Edwards and Whitefield*, Revised Edition (Sarasota: Cleruch Publishing, 2018), 105.

²⁰¹ Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America*, 313.

did revivalism and education go more consistently hand in hand than among the New Side Presbyterians.”²⁰²

Even more colleges were formed as a result of Whitefield’s influence in the latter years of the Great Awakening. It was Benjamin Franklin’s interest in Whitefield that led to the building of what became the College of Philadelphia and then later University of Pennsylvania.²⁰³ Additionally, it was Whitefield that influenced the forming of Dartmouth College and the College of New Jersey, both of which Sweet argues were “legitimate children of the revival.”²⁰⁴ Whitefield devoted considerable time and energy into establishing colleges as he saw them as the most effective vehicles for the promotion of the gospel. Another college that formed by Baptists as a result of the revival was established in Rhode Island (College of Rhode Island) in 1764,²⁰⁵ which is no surprise due to Roger Williams’ success in creating a religious refuge out of the colony. Then, later Queen’s College formed in 1766 as a result of the growth of the Dutch Reformed Church during the revival.

Formal education was not the only culturally transformative fruit born from the Great Awakening. There was also a “new missionary impulse”²⁰⁶ that rebirthed missional interest to

²⁰² Ibid., 313. Sweet describes the Presbyterians of the Great Awakening the “most active of the revivalistic churches in promoting higher education and for the next century they were to be the American college founders *par excellence*.” See also, James T. Adams, *The Founding of New England*, (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1921); Robert Baird, *Religion in America: or an Account of the Origin, Progress, Relation to the State, and Present Condition of the Evangelical Churches in the United States*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1844); Leon Whipple, *Our Ancient Liberties, the Story of the Origin and Meaning of Civil and Religious Liberties in the United States*, (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1927).

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America*, 314.

²⁰⁵ The College of Rhode Island later became Brown University.

²⁰⁶ Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America*, 315.

the Native Americans. This revival of evangelistic and missionary zeal was evidenced in the New England Congregationalists and Presbyterians alike. Additionally, as a result of a growing adoption of the doctrine of general atonement²⁰⁷ the missionary zeal spread to reaching the African American population and the first anti-slavery inclinations grew out of Samuel Hopkins' theology and preaching.²⁰⁸

After the American Revolution, Founding Father and second president of the United States John Adams writes of the undeniable link between the growing religious fervor produced in the Great Awakening and the commencement of the Revolution when stating, "The revolution was effected before the War commenced. The Revolution was in the mind and hearts of the people: and change in their religious sentiments of their duties and obligations."²⁰⁹ Historian Paul Johnson adds further clarification how it was the religious enthusiasm smoldering from the Great Awakening paired with political aims of independence from England that allowed both aims to succeed:

It was the marriage between the rationalism of the American elites touched by the Enlightenment with the spirit of the Great Awakening among the masses, which enabled the popular enthusiasm thus aroused to be channeled into the political aims of the Revolution...Neither force could have succeeded without the other. The Revolution could not have taken place without this religious background.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ General Atonement or General Redemption is defined as "the death of Christ was designed to include all humankind, regardless whether all believe. To those who savingly believe it is redemptively applied, and to those who do not believe it provides the benefits of common grace and the removal of any excuse for being lost." See *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* 2nd ed. Walter A. Elwell ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 115.

²⁰⁸ Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America*, 317.

²⁰⁹ Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People*, (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1998), 116-117, Quoting John Adams in his *Letter to Hezekiah Niles* (1818).

²¹⁰ Ibid.

Though the intensification of religiosity reached a crescendo in 1740 with Whitefield's tours and some denominations began to experience a plateauing of religious quickening, the abiding nature of the Awakening "was still powerful in parts of the country at the breaking out of the Revolutionary War."²¹¹

American Revolution 1765-1783

So, it was the three-strand cord of Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians, paired with the political force of the American Revolution, that caused a concerted effort to sever ties that had for more than a century identified the new nation with the Church of England; however, preceding and in the mix of this, it was the Pilgrims, also known as Separatists, landing near Cape Cod in September 1620 that highlights the fundamental religious interest for leaving England and starting over in the New World that formed the foundation upon which the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians could thrive.

Initially, the Puritans retained a desire to remain a part of the Church of England. They wanted to reflect a "purer part in a new England that would be able to demonstrate what a truly revitalized Church of England ought to be."²¹² The Pilgrims on the other hand, chose schism from the Church of England and aimed to start anew in the New World. Nonetheless, both the Pilgrims and Puritans provide evidence that for many, religion was a primary reason for leaving England and of a deliberate effort to establish a pure church in the New World. Gaustad articulates regarding the desire of these new religious efforts to provide an example that England would hopefully witness and adopt:

They (the new citizens) came to prove that one could form a society so faithful, a church so cleansed, that even old England itself would be transformed by witnessing what

²¹¹ Maxson, *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies*, 1.

²¹² Gaustad, *A Religious History of America*, 54.

determined believers had managed to achieve many thousands of miles away. That was the vision to be steadily pursued, without weakening or wavering, without transgressing or backsliding, without forgetting that it is God who has made us and not we ourselves. We are his people, bound together with him in a solemn covenant.²¹³

It did not take long for the unmistakable differences between the Church of England and the new Puritans to become evident in both beliefs and practice. Puritan John Cotton articulated the primary complaints against the Church of England which provided the foundation for the New England Way; complaints that paved the way for a redefinition of how the church would exist in a purer form in the New World.²¹⁴

The New England clergyman and advocate of religious freedom²¹⁵, Roger Williams, in being exiled from New England for his dissenting²¹⁶ arguments against the New England Way, founded the colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. This new colony “would be a haven for all dissenters, for persons of all shades of religious opinion, or of no religious opinion

²¹³ Ibid., 56.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 55. These primary complaints were that “the rule exercised by the bishops and the rigid conformity demanded by the law had become burdens too onerous to bear. The use of the Book of Common Prayer violated the Second Commandment...the authority of the church should be congregational, not national...and the church is created not by legislative action from above, but by contractual agreement from below. The church is not a building but a gathering of the faithful who (according to the Salem group) ‘covenant with the Lord and with another; and do bind ourselves in the presence of God to walk together in all his ways, according as he is pleased to reveal himself unto us in his blessed word of truth.’”

²¹⁵ Williams’ affection for protecting religious freedom was likely a product of his own religious denominational wanderings from originally transitioning from Anglicanism to Puritanism, then to Separatism, then Baptist, and finally ending his life as a Seeker. See William W. Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1943), 122.

²¹⁶ Sweet points out that Williams had “no appreciation of the accumulated religious experience coming down through the centuries through the historic Church.” Instead, “Williams stressed the inner experience, and to him the true Church was an invisible entity made up of the regenerate - an inward experience without physical form. The visible Church...to Williams was of slight importance...even less important than trade organizations since the dissolution of the latter would tend to disturb and endanger the welfare of society.” See Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America*, 126.

at all.”²¹⁷ It was Williams that helped found the earliest Baptist church in Providence.²¹⁸

Quakers also found safety in Rhode Island which allowed them to increase their strength, along with many other denominations²¹⁹ with which Cotton Mather found quite appalling. Mather lamented that never before had there existed “such a variety of religions together on so small a spot of ground where one might find Antinomians, Anabaptists, Antisabbatarians, Arminians, Socinians, Quakers, Ranters - everything in the world but Roman Catholics and real Christians.”²²⁰ Further evidence that the establishment of early American colonies, especially as colonies expanded, were motivated by intense religious interests during a time where individuals and communities devoted considerable effort in establishing and nurturing a pure Christian church that was cleansed of the rigid and lifeless forms of the Church of England. There was an intense desire, however varied, to establish a new nation that was from the very foundations built to seek the “guidance of scriptures in regulating all aspects of the lives of their citizens, where scripture was cited for many criminal statutes.”²²¹

²¹⁷ Gaustad, *A Religious History of America*, 67.

²¹⁸ A fact commonly accepted by historians, but with which Sweet argues against on the grounds of Callender’s *An Historical Discourse* (1738) where he states, “Mr. Williams did not form a church of the Anabaptists and that he never join’d with the Baptist church there.” The oldest inhabitants in the colony “never heard that Mr. Williams formed the Baptist church there...” See Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America* 128, footnote 8.

²¹⁹ John Callendar confirms this new colony was viewed as a religious refuge by many, “It was in no ways unlikely some odd and whimsical opinions may have been broached. The liberty enjoyed here, would tempt persons distressed for their opinions in the neighboring governments to retire to this colony as an asylum.” See John Callendar, *An Historical Discourse on the Civil and Religious Affairs of the Colony of Rhode Island*, (Boston: 1739), 31.

²²⁰ Cotton Mather as quoted by Gaustad, *A Religious History of America*, 70.

²²¹ This is why New England colonies have often been called "Bible Commonwealths" "See Library of Congress, Religion and the Founding of the American Republic America as a Religious Refuge: The Seventeenth Century, Part 1. <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel01.html> (Accessed July 20, 2019).

It was in 1792 that the Methodists were reportedly numbered approximately forty thousand. The denomination was growing at such a pace that Jedidiah Morse exclaimed “Their numbers are so various in different places, at different times, that it would be a matter of no small difficulty to find out their exact amount.”²²²

Johnson illuminates the growing personalization of the Christian faith for the believers in the New World,

Hence Americans never belonged to the religious category who seek certainty of doctrine and through clerical hierarchy...: most Americans... believe[d] that knowledge of God comes direct to them through the study of Holy Writ. They read the Bible for themselves, assiduously, daily.” Where “virtually every humble cabin in Massachusetts colony had its own Bible. Adults read it alone, silently. It was also read aloud among families, as well as in church, during Sunday morning service, which lasted from eight till twelve.”²²³

Methodists had grown with particular force in Maryland due to their concerted missionary efforts in reaching blacks and women, “utilizing both laity and clergy, employing devout women no less than zealous men.”²²⁴ Former slave turned Methodist minister, Richard Allen testified to the missionary effectiveness of the Methodists through their presentation of the gospel message for the common people in recounting, “The Methodists were the first people that brought glad tidings to the colored people. I feel thankful that ever I heard a Methodist preach...blacks were beholden to the Methodists, under God, for the light for the Gospel we enjoy; for all other denominations preached so high flown that we were not able to comprehend their doctrines.”²²⁵

²²² Edwin S. Gaustad and Mark A. Noll eds. *A Documentary History of Religion in America to 1877*, (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing, Third Edition 2003), 290. Quoting Jedidiah Morse in *American Geography* 1789.

²²³ Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People*, (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1998), 40.

²²⁴ Gaustad and Noll eds. *A Documentary History of Religion in America to 1877*, 291.

²²⁵ Richard Allen in Milton C. Sernett ed. *African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness*, (Durham: Duke University Press, Second Edition, 1999), 149.

Allen goes on to provide further confirmation of the Methodists' success in preaching the gospel in a way that was accessible to everyone,

I was confident that there was no religious sect or denomination would suit the capacity of the colored people as well as the Methodist; for the plain and simple gospel suits best for any people; for the unlearned can understand, and the learned are sure to understand; and the reason the Methodist is so successful in the awakening and conversion of the colored people, the plain doctrine of having a good discipline.²²⁶

The Revolutionary Era eventually gave rise to a period of religious decline in America due to distraction and disruption. The moderation of Christian zeal did not occur at the dawning of the War in 1765, but had been cooling for the two decades after the climax of the Great Awakening as Ahlstrom argues, "The long preoccupation of Americans with government and politics, not to mention with the war itself, raised immense problems for the churches, bringing on, among other things, a prolonged religious depression."²²⁷ Ahlstrom highlights ways in which the church was affected during the Revolutionary Era that resulted in a significant decrease in its effectiveness and general depression of religious interest in America. Primarily, the church, dissenters and high church alike, became distracted by the Revolutionary and Jeffersonian political environment. The election of Jefferson brought with it the prominence of Enlightenment philosophy and resulted in the primacy of framing theological issues in more governmental ways which resulted in, as Ahlstrom calls it, "theological transformation."²²⁸ This new political ethos that promoted natural theology and more secularized ways of interpreting the new American experience necessitated that the church respond accordingly with nearly every

²²⁶ Ibid., 148-149.

²²⁷ Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 264.

²²⁸ Ibid., 364.

denomination feeling the need to redefine how it engaged the culture. Finally, the immediate opportunity for churches to grow during this new and uncertain time was a reality, but how they were to go about it in the context of increased religious freedom was the hard question not easily answered.²²⁹

It is clear, the Revolutionary War affected the American church and initiated a period of religious decline and a transition in religious-political focus. It was a critical period for each denomination because of its preoccupation with politics. The church was so distressed during this period that Ahlstrom suggests that by the end of this era membership had diminished absolutely, “so that not more than one person in twenty or possibly one in ten seems to have been affiliated; in many churches membership itself became increasingly nominal.”²³⁰ To compound the problem of decreasing church membership and overall religious disinterest, there was a correlating reduction in new ministers being trained and deployed into churches to help rekindle the revival zeal that had long subsided. The population of current ministers also dwindled as a result of the war as many either fled (their area or the country), became chaplains, some fought, which resulted in leaving their congregations with no theological or pastoral oversight. No denomination was left unaffected, but it was the Church of England in America that experienced the most dramatic negative impact from the War. Ahlstrom suggests more than seventy thousand Loyalists fled the country during and immediately following the War.²³¹ While Noll

²²⁹ Ibid., 364-365.

²³⁰ Ibid., 365.

²³¹ Ibid., 368.

notes that when the War first began, “all of the Methodists missionaries except Francis Asbury returned to England.”²³²

Nonetheless, evidence of the persistent nature of the Christian religion can be seen in a few denominations during the Revolutionary Era. For the Baptists revival zeal persisted throughout the turmoil. When compared to the years before the War to less than a decade after, the overall number of Baptist churches in the New England colonies increased significantly:

Table 2.2 Growth in Number of New England Churches²³³

Colony	1740	1790
Connecticut	3	55
Massachusetts	11	92
Maine	-	15
New Hampshire	-	32
Rhode Island	11	38
Vermont	-	34
TOTAL	25	266

The New England colonies were not alone in witnessing significant growth among the Baptists during the War. The southern states, still reaping harvests of a continued interest in revivalism, produced much fruit. In 1790, Virginia had nearly as many Baptist churches (218) as all of New England.”²³⁴

²³² Mark A. Noll, *A History of American Christianity in the United States and Canada*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 171.

²³³ Compiled from Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 375-376. Gaustad, *Historical Atlas*, 173, notes that it wasn't until after 1800 that “the availability and reliability of religious statistics shows marked improvement.”

²³⁴ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 376.

The enduring nature of Christianity also became evident for the Methodists in the year following the conclusion of the American Revolution.²³⁵ In 1784 John Wesley implemented the Deed of Declaration, which cultivated an immediate interest in the renewal of the Methodist denomination in America, which Wesley referred to in his diary as “the desolate sheep in America.”²³⁶ The strategy to revitalize American Methodists hinged on the ordination of a large number of ministers. Wesley logged his passion and belief in the strategy of ordaining and sending ministers into these anemic congregations as the most effective way to breathe new life into these people. This newly concerted effort to restore the Methodist church in America and the continued multiplication of Baptist churches served as a precursor to the Second Great Awakening.

Nearly every denomination, for the exception of the Anglican Church, experienced growth in the fifty years leading up to the Second Great Awakening:

Table 2.3 Denominational Growth 1740-1790

Denominational Growth 1740-1790		
Denomination	1740	1790
Methodist	0	712
Baptist	96	858
Presbyterian	160	725
Roman Catholic	27	65
Congregational	423	750
Anglican	246	170
Lutheran	95	249
Quaker	50	375

²³⁵ Dates for the Revolutionary War typically agreed upon by historians are Apr 19, 1775 – Sep 3, 1783.

²³⁶ John Wesley’s September 1, 1784 diary entry as quoted by Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 371.

German Reformed	51	236
Dutch Reformed	78	115
Total	1256	4255

2nd Great Awakening -1790-1840

As a result of the war and the rational deism that seemed to be gaining a foothold in the recently victorious new nation, the church was desperate for renewed strength and vigor. It was in 1790 that what has been called the “most influential revival of Christianity in the history of the United States,”²³⁷ the Second Great Awakening was birthed. While it was the Revolutionary Revival in New England that prepared the way for the Awakening,²³⁸ it was the western frontier that seemed to provide the most kindling for the movement. Revival success in the frontier would carry this renewed religious enthusiasm that produced significant advance for Protestantism through the turn of and well into the new century until approximately 1840.²³⁹ It was the weakening of the American church, particularly in the New England colonies, as a result of the Revolutionary War created a fertile environment for the coming religious resurgence.²⁴⁰ Sweet emphasizes the draining effect the War had on the church when he confirms, "In post-Revolutionary America religious and moral conditions of the country as a whole reached the

²³⁷ Gaustad, *A History of Christianity*, 166.

²³⁸ Ibid., 167.

²³⁹ Gaustad puts the Second Great Awakening beginning in approximately 1795 and through 1810 “there was a broad and general rekindling of Christianity throughout the country.” 167.

²⁴⁰ See William W. Sweet, *Revivalism in America*, (New York: Charles Scribner, 1944).; See also, Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 365 where he echoes, "The revolutionary era was a period of decline for American Christianity as a whole. The churches reached a lower ebb of vitality during the two decades after the end of hostilities than at any other time in the country's religious history." See also, Lawrence Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience*, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970), 493, where he also suggests that twenty-five percent of the colonial population were church members in 1760.

lowest ebb tide in the entire history of the American people."²⁴¹ Gaustad goes further to substantiate the waning numerical strength of the post-Revolution church approaching the dawning of the new century by highlighting, "While church adherence remained high at least into the 1770s (with perhaps as much as 40 to 50 percent of the population attending church with some regularity), formal church membership was sinking, and in the 1790s reached an all-time low (somewhere between 5 and 10 percent of the adult population)."²⁴² It was "by 1780 the percentage of adult colonists who adhered to a church was between 10–30%, not counting slaves or Native Americans. North Carolina had the lowest percentage at about 4%, while New Hampshire and South Carolina were tied for the highest, at about 16%."²⁴³

With many areas in the western frontier regions entirely vacant of churches immediately following the War. Characteristic of the peculiar persistence of the Christian faith, the church was able to rebound from the Revolutionary ebb it was experiencing. The momentum Baptists and Methodists had been building in the years immediately prior to the beginning of the new Awakening assisted in their ability to continue to scale in each new region they reached.

Whereas the aim of the First Great Awakening was to revive those already in the church, the ambition of the new awakening was focusing its intentions on converting the unbeliever and "bringing the gospel to all America and to the heathen lands abroad."²⁴⁴ Though the movement had its beginnings in the New England colonies it quickly spread to the frontier having great

²⁴¹ Sweet, *Revivalism in America*, 117.

²⁴² Gaustad, *A History of Christianity*, 163.

²⁴³ Mark C. Carnes, John A. Garraty and Patrick Williams, *Mapping America's Past: A Historical Atlas*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 50.

²⁴⁴ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* 387. Ahlstrom adds an additional, subsequent motivation of the Second Great Awakening as those involved hoping to "make America the world's great example of a truly Protestant republic."

success in camp meetings. The most significant manifestation of the revival was in Cane Ridge, Kentucky in 1801 where some argue became the birthplace of the Second Great Awakening in the south.²⁴⁵ It was in Cane Ridge that the emotionalism that the Second Great Awakening has become known for overshadows, in much of the scholarly literature, the evangelistic underpinnings and success of the movement.

The Awakening was markedly egalitarian with many documented instances of children and women preaching,²⁴⁶ which were both a break from traditional established roles within the Church. Writing soon after the Cane Ridge revival, Richard McNemar highlights that the move of God disregarded all social and denominational divisions in that there was no, “distinction as to age, sex, color, or anything of a temporary nature: old and young, male and female, black and white, had equal privilege to minister the light which they received, in whatever way the spirit directed.”²⁴⁷ It was a revival accessible to everyone.

While there was no concerted effort to deliver a message that would have appealed more to one audience than another, interestingly the large majority of converts during this Awakening were women. Nancy Cott provides data regarding the disproportionate number of female converts in that, “There were at least three female converts to every two male converts between 1798 and 1826, according to the Reverend Ebenezer Porter's estimate in 1832.”²⁴⁸ Cott also

²⁴⁵ See Neil Meyer, “Falling for the Lord: Shame, Revivalism, and the Origins of the Second Great Awakening,” *Early American Studies*; Philadelphia Vol. 9, Iss. 1, (Winter 2011): 145-146.

²⁴⁶ See Richard McNemar, *The Kentucky Revival; or, A Short History of the Late Extraordinary Out-Pouring of the Spirit of God, in the Western States of America, agreeably to Scripture Promises, and Prophecies concerning the Latter Day: With a Brief Account of the Entrance and Progress of What the World Call Shakerism, Among the Subjects of the Late Revival in Ohio and Kentucky*, (Cincinnati: John W. Browne, 1807), 25.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 30.

²⁴⁸ Nancy Cott, “Young Women in the Second Great Awakening in New England,” quoting Ebenezer Porter, *Letters on Revivals of Religion*, Andover, Mass.: Revival Association, 1832, 5. Cott also highlights that

suggests that in addition to the likely conversion of women, it was those individuals under the age of twenty five that converted at a greater rate and were often times the first to convert.²⁴⁹ It could have been the rejection of traditional gender roles within revival meetings that served as a distraction for men that prevented their conversion at the same rate as that of women. To this point, Meyer argues that, “The emotional woman on display at the revival often proved to be a stumbling block, an example of emotionalism run amok or the traditional susceptibility of the female mind.”²⁵⁰ It is argued that the emotionalism of the revival caused men hesitation and thus resulted in the conversion ratio of women to be greater but husbands also took concern with their wives converting a point Susan Lindley illustrates, “Husbands, especially in the South, sometimes disapproved of their wives' conversion, forcing women to choose between submission to God or their spouses. Church membership and religious activity gave women peer support and place for meaningful activity outside the home, providing many women with communal identity and shared experiences.”²⁵¹ Not only did women face potential criticism within the home, but they also bore the primary responsibility of religious instruction within the home. A point Mary Ryan confirms when explaining, “Women also took crucial roles in the conversion and religious upbringing of children. During the period of revival, mothers were seen as the moral and

“women constituted the majority of New England church members from about the middle of the seventeenth century onwards.” See footnote 5 in “Young Women in The Second Great Awakening in New England.”

²⁴⁹ Nancy Cott, “Young Women in the Second Great Awakening in New England”. *Feminist Studies*. 3 (1): 1975, 15.

²⁵⁰ Neil Meyer, “Falling for the Lord: Shame, Revivalism, and the Origins of the Second Great Awakening,” 149.

²⁵¹ Susan H. Lindley, *You Have Stept Out of Your Place: a History of Women and Religion in America*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 59.

spiritual foundation of the family and were thus tasked with instructing children in matters of religion and ethics.”²⁵²

This was a responsibility the revival prepared them well for by meeting their spiritual, social, and emotional needs. As Cott suggests,

Just as the doctrine of the revivals intersected at vital points with young women's needs, the means used to propagate revivals suited young women's predilections. Prayer meetings gave young women opportunity for public expressions of anxiety and offered them sympathy and support perfectly attuned to the peer relationships they relied on at work or at school away from home. These small group meetings also put effective pressure on participants to become converts.²⁵³

Perhaps the central message being proclaimed, that of an evolving New England Calvinistic message which was beginning to adopt the afore-viewed heretical Arminian doctrine of man's involvement in salvation provided the younger, mostly female audience a sense of choice that they were now able to exercise in a manner that affected their identity formation and eternal trajectory. The message in this revival was man should do all that the individual could in the act of repenting of ones sins and placing faith in Christ's finished work on the cross. According to revivalist Increase Graves of Bridgeport, Vermont, individuals under the conviction of the Holy Spirit were to strive "to do all they are able, just as much as if they could save themselves by their own works, the sure destruction of those who forbear all exertions, and of those also, who neglect to exert themselves in the right manner."²⁵⁴ There was a very clear shift from the Calvinistic message of the complete sovereignty of God and the inability of the

²⁵² Mary Ryan, "A Woman's Awakening: Evangelical Religion and the Families of Utica, New York, 1800 to 1840". *American Quarterly*. 30 (5): 1978, 616–19.

²⁵³ Nancy Cott, 21. See also Noll, *A History of Christianity*, where he echoes that it was the “changing social conditions and new theological emphases began to offer them (women) more opportunities for public ministry.” 181.

²⁵⁴ George Leon Walker, *Some Aspects of the Religious Life of New England with Special Reference to Congregationalists*, (New York: Silver, Burdett and Company, 1897), 138.

sinner to save themselves in the First Great Awakening, to the message of the Second Great Awakening where every individual had been provided the ability to come to Christ through faith. Noll notes that this shift “arose from a widespread desire for a theology of action that could encourage and justify the expanding revivals of Christianity.”²⁵⁵

This theology for action allowed the Awakening that initiated the nineteenth century to not only reinvigorated the Protestant churches spiritually, the movement also propelled the church into politico-cultural influence and confirmed its ability to influence on a national level as Ahlstrom confirms, “Protestant churches, with their message and methods tuned to the patriotic aspirations of a young nation, reaching their high point of cultural influence” during this resurgence.²⁵⁶ The Second Awakening resulted in a clear sense of purpose for social reform generally, but evangelism both at home and abroad specifically and this dual desire led to the establishment of several institutionalized organizations to transform and evangelize America. Through the visionary leadership of Henry Beecher the following organizations were founded: American Board for Foreign Missions, the American Bible Society, the Colonization Society for liberated slaves, the American Sunday School Union²⁵⁷, the American Tract Society, the American Education Society, the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance, and the American Home Missionary Society. Beyond Beecher’s influence, the Southern Baptist Convention (which later became the largest Protestant denomination) was also established during

²⁵⁵ Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 170.

²⁵⁶ Ahlstrom, *Religious History of the American People*, 387.

²⁵⁷ Noll provides the two major aims of the Sunday School Union, 1) It channeled missionaries to unevangelized areas and 2) It supplied basic education for lower and middle class students both aims which were a shift in previous focus from conversion of the lost and the edification of believers. This new focus resulted in over 70,000 Sunday Schools by the end of the nineteenth century. See Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 229-230.

this time,²⁵⁸ but, perhaps the most enduring legacies of the Second Great Awakening were the elevation of missionary priority and the prominence of women's religious and societal roles. It is the evangelistic mobilization that affected not only the world generally with the launching of global missions endeavors but the national evangelistic aim is what Noll calls, "the truly great missionary story of the century."²⁵⁹

The aim of the local church was the salvation of the individual and the establishment of institutions both through which it would be able to affect transformation in the world.²⁶⁰ It was this at-home evangelistic success that ensured the continued successful expansion of the Methodist and Baptist churches in America. Noll admits "statistics can never tell the whole story," but the growth of the Methodist church can be evidenced in Francis Asbury's evangelistic efforts when he first came to America there were "four Methodist ministers caring for about 300 laypeople. When he (Asbury) died...there were 2,000 ministers and over 200,000 Methodists in the States and several thousand more in Canada."²⁶¹ Similarly, the Baptists had continued to see significant growth, and by "1812 there were close to 200,000 Baptists...with half of them in the states of Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Kentucky."²⁶² By 1850, on the cusp of the Third Great Awakening, Baptists numbered more than one million with approximately three quarters of them being involved in missionary endeavors.²⁶³

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 169-180.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 185.

²⁶⁰ Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*, (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004).

²⁶¹ Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 173.

²⁶² Ibid., 178.

²⁶³ Ibid. See also, C.C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation*, (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), 50 for further insight "During the Revolution, a critic had scoffed that after the war Methodists would scarcely be

An additional, persistent result of the Second Great Awakening was the increase of religious pluralism in America. This time saw a rise of sects and offshoots of various colors of the Christian faith that have persisted with varying levels of influence and strength to the present day. The Colonial through the American Civil War witnessed religious pluralism in an innocent manner in that there existed a plurality of expressions of the Christian religion. There were sects, native religions, and some expressions of religions practiced by immigrants. But, largely, religious pluralism existed in the form of varying, but somewhat similar, Christian doctrines held by different Christian denominations. The nineteenth century, however, specifically growing out of the Second Great Awakening, witnessed the development of several sects and cults that later developed into significantly influential religions in the American context. It was during the Second Great Awakening that created an experimental environment that encouraged the formation of several offshoots that have since grown in great prominence. Christian restorationism, Seventh-Day Adventism²⁶⁴, Jehovah's Witnesses²⁶⁵ and perhaps most significant, the Mormons²⁶⁶ had their beginnings in the rich spiritual ground of the period.

numerous enough to fill a corn crib; but they reported 8,504 members in 1780 and 57,631 in 1790 - a sevenfold gain in a single decade. Baptists increased from fewer than 10,000 before the Revolution to approximately 170,000 at the close of the century...In 1820 Baptists and Methodists each reported 2,700 churches and Presbyterians 1,700.

²⁶⁴ General Conference organized in 1863 with 12 churches and 3,500 members. By the end of the century there were over 50,000 Seventh Day Adventists. See Gaustad, *Atlas*, 115.

²⁶⁵ Gaustad recounts in 1893 "the first national assembly of Witnesses was held at Chicago with about 360 persons in attendance ...by the time of WWI membership was around 15,000." See Edwin S. Gaustad, *Historical Atlas of Religion in America*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 116.

²⁶⁶ Joseph Smith received his first "vision" in 1820 and by 1832 there were more than 2,000 converts. In 1844, there were approximately 18,000 converts. In 1850 there were 16 Mormon churches, by 1870 the number had reached 189. See Gaustad, *Historical Atlas of Religion in America*, 83-88.

By the end of the Second Great Awakening the number of churches had expanded exponentially throughout the colonies and states with Baptist, Methodists, and Presbyterian churches drastically outnumbering other existent denominations:²⁶⁷

Table 2.4 Denominational Growth 1850

Denominational Growth 1850							
State	Methodist	Baptist	Presby.	State	Methodist	Baptist	Presby.
AL	577	579	162	MS	454	385	143
AR	168	114	52	MO	250	300	125
CT	185	114	299	NH	103	193	113
DC	16	6	6	NJ	312	108	149
DE	106	12	26	NY	1231	781	671
FL	87	56	16	NC	784	615	151
GA	795	879	97	OH	1529	551	663
IL	405	282	206	PA	889	320	775
IN	778	428	282	RI	23	106	0
IO	71	20	38	SC	484	413	136
KY	530	803	224	TN	861	646	363
LA	125	77	18	TX	176	82	45
ME	199	326	7	VT	140	102	242
MD	497	45	56	VA	1025	649	240
MA.	262	266	528	WI	110	49	40
MI	119	66	72				

Civil War (1861-1865) Through WWI (1914-1919)

Protestant churches benefited from the renewed spirit flowing from the most recent awakenings. Carwardine summarizes Robert Baird's 1856 data in providing evidence for the

²⁶⁷ Including newly formed sects e.g. Mormonism, Jehovah's Witness, etc. along with traditional denominations: Congregational, Dutch Reformed, Episcopal, Roman Catholic, Quaker, etc. See, Gaustad, *Historical Atlas*, 168 for 1850 denominational data. See also, Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation*, 51-53 for discussion of Gaustad's denominational data.

exponential growth evangelical denominations had experienced by the mid-nineteenth century. The four largest denominations Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists had a combined membership of approximately three million or nearly 13% of the total population of the relatively young nation;²⁶⁸ however, as with the War for Independence, the Civil War also extracted a significant toll on the momentum that had been built during the years immediately preceding. Wilson argues regarding the influence of religion upon the war that though it was not an immediate cause like in the Spanish Civil War, the influence was nonetheless present, albeit developing over time in informing, “The flash points in the 1850s that became immediate causes of war had little overtly to do with religion, but with fears about the future of northerners and southerners under the Constitution.” adding, “Religion was a long-term cause of the war.”²⁶⁹ It was becoming clear that the Civil War marked a “major shift in the public story of Christianity in the United States.”²⁷⁰

Evangelical involvement in politics increased prior after the turn of the nineteenth century. As the century was drawing to a close evangelical missionary endeavors, rather than being limited to the expansion of the gospel only, were beginning to be viewed as vehicles for the expansion of American ideals in the majority world. A year after his election to the presidency, William McKinley illustrated the intimate, almost indiscernible, relationship between the aims of Christian missions and the aim of American expansion in stating in relation

²⁶⁸ Carwardine, “Evangelicals, Politics, and the Coming of the American Civil War: A Transatlantic Perspective,” summarizing Robert Baird, *Religion in America; or, An Account of the Origin, Relation to the State, and Present Condition of the Evangelical Churches in the United States*, (New York: Arkose Press, 2015), 530-532.

²⁶⁹ Charles Reagan Wilson, “Religion in the American Civil War in Comparative Perspective,” in *The American Civil War*, Charles Reagan Wilson and Harry S. Stout, and Randall M. Miller eds., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 394.

²⁷⁰ Noll, *History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 287.

to the Spanish-American war “there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God’s grace to do the very best we could by them, as our fellow-men for whom Christ died.”²⁷¹ Where revivalists were quoted as urging, “politics are a part of religion in such a country as this,”²⁷² to the majority of evangelical males being significantly involved in politics in some way.

Prior to the Civil War politicians drew heavily from evangelical practices exercised during the great awakening and adopted mass revivalism tactics into their campaign strategies. Donald Mathews highlights that politicians of this age who sought to influence on a large scale and draw the most voters would “open party conventions with prayers, multiplied political meetings and rotated speakers, their political songs even incorporated the language and tunes of evangelical hymns, and, like revivalists, party activists sought to rally the faithful, draw in the undecided, and reclaim the backsliders.”²⁷³ Campaigners leveraged God and the devil to illustrate a world sharply divided “not between two sets of morally neutral policies, but between two moral orders, between political salvation and the victory of the Devil.”²⁷⁴ The success politicians were experiencing in assimilating the revivalistic strategies also assimilated Christian rhetoric and piousness into the culture as can be seen in James Dixon’s account upon visiting America. An English Methodist who visited the United States in 1848, Dixon wrote that

²⁷¹ William McKinley quoted by Eric. P. Kaufman, *The Rise and Fall of Anglo-America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 116.

²⁷² Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, ed. William G. McLoughlin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 297.

²⁷³ Donald G. Mathews, “The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process 1780-1830: An Hypothesis,” *American Quarterly* 21 (Spring 1969): 23-43.

²⁷⁴ R. Laurence Moore, “The End of Religious Establishment and the Beginning of Religious Politics: Church and State in the United States,” in *Belief in History: Innovative Approaches to European and American Religion*, ed. Thomas Keselman (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 237-264.

"Christianity pervades the United States in vigorous action;" He did not mean however, "that every individual is a pious Christian, but that the spirit of the evangelical system is in sufficient power to give to religious opinion and sentiment the complete ascendant in society."²⁷⁵

The impending certainty of the War was evidenced by the schisms that split American Protestantism in the 1830s and 1840s which were related to the role of slaveholders within the churches. The church schisms unleashed angers, fears, and even violence, which further divided the nation's religious people and set the tone for eventual political division.²⁷⁶ Some have even suggested that the missionary enterprise itself was a great facade to hide the fractures within the church. On this point Ahlstrom argues that, "crusades of diverse sorts were organized, in part, it would seem, to heal or hide the disunity of the churches."²⁷⁷ It was the moral righteousness for which Evangelical denominations were striving to influence on a national (even global) scale through the vehicle of politics that Carwardine has expressed as a potentially unavoidable consequence that made the Civil War inescapable:

We have no way of knowing if without the evangelical element there would have been a war. What we can say is that the moral energies established by the Second Great Awakening were powerful enough to splinter national denominations and national parties; though conflicts of strictly material interest are often open to negotiation, they are rarely so when associated with a conviction of moral righteousness.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ Richard Carwardine, "Evangelicals, Politics, and the Coming of the American Civil War: A Transatlantic Perspective," in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700–1990*, eds. Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk (New York, 1994), 198 (Dixon quote), 211.

²⁷⁶ Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, 1993); See also, C. C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the Civil War* (Macon, GA, 1985); See also, Curtis D. Johnson, *Redeeming America: Evangelicals and the Road to Civil War*, (Chicago, 1993); James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War 1860-1869*, (New Haven, 1978), 21.

²⁷⁷ Ahlstrom, *Religious History of the American People*, 733.

²⁷⁸ Richard Carwardine, "Evangelicals, Politics, and the Coming of the American Civil War: A Transatlantic Perspective," 212. Compare to Goen in *Broken Churches, Broken Nation* whose final judgements, argues Carwardine, are as historically unhelpful as they are morally admirable.

Though the dawning years of the twentieth century have become known as the Progressive Era, the effects of the Civil War and proceeding years led Noll to refer to the period after the war and those years transitioning into the twentieth century as the “last years of ‘Protestant America’”²⁷⁹ and Marty calls these transitional years the “complacent era”²⁸⁰ in the Protestant experience in America, but the twilight years of the nineteenth century and the birth of the twentieth century was not void of pockets of spiritual vitality. There was what has become known as the “business man’s awakening”²⁸¹ that lasted approximately a year from 1857-1858 that gave rise to noon day prayer meetings and urban evangelism. Additionally, Dwight L. Moody’s ministry rose to prominence during the latter years of the nineteenth century where Moody Bible Institute had its founding and Moody’s central message²⁸² was an effective balance between Finney’s revivalistic rigidity and Sunday’s theatrical style. Important here is the similar rise in priority of missionary zeal that had accompanied past periods of resurgence of Christian faith. An example to highlight this recurring focus on local and global evangelization as a result of rekindled faith was Moody’s founding of the Student Volunteer Movement where he encouraged young people to pursue “the evangelization of the world in their generation.”²⁸³

²⁷⁹ Noll, *A History of Christianity*, 286-310.

²⁸⁰ Martin E. Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America*, (New York: The Dial Press, 1970), 133-176.

²⁸¹ Noll, *A History of Christianity*, 287-288.

²⁸² What Moody himself summarized as the Three Rs: Ruin by sin, Redemption by Christ, and Regeneration by the Holy Spirit.

²⁸³ Noll, *A History of Christianity*, 290. Quoting the slogan of the Student Volunteer Movement at its founding in 1888.

By 1880 the national share of the most prominent Protestant denominations had increased from 3 million or 13% of the population to approximately nine million which was then, 18% of the American population.²⁸⁴ During the second half of the nineteenth century both Methodists and Baptist saw aggressive growth. Methodists had grown from 1,250,000 to approximately 5,500,000 and Baptists increased their numbers from 750,000 to approximately 4,500,000 during that period.²⁸⁵ The Protestant population appears low given the level of growth and increased influence over the past decades but as Joseph P. Thompson notes, not all adherents would officially identify as members:

In reading the statistics of the American churches, it should be borne in mind that the term members by no means represents the total of worshippers in the several congregations, or of nominal adherents to a confession, but only those who by their own act have united with the church proper, the spiritual body, and who partake of the sacraments.²⁸⁶

Nonetheless, and despite Protestants making up far less than half of the nation's growing population they firmly believed, as Handy argues, that "they formed the majority religious voice in the culture."²⁸⁷ It was during the dusk of the eighteenth century that the commonly assumed view was that America was essentially a Christian nation but there was a growing dilemma with

²⁸⁴ Gaustad, *Historical Atlas of Religion in America*, 111. See also, Carwardine, "Evangelicals, Politics, and the Coming of the American Civil War: A Transatlantic Perspective," summarizing Robert Baird, *Religion in America; or, An Account of the Origin, Relation to the State, and Present Condition of the Evangelical Churches in the United States*, (New York: 1856), 530-532.

²⁸⁵ Edwin S. Gaustad and P.L. Barlow, *New Historical Atlas of Religion in America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 374.

²⁸⁶ Joseph P. Thompson, *Church and State in the United States*, (Boston: James R. Gosgood, 1873), 93. See also Kevin J. Christiano, *Religious Diversity and Social Change: American Cities, 1890-1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) for further explanation regarding the difficulty of interpreting religious affiliation data for earlier periods of American history.

²⁸⁷ Handy, *Undermined Establishment: Church-State Relations in America, 1880-1920*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 11.

which the church had to bend in its separation from the state whose “constitutional provisions explicitly forbade its government to institute religious tests for public office, establish religion, or prohibit its free exercise.”²⁸⁸ Even the public education system was heralded as a sacred venture as Robert Wood Lynn points out that Protestants viewed public schools as “symbolic of both our national unity and God’s handiwork in history. As such it was a sacred cause, worthy of religious devotion.”²⁸⁹ The educational system provided a solution that the denominational divisions prevented Protestants from developing in previous years.

Another common theme whose significance can be seen echoing with greater frequency in each period of resurgence is the involvement and participation of women. Similarly, in the years after the Civil War and leading into the infant decades of the twentieth century, the increase in missionary activity, both local and global,²⁹⁰ owes much to the presence and support of women. Noll provides insight into the prominence of missionary involvement of women, “single women in their own missionary societies and the lives of male missionaries made up 60 percent of the nation’s missionary force in the late nineteenth century. By the turn of the century, forty-one women’s missionary societies supported over 1,200 missionaries.”²⁹¹

Prior to this time, missionary efforts had been advanced by smaller pockets of evangelistic concern and had successfully expanded the church into the new frontier; however, as the church looked in the face a new century, missions gained national interest. “The number of

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 11.

²⁸⁹ Robert W. Lynn, *Protestant Strategies in Education*, (New York: Association Press, 1964), 22.

²⁹⁰ Women were able to exercise greater influence in global missions due to lesser restraints on the roles they were allowed to occupy in state-side churches and therefore experienced greater fruitfulness on the global scale but as a result women were able to grow in influence and expand their roles in American churches in the years to come.

²⁹¹ Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 294.

American foreign missionaries, which stood at 934 in 1890, reached nearly 5,000 a decade later and over 9,000 in 1915.”²⁹²

Early 20th Century

It was during this time that the nation’s population doubled²⁹³ and new advancements in technology, the processes of industrialization, urbanization, and the new cultural and religious nuances produced by increased immigration created a very different landscape with which Protestantism had to learn to navigate. It was the dusk of the nineteenth and dawn of the twentieth century that served as a “time when the earlier religious settlement was tested and challenged.”²⁹⁴

The years after the Civil War provided a less turbulent environment than previous decades had afforded the Protestants and the remaining years of the nineteenth century leading into the early decades of the final century of the millennium saw a renewed increase of Christian influence in the American culture. Gaustad provides insight into how these numbers continued to grow “At the beginning of the twentieth century, about one-third of the nation’s population could be found on the membership rolls of the churches and synagogues. By the middle of that century, membership had increased to well over fifty percent.”²⁹⁵ It is significant to note that during that same time frame the nation’s population doubled from approximately 76 million to

²⁹² Charles W. Foreman, “The Americans,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 6 (April 1982): 54.

²⁹³ Increasing from an estimated fifty million in 1880 to over one hundred million by 1920.

²⁹⁴ Handy, *Undermined Establishment: Church-State Relations in America, 1880-1920*, 3.

²⁹⁵ Gaustad, *The Religious History of America*, 279.

over 150 million. Correspondingly, church membership mirrored this growth in both absolute numbers and percentage of the entire population.²⁹⁶

Nonetheless, the fractures from division within the church still existed. As a result of the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy and the doctrinal divisions within the Baptist and Presbyterian denominations, Fosdick highlights the diminished appeal of the church among the educated of the day by lamenting “The educated people are looking for their religion outside the churches.”²⁹⁷

Where could the solution be found? Fosdick proposes two necessary elements. The first is a spirit of tolerance since “intolerance solves no problems.”²⁹⁸ The second element is “a clear insight into the main issues of modern Christianity and a sense of penitent shame that the Christian church should be quarreling over little matters when the world is dying of great needs.”²⁹⁹

Ministers often bewail the fact that young people turn from religion to science for the regulative ideas for their lives. But this is easily explicable. Science treat’s a young man’s mind as though it were really important.” “A scientist says to a young man: ‘Here is the universe challenging our investigation. Here are the truths we have seen so far. Come study with us.’ See what we have already seen and then look further to see more. For science is an intellectual adventure for the truth. Can you imagine any man who is worthwhile turning from that call to the church, if the church seems to him to say, ‘Come and we will feed you opinions from a spoon. No thinking is allowed here except such that brings you to certain specified, predetermined conclusions. These prescribed opinions we

²⁹⁶ Edwin Scott Gaustad, *A Religious History of America*, New Revised Edition, (San Francisco, HarperCollins Publishers, 1990), 245-246.

²⁹⁷ Harry Emerson Fosdick, “Shall the Fundamentalist Win?” a sermon preached at the First Presbyterian Church, New York, May 21, 1922. 10. <http://catalog.history.pcusa.org/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=46260> (Accessed July 19, 2019).

²⁹⁸ Harry Emerson Fosdick, “Shall the Fundamentalist Win?” a sermon preached at the First Presbyterian Church, New York, May 21, 1922, *The Journal of Presbyterian History* (1997-), Vol. 94, No. 2 (Fall/Winter 2016), 80.

²⁹⁹ Fosdick, “Shall the Fundamentalist Win?” 10-13.

will give you in advance of your thinking; no think, but only so as to reach these results.³⁰⁰

As in the past, the dawning of a new century in America brought with it an entirely new social and cultural context in which the church had to determine its place. Similarly, as in each preceding cultural context, the church sought the moral reform of society and determined the best way to achieve this end was, as Noll suggests that, “most Protestant reformers maintained that they key to changing society lay in converting individuals, who would then reorder their private lives.”³⁰¹ This renewed gusto for moral reform again provide opportunity for women to assume a leading role. One such reformation initiative was that of the Temperance movement which paved the way for the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1919; however, and although the Temperance movement along with the implementation of the new Amendment had short lived positive results highlighting the government’s general inability to mandate moral reform.³⁰² This movement is mentioned here as evidence of the inability of a government to successfully legislate morality, a tendency at which the First Amendment sought to prevent as Philip Schaff explained, “the American nation is as religious and as Christian as any nation on earth, and in some respects even more so, for the very reason that the profession and support of religion are left entirely free.”³⁰³ This is a point that will be touched on again as the rise of the religious right and the founding of the Moral Majority is discussed below.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 10.

³⁰¹ Noll, *A History of Christianity*, 295.

³⁰² See Mark Thornton, “Cato Institute Policy Analysis No. 157: Alcohol Prohibition was a Failure,” *Policy Analysis*, no. 157, July 17, 1991, where Thornton provides four arguments against the success of the Prohibition: 1) The decrease in alcohol consumption was not significant. 2) Consumption of alcohol steadily rose after the initial drop. 3) Heightened reinforcement did not curtail consumption. 4) The overall increase in social evil e.g. organized crime.

³⁰³ Philip Schaff, *Church and State in the United States*, (New York: Putnam, 1888), 53. Schaff also referred to the First Amendment as “the Magna Charta of religious freedom in the United States...the first example

It was during this period that saw the rise of fundamentalism as a reaction against growing theological liberalism, the naturalistic explanations germinating from Darwin's *Origin of Species*, and the biblical higher criticism encouraged by modernity's threat against the Christian faith. There were forces aimed at undermining the influence that Protestantism had so long enjoyed, namely the liberalism and rationalism that some within the Protestant camp viewed as the formidable enemy which had to be met head on in order to preserve the influence Protestantism had enjoyed for two centuries. Fundamentalism was able to rally their influence by aiming their aggression against the increasingly popular Social Gospel movement that was able to use the same Bible Protestants had historically used but Darwinian ideology and higher criticism created an impasse preventing consensus regarding the inerrancy of Scripture. The Social Gospel was charged by conservative evangelicals of being a different gospel altogether in that the salvation of sinful man was the primary aim of the true gospel not the salvation of society against which Hugh Price Hughes argued, "The salvation of the individual soul was not sufficient. Society must be saved as well as Christians."³⁰⁴

James Hunter suggests it was "By 1910 the majority of Protestant ministers and theologians had abandoned the conservative positions as indefensible."³⁰⁵ It was against this context that formulated the expressed aim of fundamentalists to produce a reestablishment of fundamental Christian doctrines that had suffered from rationalism in recent years. The movement has become known for its militant-like defense of these fundamentals which were

of a government deliberately depriving itself of all legislative control over religion, which was justly regarded by all older governments as the chief support of public morality, order, peace, and prosperity." 22-23.

³⁰⁴ *Christian World*, October 27, 1887, 810 as quoted by Christopher Oldstone-Moore, Hugh Price Hughes: Founder of a New Methodism, Conscience of a New Nonconformity (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999).

³⁰⁵ James D. Hunter, "The Evangelical Worldview since 1890," 32.

outlined in a work edited by R.A. Torrey, *The Fundamentals of the Faith*, from which the Fundamentalists get their name.³⁰⁶ It was this argument and fight for a return to the fundamentals of the Christian religion that forbade any views contrary to those outlined in Torrey's work. As Martin notes they were the "Fundamentals of the Faith from which no deviation could be tolerated."³⁰⁷

The 1920s came to a close with the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy that surfaced the split within American Protestantism. In attempting to regulate public school curriculum, culminating in the Scopes Monkey Trial in July 1925, Fundamentalists led by William Jennings Bryan who led the prosecution of a high school biology teacher that taught Darwinian evolution. Though the Fundamentalist's prosecution was successful, the movement suffered irreparable damage to their reputation due to the media's portrayal of Fundamentalists as anti-intellectual stemming from their view of biblical literalism. As a result, Fundamentalists retreated from the public scene and turned their attention inward and focused on building private institutions for learning in attempts to serve as what American religious historian Randall Balmer describes as, "a protective device to shield evangelical kids in particular from the corrupting influences in the larger culture...giving way to Liberal Christians dominating national politics and denominational institutions, until key court decisions -- *Green v. Connally* and *Roe v. Wade* which served to galvanize them to re-engage in wider culture."³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ The most commonly agreed upon list of the fundamentals is 1) Inerrancy of Scripture 2) Deity of Christ 3) Virgin Birth 4) Substitutionary Atonement 5) The Resurrection 6) The imminent, bodily second return of Christ in power. See George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006 for a robust illustration of the rise and influence of Fundamentalism on the American culture.

³⁰⁷ William Martin, *With God on our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America*, (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 11.

³⁰⁸ Interview with Randall Balmer, PBS God in America series, May 10, 2010, <https://www.pbs.org/godinamerica/interviews/randall-balmer.html#retreat> (Accessed July 24, 2019).

Balmer provides an illustrative summary regarding the fundamentalists' withdrawal from the public and political scene after the Scopes Monkey Trial:

For about 50 years from the Scopes Trial in 1925 until, Jimmy Carter's campaign for the presidency beginning in 1975, evangelicals are not involved in politics. Many of them are not even registered to vote because politics is dirty and unseemly, and besides, Jesus is coming back at any time to get us out of this mess, so why should we worry about the temporal order? And that was a very, very real sentiment among America's evangelicals for the middle decades of the 20th century.³⁰⁹

Though as militant and commonly divisive as history has shown Fundamentalism to be, the movement endured with lessening force. Grant Whacker of Duke University Divinity School writes of the lasting effects of fundamentalism that germinated throughout the twentieth century in outlining, "Historic Fundamentalism, largely forged before World War I, helped to produce the massive evangelical, Pentecostal, and charismatic revivals after World War II, as well as the Christian Right in the 1970s and 1980s."

World War II to the Rise of the Religious Right

The individualistic theology that grew out of the Second Great Awakening and the individualism³¹⁰ in general that had been growing in acceptance through naturalistic and humanistic philosophies continued to create shifting shades of religious affiliation throughout the second half of the twentieth century. There was in the years after World War II what historian Robert Wuthnow calls a "restructuring of American religion"³¹¹ where he notes Christianity remained vigorous throughout the post-war decades. As Wuthnow notes the evangelistic force

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Handy defines individualism as the emphasizing of one's situation in life was largely the result of that person's own ability and energy. See Handy, *Undermined Establishment*, 59.

³¹¹ Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since World War II*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

characteristic of Evangelicals previous to the War was becoming more difficult to discern in the surrounding culture,

In area after area it was as if the war had shaken religious leaders from their previous ways of thinking and forced on them a larger consciousness of the world which left them in awe of forces shaping modern culture. Their call to repentance remained clear, but increasingly it seemed to echo from the stratosphere rather than focusing on individual hearts.³¹²

However, until the rise of the Religious Right in the late 1970s the influence of Christianity in the public and political arenas had abated, but not vanished entirely. It was during these years that “the churches’ larger role in society was, however, conceived of primarily as influencing society by influencing individuals.”³¹³ Nonetheless, though evangelicals were taking a break from politics their churches benefited from renewed strength in the post-war prosperity. After what he calls a decade long “lull” Wuthnow provides statistics that illustrate the post-war church growth:

Southern Baptists added nearly 300,000 new members in the first four years after the war...the Methodist church in 1948 showed that membership had increased faster in the previous four years than at any time since 1925 and projected a need for nearly 3,000 additional clergy in the next five years. The Disciples of Christ announced their largest annual gains in over 30 years.³¹⁴

Yet it was not only the Protestants that were reaping the harvest of the rekindled religious interest. Additionally, the Catholics were baptizing over one million infants each year and launched their own building initiatives that resulted in 125 hospitals, over 1,000 new elementary schools, and 3,000 new parishes. Additionally, Catholic seminaries saw a thirty percent increase

³¹² Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 70.

³¹³ Ibid., 64.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 37.

in enrollment.³¹⁵ Further, Church historian Martin Marty provides further evidence of a renewed enjoyment of religion in America and suggests it was the relaxing of standards for membership that contributed to growth. Nonetheless, the War was over, the economy was thriving, and the church was again worth attending as the numbers show:

In 1920, 43 percent of the people were on the rolls; in 1930 47 percent; in 1940 this had grown only to 49 percent but in 1950 57 percent were members, and by 1956 this had grown to 62 percent. Eventually, the crest was reached at 63 percent or 64 percent, and almost 50 percent of the American people claimed to have attended church in any week.³¹⁶

As the church was directing efforts at creating organizations and the preaching and teaching ministries in local congregations to positively affect individuals with the gospel who could then in turn positively affect society. This is the philosophy of ministry in which the young Jerry Falwell was trained and which he echoed in his early preaching encouraging ministers to preach the gospel only and to avoid becoming entangled in civil and political issues of the day. Nonetheless, as the young Falwell matured in ministry and understanding of American culture and began organizing efforts to catapult evangelicals onto the political scene for a fight to re-establish biblical morality in America once more.

In a 2005 interview with Jon Meacham, Jerry Falwell confessed the motive behind changing his position in his early ministry from encouraging ministers to preach the gospel only and not get involved in civil issues, to being one of the most prominent religious-political figures of the twentieth century when stating, “It was only after the early '60s, with the court rulings outlawing voluntary Bible reading and school prayer, and [then] *Roe v. Wade*, that I became

³¹⁵ Ibid., 36-37.

³¹⁶ Martin E. Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America*, (New York: The Dial Press, 1970), 259.

convinced that my position was now wrong ... and I did an about-face and spent the last 30 years forming the religious right."³¹⁷

A seismic shift in the center of Evangelicalism occurred from the 1950s to the latter half of the 1970s. In analyzing the content of the most popular Christian publication, *Christianity Today*, David Wells provides an illustration of the Evangelicals' moving away from their traditional center to adopting the mores of the modernist culture through the shrinking space given to expounding biblical truth,

In the editions of 1959, fully 39 percent of the space was given to exploring and expounding biblical truth; by 1989, this had fallen to 8 percent. And whereas the news, which in modern experience is virtually synonymous with the experience of diversity, had filled only 20 percent of the pages in 1959, three decades later in 1989 it filled 40 percent.³¹⁸

However, the lull was to be short lived as George Gallup in a 1976 issue of *Newsweek* magazine called it the "year of the Evangelical."³¹⁹ Though Evangelicalism did experience success through the public crusades of Billy Graham, as a whole it experienced relative minimal cultural influence compared to previous generations, that is, until the 1970 Supreme Court case of *Green vs. Connally* in which the Internal Revenue Service issued a statement that argued any organization that engaged in racial discrimination or segregation was not a charitable institution and should not be eligible for tax-exempt status. This case led to withdrawal of Bob Jones University's tax-exempt status and influenced the rise of the religious right and sparked the

³¹⁷ Jon Meacham, "The Editor's Desk," *Newsweek*, November 12, 2006.
<https://www.newsweek.com/editors-desk-106637> (Accessed July 17, 2019).

³¹⁸ David Wells, "On Being Evangelical: Some Theological Differences and Similarities," Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk eds. *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, The British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 399.

³¹⁹ "Born Again! The Evangelicals," *Newsweek* October 25, 1976.

interest of Jerry Falwell, and eventually led to the growth of the Religious Right and the founding of the Moral Majority (1979-1989).

Resurgence of Religious Education

It was from the years immediately following World War II through the rise of the Religious Right that America experienced a surge in the interest in and establishment of an emphasis on religious education. This renewed enthusiasm was motivated by the projected population increases and the church's corresponding desire to continue to influence society by educating the individual in Christian values and a biblical worldview. Wuthnow explains how the absence of religious instruction in higher education had resulted in a growing biblical illiteracy during the twentieth century, "casual surveys by some of the larger denominations revealed that students on secular campuses were already virtually illiterate as far as biblical knowledge was concerned."³²⁰ "The goal of religious education," Wuthnow submits, "was to halt the corrosive tendency," of uneducated individuals to naturally gravitate toward evil.³²¹

Through 1991, the percentage of Nones was stationary across time at about 7 percent of the U.S. adult population. After 1991, there is a steady linear increase in the percentage of respondents who are religiously unaffiliated, reaching nearly 22 percent by the last year of the survey and showing no signs of slowing.³²²

³²⁰ Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 68.

³²¹ Ibid., 69.

³²² Aaron Gullickson, "The Diverging Beliefs and Practices of the Religiously Affiliated and Unaffiliated in the United States." *Sociological Science* 5 (06, 2018): 361-79,

The Dying Protestant Mainline

Beginning in the years following World War II the declining importance of denominationalism began being felt throughout the American religious landscape.³²³ Joseph Bottum writes of the certainty of the demise of mainline denominations in America in stating undeniably,

The death of the Mainline is the central historical fact of our time: the event that distinguishes the past several decades from every other period in American history. Almost every one of our current political and cultural oddities, our contradictions and obscurities, derives from this fact: The Mainline...has lost the capacity to set, or even significantly influence, the national vocabulary or the national self-understanding.³²⁴

The 1998 and 2002 GSS surveys report the Mainline Protestant denominations have the oldest average age of any religious group in America at 52 years of age. With the aging demographic of the mainline denominations coupled with the decrease in young adults who are religiously affiliated the population is vanishing from which these churches have traditionally attracted adherents. The shrinking membership is not the only alarm sounding for these Mainline churches. Certainty of belief has also correspondingly decreased in recent years as well. As Joseph Bottum explains,

Strength of belief is usually taken to indicate future stability: a measure of the likelihood of a denomination's members will pass their faith on to their children. When the Baylor study (2005) asked about doubts of the existence of God, 100 percent of the members of historically black Protestant churches reported no doubts, 86.5 percent of evangelical Protestants had no doubts, and only 63.5 percent of Mainline Protestants had no doubts. Regarding reading the Bible regularly, Evangelicals were at 42.1 percent but Mainline was at only 16 percent.³²⁵

³²³ See Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 71-99 for in depth analysis of the declining significance of denominationalism in America in the years after World War II.

³²⁴ Joseph Bottum, "The Death of Protestant America: A Political Theory of the Protestant Mainline," *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*; New York, 185, (Aug/Sep 2008): 24.

³²⁵ Ibid., 26.

Church historian, Walter Sundberg, provides additional insight into potential factors influencing the demise of mainline denominations in America.

Mainline denominations lack impetus because they deliver a confused message based on a strategy of accommodation. This strategy asserts that the Christian proclamation must be made as compatible as possible with the intellectual presuppositions of contemporary society. Churches must re-symbolize their historic faiths in light of prevailing cultural imperatives taken from the natural and social sciences. Otherwise the Christian message will fall on deaf ears. The primary means of accommodation are historical-critical method in biblical scholarship, the politicization of theological concepts and denominational activities for the purpose of social reform, the redefinition of Christian anthropology using therapeutic categories derived from psychology, and the toleration of religious diversity in ecclesial life.³²⁶

Comparing this intrinsic “confusion” of method and message to the Evangelical doctrinal certainty provides a formidable theory for the slower decline of Evangelical adherents in America. There is a slow, but sure decline in Evangelical churches where The Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches reveals “growth fell from over 3 percent annually during the 1950s to about 1 percent through the 1980s to less than a half percent through 2005, at which point Southern Baptist declines pushed the entire family into negative growth for the first time.”³²⁷

Shrinking Southern Baptists

While Mainline denominations have been the focus of recent research with many attributing the steady decline to liberal theologies and shifting positions regarding cultural issues these hypotheses are no longer holding true as the only reasons for shrinking numbers. The recent Annual Church Profile released by the Southern Baptist convention revealed and

³²⁶ Walter Sundberg, “Religious Trends in Twentieth-Century America,” *Word & World* Volume XX, Number 1 Winter 2000, 24.

³²⁷ Lexile Measure, “Negative numbers: the decline narrative reaches evangelicals,” *The Christian Century*, December 11, 2013. <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2013-11/negative-numbers> (Accessed July 17, 2019).

confirmed what pollsters and sociologists have been asserting for some time. Overall membership numbers for the Convention which fell to below fifteen million for the first time since 1989 and are at the lowest point since 1987.³²⁸ This drop in membership is a decrease of nearly 200,000 from the previous count in 2017 which was the largest decline in the denomination since 1881. Adding to the severity of shrinking numbers is the decline in the number of baptisms which are lower than they have been in over fifty years when the denomination baptized as many but was half the size as it is now.

The “conservative resurgence” birthed in a 1979 effort of conservatives, led by Adrian Rogers, in the Southern Baptist Convention to take control of the Convention over the issue of biblical authority and the direction of their seminaries. Conservatives argued liberal theology had infiltrated the faculty ranks at these seminaries and was wrecking the conservative values of the ministers in training. Michael Foust supports this allegation by providing a summary of a 1976 Ph.D. dissertation by a Southern Seminary student:

According to the thesis, 87 percent of first-year students had no doubts that Jesus was the divine Son of God. By their final year, the number had fallen to 63 percent. In another category, 85 percent of first-year students believed that belief in Christ was absolutely necessary for salvation; by their final year, only 60 percent held to that view.³²⁹

In a successful movement, Adrian Rogers’ leadership was able to right the Southern Baptist ship and as a result of a recovered conservative biblical heritage and the six seminaries, publishing house, and missions boards all instituted new leadership and all faculty are now required to affirm biblical inerrancy as a criteria to teach and lead.

³²⁸ As of May 2019, membership was counted at 14,813,234 and baptisms in 2018 were 246,442. See, “Fast Facts about the SBC,” Southern Baptist Convention, <http://www.sbc.net/BecomingSouthernBaptist/FastFacts.asp> (Accessed July 18, 2019).

³²⁹ Michael Foust, “25 years ago, conservative resurgence got its start,” *Baptist Press*, June 14, 2004. <http://www.bpnews.net/18486/25-years-ago-conservative-resurgence-got-its-start> (Accessed July 19, 2019).

The Current State of Biblical Higher Education

The concerted emphasis on religious education renewed in the years following World War II is now on the backside of its apex where institutions of Christian higher education have experienced the sixth straight year of declining enrollment. This appears to be a direct correlation to the corresponding decreased importance the role of religion is occupying in the lives of college-aged individuals. With a few of the larger Christian institutions experiencing relative success (though some are declining in various categories of enrollment) most smaller Christian institutions are struggling to keep their doors open as a result of rising tuition, decreased donor support, and the rapid expanse of online education. One example of a recent closure is Baptist Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. It was “the first free-standing seminary started as an alternative to the six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries during a schism in the late 20th century – is closing its doors at the end of the current academic year.”³³⁰ However, the school was forced to close its doors much sooner than the end of the 2019-2020 academic year due to financial pressure and low student enrollment.

Several other seminaries and theology schools with mainline denomination affiliations have or are on the verge of closing their doors due to the same enrollment and financial pressures experienced by Baptist Theological Seminary.³³¹ The declining enrollment in biblical higher education provides further evidence of the ebbing influence of Christianity in America and

³³⁰ Bob Allen, “Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond to close in 2019,” *Baptist News Global*, November 14, 2018. <https://baptistnews.com/article/baptist-theological-seminary-at-richmond-to-close-in-2019/#.XZSpnajYqto> (Accessed July 21, 2019).

³³¹ See Ian Lovett, “Seminaries Reflect Struggles of Mainline Churches: Storied institutions are shutting their doors as enrollment shrinks,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 10, 2017. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/seminaries-reflect-struggles-of-mainline-churches-1502357400> (Accessed July 20, 2019).

perhaps, secondarily reflects the characteristic lethargy of these institutions to adapt methods to meet the needs of its people.

Secularization and Secular Theory

Secularization theories in general, which will be addressed in the next chapter have failed to account for the peculiar persistence of evangelical forms of Christianity in America:

Virtually every discussion of secularization asserts that high level of religiosity in the United States make it a decisive counterexample to the claim that modern societies are prone to secularization. Focusing on trends rather than levels, the authors maintain that, for two straightforward empirical reasons, the United States should no longer be considered a counterexample. First, it has recently become clear that American religiosity has been declining for decades. Second, this decline has been produced by the generational patterns underlying religious decline elsewhere in the West: each successive cohort is less religious than the preceding one. America is not an exception. These findings change the theoretical import of the United States for debates about secularization.³³²

Interestingly, Schnabel and Bock argue that religion is not waning in America and any claims that secularization is the catalyst for the recent spike in religious Nones are mistaken. Their research suggests that intense religion defined as strong affiliation, very frequent practice, literalism, and evangelicalism continues to experience vitality in the American context even though it is abating in comparable countries such as the UK. This hypothesis leads them to conclude that intense religion in America is as strong as ever but it is the population of individuals who are only moderately religious that is shrinking and contributing to the increase of those who do not identify with any specific religion.³³³ Rodney Stark of Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion similarly found when looking at U.S. church attendance numbers going back

³³² David Voas and Mark Chaves, "Is the United States a Counterexample to the Secularization Thesis?" *AJS* Volume 121 Number 5 (March 2016): 1517–56.

³³³ Landon Schnabel and Sean Bock, "The Persistent and Exceptional Intensity of American Religion: A Response to Recent Research," *Sociological Science* 4: 2017, 686.

to the earliest days of the nation, that the percentage of church-attending Americans relative to overall population is more than four times greater today than it was in 1776.³³⁴

Sociologists Peter Berger had long been an evangelist for secularization theory as evidenced in his publications from the 50s and 60s but in recent decades he has recanted his previous position. The reason for his deconversion from his views is due to the persistence of religion in the world in general and in America particularly. Berger defines secularization as the thought that, “Modernization necessarily leads to a decline of religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals.”³³⁵ It is this assumption, he admits, “that has turned out to be wrong.” He goes on to confirm his belief in the failure of secularization theory by concluding, “The world today, with some exceptions... is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labeled "secularization theory" is essentially mistaken.”³³⁶ Additionally, Schnabel and Bock conclude that contrary to what is occurring in comparable countries, “religion in the United States is persistent and exceptional in ways that do not fit the secularization thesis.”³³⁷

Chapter Summary

In an essay originally published in 1899, William Reed Huntington addressed the temporal nature of the old vestiges (Bible reading and prayer in public schools, religious mottoes on currency, etc.) that remained from a past, more intimate relationship between church

³³⁴ See Rodney Stark, *What Americans Really Believe*, (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008).

³³⁵ Peter L. Berger ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 2.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Schnabel and Bock, “The Persistent and Exceptional Intensity of American Religion: A Response to Recent Research,” 698.

and state by prophetically outlining what was sure to unfold in the coming century as the fissure between the two bedfellows continued to widen to the chagrin of continued prevailing Protestant desires for shaping the moral fabric of the nation:

These vestiges of Christianity, as we may call them, are printed on the sand. The tide has only to crawl up a few inches further to wash them clean away. There is nothing in the theory of the Republic that makes such usages an essential part of the national life. They rest for the most part upon the precarious tradition of colonial days: or if on the statute law, what is statute law but the creature of temporary majorities? The moment popular opinion sets against them, all these relics of an established religion must go by the board. They are not the natural fruit of our system; they are but reminders of an old order of things that have passed away; fossils embedded in the rock on which the existing structure stands. One by one they will probably be chipped out and set aside as curiosities.³³⁸

Bottum argues the relationship between Protestantism and politics that has permeated American culture has created a precarious situation for the contemporary church that finds itself struggling for survival,

Many Americans are profoundly patriotic...and many Americans are profoundly critical of their country. We are left...with a great problem in combining the two and that problem was bequeathed to us by the death of Protestant America - by the collapse of the churches that were once both the accommodating help and the criticizing prophet of the American experiment.³³⁹

As the largest denominations are experiencing a dwindling enrollment there is, nonetheless, a sign of continued and persistent spiritual vitality. There has been, in each period, a steady increase in American commitment to send missionaries to the world. Though America continues to send more missionaries the increase in the periods illustrated below trails significantly behind the percentage of population increase in America. In other words, as the

³³⁸ William R. Huntington, *The Church-Idea: An Essay Towards Unity*, 4th ed. (New York: Scribner, 1899), 102.

³³⁹ Bottum, "The death of Protestant America," 25.

overall population continues to increase the percentage of missionaries sent does not match the percentages in overall population growth:

Table 2.5 Number of Missionaries Compared to Population Growth 1900-2010

1900			1960		
Rank	Country	#	Rank	Country	#
1	UK	6,530	1	USA	20,500
2	USA	5,591	2	UK	5,700
3	Germany	1,833	3	Canada	3,600
2000			2010		
Rank	Country	#	Rank	Country	#
1	USA	64,084	1	USA	95,000
2	India	41,064	2	India	82,950
3	S Korea	12,279	3	S Korea	21,500

Regarding the frequency with which Americans pray, there is an intriguing discontinuity in the GSS data between 2002 and 2004. Between 1983 and 2002, there is essentially no change in the percentage of those saying that they pray several times per day, but the value jumps dramatically from 24.6 percent in 2002 to 32.2 percent in the next GSS survey in 2004, and it declines thereafter.³⁴⁰ The importance of this data is that the decline has continued since 2004.

President and CEO of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, Ronnie Floyd ardently stated in response to the 2018 Annual Church Profile,

It is time to press reset spiritually and strategically in the Southern Baptist Convention. Prioritizing and elevating the advancement of the good news of Jesus Christ into every town, city and county in America, as well to every person across the world, must be recaptured by every church. Urgency is not an option for any of us as Christ-followers. People need Jesus and they need Jesus now. Our generation of Baptists must believe and

³⁴⁰ Voas and Chaves. “Even Intense Religiosity,” 697.

determine now that we will do whatever it takes to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every person in the world and to make disciples of all the nations.³⁴¹

Similarly, current Southern Baptist Convention president J. D. Greear outlines what he believes is needed to reverse diminishing influence of conservative American Evangelicals,

For the upcoming generation, our prayer should be to see an increase in evangelism, church planting and revitalization, and ultimately an end to decades of decline. First things must be first, not only in our declarations but especially in our demonstrations. I pray that our annual meeting in Birmingham will spur all of us to that end.³⁴²

Perhaps Fosdick with many other Evangelical ministers of times past clearly articulated the message that continues to give life to the church and thus to the world, “There is one thing that does matter - more than anything in all the world - that men in their personal lives and in their social relationships should know Jesus Christ.”³⁴³ It is to this end that Chapter 3 aims to further investigate the periods of American history surveyed here in Chapter 2 to identify and extract those fundamental mechanisms that sparked seasons of Evangelical resurgence.

³⁴¹ Carol Pipes, “SBC: Giving increases while baptisms continue decline,” *Baptist Press*, May 23, 2019, <http://www.bpnews.net/52962/sbc-giving-increases-while-baptisms-continue-decline> (Accessed July 24, 2019).

³⁴² Kate Shellnutt, “Southern Baptists Down to Lowest in 30 Years,” *Christianity Today*, May 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/may/southern-baptists-acp-membership-baptism-decline-2018.html> (Accessed July 24, 2019).

³⁴³ Fosdick, “Shall the Fundamentalist Win?,” 14.

CHAPTER 3 - HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS RESURGENCE IN AMERICA

“History doesn't repeat itself but it often rhymes” Attributed to Mark Twain

Introduction

Several scholars have examined the peculiar resiliency of religion in the United States and how that resiliency seems to provide a fatal blow to the general conclusion of secularization theories.³⁴⁴ Others have argued on the contrary using the evidence of the rapid pace of religious disaffiliation among younger cohorts³⁴⁵ while others continue this argument by leveraging European data to suggest that the United States is on a similar secularizing trajectory as experienced in the UK. Sociologists such as Simon Brauer and Robert Wuthnow suggest it should be no surprise that religion is on the decline in America;³⁴⁶ however, none of these have examined previous periods of American religious history for the purpose of identifying comparable declines of religious affiliation and the religious or cultural mechanisms that sparked religious resurgence.

³⁴⁴ See Mark Chaves, *American Religion: Contemporary Trends*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). See also, Philip S. Gorski and Ates Altinordu, “After Secularization?” *Annual Review of Sociology*, 2008 34:55-85. See also Jeffrey K. Hadden, “Toward Desacralizing Secularization Theory,” *Social Forces*, 1987 65(3): 587-611. See also Stanley Presser and Mark Chaves, “Is Religious Service Attendance declining?” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 46(3): 417-423.

³⁴⁵ Michael Hout and Claude Fischer, “Explaining why more Americans have no religious preference: Political backlash and generational succession, 1987-2002,” *Sociological Science*, 2014 1:423-447. See also Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, “*American Grace: How religion divides and unites us*,” (New York: Simon Schuster Paperbacks, 2012). See also, David Voas and Mark Chaves “Is the United States a counterexample to the secularization thesis?” *American Journal of Sociology*, 121(5): 1517-1556. It is beneficial to note here that the claim that younger cohorts are less religious than older cohorts has historically nearly always been the case as identity is formed during these formative years. But, the significance of this claim for the contemporary study of Nones is that proportionally the number of religiously unaffiliated is much greater among younger cohorts than in past periods of American religious history.

³⁴⁶ See Robert Wuthnow, *After the baby boomers: How twenty- and thirty-somethings are shaping the future of American religion*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); see also Simon Brauer, “The Surprising Predictable Decline of Religion in the United States,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, (2018) 0(0): 1-22.

The intent of this chapter is to identify a familiar cycle regarding those mechanisms that served as triggers for the ebb and flow in levels of Evangelical affiliation during those periods of American religious history surveyed in Chapter 2. As such, this chapter seeks to uncover the factors that have caused or inhibited religious affiliation. It is here proposed that there will be an identifiable cycle consisting of an ebb or decline in intense religiosity, concerted prayer born out of dissatisfaction with the current religious climate, a resurgence of religiosity that leads to a renewed zeal for evangelism and missions resulting in church growth both locally and globally, the establishment of organizations and/or the institutionalization of aspects of the resurgence, Evangelical political involvement/influence, which results in a subsequent ebb in religiosity. The conclusion suggested in this chapter is that Evangelical alliance with politics diminishes the appeal, attractiveness, and effectiveness of the gospel specifically and church generally.

It is hypothesized at the beginning of this chapter that each time the Church experiences a great period of resurgence it has tended to establish organizations aimed at institutionalizing the primary facets of the resurgence in attempt to secure the moral reform of society. Then, the Church abdicates its responsibility to preach the gospel to the individual for the conversion of the individual so the individual can multiply that new life in society. This responsibility is abdicated through the process of politicization. As a result of this abdication of responsibility, there is a diminished importance of the local church and a corresponding diminishing of the authority and reliability of Scripture to speak to the whole life of the individual. Finally, there is a diminished confidence or certainty in religion in general and Evangelical expressions of Christianity specifically.

This chapter also aims to go beyond Simon Brauer's brief discussion regarding the potential inevitability of religious decline in American and whether it is irreversible and if it is a

self-reinforcing process.³⁴⁷ As discussed above, both Mainline and Evangelical churches are experiencing declining numbers with, “mainline theologians and church officials rationalize membership loss by ascribing it to the effects of modern secularization.”³⁴⁸ this generalized hypothesis is found to be inaccurate when viewing overall levels of religiosity in America.³⁴⁹ There are some pockets that show growth,³⁵⁰ but to ascribe an increase in Nones and a decrease in Mainline and Protestant numbers in America to secularization alone is a false conclusion.

Colonial America

Preceding the spread of Christianity to America was the more recent resurgence of a vibrant Protestant faith in the Motherland during the seventeenth century. Without providing an examination that is too broad in scope, the work of Richard Baxter provided much momentum for the growth of Pietism and the Evangelical Awakening that occurred in Britain beginning in 1735. Perhaps his greatest contribution to the growth of Protestantism was his *The Reformed Pastor* published in 1656 which provided pastors with practical advice exhorting them to “serve with spiritual vitality.”³⁵¹ In the work, Baxter admonishes pastors to be consumed with evangelistic fervor and earnestly attend to the spiritual vitality of their families in stating, “You

³⁴⁷ Simon Brauer, “The Surprising Predictable Decline of Religion in the United States,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, (2018) 0(0): 1-22.

³⁴⁸ Walter Sundberg, “Religious Trends in Twentieth-Century America,” *Word & World* XX:1 Winter 2000, 23.

³⁴⁹ Landon Schnabel and Sean Bock, “The Persistent and Exceptional Intensity of American Religion: A Response to Recent Research,” *Sociological Science* November 2017, 4:686-700.

³⁵⁰ From 1965 to 1994 the Assemblies of God denomination, the fastest growing denomination in Christian history, experienced a 306% growth. See, *Christianity Today*, 11 August 1997, 11.

³⁵¹ Malcom McDow and Alvin L. Reid, *Firefall: How God has shaped history through revivals*, (Nashville: B&H Publishing), 173.

are not likely to see any general reformation (revival), till you procure family reformation.”³⁵²

These ends were to be birthed from a renewed discipline of cultivating a life of prayer as Baxter states, “Your people will likely feel when you have been much with God,” and more certainly, “Prayer must carry on our work as well as preaching: he preacheth not heartily to his people, that prayeth not earnestly for them.”³⁵³

Philip Spener authored *Pia Desideria* (Pious Desires) which was to serve as a manual of reform for the Lutheran church in the latter years of the seventeenth century. Drummonds referred to Spener’s work as the “manifesto” which provided eight characteristics of the renewed Lutheran movement important to note here: the new birth, religious enthusiasm, a joyous feeling of communion with Christ, sanctification, biblicism, theological education, missionary evangelism, and social concern.³⁵⁴ In his six measures necessary for the reform of the Lutheran church, Spener’s first measure was a “greater commitment to the spread of the Word of God,”³⁵⁵ which assumes a great confidence in its authority and reliability. A conviction that will be seen repeated in each future period of resurgence of American Evangelicalism.

The cultural environment before resurgence as McDow and Reid recount was rife with “Philosophical rationalism and divergent theological views” that “created a spiritual vacuum within Christianity that contributed significantly to spiritual declension. At the same time, strong spiritual influences in Protestant churches were used of God to create spiritual hunger within the

³⁵² Richard Baxter as quoted by McDow and Reid, *Firefall: How God has shaped history through revivals*, 172.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Lewis A. Drummond, “The Puritan Pietist Tradition: Its meaning, history, and influence in Baptist life,” *Review and Expositor* 77 (1980): 485-86.

³⁵⁵ See Philip Spener, *Pia Desideria*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964).

lives of many that served as a catalyst for revival.”³⁵⁶ It was against this context that men like Baxter and Spener served as catalysts for the Evangelical Awakening in Britain in 1735, which prepared the way for Whitefield and Wesley to ignite the spiritual blaze in the New World during the First Great Awakening.

Immediately preceding the Evangelistic Awakening in Britain was the deplorable social situation that provided a spiritual vacuum that W.H. Fitchett describes as “It would be easy to multiply testimonies showing how exhausted of living religion, how black with every kind of wickedness, was the England of that day.”³⁵⁷ The ministers mirrored, and perhaps facilitated, the lifeless spirituality of the day due to being “more concerned with political unity than spiritual fervency,”³⁵⁸ where “the Church of England was highly involved in secular politics and culture.”³⁵⁹ A situation that necessitated determined devotion to revitalizing the anemic church. John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield each played their part in the forming Methodist church but the movement was born from concerted effort in practicing a life of scholarship, holy living, and cultivating a life of vibrant prayer.

It was in 1738, that the Wesley brothers along with others experienced, as a result of an organized all night of prayer, what has been called the Methodist Pentecost. Wesley recounts this event in his *Journals*,

About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to

³⁵⁶ McDow and Reid, *Firefall: How God has shaped history through revivals*, 175.

³⁵⁷ W.H. Fitchett, *Wesley and His Century*, (London: Smith, Elder, & Company, 1906), 139. See also Arnold A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the 18th Century Revival*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1970), 19-32.

³⁵⁸ McDow and Reid, *Firefall: How God has shaped history through revivals*, 184.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

the ground. As soon as we recovered a little from the awe and amazement at the presence of His majesty, we broke out with one voice, “We praise Thee, O God; we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord!”³⁶⁰

After returning from America, George Whitefield wrote a parallel testimony of the overwhelming nature regarding the intensity of this season of prayer,

Sometimes whole nights were spent in prayer. Often have we been filled as with new wine. And often have we seen them overwhelmed with the divine presence and crying out, ‘Will God indeed dwell with men upon earth? How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven!’³⁶¹

These accounts are provided here as further evidence that purposeful and intense prayer born from a despair regarding the current state of affairs and a desperation for the presence of God precedes waves of resurgence of Christianity. As a result of Whitefield’s intentional cultivation of a life of prayer and diligence in preaching the gospel, after preaching his first sermon in 1739 to his death in 1791 there were nearly two hundred thousand Methodists around the world.³⁶²

First Great Awakening

The period immediately preceding the First Great Awakening was marked with ...”What concerned American Protestants, after the first planting of Massachusetts Bay, was the sterility - not of colonial soil but of its spiritual life.”³⁶³ It was in this religiously sterile backdrop that men like Increase Mather and John Cotton gave rise to the “jeremiad” sermons where they saw the opportunity to leverage the fast day sermons issued on the state-ordained³⁶⁴ fast days to speak

³⁶⁰ *John Wesley Journals*, 3rd edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Pub Group; 3rd edition, 1979), 140.

³⁶¹ John Gillies, *Memoirs of the Life of the Reverend George Whitefield*, (Farmington Hills, Gale Ecco Publishing, 2018 edition), 34.

³⁶² McDow and Reid, *Firefall: How God has shaped history through revivals*, 198.

³⁶³ Alan Heimert and Perry E. Miller, *The Great Awakening*, (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1967), xvii.

³⁶⁴ Fast days were voted on and approved by the Massachusetts General Court on January 19, 1637.

against the spiritual lethargy of the church. Though there were some such as these men who were devoted to preaching with renewed vitality, as McDow and Reid notes, “the majority that sought revival began to acknowledge by the turn of the eighteenth century that “only united, earnest prayer could bring a divine outpouring...Rather than calling the people to change so that God would pour out His Spirit, ministers began calling people to seek God’s face in prayer, in order that He would lead the people into revival, which would in turn would initiate a moral reformation.”³⁶⁵ The focus on God’s intervention and renewal of the individual as a catalyst for moral reform in society is another fundamental principle that will be evidenced in later periods of resurgence. When this principle is reversed spiritual vitality begins to ebb.

Dutch Reformed pastor Theodore Frelinghuysen witnessed some of the earliest intimations of the Awakening when he acknowledged the apathy³⁶⁶ of his own congregation and began focusing his efforts on evangelistic preaching and the necessity of the conversion of the individual through faith alone for entrance into the eternal Kingdom as well as for church membership.

Presbyterian William Tennant Sr. founded the Log College movement initially aimed at providing a space for intense theological training to combat the dead orthodoxy rampant in those Pennsylvania churches. His primary vision was to “instill in each student a passion for evangelism, for a devotional life, and for the Word of God,” with the curriculum being “critical

³⁶⁵ McDow and Reid, *Firefall: How God has shaped history through revivals*, 205.

³⁶⁶ Frelinghuysen commented on this in a sermon, “While horse racing, gambling, dissipation, and rudeness of various kinds were common, the church was attended at convenience, and religion consisted of the mere formal pursuit of the routine of duty.” As quoted by Keith J. Hardman, *Seasons of Refreshing: Evangelism and Revivals in America*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 54. See also, “Theodore Jacob Frelinghuysen in the Middle Colonies,” *Christian History*, no. 23:10.

in the future development of leaders in the Awakening.”³⁶⁷ Williams’ son, Gilbert, continued the movement of his father and published his sermon “The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry” in 1740 which was distributed throughout the colonies as an indictment against many Presbyterian ministers suggesting many were unregenerate and thus entirely unfit to preach the gospel. This renewed focus or doubling down on orthodoxy, evangelism, necessity of personal conversion experience, and commitment to the authority of Scripture resulted in an increase of “New Side” ministers from twenty-two to seventy-two. Those who were against the approaches that advanced the Awakening (Old Side) witnessed a corresponding decrease in their numbers.

Jonathan Edwards, considered the father of the Awakening in New England, also demonstrated a frustration with the characteristic apathy of his congregants toward God and their lack of zeal for piety. His life, like those other leaders in the Awakening, was “characterized by fasting and prayer”³⁶⁸ and encouraged youth to follow suit and form small groups for the purpose of prayer, which he considered the most important key for promoting a resurgence of faith. It was during Edwards’ sermons on justification through faith alone that the Awakening revived his congregation, which resulted in several hundred professing faith in Christ in only a few months’ time. It is worth noting here, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Holy Spirit*, which Edwards published in 1741 provided five marks of a true revival, three of which provide further evidence for a recurring theme in periods of resurgence. The first was a focus on pure doctrine exegeted from an authoritative view of Scripture. The third mark suggested true revival caused men to hold Holy Scriptures in greater regard. The fifth mark illustrated the recovery of the

³⁶⁷ McDow and Reid, *Firefall: How God has shaped history through revivals*, 208.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 211.

passion for evangelism.³⁶⁹ “The degree of their acceptance of these evangelistic ideals,” Maxson notes, that was “the ultimate measure of the ultimate numerical strength” of the Great Awakening churches.³⁷⁰

Post Awakening Expansion

That there was a resurgence of religious interest can be seen in the results produced during this period. McDow and Reid summarize the general results of the movement by explaining, “Multitudes professed to changed lives. Churches were established and strengthened. Missions enterprises were birthed...Christian experience, when yoked with doctrinal fidelity, was affirmed. Institutions were founded.”³⁷¹ As an example of the number of churches established between New England and the South, Baptist churches grew from forty nine to seven hundred and twenty seven.³⁷² More specifically, as outlined above, this movement was birth from attention to intense prayer and pastors consistently speaking about the issues of the day and challenging their people to study, understand, and discuss these matters as they related to living a holy life in a world that was not their home.³⁷³

³⁶⁹ The text of these marks are as follows: 1) When the operation is such to raise their esteem of that Jesus who was born of the Virgin, and was crucified without the gates of Jerusalem; and seems more to confirm and establish their minds in the truth of what the gospel declares to us of his being the Son of God, and the Savior of men; is a sure sign that it is from the Spirit of God. 3) The spirit that operates in such a manner, as to cause in men a greater regard to the Holy Scriptures, and establishes them more in their truth and divinity, is certainly the Spirit of God. 5) If the spirit that is at work among a people operates as a spirit of love to God and man, it is a sure sign that is the Spirit of God. See *Distinguishing Marks*, in *Complete Works, II*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishing, 1998),: 266-268.

³⁷⁰ Maxson, *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies*, 1.

³⁷¹ McDow and Reid, *Firefall: How God has shaped history through revivals*, 203.

³⁷² Roy J. Fish, “The Effect of Revivals on Baptist Growth in the South,” *The Lord’s Free People in a Free Land*, ed. William R. Estep (Fort Worth: Evans Press, 1976), 104-105.

³⁷³ Barna, *America at the Crossroads*, 49.

It was Edwards that highlighted the broad scope of revival which tends nearly always to extend almost infectiously into other regions, “The tidings of remarkable effects of the power and grace of God in any place, tend greatly to awaken and engage the minds of persons, in other places.”³⁷⁴ Hammond expounds further the cyclical nature of revival highlighting how they begin in pockets and typically combust into a regional or even national reach,

The cyclical nature of these movements is imposed by the kind of activity that a revival represents. An outburst affects communities and extends well beyond communities to large areas and even at times to a whole country. Whether begun by a single charismatic leader or simultaneously in several different places, a revival has a contagious effect which spreads elsewhere. The same social forces that produce a revival in one place are likely to be germinating in other places, and an initial outburst attracts the attention of others who take up the call.³⁷⁵

Nonetheless, by 1750 the waves of religious affection had begun to wither. Edwards so clearly articulated his heart, and echoed the fundamental activity that led so many to witness such a widespread resurgence of a lively faith, namely intense, focused prayer for God’s presence, “So it is God’s will...that the prayers of his saints shall be on great and principal means of carrying on the designs of Christ’s kingdom in the world. When God has something very great to accomplish for his church, it is his will that there should precede it the extraordinary prayer of his people.”³⁷⁶ So, it was the concerted prayer of New England ministers that paved the way for the Second Great Awakening.

The French and Indian War distracted attention away from the work that had been birthed in the Great Awakening to such a degree that “after 1763 by the declining state of Anglo-

³⁷⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998 edition), 425.

³⁷⁵ John L. Hammond, “The Reality of Revivals.” *Sociological Analysis*, 1983 44, 2:112.

³⁷⁶ McDow and Reid, *Firefall: How God has shaped history through revivals*, 207.

American relations, the revivals lost priority as a general concern in New England.”³⁷⁷

Distraction coupled with internal division in the Church snuffed out the blaze of the Awakening to nothing more than rote religiosity as Ahlstrom recounts of the resulting cooling of religious fervor of the time,

For half a century ‘Old Calvinists’ and Edwardseans would contend for control of local parishes, educational institutions, and other corporate enterprises of the churches. Such contention had serious negative consequences, in that it drove many peace-loving souls out of the churches and led many more to embrace milder forms of religion.³⁷⁸

By the end of the eighteenth-century higher criticism had served as a catalyst for growing theological liberalism which had created a ripe cultural context for a renewal of Protestant expressions of the faith born out of a desperation of the spiritless church.

American Revolution

The natural result of this distraction and disunity was that the Evangelicals "increasingly confused civic virtue with piety and, finally, political enthusiasm with the joy of conversion ... the very religious life of the colonies came to center on the crisis in public affairs."³⁷⁹ Where, "religious revivalism, saving souls," devolved into "a political activity, a way of producing a reborn majority to remodel society according to God's will and with his help."³⁸⁰ Gordon-McCutchan follows, "Should this ‘remodeling’ be opposed, revolution will be in the making.” A

³⁷⁷ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*. 287.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 288.

³⁷⁹ Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind from the Great Awakening to the Revolution*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 345.

³⁸⁰ William G. McLoughlin, "Essays on Jacksonian America," Frank O. Gattell ed., (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1978), 75.

cycle that is witnessed after each major American Awakening and will be evidenced below through the political crusades of the Religious Right.

The Revolutionary Era gave rise to a period of religious decline in America due to distraction and disruption. Where “the churches reached a lower ebb of vitality during the two decades after the end of hostilities than at any other time in the country’s religious history. In many ways, the war itself began the process of decline.”³⁸¹

Additionally, it was the war that created a roadblock for the recruitment of new ministers and the retention of current clergy. Current clergy were distracted, some fled, some became chaplains, while others chose to fight in the War. To compound the issue of clergy supply, the faculty of the new colleges that had been established for the training of new ministers were scattered and there was no longer attention given to maintaining a recruitment funnel for producing new pastors. With fewer ministers devoted to rekindling the fire of revival, there was a correlating decrease in religious interest and a prolonged period of religious attention redirected to political questions. Where for Evangelicals, "independence thus became not only political, but moral. Revolution, republicanism, and regeneration all blended in American thinking."³⁸² Ahlstrom explains this transformation of the relationship between religion and patriotism,

It is ironic that a time of religious desuetude should also provide the circumstances for a resurgence of churchly activity in America, but such is the case - made doubly ironic by the fact that religious apathy contributed directly to the result. The great tradition of the American churches, as it developed in the nineteenth century, depended upon - almost consisted of - 1) the reality of religious freedom, 2) the relatively distinct separation of church and state, 3) the growing acceptance of the idea of denominationalism 4) the rapid

³⁸¹ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 365.

³⁸² Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic: 1776-1787*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969), 118.

growth in favor of the voluntary principle in matters of patriotic piety, with its belief in the divinely appointed mission of the American nation.³⁸³

He concludes for clarity “A colonial people almost congenitally exercised with religious questions of all sorts - and possibly exhausted by or in reaction against the Great Awakening - became preoccupied for forty years chiefly with the problems of politics.”³⁸⁴

Second Great Awakening

The French and Indian and Revolutionary Wars had a significant philosophical influence on the religious zeal that resulted from the First Great Awakening before these wars. It was Thomas Paine’s *The Age of Reason* that criticized the Evangelical belief of revelation and the authority of Scripture. This “new” thinking infiltrated the college campuses and eroded confidence in traditional orthodox beliefs and resulted in a quelling of spirituality throughout the campuses and began to be reflected in the morals of the citizens. Being the first college founded in the new nation, William and Mary had succumbed to the skepticism transplanted from Europe leading Bishop Meade to regretfully describe the situation where “Infidelity was rife in the state, and the college of William and Mary was regarded as the hot-bed of French politics and religion. I can truly say that then and for some years after in every educated young man in Virginia whom I met I expected to find a skeptic, if not an avowed unbeliever.”³⁸⁵ Nonetheless, “revival often begins at times and places where circumstances appear most bleak,”³⁸⁶ and it was so as revival erupted on several college campuses as a result of student-led prayer meetings.

³⁸³ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 379.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 365.

³⁸⁵ Daniel Dorchester, *Christianity in the United States*, (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1895), 316.

³⁸⁶ McDow and Reid, *Firefall: How God has shaped history through revivals*, 228.

The Reverend Ammi Robbins described the impact that an individual profession of faith had in Norfolk, Connecticut in 1798,

Numbers who had as yet remained unmoved, when ... they beheld many of their intimate companions a husband, a wife, a brother, a sister, a parent, a child, a near friend, a late jovial companion, with sweet serenity, solemnly giving up themselves to the Lord ... they were pierced through, as it were, with a dart. They often went home full of distress, and could never find rest or ease until they had submitted to a sovereign God.³⁸⁷

Methodism after the 1784 Christmas Conference “expanded almost exclusively by domestic evangelism” and it would “exceed in its rate of growth all other large Protestant churches.”³⁸⁸ The new growth of the church can be traced to two fundamental aspects, according to Ahlstrom, its message and its structure,³⁸⁹ and although ministers delighted in unexpected conversions of lifelong infidels, they had to report that the best subjects for conversion were young persons who had been reared in families of some piety.³⁹⁰

Mark Noll recounts the spread of revival through the Congregational churches of the Northeast, “In the east concern for revival gripped several local Congregational ministers in Connecticut during the early 1790s. By the turn of the century a considerable network of these ministers was exchanging information on signs of religious vitality. Together they were praying and preaching for the revival of church attenders and for the conversion of the indifferent.”³⁹¹

³⁸⁷ Quoted in N.E. Tyler, *Revivals*, pp. 186-87; also in New England Tracts, No. 1; Narratives of Reformations, in Canton and Norfolk, Connecticut, in four letters (Providence, Barnum Fields, n.d.), 16.

³⁸⁸ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 372.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 373.

³⁹⁰ Tyler, N. E. *Revivals*, pp. 197, 209, 318, 342, 357; Sprague, *Lectures*, p. 114; Porter, *Letters*, p. 5. Many ministers joined Ammi Robbins in recognizing and exploiting the influence a person's conversion could have on other members of her or his family; e.g., Woodward, *Surprising Accounts*, pp. 7, 238-42; Tyler, N. E. *Revivals*, pp. 186-87; New England Tracts, p. 16.

³⁹¹ Noll, Mark A. Noll, *A History of American Christianity in the United States and Canada*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 168.

For example, Congregationalist minister and eighth president of Yale College, Timothy Dwight, grandson of Jonathan Edwards, discovered several of his students were deists and to confront the “infidelity,” he “labored by forthright argument to restore confidence in the Bible, and he began a four-year cycle of sermons designed to communicate the essentials of the faith.”³⁹² In 1802 revival swept the campus where a third of the 225 students were converted.

The western frontier was spiritually destitute which made it a prime missionary target for zealous ministers. The living conditions were much harsher than the developed East and as a result ministers were few, and most pioneered the new territory to secure land for their family. Reflecting on the dire spirituality of the west Asbury lamented, “When I reflect that not one in a hundred came here to get religion, but rather to get plenty of good land, I think it will be well if some or many do not eventually lost their souls;”³⁹³ however, the spreading of the Awakening quickly bore much fruit in this barren land as evidenced by a camp meeting at Cane Ridge in August 1801 where an estimated twenty to twenty five thousand pioneers traveled to attend.³⁹⁴

As the movement continued it became apparent that not only were young people converting at a higher rate than their elders, but it was women that were much more likely than men to convert. Phoebe Palmer “insisted that God’s grace was poured out on women and men alike and that all who tasted the heavenly gift had the obligation to pass it on.”³⁹⁵ Explaining the important role women played in the spread of Christianity during this time, Nancy Cott explains,

It is important to recognize that economic development especially the decline in household manufacture disrupted the daughter's usual place in the household before it

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Mark Galli, “Revival at Cane Ridge,” *Christian History* 45:10.

³⁹⁴ McDow and Reid, *Firefall: How God has shaped history through revivals*, 235.

³⁹⁵ Noll, *A History of American Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 183.

disrupted the mother's. The predictability of the daughter's relation to and function in the family faltered. The decline of household manufactures compelled many young women to seek paid employment outside the family, to reproduce in cash their former domestic usefulness.³⁹⁶

As a result of the renewed interest in the authority of Scripture and making disciples of all nations the increase in missional fervor was a natural result of the Second Awakening affecting both congregations and campuses alike. One example of the revived zeal for missions was the missions work that began at Williams College after the revival. It then spilled over to the student body of Andover Theological Seminary. In 1806 Samuel Mills and fellow classmates took refuge from a thunderstorm in a barn and held a prayer meeting in which they each committed to take the gospel to the world. As a result, they created the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Mills concentrated his efforts on taking the gospel to the American frontier and as a result of his fruitful efforts the American Home Missionary Society was formed in 1826 after his death.

As renewed concern for evangelism increased it reignited a zeal for missions during the Second Great Awakening. President of Brown University, Francis Wayland, "What object ever undertaken by man can compare with this same design of evangelizing the world? Patriotism itself fades away before it."³⁹⁷ Wayland goes on to confirm that it is only through the conversion of individuals rather than the conversion or influence of society can a moral revolution be realized when urging his audience to consider the means by which a moral revolution is to be obtained by arguing, "It is, in a word, by the preaching of Jesus Christ and him crucified. It is by going forth and telling the lost children of men, that God so loved the world, that he gave his

³⁹⁶ Nancy Cott, "Young Women in the Second Great Awakening in New England," *Feminist Studies*. 3 (1): 1975, 15.

³⁹⁷ Francis Wayland, *Moral Dignity of the Missionary Enterprise*, (Derby: Thomas Richardson, 1824), 8.

only begotten son to die for them...This is the lever by which, we believe, the moral universe is to be raised; this is the instrument by which a sinful world is to be regenerated.”³⁹⁸

By the late eighteenth century the continued revivalism that had been popularized in the First Great Awakening had “swept Evangelicals into command of America’s Protestant churches.”³⁹⁹ As a result of the pervasive expansion of Evangelicalism throughout the first half of the century, by the end of the Revolutionary War, Evangelicals had secured a monopoly in the American publishing industry and saturated the land with the distribution of tracts, books, popular literature, and devotional material.

Leading up to the cusp of the Civil War, “the revolutionary transition was to the acceptance of an unordained and uneducated layman as an appropriate interpreter of the tradition, spokesman for the church, and shepherd of souls.”⁴⁰⁰ Still, it was during the latter years of the Second Awakening that Evangelicals focused their efforts on expanding their influence through education. One significance of the educational aspirations of Evangelicals that assisted in increasing influence and prominence throughout the mid-century was the establishment of institutions of higher education; however, one of the most successful of these endeavors was directed at reaching and educating children through what came to be known as the Sunday School movement. Originally aimed as a mission to the poor and unconverted working-class, each Sunday, nearly one-seventh of American children ages five to fifteen were benefiting from

³⁹⁸ Wayland, *Moral Dignity of the Missionary Enterprise*, 53

³⁹⁹ Stephen A. Marini, “The Great Awakening” in *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience*, Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams eds. Volume II (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1988), 795.

⁴⁰⁰ Stuart C. Henry, “Revivalism,” in *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience*, Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams eds. Volume II, (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1988), 807.

these two and a half hours of instruction each Sunday. In 1827 it was estimated that 350,000 children were being instructed in the approximately four hundred auxiliary societies.⁴⁰¹

Nevertheless, even the original righteous ambitions of the Sunday School movement would eventually be leveraged by Evangelicals for the hopeful zeal of reforming and securing a Christian America. As Sweet summarizes, “The Sunday school, it was believed, could produce moral character for democracy, build a Christian America, and provide America with a constantly renewed soul.”⁴⁰² The American Sunday School Union even formally adopted a missional statement positioning it as a morally guiding force for the nation as being “eminently adapted to promote the intellectual and moral culture of the nation, to perpetuate our republican and religious institutions, and to reconcile eminent and national prosperity with moral purity and future blessedness.”⁴⁰³

Further, at the same time as Evangelicals were devoting energy to reaching the world zeal for missions was advanced in the form of local voluntary missionary societies. Regarding the original ethos of missionary purity in the forming of voluntary societies, Sweet reveals, “the fundamental premise of these associations...was that a nation could be conquered for Christ just as readily by collective action as by political group.”⁴⁰⁴ These voluntary societies were growing in popularity with approximately more than thirty percent of adults in New York City belonging

⁴⁰¹ *Annual Report of the American Sunday School Union*, Volume 22, (Philadelphia: The Society, 1846), 12.

⁴⁰² Leonard I. Sweet, “Nineteenth Century Evangelicalism,” in *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience*, Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams eds. Volume II (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1988), 885.

⁴⁰³ *Annual Report of the American Sunday School Union*, Volume 22, 12.

⁴⁰⁴ Sweet, “Nineteenth Century Evangelicalism,” 891.

to one of the church-related societies;⁴⁰⁵ however, the Constitution of the American Home Missionary Society reveals the characteristic nineteenth century Evangelical fascination with establishing a Christian America in confirming its dual patriotic-Christian ambition in affirming, “We are doing the work of patriotism, no less than that of Christianity.”⁴⁰⁶ “There were those who thought that individuals, redeemed and reformed, would automatically and irresistibly transform the social order. Others believed that only through broad attack on social problems could the Kingdom be forced.”⁴⁰⁷

Nonetheless, by the 1850s evangelicals began to ignore social issues and social stability with the most prominent example being involvement with the Temperance movement. With the movement enjoying the “greatest intensity and longevity of any reform movement in American history and the evangelicals were zealous in promoting it. “Evangelicals justified their temperance action as a religious and patriotic duty to build a sober and energetic republic of good rather than a drunken and lazy republic of evil.”⁴⁰⁸ Furthermore, Evangelicalism’s infiltration and influence of American culture is seen in Sweet’s summary of the results of Finney’s theology, “Finney’s dyadic doctrine of human freedom and self-determination, in which sin was something one did, not something one was, broke the back of Calvinism by 1830

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ *Constitution of the American Home Missionary Society*, (New York: American Tract Society, 1826), 47.

⁴⁰⁷ Henry, “Revivalism,” in *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience*, Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams eds. Volume II, (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1988), 805-6.

⁴⁰⁸ Sweet, “Nineteenth Century Evangelicalism,” 892-93.

and proved the perfect theological scaffolding for the emergence and espousal of a free-labor, free-market economy.”⁴⁰⁹

Gordon-McCutchan summarizes how periods of Evangelical awakening have dramatically accelerated the rate of social change and have resulted, “ironically,” in the opposite of what one might expect of a movement aimed at providing a “stabilizing social force” as he proposes is the aim of such awakenings. He continues to argue, “Each of these awakenings contributed, to the populace at large, ideological assumptions which quickly led to violent revolution. Revivalistic religions which emerged to calm social anxiety rapidly became agencies for social destruction.”⁴¹⁰ In his research he examines four different periods of American religious history and discovered a particular pattern where in times of social stress people became likely converts to “enthusiastical” religions. Once converted, these enthusiasts then engaged in revolutionary activity.”⁴¹¹

Civil War

It was by the middle of the nineteenth century that “a holiness emphasis asserted itself among American Evangelicals that led to a reform-minded call for an alignment of personal morality with social and political purity.”⁴¹² As mentioned above, those in the South carried longest the view that social reform would come through the conversion of the individual who would “indirectly elevate the moral well-being of society.”⁴¹³ It was also during this same time

⁴⁰⁹ Sweet, “Nineteenth Century Evangelicalism,” 876.

⁴¹⁰ R.C. Gordon-McCutchan, “The Irony of Evangelical History.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 1981, 20: 310.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 309-326.

⁴¹² Sweet, “Nineteenth Century Evangelicalism,” 877.

⁴¹³ Ibid., 893.

that Evangelicals replaced the “theological doctrine of predestination with a political doctrine of predestination,” which Sweet defines as “the evangelical empire was predestined and thus had a natural right to expand to its geographical boundaries, which were across the continent, and to its religious boundaries, which were across the globe.”⁴¹⁴

The Civil War also created a monumental shift in traditionally held views concerning the millennium. Postmillennialism was long held as the dominant view of most Protestants but as a result of the Civil War, the de-emphasis on personal conversion, and the rise of biblical higher criticism where biblical imagery was mythologized this gave way to premillennial notions which resulted in the rise of the Social Gospel and the drive to establish the Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Leading up to the commencement of and during the Civil War Evangelicals found themselves wrestling with how the morality of slavery should be defined, with many of the earliest abolitionist leaders being Evangelical. Although, as Sweet concludes, “Evangelicalism found the coils of the slavery controversy impossible to get out of. Its strategies proved inadequate to eradicate America’s greatest evil and instead ended up rending divisions, splitting denominations, enraging religious friends, and alienating social institutions and political parties.”⁴¹⁵ It was this inability of Evangelicalism to unify around such a momentous moral cause during such an integrally opportunistic time in American history that led to an eventual ebbing of Evangelical vitality during the twilight years of the nineteenth century.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 879.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 895.

Though the Civil War further embedded Evangelicalism into the fabric of American society, the rise of new religions, higher criticism, and Darwinian theories of evolution created an ever-increasing indifferent environment and entirely novel ways of interpreting reality. This was a new world to which Evangelicals were not accustomed and where “a scientific and historical spirit worked to flatten the landscape of the spiritual life.”⁴¹⁶ Leading into the dawning of a new century Evangelicalism had successfully entwined itself into the DNA of the nation. However, such a grafting in created a socio-religious environment that in most cases prevented Evangelicals from assimilating many if not all new historical-critical influences. These influences nuanced theology in subtle ways where God had been tamed from sovereign ruler of the universe and wrathful against sinners with Jesus being the only way of salvation to now both God and Jesus being a source of great comfort and unlimited blessing. Further the biblical text, being demythologized, now served as a source of inspiration for a better life rather than conviction.

Throughout the nineteenth century where the resurgence of Evangelicalism through revivals and Awakenings transitioned into the Sunday School movement as the primary vehicle for evangelistic efforts, it too fell into the cycle of being effective at producing converts, successful in growing the church both numerically and in influence, served as a unifying agent, was institutionalized in the American Sunday School Union, with the mission and effectiveness eventually becoming diluted with affection for societal reform through political engagement.

Early Twentieth Century

In postulating a proposed cyclical nature of Evangelical history, Gordon-McCutchan illustrates the twentieth century emergence of Fundamentalism with its inward focus to its

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 897.

evolution into the rise of the Religious Right and its insistence on Evangelical political crusade as the primary means of (re)-establishing the Kingdom of God in America with millennial hopes of preparing the way for the second coming of Christ,

...the breakdown of traditional institutions produces social chaos and anomie; an inwardly directed religious form emerges to minimize the anxiety born of this social dislocation; this inwardly directed form succeeds insofar as it makes people independent of institutions or self-reliant; those still in the hierarchy of society (be they religious or political figures) attack the newly emergent religion of inwardness, thereby politicizing the thinking of its members; the religion of inwardness reacts by extending and making ever clearer and more radical the theological principles on which its break with tradition rests; it then begins insisting upon changes in the political or religious sphere to bring them into coincidence with the teachings of the inner religion; next, it justifies these changes in terms of millennial expectation; if it meets with opposition it will soon identify those who oppose it with the forces of evil; it will then teach those who follow the religion of inwardness that they have a religious duty to engage in political revolution.⁴¹⁷

The early Twentieth century was marked by Protestant attempts to reform society through social organizations and political influence. The turn of attention from preaching the gospel for converting the individual to a focused desire to renovate society born from the revivals in antebellum America continued as a “potent force in American life...through the first World War.”⁴¹⁸ This eventually led to the rise of the Social Gospel movement. Born in the late nineteenth century, the Social Gospel movement is defined by Noll as “The most prevalent Protestant attempts to reform urban life were based on principles of private action and personal responsibility. Many older churches developed programs of social outreach and support to supplement more traditional services.”⁴¹⁹ “The origins of the Social Gospel were both domestic and foreign. The strong link in the American revival tradition between personal holiness and

⁴¹⁷ Gordon-McCutchan, “The Irony of Evangelical History,” 311.

⁴¹⁸ Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 296.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 304.

social reform contributed to the genesis of the movement...⁴²⁰ Leaders of the Social Gospel were trying to solve an American dilemma, namely how to adapt the Protestant tradition of an earlier rural America to the changing demands of a newly industrial society.⁴²¹

Protestants saw it as the “duty of the government to make it easy to do right and difficult to do wrong.”⁴²² There was perhaps no greater example of Protestant attempts to leverage government to make it “easy to do right and difficult to do wrong” than the Temperance movement. It was the Prohibition that “would establish the social conditions of morality under which men are more likely to be moral than when living under an environment which is conducive to immorality and wrong-doing.”⁴²³

World War II to Present

The mass evangelism success of Billy Graham is perhaps the most vibrant illustration of the effectiveness of a confident belief in Evangelical doctrine and certainty in the power of the gospel during the mid-twentieth century. Regarding the message of Billy Graham (like Moody before him), he saw the first objective for the gospel to “change the hearts of women and men then, one may proceed to transform the world.”⁴²⁴ With careful concern so as to not dilute the fundamental aim and power of the gospel, Graham acknowledged that his understanding of the power of the gospel to affect society through the individual evolved throughout the first decade of his ministry,

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 305.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 307.

⁴²² Marty, *Righteous Empire*, 213.

⁴²³ Ibid., 213.

⁴²⁴ Gaustad, *A Religious History of America*, 291.

My belief in the social implications of the gospel has deepened and broadened. I am convinced that faith without works is dead. I have never felt that the accusations against me of having no social concern were valid. Often the message of the evangelist is so personal that his statements on social matters are forgotten or left out when reports are made. It is my conviction that even though evangelism is necessarily confined within narrow limits the evangelist must not hedge on social issues. Yet I am more convinced than ever before that we must change men before we can change society. The international problems are only reflections of individual problems. Sin is sin, be it personal or social, and the word *repent* is inseparably bound up with evangelism. Social sins, after all, are merely a large-scale projection of individual sins and need to be repented of by the offending segment of society.⁴²⁵

Graham conceded that mass evangelism, though an important form, was not the most ideal form of evangelism as this responsibility was to be owned by the church. Graham echoed the necessity of having an authoritative view of Scripture as a prerequisite for the effectiveness of the church in the world. “The church has been effective only when it has spoken with authority.” He said, “I am convinced that the reason some ministers are cracking up is that they have no authority. I am thankful that there is a return to biblical preaching in America. The Scriptures are beginning to return to their rightful place as the authority in the church.”⁴²⁶

The first aim of evangelism and resurgence then should be a converted membership. Speaking to the criticisms that were often leveled against the mass evangelism crusades of Graham, Elton Trueblood clarified that one of the largest mission fields in America at the time, and most certainly currently, is the church roll. He argued,

If our only mission field is that of the 4 per cent who claim no affiliation, our opportunities for religious advance are severely limited... Our main mission field today, so far as America is concerned, is within the church membership it- self...[Our] task is to try to reach the present membership of churches with a message of such vitality that all experience conversion within the church, rather than a conversion to the church...In the Billy Graham Crusade in New York there were certain skeptics who sometimes complained that the figures were not dependable because, they said, many of the persons

⁴²⁵ Billy Graham, “What ten years have taught me,” *The Christian Century*, February 17, 1960. <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/first-person/what-ten-years-have-taught-me> Accessed September 1, 2019.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

who made decisions for Christ were already church members. Therefore, they said, the statistical reports were not accurate. What amazing misunderstanding this shows on the part of the critic!⁴²⁷

While the generation influenced by Billy Graham's shows higher levels of religious affiliation, they did a poor job of passing on that intensity of Christian affections to their children who, in turn, did even more poorly at passing on those affections to the next generation. With each subsequent generation there is an increased diminishing of intensity of religious belief and decrease in religious affiliation. According to the American Family Survey, of those who matured during the successful years of Graham's crusades, those currently older than 65, only twenty one percent self-identify as atheist, agnostic, or nothing in particular, which is a five percent increase from 2015.⁴²⁸

The Conservative Resurgence and the Rise of the Right

Examining the past presidential elections since 1980 it becomes increasingly clear to absolute certainty that Evangelicals continued to align with and crusade for Republican initiatives. Gordon-McCutchan suggests that Evangelicalism has always tended to be "a religion of social control predicated upon inner- direction," and this fascination with social control is what has given it "a pronounced tendency toward political revolution."⁴²⁹ But this is not how periods of resurgence began, nonetheless this is what each devolved into, which resulted in a

⁴²⁷ Elton Trueblood as quoted by Billy Graham in "What ten years have taught me."

⁴²⁸ American Family Survey, "What Americans Think about Marriage and Family," <https://www.deseretnews.com/americans-family-survey/2018> Interestingly, in Canada the rate of religious disaffiliation is quickly rising among older cohorts as well as younger, "Between the oldest (1905-1909) and youngest (1995-1997) cohorts overall, the average rate of religious nones has risen by 245% in Canada." See, Joel Thiessen and Sarah Wilkins-LaFlamme, "Becoming a Religious None: Irreligious socialization and disaffiliation," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (2017) 56:(1) 64-82. See also Sherkat, "Tracking the Restructuring of American Religion," 1466-1468 for detailed data analysis for the falling retention rates among both liberal and conservative denominations tracked by cohort.

⁴²⁹ Gordon-McCutchan, "The Irony of Evangelical History," 317.

recession of religiosity. He goes on to rightly caution, “Hence preaching social control by means of Evangelical piety is a very dangerous business.”⁴³⁰

During previous periods of Evangelical resurgence, “the sort of revivalism preached corresponded with the social situation of the hearers.”⁴³¹ Where the social anxiety was most intensely experienced the awakenings spread quickest. This can be seen with the Second Great Awakening spreading quickest in the frontier where it can be assumed anxiety generated from the economic instability and uncertainty of personal health were prevalent through to the rise of the Religious Right as Supreme Court decisions invalidated long-held traditional Evangelical mores in the public spheres which created inner and external social and religious angst. This angst nurtured a ripe environment for Evangelicals to rally a new revolution. Unfortunately, and again, efforts were misguided at seeking reformation political action.

Chief Executive Officer of the Public Religion Research Institute, Robert P. Jones outlines it was the waves of Evangelical resurgence throughout the eighteenth century that formed the political underpinnings and identity of the new nation. He continues to summarize the political contest during the latter half of the twentieth century that facilitated the alliance, especially in the South, between politics and the Evangelical church,

In the south, the explosion of evangelical churches coincided with a wave of racial reaction in the wake of the civil rights movement. After being a Democratic stronghold, the South became solidly Republican beginning in the early 1970s. The Republican “southern strategy” used race as a wedge issue to attract white votes in the wake of the civil rights movement, but it also proffered a socially conservative message that gelled with the values of the emerging Religious Right.⁴³²

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid., 315.

⁴³² Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016),

In the late 20th century, there was another resurgence in religious interest that fueled new successes of conservative politics. Building the momentum that reached its apex with the rise of the religious right and conservative resurgence it was “Preachers like Billy Graham and Jimmy Swaggart – in spectacular revival meetings and increasingly on television – attracted millions of white converts to churches which emphasized literalist interpretations of the Bible, strict moral teachings and apocalyptic expectations;”⁴³³ however, scandal also rocked the Evangelical confidence in the late 1980s with several televangelists being found out for mishandling finances, prostitution, and infidelity. This had significant reverberations throughout the American culture as confidence in the trustworthiness of religious leaders plummeted. Tom Smith, Director of the National Opinion Research Center, provides a summary of the Gallup Social Survey data regarding the impact of the televangelists scandal,

the percent with a ‘great deal’ of confidence in the leaders of ‘organized religion’ fell from 30% in early 1987 before the Bakker scandal to 21% in 1988 after the Bakker disclosures and during the Swaggart expose (and those with ‘hardly any’ confidence rose from 19% to 32%). Also, showing a clear scandal effect was the general measures on religious influence. The percent saying that the influence of religion was increasing fell from 48% in 1985 and 1986 to 36% in 1987 and 33% in 1988...church membership dipped from 69% in 1986 and 1987 to 65% in 1988 and the percent praying daily fell from 58% in 1985 to 53% in 1989.⁴³⁴

Even so, confidence in religion and the church remained as the majority among other categories polled by Gallup even after the televangelist scandals broke. It wasn’t until 2002 Catholic sex abuse scandal that the confidence Americans placed in religion and the church

⁴³³ Jason Wilson, “We’re at the end of White Christian America. What will that mean?” *The Guardian* September 20, 2017.

⁴³⁴ Tom W. Smith, “The Impact of the Televangelist Scandals of 1987-88 on American Religious Beliefs and Behaviors,” GSS Social Change Report No. 34, April 1991, 4.

dropped sharply below fifty percent for the first time.⁴³⁵ General Social Survey data from showed a majority of Americans (sixty nine percent) believed that the influence of religion was increasing in America. By 1990 confidence had dropped to thirty three percent.⁴³⁶ The General Social Survey religious preference trendline from 1972 held relatively flat until 1991. As seen in the chart below, the number of those selecting “No religion” begins to sharply increase after 1991.⁴³⁷

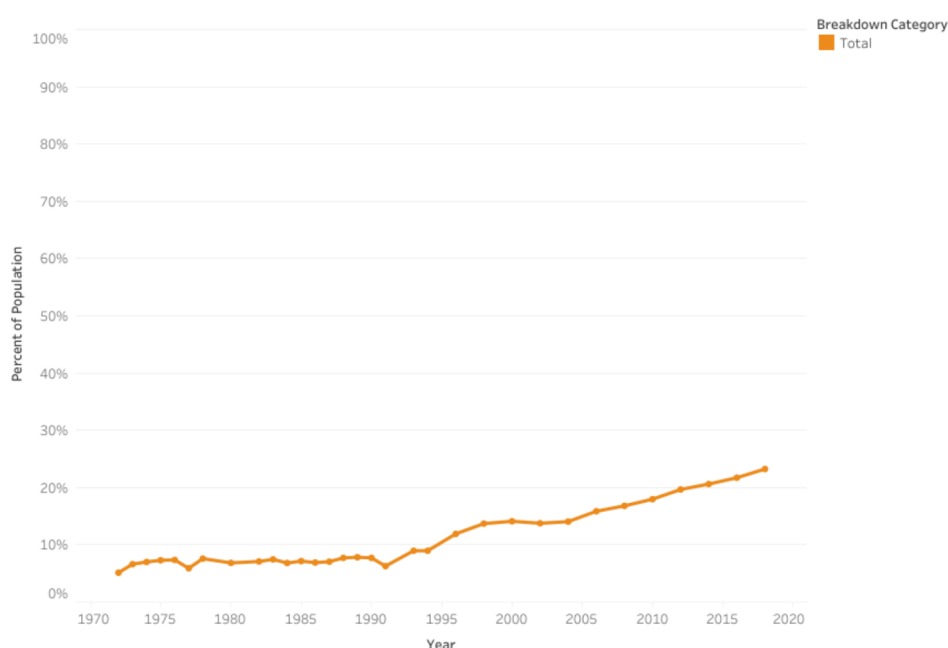


Figure 3.1 - Religious Preference Timeline

⁴³⁵ Justin McCarthy, “U.S. Confidence in Organized Religion Remains Low,” *Gallup*, July 8, 2019. https://news.gallup.com/poll/259964/confidence-organized-religion-remains-low.aspx?fbclid=IwAR31_eLwS46yy2bEVwBAUOJSKvLrfXA3kInPdn018Op1G8IOJ6NE3Z0Mez4

⁴³⁶ Tom W. Smith, “The Impact of the Televangelist Scandals of 1987-88 on American Religious Beliefs and Behaviors,” 9-10. Belief in the increasing influence of religion dropped to an all-time low of 14% in the years 1968-69, possibly due to being in the height of the Vietnam War.

⁴³⁷ Chart taken from the GSS Data Explorer for religious preference, https://gssdataexplorer.norc.umd.edu/trends/Religion%20&%20Spirituality?measure=relig_rec

Religious affiliation reached a fourteen-year low in 1991 matching the 1977 low of six percent however it was during 1991 that a continual drastic climb has occurred in the number of those who have chosen “no religion” in the General Social Survey. Similarly, there was a corresponding increase in those that chose “Other” as their religion from less than two percent in 1991 and more than doubling to three and a half percent by 2018.⁴³⁸ Interestingly, the number of Americans that identify as being Evangelical has held relatively flat since 1991 according to Gallup survey data. At forty one percent of Americans identifying as Evangelical in 1991, reaching a low of thirty six percent in 2015 it was hovering at forty one percent in 2018.⁴³⁹

Similar to what has been witnessed in past resurgences of Christianity in periods of American history examined here, current levels of intensity of religiosity remain consistent among those aged 25 and younger, however as Schnabel and Bock point out, the number of those in this age category who have disaffiliated has drastically increased in recent decades:

We also considered patterns among young people on this and other measures and found similar patterns of persistent intensity. Looking just at people aged 25 and under—a relatively small proportion of the sample for which we would expect some year-to-year fluctuation—26 percent were strongly affiliated in 1974, 22 percent in 1988, and 25 percent in 2016. Whereas strong affiliation remained consistent, no affiliation among those 25 and under almost tripled from 13 percent in 1974 to 35 percent in 2016. The percentages for strong affiliation are lower overall for this group than those for all Americans—which suggests that people may age into strong affiliation, as we are effectively controlling for cohort by looking at the same age group over time—but are similarly consistent.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁸ An interesting hypothesis could be proposed here to correlate the Gulf War (1990-91) as the instigator of this steep increase in religious disaffiliation but no firm empirical data exists to support to refute the hypothesis.

⁴³⁹ Frank Newport, “5 Things to Know about Evangelicals in America,” *Gallup*, May 31, 2018. <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/235208/things-know-evangelicals-america.aspx>

⁴⁴⁰ Schnabel and Bock, “The Persistent and Exceptional Intensity of American Religion: A Response to Recent Research,” *Sociological Science* November 2017, 4:698.

Hout and Fischer conclude that the growth of religious non-affiliation, particularly among younger cohorts of Americans, represents a movement away from the organized religious bodies that Americans associated with conservative politics throughout the 1980s and 1990s.⁴⁴¹ More specifically, Schnabel and Bock conclude that the general increase of religious disaffiliation in America was initially sparked as a backlash against the rise of the Religious Right.⁴⁴² Which served as a “reminder...that the relationship between the sacred and the secular have been a frequently contentious issue in American politics.”⁴⁴³

The Diminishing of American Evangelicalism

Jeffrey Jones of Gallup illustrates the accelerated decrease in membership numbers in America’s churches within the past two decades, “U.S. church membership was 70% or higher from 1937 through 1976, falling modestly to an average of 68% in the 1970s through the 1990s. The past 20 years have seen an acceleration in the drop-off , with a 20-percentage-point decline since 1999 and more than half of that change occurring since the start of the last decade.”⁴⁴⁴

Declining denominationalism has expanded beyond the collapse of Mainline denominations to now seriously affect the largest denomination in America. The significance of

⁴⁴¹ Michael Hout and Claude Fischer. 2014. “Explaining why more Americans have no religious preference: Political backlash and generational succession, 1987–2012,” *Sociological Science* (2014)1:442-444.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Ted G. Jelen, “Religion and the American Political Culture: Alternative Models of Citizenship and Discipleship,” *Sociology of Religion* 1995, 56:3, 271.

⁴⁴⁴ Jeffrey M. Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades,” Gallup, April 18, 2019. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/248837/church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx>; See also Ed Stetzer, “The Southern Baptist Decline Continues - and Accelerates,” *Between the Times*, June 11, 2015, <http://betweenthetimes.com/index.php/2015/06/11/the-southern-baptist-decline-continues/>; See also, Carol Pipes, “SBC Reports More Churches, Fewer People,” *Baptist Press*, June 10, 2015, <http://www.bpnews.net/44914/sbc-reports-more-churches-fewer-people>.

this decline is seen in Wuthnow's explanation of the meaning denominationalism once had in forming and determining the religious identity for Americans. He argues,

over the past half-century, denominationalism has declined seriously as the primary mode of identification in American religion. Indications of this decline include increased interfaith and interdenominational switching, heightened tolerance across faiths and denominational boundaries, ecumenical cooperation, and a deemphasis in many denominations on distinctive teachings and specific membership requirements.⁴⁴⁵

This decline in denominational loyalty and its subsequent negative effects on religious affiliation was acknowledged by Sherkat at the turn of the twenty first century where he predicted this increased permeability of denominationalism would result in a decline in religious loyalty "particularly in younger cohorts."⁴⁴⁶ This is precisely what has occurred at a very rapid rate in the twenty first century, especially in the last decade.⁴⁴⁷

According to Sundberg, many Mainline theologians and leaders attempt to "rationalize membership loss by ascribing it to the effects of modern secularization." He goes on to affirm that, "They assert that the decline of the church is inevitable because we live in a 'post-Christian' era in which fewer people are attracted to organized religion. The trouble with this mainline scenario is that it does not fit the facts of religious life in America."⁴⁴⁸ The culprit for the decline of religious affiliation generally and Evangelical affiliation specifically is not the secularization of culture (though that is occurring, naturally) but it is the secularization of the church as illustrated by the overall decline in spiritual vitality in these Evangelical congregations.

⁴⁴⁵ Robert Wuthnow, *The Future of American Christianity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 156.

⁴⁴⁶ Darren E. Sherkat, "Tracking the Restructuring of American Religion: Religious Affiliation and Patterns of Religious Mobility, 1973-1998, *Social Forces*, Volume 79, Number 4, June 2001, 1462.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Walter Sundberg, "Religious Trends in Twentieth-Century America," *Word & World*, Volume XX, Number 1 Winter 2000, 23.

Clarifying Kelley's central thesis in *Why Conservative Churches are Growing*, Sundberg asserts, "This strategy asserts that the Christian proclamation must be made as compatible as possible with the intellectual presuppositions of contemporary society."⁴⁴⁹ Sundberg continues to provide a succinct summary of the primary means by which Mainline churches capitulate to culture in accommodating their message, "The primary means of accommodation are historical-critical method in biblical scholarship, the politicization of theological concepts and denominational activities for the purpose of social reform, the redefinition of Christian anthropology using therapeutic categories derived from psychology, and the toleration of religious diversity in ecclesial life."⁴⁵⁰ Although Kelley was writing in the latter part of the Twentieth century and Sundberg was echoing these charges against Mainline congregations at the turn of the Twenty-First century it has become increasingly definite that more and more Evangelical churches have made their message "as compatible as possible with the intellectual presuppositions of contemporary society," where now only ten percent of those who consider themselves "born again" hold a biblical worldview.⁴⁵¹ This has consequently initiated a resultant decline in membership and affiliation in Evangelical denominations.

Writing in 2001, Darren Sherkat provided data analysis that concluded, "denominational loyalty is only declining among Liberal Protestants, Episcopalians, and in Catholicism."⁴⁵² Data from the Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches reveal a deceleration of growth for Mainline churches going back as far as 1955. Growth fell from over three percent annually

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 24.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Barna Group, OmniPoll 1-14, conducted January 2014, See Barna, *America at the Crossroads*, 49.

⁴⁵² Darren E. Sherkat, "Tracking the Restructuring of American Religion," 1484.

during the 1950s to about one percent through the 1980s to less than a half percent through 2005, at which point Southern Baptist declines pushed the entire family into negative growth for the first time.⁴⁵³

Perhaps the most prominent bastion of Evangelicalism in America is represented by the Southern Baptist Convention who in 1967 surpassed the United Methodists in size. The denomination has prevailed as the largest, growing denomination in America until recently. Unfortunately, with no accurate way of measuring conversions one is left with relying on data recording the number of baptisms for a given period for measuring congregational effectiveness. The data is showing more interest as recorded by increased attendance to religious services, but commitment is decreasing as illustrated by the decline in recorded baptisms where they have declined for eight of the last ten years with. For 2017, congregations reported baptizing 254,122 individuals which was nearly a twenty seven percent decrease from 2007. This provides the ratio of one baptism for every fifty-nine church members. These alarming indicators of a deceleration of growth led Mohler to admit this, “statistical crisis related to baptisms raises huge theological questions.”⁴⁵⁴

Albeit, the denomination is still adding numbers and saw just over a six percent increase in churches between 1997 and 2007,⁴⁵⁵ however, increasing the number of churches is not translating into evangelistic effectiveness as missions activity declined from 2016 to 2017.

⁴⁵³ David A. Roozen, “Negative numbers: The decline narrative reaches evangelicals,” *The Christian Century*, 2013.

⁴⁵⁴ Albert Mohler, “The Future of the Southern Baptist Convention: The Numbers Don’t Add Up,” Albert Mohler, May 31, 2019. <https://albertmohler.com/2019/05/31/the-future-of-the-southern-baptist-convention-the-numbers-dont-add-up>

⁴⁵⁵ Lisa C. Green, “Worship Attendance Rises, Baptisms Decline in SBC,” *Facts & Trends LifeWay*, June 1, 2018. <https://factsandtrends.net/2018/06/01/worship-attendance-rises-baptisms-decline-in-sbc/>

Southern Baptist churches reported 4,376 church-type missions in 2017, which is a decrease of nearly three percent from 2016.⁴⁵⁶ Additionally, individual membership in Southern Baptist congregations fell for the eleventh consecutive year, to below fifteen million. Since 2006, Southern Baptist Convention congregations have lost about 1.3 million members.⁴⁵⁷

Mohler provides two insights as potential reasons for the steadily declining numbers in the largest Evangelical denomination in America. First, those in the Southern Baptist Convention are not as concerned about reaching the lost as they once were. Second, the methods of evangelism that were once successful at reaching the lost and increasing membership numbers are no longer effective in the current culture.⁴⁵⁸ Mohler concedes that for the largest denomination in America, it is time “to acknowledge the hard fact that rates of identification with and membership in evangelical congregations is likely to fall even further.”

Although, even with the high child mortality rate in Colonial America, the church was still growing, a fact contrary to assumptions by the Southern Baptist Convention and other theories regarding low birth rates. Mohler argues that it is the falling birth rates that has contributed to the corresponding decline in SBC’s numbers,

Throughout recent centuries, the vast majority of church members have been the children of church members. It is no accident that falling birth rates are reflected, in short order, in baptism statistics. There is no question that children raised within Christian homes by Christian parents are most likely to make their own profession of faith and continue church participation into adulthood. There is also no question that when Christian parents have fewer children, they produce fewer future converts to Christianity. The fall in the birth rate has been precipitous and the trend lines parallel baptism statistics in the SBC.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Albert Mohler, “The Future of the Southern Baptist Convention: The Numbers Don’t Add Up.”

⁴⁵⁹ Mohler, “The Future of the Southern Baptist Convention: The Numbers Don’t Add Up”

The decreased fertility rates in America are a natural consequence of increased wealth and availability of healthcare, which resultantly lowers child mortality rates. Max Roser explains, “When more infants survive fertility goes down and the temporary population growth comes to an end.”⁴⁶⁰ While reaching children of current members is the “top priority” for Southern Baptists, Mohler concedes that they are “also about to find out if we can reach young people to whom we did not give birth. That is more challenging.”⁴⁶¹

With the rise of the outwardly (politically) focused Religious Right and the parallel inward focused Evangelical Conservative Resurgence aimed at reestablishing the authority of Scripture during the late 70s and throughout the 80s there was a revived sense of certainty of belief among Evangelicals.⁴⁶² Reminiscent of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the early twentieth century, albeit not as militant, the conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention did not so much create a resurgence in affiliation or interest in Evangelicalism as it aimed to purify and realign the denomination especially regarding the authority and inerrancy of Scripture.

In surveys between 1984 and 1992, in polling to determine national distribution of religious conservatives, liberals, and moderates, it was found that Americans began to exhibit a greater degree of certainty regarding their religious identity. During the heyday of the Moral Majority and as the Conservative Resurgence was accomplishing its aim of reestablishing the authority of Scripture in the Southern Baptist Convention and its seminaries, those that indicated

⁴⁶⁰ Max Roser, “Child and Infant Mortality,” *Our World in Data*, <https://ourworldindata.org/child-mortality>

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² Wuthnow, “Restructuring American Religion: Further Evidence,” 305-308.

they did not know if they were conservative, liberal, or moderate fell from sixteen percent in 1984 to seven percent in 1989. There was a corresponding increase in those that identified as conservative, increasing from nine percent in 1984 to sixteen percent in 1989; however, certainty of belief has continued to decline with each subsequent generation.

Sherkat speaks to the effects of these dissolving religious convictions and how the lack of clear or strict⁴⁶³ denominational distinctiveness creating clearly definable costs and benefits facilitates a denominational permeability. He concludes from General Social Survey data evaluated from 1973 to 1998 that “(1) religious groups with distinctive theologies, liturgies, or rituals will have higher rates of retention; (2) denominations with little distance from secular society will have lower rates of retention and will lose members through switching; and (3) denominations that are similar to a high number of other religious organizations will have lower rates of retention.”⁴⁶⁴ The relatively recent increase in churches with non-denominational names or denominationally unaffiliated also experience the same vague definability that eases attrition for their intended audiences. General Social Survey data shows, “the nondenominational “other Protestant” category posts the lowest overall retention rate among religious affiliations, while the diverse “other religions” category charts a relatively high loyalty percentage.”⁴⁶⁵ Whereas, perhaps not surprising, the retention rates of the unaffiliated are increasing with each subsequent

⁴⁶³ According to Sherkat, “Tracking the Restructuring of American Religion,” “Strict church” theories argue that more demanding sectarian denominations will have higher rates of retention and be more attractive to new members compared to liberal bodies.” 1463. See also, Roger Finke, and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992). See also, Laurence Iannaccone, “Sacrifice and Stigma: Reducing Freeriding in Cults, Communes, and Other Collectivities.” *Journal of Political Economy*, 1992, 100:2:271-91. See also, Laurence Iannaccone, “Why Strict Churches are Strong,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 1994, 99:1180-1211.

⁴⁶⁴ Sherkat, “Tracking the Restructuring of American Religion,” 1464.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 1468.

generational cohort. Further, retention rates even among the strictest denominations that have clear distinctives are on the wane in America. Chaves and Voas provide empirical evidence that religious affiliation, belief, and practice in the United States have in fact been declining for decades and because this decline has been produced by the same generational patterns underlying religious decline elsewhere in the West: “Each successive cohort is less religious than the preceding one.”⁴⁶⁶ Importantly, this decline in the intensity of religiosity in America is occurring among the moderately (fuzzy middle) religious as well as intensely religious.

General Social Survey data from 2000 to 2010 reveal the membership decline was nearly the same for Evangelical congregations as for Mainline.⁴⁶⁷ Roozen goes on to report that interestingly, “the biggest decline among any age group within these families is among older evangelicals. Among that group, the number expressing confidence in organized religion fell from forty three percent to twenty seven.”⁴⁶⁸ Roozen went on to illustrate in the “Decade of Change” report, that “spiritual vitality”⁴⁶⁹ of American congregations also dropped significantly among Mainline, Evangelical, and Catholic denominations but the decline was most dramatic again for those Evangelical congregations dropping from forty nine percent in 2005 to thirty one

⁴⁶⁶ David Voas and Mark Chaves, “Even Intense Religiosity Is Declining in the United States,” *Sociological Science* 5:708.

⁴⁶⁷ Ryan P. Burge, “Evangelicals Show No Decline, Despite Trump and Nones,” *Christianity Today*, March 21, 2019. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/march/evangelical-nones-mainline-us-general-social-survey-gss.html> Accessed August 28, 2019.

⁴⁶⁸ David A. Roozen, “Negative numbers: the decline narrative reaches evangelicals.” *The Christian Century*, 11 Dec. 2013, 10. Gale In Context: Biography, https://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A354859101/BIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=BIC&xid=8e012ec1. Accessed July 26, 2019.

⁴⁶⁹ Roozen defines spiritual vitality as the extent to which a congregation emphasizes personal spiritual practices like prayer and scripture reading. See Roozen, *A Decade of Change in American Congregations 2000 – 2010*, 16.

percent in 2010. The lower vitality was mirrored in the FACT survey by a decrease in congregational emphasis on prayer groups, spiritual retreats and scripture or theology studies.

While it is clear the spiritual vitality of American congregations has significantly decreased over the last decade, there is a demand for more rigorous and relevant teaching from Scripture is reflected in the desires of the majority of parishioners. A recent Barna survey revealed that more than sixty seven percent of spiritually active believers confirmed their desire for their church to provide more instruction describing what the Bible teaches about current social and political issues.⁴⁷⁰ When congregational leaders intentionally built supportive communities, and engaged their people in faith practices (within and outside the congregation), they strengthened vitality. When leaders or the congregation at large focused on anything else, vitality diminished.⁴⁷¹

Further, polling data reveal that younger generations are disaffiliating at a much faster rate than previous generational cohorts. With the decreased birth rate in America coupled with the lack of confidence in religious teaching, the importance of religious socialization through the family unit becomes magnified as indispensably necessary.⁴⁷² Indeed, the structures of society, perhaps unknown to converts themselves, play a key role in determining religious choice.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷⁰ See Barna, *America at the Crossroads*, 45. Data drawn from American Faith and Culture Institute, God's People Want to Know, (Woodside: August 2015). http://www.culturefaith.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Gods-people-want-to-know-Barna-ACFI_8-27-15.pdf.

⁴⁷¹ Linda Bobbitt, "Vital Congregations," Congregational Vitality Project, (Hartford: Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2018), 8.

⁴⁷² The statistical significance of religious socialization leveraged here is as Wuthnow defines it, "Religious socialization variables emphasize generational continuity in religious orientations that arise from early childhood training, parental role models, and family involvement in religious activities." See Robert Wuthnow, "Restructuring American Religion: Further Evidence," 310.

⁴⁷³ Rizvi, Mohd Ahsan Kabir and Mohammad Zakir Hossain. Relationship Between Religious Belief and Happiness: A Systematic Literature Review. *Journal of Religion and Health* (2017) 56:1561–1582 p.442

However, Simon Brauer acknowledges that though unique cultural nuances may contribute to the decline of religious interest and affiliation what sustains that decline is not necessarily unique and can be addressed. He explains that,

Despite varied histories and cultures, countries might undergo the same process of religious decline if it is instigated by certain conditions common to contemporary life and maintained by basic processes of familial and societal socialization of new members. In other words, what starts religious decline is relatively new while what maintains it is not. One possibility is that forces that had previously engaged religious convictions have weakened, leading to a slow decline toward modest religiosity (Smith 2017:198).conditions, albeit at different times and under different circumstances, that weaken the ability of society and families to socialize youth into religious traditions...Religious counter-movements, such as the religious right in the United States or anti-Soviet Catholic nationalism in Poland, might combat or offset some of that change. But so long as it remains harder to socialize new members into religious traditions than before, each subsequent generation will slowly make society less religious overall.⁴⁷⁴

Regarding the factors that appear to be causing religious non-affiliation and disaffiliation in the West, Brauer discusses the influencing force of religious change as a non-directional process versus religious change as a self-reinforcing process.⁴⁷⁵ In short, "with each generation, irreligious socialization will increasingly fuel the growth among religious nones more so than disaffiliation."⁴⁷⁶ Hammond echoes this as it relates contrarily to resurgence in arguing that, "just as the revival is social, so is its dying out: fading enthusiasm can also be contagious."⁴⁷⁷ Religious communities not only inform members' preferences and considerations of options, but

⁴⁷⁴ Simon Brauer, "The Surprising Predictable Decline of Religion in the United States," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 2018 0(0): 17-18.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Hammond, "The reality of revivals." 112.

also sanction members' behaviors.⁴⁷⁸ Youth researchers Regnerus, Smith, and Fritsch suggest that it is a “common sense notion that parents and their own religious practices are among the strongest influences on the religious behavior of adolescents.”⁴⁷⁹

Importance of Familial Religious Socialization

The ability of parents to effectively communicate and transmit their own religious beliefs to their children for sustained growth (even survival) of that religion magnifies the importance of religious socialization that allows Wuthnow to confidently assert, “Put simply: One important way in which religious orientations have become institutionalized is family.”⁴⁸⁰ Thus the integral necessity of family can be seen as the lynchpin for securing future Evangelical resurgence in America. As Richard Baxter contended, “You are not likely to see any general reformation (resurgence), till you procure family reformation.”⁴⁸¹

Generally, the overall importance of religion in one's family of origin and the parents' specific religious activities reinforce religious conservatism that can be typically correlated with Evangelicalism. According to Wuthnow, the specific activity that had the strongest effect on reinforcing religious conservatism was reading the Bible at home and being sent to Sunday school having the weakest effect.⁴⁸² This leads Wuthnow to confidently conclude, it is religious socialization in the family unit that “plays a role in maintaining religious conservatism: People

⁴⁷⁸ Darren E. Sherkat, Darren E. and John Wilson. 1995. “Preferences, Constraints, and Choices in Religious Markets: An Examination of Religious Switching and Apostasy.” *Social Forces* 73:993- 1026.

⁴⁷⁹ Mark Regnerus, Christian Smith, and Melissa Fritsch, “Religion in the Lives of American Adolescents: A Review of the Literature,” *National Study of Youth and Religion* no. 3, 2003, 39.

⁴⁸⁰ Wuthnow, “Restructuring of American Religion: Further Evidence,” 324.

⁴⁸¹ Richard Baxter as quoted by McDow and Reid, 172.

⁴⁸² Wuthnow, “Restructuring of American Religion: Further Evidence,” 311

whose parents regarded religion as important and who engaged in family devotional practices such as reading the Bible together are more likely to attend religious services regularly and identify themselves as conservative.⁴⁸³ This finding suggests that some of the shift toward religious conservatism among baby boomers (noted earlier) may be a return to the religious practices of respondents' childhoods.⁴⁸⁴

Unfortunately, however, the generational picture is bleak in America. With over a third of young Protestant teens do not think that church usually makes them think about important things. Schwadel and Smith's research suggests, "On the whole, teens whose parents are affiliated with conservative denominations are somewhat more likely than most other Protestant teens to report that church usually makes them think about important things."⁴⁸⁵

While it is the youngest generation in which a resurgence of Evangelical influence would most likely occur, it is precisely this generation (Millennial) that is most likely to continue the abdication of traditional Evangelical worldview as Barna laments,

The United States is in the early stages of biblical abandonment and the consequent cultural decline. Increasing numbers of people are comfortable with faith as long as it provides the benefits they seek and is neither demanding nor constraining. This shift began tentatively more than four decades ago and has been gathering momentum ever since. Millennials, the generation whose choice will ultimately determine the nature of Christianity and the Church in America for several decades, appear poised to wholeheartedly support the shift away from biblical Christianity and toward new belief patterns.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 324.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 313.

⁴⁸⁵ Phil Schwadel and Christian Smith, "Portraits of Protestant Teens: A report on teenagers in major U.S. Denominations," *National Study of Youth and Religion*, 2005, 42-43.
<https://youthandreligion.nd.edu/assets/102510/portraitsprotteens.pdf>

⁴⁸⁶ Barna, *America at the Crossroads*, 29.

Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church of the United States, Katharine Jefferts Schori explains her parents' reasoning for conversion from Catholicism to Episcopalian "I think my parents were looking for a place where wrestling with questions was encouraged rather than discouraged."⁴⁸⁷ This testimony reminds the Church of the necessity to preach and teach with a confident certainty which results naturally in a clarity of how Scripture continues to speak into the lives of each generation. Steve Bruce explains the benefit of parents transmitting a confident Evangelical faith to their children that assists its ability to thrive compared to an ambiguous faith,

The socialization of young children necessarily involves bowdlerizing and simplifying. The virtue of conservative Protestantism is that it survives such treatment better. Children can understand and believe in a God with the white beard who actually did make the world in six days and who dictated the Bible to faithful stenographers. Apart from anything else, conservative Protestantism has the advantage that its treatment of the Bible, as containing true stories of miraculous occurrences, makes for appealing presentation to children. Because conservative Protestantism is realistic and dogmatic, what is left after it has been reduced to the level of the comic book is still consistent with the mature product. When it suffers the same translation, liberalism appears either empty or uncertain and ambiguous.⁴⁸⁸

In discussing the ambiguity that has led to the decline of the Protestant Mainline denominations that has prevented the passing on of the faith to the next generation, Sundberg affirms the situation is no better for those Evangelicals that have not engaged in rigorous religious activity by concluding, "Lapsed evangelicals are no more successful in passing faith on to their children than Christians raised in mainline churches."⁴⁸⁹ Barna suggests the abiding lack

⁴⁸⁷ Deborah Solomon, "State of the Church: Questions for Katharine Jefferts Schori," *The New York Times*, November 19, 2006.

⁴⁸⁸ Steve Bruce, *A House Divided: Protestantism, Schism, and Secularization*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 139.

⁴⁸⁹ Sundberg, "Religious Trends in Twentieth-Century America," 26.

of planning and inadequate investment in the next generation will continue to add to the unstable futures of American churches. Where now three out of five religiously active parents say that they are primarily responsible (fifty nine percent) and more than one-third says that it's mostly them, with the help of church leaders (thirty six percent).⁴⁹⁰⁴⁹¹

Additionally, Wuthnow's data suggest that religious conservatism is also reinforced by congregational interaction, that is involvement in the local church, but not by special-purpose groups operating outside the local congregation.⁴⁹² He argues, "One reason why religious conservatives are, in fact, conservatives rather than moderates is simply that they participate in congregations that provide affirming plausibility structures for conservative beliefs."⁴⁹³

However, the conversion occurs most frequently through pre-established relationships with family being the most obvious and perhaps accessible, social networks (sacred and secular) also serve as a catalytic agent in the conversion process, to or from religion. Since it is "through repeated consumption of specific religious products, individuals come to prefer them to

⁴⁹⁰ "Parents and Pastors: Partners in Gen Z Discipleship," *Research Releases in Millennials & Generations*, July 17, 2018. <https://www.barna.com/research/parents-and-pastors-partners-in-gen-z-discipleship/>

⁴⁹¹ According to Barna this data is compiled from two nationally representative studies of teens were conducted. The first was conducted using an online consumer panel November 4–16, 2016, and included 1,490 U.S. teenagers 13 to 18 years old. The second was conducted July 7–18, 2017, and also used an online consumer panel, which included 507 U.S. teenagers 13 to 18 years old. The data from both surveys were minimally weighted to known U.S. Census data in order to be representative of ethnicity, gender, age and region. One nationally representative study of 1,517 U.S. adults ages 19 and older was conducted using an online panel November 4–16, 2016. The data were minimally weighted to known U.S. Census data in order to be representative of ethnicity, gender, age and region.

⁴⁹² Wuthnow, "Restructuring of American Religion: Further Evidence," 314.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 324. See also Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967); See also, Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing*, 2nd ed. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1977).

alternatives”⁴⁹⁴ the necessity of familial involvement in purposeful religious socialization of their children becomes even more integral for any hope of a resurgence of Evangelicalism in America.

Chapter Summary

As a result of the examination presented in this chapter, a few conclusions must be proposed. First, religious alignment with political authority tends to diminish religious influence. Second, the primacy of prayer and preaching has served in each period as the impetus that sparked Evangelical resurgence. Third, the importance of the family unit in transmitting the Christian faith to the next generation was viewed as a primary responsibility of parents, and fourth, as the authority of Scripture is diminished there is a corresponding ebbing of intense religiosity. When the Evangelical message has evolved from the conversion of the individual so the individual can influence the greater culture, to interests in transforming the greater culture to affect the morality of individuals there is a declension in the effectiveness of Evangelicalism in the culture. This loss of evangelistic effectiveness, an Evangelical distinctive, is an influential catalyst for the rise of the Nones, especially among the traditionally Evangelical-affiliated, which Sherkat echoed nearly two decades ago,

In the latter half of the twentieth century, liberal and moderate denominations became increasingly secular and this lack of distinctiveness from secular society pushed out members who desired more otherworldly religious compensators. Further, niche overlap with secular alternatives has meant that decreased loyalty also contributed to increasing rates of defection from organized religion — to both nonaffiliation and the nebulous “other Protestant” designation.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁴ Sherkat, “Tracking the Restructuring of American Religion,” 1463. See also, Jon Elster, *Sour Grapes: Studies in the Subversion of Rationality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). See also, Darren E. Sherkat, 1997. “Embedding Religious Choices: Integrating Preferences and Social Constraints into Rational Choice Theories of Religious Behavior” *Rational Choice Theory and Religion: Summary and Assessment*, edited by Lawrence A. Young. (New York: Routledge Press, 1997), 65-86. See also, Darren E. Sherkat and John Wilson, “Preferences, Constraints, and Choices in Religious Markets: An Examination of Religious Switching and Apostasy.” *Social Forces* 1995 73:993-1026.

⁴⁹⁵ Sherkat, “Tracking the Restructuring,” 1486. See also, Stark, Rodney, and William Sims Bainbridge. *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation*, (Berkeley. University of California Press, 1985)

In nearly every period of American religious history periods that experienced intense religious resurgence in America provide evidence that religious alignment with political authority tends to diminish religious influence over time. The dangers of religion aligning with government and politics can be evidenced in other countries as well. For example, the 1876 Spanish Constitution had established near complete religious freedom, and the influence of the Catholic church among the masses had been in decline in the early twentieth century because of its alliance with the oligarchy.⁴⁹⁶ Historian William Sweet provides further insight into how this relationship tends to weaken the fundamental aim of the religion,

When religion attempts to interfere in the affairs of the civil state, it weakens and undermines the state's legitimate power - the state becomes the tool of the church and does not function in its own right. Persecution by the state because of religion, in the attempt to secure religious uniformity, confuses the civil and the religious, denies the principles of Christianity and civility.⁴⁹⁷

Further, as Sweet quips, Evangelicals have a persistent tendency of “constantly sticking their noses into the public arena.”⁴⁹⁸ Whereas the political agenda in the nineteenth century was fashioned around religious issues and leveraged tactics taken from the revivalist tradition the current political agenda in America is fabricated around constitutional and civil issues that leverage an equation of civil rights with inalienable morality.

The men and women that sparked and served in advancing these periods of resurgence were burdened with an intense dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs both inside the church and culturally. They had been serious students of Scripture and had given themselves to .

⁴⁹⁶ Charles Reagan Wilson, “Religion in the American Civil War in Comparative Perspective,” in *The American Civil War* Charles Reagan Wilson and Harry S. Stout, and Randall M. Miller eds., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 397.

⁴⁹⁷ William W. Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America*, (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1942), 126.

⁴⁹⁸ Sweet, “Nineteenth Century Evangelicalism,” 895.

Although they were burdened with the current state of affairs of society, they did not aim to convert society. As they were students of Scripture, they were also students of the times, which allowed them to craft their methodologies accordingly for the conversion of the individual who lived in those churches and cultures, and although many revivals are known for their emotionalism, the key players used in these greater resurgences tended to avoid the emotionalism and were able to promote a sense of ecumenicity that allowed the movement(s) to transcend traditional and previously limiting denominational, demographic, and geographical boundaries.

Indeed, there has been a vast growth of the non-religious in the United States in the past decade. One potential factor is just when a certain critical mass is obtained being unaffiliated becomes a legitimized identity that is no longer taboo and has become socially normalized. Although the decline in Evangelical affiliation has accelerated in recent years, hope is not lost for a resurgence in the near future as Brauer believes, “Even if the conditions that enable religious decline remain (making decline inevitable), religious revivals may effectively undo decades of slow decline.”⁴⁹⁹ Adding, “until we understand the nature of the water heater and the person turning on the faucet, we are left with significant unknowns about how long the bath will remain comfortable.”

As with the importance of religious socialization in familial structures for the transmitting of religious values and increasing probability of affiliation, the principle holds true for political affiliation as well. Wuthnow confirms the political socialization power of congregations by arguing, “One reason why religious conservatives are, in fact, conservatives rather than moderates is simply that they participate in congregations that provide affirming plausibility

⁴⁹⁹ Brauer, “The Surprising Predictable Decline of Religion in the United States,” 19.

structures.”⁵⁰⁰ The current religious climate highlight these affirming plausibility structures making it easier, or perhaps more comfortable, for many who would have in previous generations to self-identify as a None. On the contrary, congregations that

Individuals do not choose their religious identities as an act of rebellion but more so, perhaps, in a vacuum void previously occupied by religious belief that was certain, most importantly to this study, orthodox Evangelical belief in the authority of Scripture and “Religious orientations are not arbitrary labels that people choose when confronted with a Gallup pollster, but are identities that correspond loosely with stances on the Bible and on contested issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and school prayer.”⁵⁰¹ Rizvi and Hossain confirm that “the single best predictor of church participation turned out to be belief - orthodox Christian belief, and especially the teaching that a person can be saved only through Jesus Christ.”⁵⁰²

Further, the life of the mind was never ignored and concerted effort was typically always devoted to creating or substantiating institutions, schools, etc. that provided academic opportunity to sharpen the intellect for a more ardent delivery of the gospel and theology. Elton Trueblood articulated during the pinnacle of Billy Graham’s evangelistic success that “No vital Christianity is possible unless at least three aspects of it are developed. These are the inner life of devotion, the outer life of service, and the intellectual life of rationality.”⁵⁰³ Evidence of these

⁵⁰⁰ Wuthnow, “Restructuring of American Religion: Further Evidence,” 324.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 325.

⁵⁰² Benton Johnson, Dean R. Hoge, and Donald A. Luidens, “Mainline Churches: The Real Reason for Decline,” *First Things*, 1993.

⁵⁰³ Elton Trueblood, *While it is Day*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 97-98.

three aspects of vital Christianity can be traced in each major period of Evangelical resurgence in American religious history.

The decline in the spiritual vitality, religious interest and affiliation continues as the new century begins to mature. As Roozen illustrated in the 2010 FACTS survey, “Despite bursts of innovation, pockets of vitality, and interesting forays into greater civic participation, American congregations enter the second decade a bit less healthy than they were at the turn of the century.”⁵⁰⁴ This process of declination appears to be increasing in momentum as each year passes. Chapter 4 will provide an analysis of the current state of spirituality in America, specifically as it relates to Evangelical affiliation among each generation. An investigation of current beliefs and possible motivations for disaffiliation for each generational cohort will be provided for identification of any existing common themes. The purpose of discovering any identifiable catalyst(s) for the accelerated growth of the Nones population in America to possibly confirm future Evangelical resurgence is possible.

⁵⁰⁴ David A. Roozen, “A Decade of Change in American Congregations 2000 – 2010,” (Hartford: Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2011), 2, 16.

CHAPTER 4 - THE CURRENT STATE OF AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY

Introduction

Writing in the latter half of the twentieth century, American historian Theodore Roszak explained that the Christian faith in America had become, “socially irrelevant, even if privately engaging.”⁵⁰⁵ While Protestant forms of Christianity have dominated the American culture for more than two centuries, according to some researchers it should be no surprise that there has been a significant shift away from religion as experienced in America during the last two decades.⁵⁰⁶

In a 2016 interview at the Reason Rally,⁵⁰⁷ Executive Director of the Secular Coalition Larry Decker proclaimed with confidence the rapidly increasing influence of the religious Nones in America,

I’m religiously unaffiliated. I think that what we’re seeing is that the - None of the Above community, and the religiously unaffiliated community in this country is growing, larger than any religious demographic. And to me, *that says that we’re winning*, you know. And it’s not a fight against religion, per se. But it’s a fight for the equality for all people in this country to have freedom of religion, and freedom from religion. I personally think that we’re going to turn this into a very strong voting bloc, particularly when we’re connecting with people around values that the secular community shares -

⁵⁰⁵ Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*, (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1973), 412.

⁵⁰⁶ Simon Brauer, “The Surprising Predictable Decline of Religion in the United States,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 2018 0(0): 1-22. See also James E. White, *Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014) where he holds fast to the process of secularization as the primary cause of the rise of the Nones and clearly states since America is becoming more secular, “we should not be surprised at the rise of the Nones - or when their ranks continue to swell.” 48.

⁵⁰⁷ The Reason Rally is an event held during presidential election years. It is “a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to hold large events in celebration of atheist, humanist, and secular identity and to demonstrate the power of the secular voting bloc.” It supports “fact-driven public policy, the value of critical thinking, and the voting power of secular Americans.” With the stated goal of showcasing “the presence and power of the nonreligious voting bloc, and to demand that reason be put at the forefront of our public and political discourse.” See, <https://reasonrally.org/about.html> Accessed August 23, 2019.

the values of freedom, equality, inclusion, and knowledge. And, and you know - they're not just for the secular community. They're American values.⁵⁰⁸

Political scientist, Ryan Burge provides further insight into the historically ascending religious trendline as revealed in General Social Survey⁵⁰⁹ data that the increase is occurring among all generational cohorts where, "A person under the age of 40 is four times more likely to say that they have no religious affiliation today than in 1972. However, the jump in those over 40 is six times as likely."⁵¹⁰ As there has been an increase in those that have self-identified as Evangelical in both age groups described by Burge, the expansion of Evangelicals has been negligible compared to the increase in those who have no religious affiliation. The increase in those identifying as Evangelical has increased from seventeen percent to twenty one percent among those under 40 and seventeen percent to eighteen percent for those over 40 years of age from 1972 to 2018; however, the increase in those identifying with no religion has increased from eight percent to thirty two percent among those under 40 and three percent to seventeen percent for those over 40 years of age in the same amount of time.⁵¹¹ This accelerated population increase now gives religious Nones (twenty three percent) a slightly greater share of the

⁵⁰⁸ Quoted from personal interview with Jerry Johnston, June 4, 2016 Washington D.C. Reason Rally. Larry Decker joined the Secular Coalition as its Executive Director in December 2015. He has spent nearly two decades in Washington, D.C. as a government relations professional in the public, private and nonprofit sectors. Thoroughly a humanitarian, he has secured nearly \$1.5 billion for the global fight against AIDS and global Red Cross relief efforts. He is devoted to creating better lives for humanity.

⁵⁰⁹ Since 1972, the General Social Survey (GSS) "has studied the growing complexity of American society. It is the only full-probability, personal-interview survey designed to monitor changes in both social characteristics and attitudes currently being conducted in the United States." The GSS is the National Opinion Research Center's (NORC) longest running project. "NORC at the University of Chicago is an independent research institution that delivers reliable data and rigorous analysis to guide critical programmatic, business, and policy decisions." See, <https://gss.norc.org/About-The-GSS> Accessed August 23, 2019.

⁵¹⁰ Ryan P. Burge, "Plenty of the 'Nones' Actually Head Back to Church," *Christianity Today*, February 6, 2018.

⁵¹¹ General Social Survey Data Explorer, https://gssdataexplorer.norc.org/trends/Religion%20&%20Spirituality?measure=relig_rec

American population as Evangelicals (twenty two and a half percent) and Catholics.⁵¹² The population of Nones has now surpassed Evangelicals in size from the Pew Research Center Religious Landscape survey conducted in 2014 where over twenty five percent of the population identified as Evangelical and only twenty two percent identified as None.⁵¹³

The American Family Survey reports the highest number of Nones at thirty five percent of Americans and the number is even more staggering among the Millennial cohort at forty four percent with the Generation X cohort nearly as large at forty three percent.⁵¹⁴ The data are providing a clear illustration of Decker's declaration that the Nones are beginning to "win" in redefining the American religious landscape at the detriment of Evangelicalism. In examining only a one year span, Brauer is able to illustrate the stability of the moderately religious population⁵¹⁵, but the decline of the highly religious and corresponding growth of those that do not consider themselves to be religious.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹² Neil Monahan and Saeed Ahmed, "There are now as many Americans who claim no religion as there are evangelicals and Catholics, a survey finds," CNN, April 26, 2019. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/13/us/no-religion-largest-group-first-time-usa-trnd/index.html> Summarizing Ryan P. Burge's analysis of 2018 General Social Survey data available found in, https://gssdataexplorer.norc.umd.edu/pages/show?page=gss%2Fhelp_variables

⁵¹³ Pew Research Center, "America's Changing Religious Landscape," May 12, 2015.

⁵¹⁴ American Family Survey, *Deseret News* and *The Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy*.

⁵¹⁵ Brauer categorized GSS respondents as religious if they met two criteria. "First, they must have reported being at least "Somewhat religious," the third-most-religious response option on a seven-point scale. Second, they must have reported that they attended religious services at least once per month. I categorized respondents as secular if they met three criteria. First, they must have reported being no more than "Somewhat nonreligious," the third-least-religious response option on a seven-point scale. Second, they must have reported that they attended religious services several times a year or less frequently. Finally, they must have reported that they prayed less frequently than once a week. The remaining respondents were categorized as 'fuzzy.'" Simon Brauer, "The Surprising Predictable Decline of Religion in the United States," 6. See also, David Voas, "The rise and fall of fuzzy fidelity in Europe," *European Sociological Review*, 2009 25(2): 161 for a more detailed discussion of "fuzzy" religiosity.

⁵¹⁶ Simon Brauer, "The Surprising Predictable Decline of Religion in the United States," 10-16.

Table 4.1 Stability of the Moderately Religious

Category	2016	2017
Highly Religious	38	37
Moderately Religious	30	30
Not Religious	32	33

The number of Americans who identify as atheist, agnostic, or nothing in particular is now thirty five percent. For Millennials and Generation X, the most common “religion” is no religion at all. The Nones claim forty four percent of the 18–29 age group, and nearly that (forty three percent) among those who are 30–44.⁵¹⁷ The fact that high levels of religiosity are declining even among those that have traditionally been viewed as the most religiously conservative, i.e. Evangelicals, and those that are not identifying with religion are becoming more confident in identifying as such creates a precarious situation for the American church and perhaps a religio-cultural situation that can be celebrated by secularists generally and Nones particularly.

In short, the confidence Americans currently place in religion and the church is at an all-time low since Gallup began polling this survey question in 1973 after the Watergate scandal. Breaking below fifty percent for the first time in 2002 after the Catholic sex scandal news broke, the confidence has continued to plummet to an dismal thirty six percent, lower even than the presidency and United States Supreme Court.⁵¹⁸ One potential factor contributing to the waning

⁵¹⁷ Jana Riess, “Religion declining in importance for many Americans, especially for Millennials,” *Secular Coalition for America*, December 11, 2018. Riess is citing the American Family Survey data in the context of the benefits of an ever-increasingly secular America.

⁵¹⁸ Justin McCarthy, “U.S. Confidence in Organized Religion Remains Low,” *Gallup*, July 8, 2019. https://news.gallup.com/poll/259964/confidence-organized-religion-remains-low.aspx?fbclid=IwAR31_eLwS46yy2bEVwBAUOJSKvLrfXA3kInPdn018Op1G8IOJ6NE3Z0Mez4

confidence in religion provided by a recent Pew Forum study reveals Nones believe religious organizations are too concerned with money and power, rules and politics.⁵¹⁹ Those that have grown up in the church are leaving in droves; even those that have served as prominent speaking and worship leaders of global ministries are publicly renouncing their Christian faith.⁵²⁰

Underlying Reasons for Religious Departure

Religious switching, according to Pew Research, accounted for an estimated twenty three percent increase in growth of the religiously unaffiliated population in America.⁵²¹ However, for those that grew up attending Protestant church(es) during their adolescent years and later left the church, an overwhelming majority indicated they disaffiliated due to “life changes,” typically college or moving away from home, that create resulting in enough distance from the church to show that it was not that integral for their spiritual well-being. Sixty six percent of college-age adults ages 18-22 stop attending church according to the most recent LifeWay “student dropout survey.” The survey respondents were provided with fifty-five options as for indicating the reason they stopped attending church. According to the survey, the results could be grouped into four primary categories:

⁵¹⁹ Pew Research Center, “Nones on the Rise,” October 9, 2012. <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>

⁵²⁰ Both songwriter and worship leader for Hillsong United, Marty Sampson and best-selling Christian author and pastor, Joshua Harris renounced their faith in Christianity in 2019.

⁵²¹ Pew Research Center, “Ranks of unaffiliated are expected to grow due to religious switching,” The Changing Global Religious Landscape, March 31, 2017. https://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/pf_17-04-05_projectionsupdate_switching640px/

Table 4.2 Reasons Young Adults are Dropping out of Church⁵²²

Life Changes: that prevented them from attending	96%
Church/Pastor Related	73%
Religious, Ethical, or Political Beliefs	70%
Youth/Student Ministry	63%

Interestingly, among those aged 18-22 that attended church regularly during high school and continued to do so, though a diminishing group, chose to remain connected to the church because they viewed church as a vital part of their relationship with God.⁵²³ Further, those that did drop out of church after graduating from high school, but later returned to the church primarily did so as a result of parents or family members encouraging them to attend (thirty seven percent).⁵²⁴ Of those that dropped out after graduating high school, only thirty one percent

⁵²² Holly Meyer, "What new LifeWay Research survey says about why young adults are dropping out of church," *Nashville Tennessean*, January 15, 2018. Life Changes included work responsibilities, moving to college that prevented them from attending. Church/Pastor concerns included thirty two percent citing church members being judgmental and twenty nine percent cited a lack of feeling connected. Religious, Ethical, and Political beliefs included twenty five percent disagreeing with the church's political or social stance on issues and twenty two percent admitted to attending only to please someone else in their lives at the time. Youth/Student ministry related concerns twenty three percent cited a lack of connection with the student ministry and only twenty percent cited the students in the ministry were judgmental or hypocritical. See also, Frank L. Pasquale, "Empirical Study and Neglect of Unbelief and Irreligion," in *The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief*, ed. Tom Flynn (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2007), 763-764 where Pasquale explains additional hypothesized factors, "Psychologist Bruce Hunsberger and his colleagues have provided more relevant data in a series of studies of Canadian high school and college students who adopt substantially irreligious stances. They tend to measure low in authoritarianism, high in complexity of thinking, and they exhibit a more gradual process of attitude change that begins earlier in life than among religious converts."

⁵²³ Young Adult Dropout Report 2017, "Church Dropouts: Reasons Young Adults Stay or Go between ages 18-22," *LifeWay Research*, 25. <http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Young-Adult-Church-Dropout-Report-2017.pdf>

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

returned to the church to attend services at least twice a month.⁵²⁵ So, the large majority, nearly seventy percent, that leave church will never return.⁵²⁶

Importantly, those that are leaving are not leaving because of life stage effects.⁵²⁷ In other words, the rapid rise of Nones among Millennials is not simply a result of “that’s what people do in during that stage of life.” Rather, those that are choosing no religion appear to be doing so as a result of generational differences in preferences. It is true that for decades coming-of-age young adults tend to disappear from church during their young adult years, typically in large numbers but many of them have usually found their way back to their childhood faith. This is no longer the case with each subsequent generational cohort. The most recent Gallup data reveals, “The lower rate of church membership among religious millennials appears to be more a product of generational differences than of life-stage effects. In 1998-2000, sixty eight percent of Generation X respondents were church members when they were roughly the same age as today's millennials.”⁵²⁸

Similar to Decker’s proclamation above, the majority (sixty two percent) survey respondents in America believing the global share of religiously unaffiliated will continue to increase in the coming decades, Pew research seems to indicate the contrary. Pew Research Center is able to project that the global unaffiliated population will *decline* in the decades ahead due to the older religiously unaffiliated population in Asia being replaced by a younger, more

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 30.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ Jones, Cox, Cooper, and Lienesch. *Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion— and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back*. Washington D.C.: Public Religion Research Institute September 22, 2019. Accessed January 20, 2019. <https://www.prri.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/PRRI-RNS-Unaffiliated-Report.pdf>

⁵²⁸ Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Last Two Decades,” *Gallup*, April 2019.

religious cohort.⁵²⁹ It is interesting, however, that it is Americans who assume the population of Nones will continue to increase; perhaps a reflection of their own experience with the rapid increase of the religiously unaffiliated in recent years. Further, young adults, currently the fastest growing cohort of Nones, believe the religiously unaffiliated will be the largest religious category by the year 2050.⁵³⁰

Since it is becoming increasingly clear that the population of Nones in America has dramatically increased among all cohorts in the past two decades and the increase shows no sign of slowing, Christianity is growing in the global context and slowing in the American context, and membership and beliefs of traditional Evangelicalism in America as represented by the Southern Baptist Convention is declining, the aim of this chapter is three fold. First, there will be a general examination of the geography and demography of American Nones. This section will speak to the context and any contributions geography provides in determining the religious beliefs, or lack thereof, of American Nones. Additionally, there will be an examination of the religious beliefs and characteristics of four generational cohorts (Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z) for the purpose of revealing in each cohort potential cause(s) that serve as catalyst(s) for the rapid increase in religious unaffiliation with each successive grouping. Second, a general qualifying of popular theories that have been presented as primary stimulants for the abandoning of Evangelical Christianity and the increase of religious switching, which has

⁵²⁹ Pew Research Center, “*Babies born to Muslims will begin to outnumber Christian births by 2035; people with no religion face a birth dearth*,” *The Changing Global Religious Landscape*, April 5, 2017. <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/#what-americans-believe-and-expect-about-the-global-size-of-religious-groups>

⁵³⁰ Pew Research Center, “*Young adults and the religiously unaffiliated among most likely to think people with no religion will be the largest group in 2050*,” *The Changing Global Religious Landscape*, April 4, 2017. https://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/pf-04-05-2017_-projectionsupdate-00-041/

resulted in an ever-increasing population of Americans who choose to refuse to identify with any religion. Finally, an examination of the Evangelical Church in America, specifically data from the Southern Baptist Convention, as it relates to the loss of Evangelicalism's foothold in American culture and how the failure of the Baby Boomers and Generation X in the American Evangelical Church to religiously socialize (evangelize) the subsequent generation has served as the primary catalyst for the rise of Nones and the decreasing membership in American Evangelicalism in general and Southern Baptist Churches specifically.

Southern Baptist Convention membership data will be leveraged due to the Southern Baptist Convention serving as the largest evangelical denomination in America for several decades. It is assumed that Southern Baptist Convention data provides a more reliable representative sample of American Evangelicalism for this study.⁵³¹ This chapter will utilize historical data from the Southern Baptist Convention to serve as a comparison between the religious views and characteristics of the religiously unaffiliated and the beliefs and characteristics of the largest Evangelical denomination in America.

Geography of Belief

Geography can play a role in how one chooses to religiously affiliate. Regarding the influence of geography, Keysar suggests, "The geographic clustering of American non-

⁵³¹ Ryan Burge clarifies why narrowing the data set to the Southern Baptist Convention provides more objectivity compared to examining non-denominational data. The high defection rate among those that identify as non-denominational, "Not only is nondenominational Christianity among the largest affiliations, it also saw the highest rates of defection...Nondenominational Protestants were more likely than Protestants in other traditions to shift their identity during the four-year period (CCES data). Around 24 percent of those who claimed a nondenominational affiliation in 2010 switched—about double the volatility among Baptists and Methodists (12% and 12.9% respectively) and nearly three times that of Lutherans and Episcopalians (both at 8.6%) during the same time period." Ryan P. Burge, "Where Protestants and Catholics Go When They Leave Their Churches," *Christianity Today*, February 20, 2015. See also, Jeffrey M. Jones, "U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades," Gallup, April 18, 2019 "Nondenominational Christians (fifty seven percent) are less likely to belong to a church than those tied to a specific denomination (seventy percent)."

identifiers, non-members and non-believers in the West fits its classification as the “none zone” in the Religion by Region series.”⁵³² Further, and contrary to previous FACT surveys that showed that newer rural developments produced the most religious growth, the most recent survey conducted in 2010⁵³³ indicated that those congregations located near or in cities, regardless of geographical region, now experience the most growth; however, as far as the most spiritually fertile national geographic region, the South, from Maryland to Texas, continues to produce the most growth.⁵³⁴ Nonetheless, even the South is not immune to the declining inclination to share ones faith where from 2005 to 2015 those considered born-again residing in the South witnessed a twenty eight point decrease in those that share their faith with others.⁵³⁵ Further, the South also is experiencing an exponential increase in the number of Nones.⁵³⁶ David

⁵³² Ariela Keysar, “Shifts Along the American Religious-Secular Spectrum,” *Secularism and Nonreligion*, 2014 3: 1, 4.

See also, Patricia O. and Mark Silk eds., *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: The None Zone*, (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004).

⁵³³ FACTs on Growth: 2010 is based on the Faith Communities Today 2010 Survey of U.S. Congregations (FACT 2010). FACT 2010 is a key informant survey of American congregations. It is the fourth in a series of national congregational surveys that began in 2000. The FACT 2010 sample included 11,077 congregations and is broadly representative of US congregations. The sample is a composite of 26 separate surveys. The total number of congregations was reduced to 7,403 and then weighted. The result was a dataset with nearly twenty four percent (23.8%) Mainline congregations, fifty five percent Conservative Protestant and Black congregations, just over six percent (6.4%) Roman Catholic and Orthodox congregations, just over eleven percent (11.2%) Other Christian congregations, and nearly four percent (3.6%) Non-Christian congregations.

⁵³⁴ C. Kirk Hadaway, “Facts on Growth: 2010,” *Hartford Institute for Religion Research*, (Hartford: Hartford Seminary, 2010), 20-21.

⁵³⁵ George Barna, *America at the Crossroads: Explosive trends shaping America’s future and what you can do about it*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 34.

⁵³⁶ Jones, Cox, Cooper, and Lienesch. “Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion— and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back,” 14-15. Unattached believers, those Nones who claim religion is still important in their lives, live in the south with over half being women. <https://www.prii.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/PRRI-RNS-Unaffiliated-Report.pdf>

Roozen, Director of Hartford Seminary's Hartford Institute for Religion Research outlines how it is more than location that now determines the likelihood of influence for a congregation,

Location, Location, Location used to be the kind way that researchers described the extent to which the growth or decline of American congregations was captive to the demographic changes going on in their immediate neighborhoods...in today's world, growth and decline are primarily dependent upon a congregation's internal culture, program and leadership, and therefore a congregation's own ability to change and adapt.⁵³⁷

Though there are pockets containing higher rates of the religiously unaffiliated, largely the numbers are increasing in every geographical region in America even in the South which has typically been perceived as a geographical bastion of religious conservatism.

Demography of Belief

Attempting to generalize the religiously unaffiliated in America falls outside the scope of this project. Julia Duin's research concludes that "men and singles are the largest demographic among the unchurched." Although, "unchurched" does not necessarily correlate to religiously unaffiliated. Duin goes on to provide data showing an emerging classifiable group, working moms, which is about to join those two demographics of men and singles.⁵³⁸ Additionally, there are other facts such as sexual orientation that can increase the likelihood of identifying as a None. Students whose sexual orientation is Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, or Other were more than twice as likely to be Atheist, Agnostic, or None, compared to heterosexual students (57 percent versus 27 percent).⁵³⁹ Further, research from the Public Religion Research Institute

⁵³⁷ David Roozen, "Facts on Growth: 2010, If congregations can change, they can grow," <https://faithcommunitiestoday.org/facts-on-growth-2010/>

⁵³⁸ Julia Duin, *Quitting Church*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 23.

⁵³⁹ Kevin Eagan, Ellen Bara Stolzenberg, Abigail K. Bates, Melissa C. Aragon, Maria Ramirez Suchard, and Cecilia Rios-Aguilar, *The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2015*, "Higher Education Research Institute, (Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, 2016).

reveals that among those who left their childhood religion, women are twice as likely as men to say negative religious teachings about or treatment of gay and lesbian individuals was a major reason they chose to leave their religion (forty percent vs. twenty percent, respectively). Women are also about twice as likely as men to cite the clergy sexual-abuse scandal as an important reason they left their childhood faith (twenty six percent vs. thirteen percent, respectively).⁵⁴⁰

Moving beyond gender and identity demography, Voas and Chaves suggest it is generational replacement that has contributed significantly to the religious decline as they say it “is largely the result of more-religious older generations being replaced by less-religious younger generations.”⁵⁴¹ However, the rate of growth of the Nones population is compounded by the fact that each generation is doing less and less to religiously socialize or disciple the next where now in America, “with each generation, irreligious socialization will increasingly fuel the growth among religious Nones more so than disaffiliation.”⁵⁴² Therefore, It is necessary to provide a survey of the four most prominent generational cohorts in America. Generation Z, Millennials, Generation X, and the Baby Boomer generation, which comprise the majority of the American population and are of age to make influential decisions, many are of age to have families, and contribute to society.

⁵⁴⁰ Jones, Cox, Cooper, and Lienesch. “Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion— and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back,” 6.

⁵⁴¹ David Voas and Mark Chaves, “Even Intense Religiosity is Declining in the United States,” *Sociological Sciences* 5 November 15, 2015, 702.

⁵⁴² Joel Theissen and Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, “Becoming a Religious None: Irreligious Socialization and Disaffiliation,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, (2017) 56(1): 79.

Generation Z

Although the General Social Survey only provides data on those over eighteen years of age America's youngest cohort, Generation Z, typically classified as those born after 1996⁵⁴³, will be briefly discussed here since valuable insight can still be ascertained regarding the religious preferences of America's youngest cohort. An overwhelming forty percent of young adults aged eighteen to twenty two are religiously unaffiliated and only a little over fourteen percent identify as Evangelical which fell to third behind Catholicism (sixteen percent).⁵⁴⁴ Further, and perhaps most alarmingly, Generation Z has deprioritized family placing personal achievement, even hobbies and pastimes, above their value of family heritage as influencing their sense of self. Falling to fourth, tying with the prioritization of religion, among the youngest generation, the influence of family was the top priority among all other preceding generations. Similarly, and perhaps the catalyst for this is the family's decreasing prioritization of religion with each subsequent generation.⁵⁴⁵

Perhaps one of the most alarming symptoms of decreasing levels of religiosity among the youngest cohort is the drastic increase in mental health issues experienced by this generation. In explaining that, "as a proxy of the social aspects of religion, attendance is one of the primary reasons for better health and well-being among the religious,"⁵⁴⁶ Fenelon and Danielsen speak to

⁵⁴³ See Michael Dimock, "Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins," Pew Research Center, January 19, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/> Similarly defined by the American Marketing Association.

⁵⁴⁴ Cooperative Congressional Election Study, Brian Schaffner; Stephen Ansolabehere; Sam Luks, 2019, "CCES Common Content, 2018", <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/ZSBZ7K>, Harvard Dataverse, V1. The data includes a nationally representative sample of 60,000 American adults.

⁵⁴⁵ David Kinnaman, "Gen Z: Your questions answered," *Barna Research Group*, February 6, 2018. <https://www.barna.com/research/gen-z-questions-answered/>

⁵⁴⁶ Andrew Fenelon and Sabrina Danielsen, "Leaving my religion: Understanding the relationship between religious disaffiliation, health, and well-being," *Social Science Research* 57 (2016), 55, 50.

the positive mental health benefits of regular religious service attendance illustrates the correlation between drastically lower rates of religious service attendance among the youngest generations and the dramatic rise in mental health issues.

Evidence of this correlation is shown among members of Generation Z who are the least likely to report "excellent or very good" mental health. Generation Z is significantly more likely to report their mental health as fair or poor, with twenty seven percent saying this is the case. Millennials (fifteen percent) and Gen Xers (thirteen percent) have similar numbers reporting fair or poor mental health, while fewer than one in ten Boomers (seven percent) and older adults (five percent) consider their mental health fair or poor.⁵⁴⁷ When it comes to specific mental health issues, adult Gen Zs are more likely than other generations to report they have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder (eighteen percent) and more likely than all other generations to report they have been diagnosed with depression (twenty three percent). While those in Generation X (fifteen percent), Millennials (fourteen percent) and Boomers (twelve percent) are diagnosed. Recent research confirms what college mental health professionals and administrators have noticed over the past few decades: there is a mental health crisis taking place on college campuses.⁵⁴⁸ Growing numbers of students arrive on campus with histories of significant mental health challenges, and higher proportions of college students report taking

⁵⁴⁷ American Psychological Association, *Stress in America: Generation Z. Stress in America Survey*, October 2018.

⁵⁴⁸ JB Hunt, D. Eisenberg, L. Lu, M. Gathright, "Racial/ethnic disparities in mental health care utilization among U.S. college students: Applying the institution of medicine definition of health care disparities," *Academic Psychiatry*, 2015;39:520-526.

psychiatric medications than ever before.⁵⁴⁹ As those in Generation Z show the lowest levels of religious service attendance they are reporting the highest number of mental health issues.

Millennials

There are varying opinions regarding a definitive date range for Millennials. This study employs the parameters used by Pew Research Center where Pew Research Center decided in 2018 to use 1996 as the last birth year for Millennials for their future work. Anyone born between 1981 and 1996 (ages 23 to 38 in 2019) is considered a Millennial, and anyone born from 1997 onward is part of a new generation. Gallup provides data showing that the None population is more than one in three Millennials with thirty three percent reporting no religious affiliation in 2019.⁵⁵⁰ Some researchers have referred to Millennials as being “spiritually confused” largely as a result of “the guidance (or lack thereof) provided by religiously unaffiliated Baby Boomer parents on religion and spirituality.”⁵⁵¹ For this cohort, church membership is becoming much less important than previous generations with “just forty two percent of millennials are members of churches.”⁵⁵² With only twenty two percent of Millennials holding that none of the primary, traditionally held religious texts qualify as a sacred text ⁵⁵³ it is clear that the belief in the inerrancy of Scripture is in sharp decline.

⁵⁴⁹ Kay J. Schwartz V, “The crisis in college and university mental health,” *Psychiatric Times* (2009) 26(10):32.

⁵⁵⁰ Jeffrey M. Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades,” *Gallup*, April 18, 2019.

⁵⁵¹ Samantha A. Bahan, “The Spirituality of Atheist and “No Religion” Individuals in the Millennial Generation: Developing New Research Approaches for a New Form of Spirituality,” *The Arbutus Review*, Fall 2015 Vol. 6, No. 1, 67.

⁵⁵² Jeffrey M. Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades,” *Gallup*, April 18, 2019.

⁵⁵³ Barna Group “The Bible in America: 6-Year Trends,” June 15, 2016, <https://www.barna.com/research/the-bible-in-america-6-year-trends/> Accessed January 16, 2019.

It was the parenting style of the Baby Boomer cohort provided a developmental environment that provided children more freedom of choice. Explaining this new parental encouragement of choice, Bibby, Russell, and Rolheiser show that “pluralism, equality, diversity, and individual freedom were values woven into the parenting practices of many Baby Boomers who, unlike their own parents, were less inclined to expose and involve their children in religious traditions and faiths.”⁵⁵⁴ Consequently, “many Millennials received passive guidance from parents, who actively chose to allow their children to independently explore religion and spirituality.”⁵⁵⁵ This accurately mirrors Thiessen’s and Wilkins-LaFlamme’s research that concludes the four primary factors serving as the most significant catalysts for the two youngest generations in choosing to not identify with a religion being 1) Parents give choices to children (whether to attend religious services), 2) Intellectual Disagreements (Unanswered questions, compatibility of faith/science, etc.), 3) Social Influences, and 4) Life Transitions.⁵⁵⁶ The primary influencing agent became parents imparting autonomy at an early age which showed to be detrimental to the child’s spiritual development and the vitality of the church as “this emphasis on autonomy and choice gives young people, for example, the option of not attending church.”⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁴ For parallels present in Canadian Millennials see, Bibby, R. W., Russell, S., & Rolheiser, R., *The emerging millennials: How Canada’s newest generation is responding to change and choice*, (Lethbridge: Project Canada Books, 2009).

⁵⁵⁵ Bahan, “The Spirituality of Atheist and “No Religion” Individuals in the Millennial Generation: Developing New Research Approaches for a New Form of Spirituality,” 67.

⁵⁵⁶ Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme, “Becoming a Religious None: Irreligious Socialization and Disaffiliation,” 74-77.

⁵⁵⁷ David Voas, ‘Explaining Change over Time in Religious Involvement’, in *Religion and Youth*, eds. Sylvia Collins-Mayo and Pink Dandelion (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 29.

This created a cultural context where, “religious affiliation is now a matter of private choice”⁵⁵⁸ confirming that these identified causes reaffirm the critical role parents play in passing on religious faith leading Ed Stetzer to state forthrightly,

There is no easy way to say it, but it must be said. Parents and churches are not passing on a robust Christian faith and an accompanying commitment to the church. We can take some solace in the fact that many do eventually return. But Christian parents and churches need to ask the hard question, “What is it about our faith commitment that does not find root in the lives of our children?”⁵⁵⁹

The “roots” as Stetzer suggests, are what is missing in the lives of the youngest cohorts and which is allowing them to spiritually drift as they mature. To this, Smith and Snell posit, “Little evidence supports the idea that emerging adults who decline in regular external religious practice nonetheless retain over time high levels of internal religious faith.”⁵⁶⁰ Leading them to conclude that the case is “quite the contrary.”⁵⁶¹ McConnell argues, that thirty five percent of those that leave the church eventually find their way back to the church. However, this reveals that the overwhelming majority, approximately sixty five percent or more, will not return.⁵⁶² This data magnifies Mohler’s emphasis on the necessity of parents intentionally discipling their children while they are young by concluding, “There is no question that children raised within

⁵⁵⁸ Erik van Ingen and Nienke Moor, “Explanations of changes in church attendance between 1970 and 2009,” *Social Science Research* 52 (2015) 560.

⁵⁵⁹ Ed Stetzer, *Lost and Found*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2009), 1.

⁵⁶⁰ Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 252.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid. 252.

⁵⁶² Scott McConnell, “LifeWay Research Finds Reasons 18-22 Year Olds Drop Out of Church,” August 7, 2007.

Christian homes by Christian parents are most likely to make their own profession of faith and continue church participation into adulthood,”⁵⁶³

Hope is not lost on the Millennials, however. Social scientist, Robert Putnam provides a glint of confident hope that these will be the individuals who will lead the way in a positive cultural revolution that is not so individualistic but more civil and interdependent upon one another. And, it is religion, he says, that is the best vehicle for this generation to create a resurgence Putnam states, “I actually think it’s possible that the millennials will lead a renewal of civil society. There’s a decent chance we’re on the verge of a major change in American society...And religion, he said, could very well be a part of that.” ⁵⁶⁴

Generation X

Pew defines Generation X as those born between 1965 and 1980.⁵⁶⁵ A comparison of the 1990 and 2008 American Religious Identification Surveys⁵⁶⁶ indicated that “Generation X became more secular and also less Christian (eighty five percent in 1990 v. seventy five percent in 2008) as it aged and grew in size.”⁵⁶⁷ Importantly, the number of Nones grew among

⁵⁶³ Albert Mohler, “The Future of the Southern Baptist Convention: The Numbers Don’t Add Up,” Albert Mohler, May 31, 2019. <https://albertmohler.com/2019/05/31/the-future-of-the-southern-baptist-convention-the-numbers-dont-add-up>

⁵⁶⁴ Robert Putnam in an interview with Bob Smietana and Aysha Khan, “Gallup: Number of Americans who belong to a church or house of worship plummets,” *Religion News Service*, April 18, 2019. See also Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

⁵⁶⁵ Pew Research Center, “Generations and Age,” <https://www.pewresearch.org/topics/generations-and-age/>

⁵⁶⁶ The surveys were conducted in 1990 and again in 2008, highlighting trends over an 18-year period. The 1990 ARIS involved 113,723 respondents, including 16,959 adults between the ages of 18 and 25 years. The 2008 ARIS had an overall sample size of 54,461, with 6,407 respondents between the ages of 36 and 43 years. Full explanation of the ARIS methodology can be found at <https://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/about-aris/methodology/>

⁵⁶⁷ Barry A. Kosmin and Juhem Navarro-River, “The Transformation of Generation X: Shifts in Religious and Political Self-Identification, 1990-2008,” (Hartford: Trinity College, 2008), 4.

Generation X during the same time period from eleven to sixteen percent.⁵⁶⁸ In general, Generation X experienced significant growth due to immigration, increasing its overall population from twenty nine million to thirty four million between 1990 and 2008.⁵⁶⁹ This growth from immigration was primarily due to immigration from Latin America, a point worth noting as the significance is seen in the strikingly low number of first and second generation immigrants in the Southern Baptist Convention.⁵⁷⁰ Regarding immigration, according to 2007 and 2014 Pew survey data the overwhelming majority of the religiously unaffiliated population is third generation or greater immigrant. With this population holding relatively steady in the seven-year period at eighty percent in 2007 vs seventy five percent in 2014.⁵⁷¹

The data make it clear that Generation X experienced a significant secularizing effect and it is necessary to determine whether this was a result of more individuals from this cohort pursuing higher education with fifty seven percent having completed some college or completed

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., 1.

⁵⁷⁰ For immigrant status among members of the Southern Baptist Convention see, Pew Research Center, “Members of the Southern Baptist Convention,” *Religious Landscape Study, 2014*. Each successive generational cohort is becoming increasingly multi-racial. David Kinnaman suggests that the church is a more important consideration for minorities than whites in among the youngest generation where, “African American and Hispanic teens are more likely to choose (from a number of options) church-themed activities or icons that have a more communal feel and greater diversity as opposed to white teens.”# Additionally, it is not only that the youngest cohort is more racially diverse with church related activities being more important but church attendance and prayer is more common among younger minorities as well as Burge points out, “Recent evangelical immigrants to the United States have higher levels of prayer and church attendance than Evangelicals who have been living in the U.S. for generations.” See, David Kinnaman, “Gen Z: Your questions answered,” Barna Research Group, February 6, 2018. <https://www.barna.com/research/gen-z-questions-answered/> See also, Ryan P. Burge, “A Deeper Look at Immigration & Potential Targets of the ICE Raids,” *Christianity Today*, July 14, 2019.

⁵⁷¹ Pew Research Center, “The Unaffiliated,” *The Religious Landscape Study, 2014.*” <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/unaffiliated-religious-nones/>

a bachelor's degree or higher.⁵⁷² In addressing the assumed secularizing effect of higher education, Kosmin explains that the assumption does not hold true for Generation X; "Secular members of Generation X are just as likely as religious members of Generation X to have a college education. Moreover, members of Generation X with a college degree are no more likely to identify as Nones than those without college degrees. Thus, education was not a factor in secularization among Generation X in 1990 or 2008."⁵⁷³

Brooke Hempell, senior vice president of research for Barna remarked,

What stood out most to us was how stark the shift was between the Boomer and Gen-Xer generations...We expected Millennials to be most influenced by other worldviews, but the most dramatic increase in support for these ideals occurs with the generation *before* them. It's no surprise, then, that the impact we see today in our social fabric is so pervasive, given that these ideas have been taking root for two generations.⁵⁷⁴

So, it was not necessarily those in Generation X that were secularized through the process of pursuing higher education but rather they were conditioned by the generation before them; their parents. Confirming the hypothesis that preceding generation(s) socialization had a great effect on the religiosity of the succeeding generation is confirmed by Kosmin and Navarro-River's analysis,

Identification with religion declined among Generation X as they aged, particularly among men, which suggests that the secularization of Americans is not just about young people from the Millennial Generation abandoning religion because it has become too

⁵⁷² Kristen Bialik and Richard Fry, "Millennial life: How young adulthood today compares with prior generations," Pew Research Center, February 14, 2019. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/essay/millennial-life-how-young-adulthood-today-compares-with-prior-generations/>

⁵⁷³ Kosmin and Navarro-River, "The Transformation of Generation X: Shifts in Religious and Political Self-Identification, 1990-2008," 8.

⁵⁷⁴ David Kinnaman, "Competing Worldviews Influence Today's Christians," *Barna Research Group*, May 9, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/competing-worldviews-influence-todays-christians/>

politicized. It is an on-going and wider process that involves other generations in American society, particularly Generation X.⁵⁷⁵

Similarly, to general fertility estimates of the religiously affiliated, those in Generation X “who self-identified with the Christian traditions have more children and are more likely to be married than are Nones or Other Religions.”⁵⁷⁶ Nonetheless, the current trend of lower fertility and marriage rates can find its origin among those in Generation X.⁵⁷⁷ Following the trends of the generations that came before them, it could have been assumed that Generation X would have married, had children, and identified with religion as they aged but this has not been the case. Those in Generation X that are now having children are raising those children in less religious environments than preceding generations which will most assuredly serve as a continued catalyst for the declining American Evangelicalism in general and the rapid increase of Nones specifically.

Those in Generation X experienced a new cultural development that began in the home initiated by their parents of the Baby Boomer Generation. Generation X children were afforded more autonomy of choice and as they aged, they began making decisions like no generation before them. Speaking to the surprise of the effects the home environment had on this generation Kosmin stated, “Many in this generation of Americans have abandoned their religious roots and political affiliations in adulthood. Historically and sociologically, that’s an unexpected

⁵⁷⁵ Kosmin and Navarro-River, “The Transformation of Generation X: Shifts in Religious and Political Self-Identification, 1990-2008,” 12. See also, Michelle Boorstein, “Huge Religion Survey: Gen X-ers less Christian, Less Republican,” *Washington Post*, May 31, 2012.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ See, Michael Hout, Andrew Greeley, and Melissa J. Wilde, “The demographic imperative in religious change in the United States,” *American Journal of Sociology* (2001) 107(2):468–500, For the importance of fertility rates and their influence on religious change.

development.”⁵⁷⁸ These changes, “religious, social, and political,” report Kosmin and Navarro-River, are often first evident and most pronounced among the youngest cohort of American adults, comparing responses between 1990 and 2008 is useful for highlighting social change.”⁵⁷⁹

Baby Boomers

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, “By 2029, when all of the Baby Boomers will be 65 years and over, more than 20 percent of the total U.S. population will be over the age of 65.”⁵⁸⁰ Interestingly, even at its eventual largest number, the entire population of Baby Boomers is smaller than the current population of Nones, which is continuing to increase year over year; however, according to the Census Bureau, “By 2056, the population 65 years and over is projected to become larger than the population under 18 years.”⁵⁸¹ This means the Millennial and Gen Z cohorts have and will continue to have significant generational influence due to their large population size.

While surveys indicate a seismic shift away from identifying with religion among the Millennial generation, these same data suggest that it was the Baby Boomer generation where the slide began.

Generally, cohorts experience an increase in religiosity later in life. A reason for this increased attention to religious thought and activity is proposed by Lars Tornstam as

⁵⁷⁸ Barry Kosmin quoted in, “Generation X Becoming Less Christian, Less Republican,” *Trinity College*, May 31, 2012. <https://www.trincoll.edu/NewsEvents/NewsArticles/pages/Generation-X-Becoming-Less-Christian-Republican.aspx>

⁵⁷⁹ Kosmin and Navarro-River, “The Transformation of Generation X: Shifts in Religious and Political Self-Identification, 1990-2008,” i.

⁵⁸⁰ Sandra L. Colby and Jennifer M. Ortman, “The Baby Boom Cohort in the United States: 2012 to 2060: Population Estimates and Projections,” *U.S. Census Bureau*, May 2014.

⁵⁸¹ The author of this project is considered a Millennial by Pew’s definition and will be seventy-five years old in 2056.

“gerotranscendence” which suggests older individuals “experience a shift in meta-perspective from a midlife materialistic and rational vision, to a more cosmic and transcendent one, accompanied by an increase in life satisfaction.”⁵⁸²

Baby boomers are particularly disconnected from religion. Americans born in the later 1940s and in the 1950s—the heart of the baby boom generation—are particularly unlikely to hold literal views of the Bible. The across-cohort decline in attendance begins among baby boom cohorts. Additionally, the probability of weekly prayer is lowest among baby boom cohorts. In their analysis of religious disaffiliation, Hout and Fischer propose a 1960s legacy effect⁵⁸³ that leads to religious decline. The above results suggest that the 1960s legacy effect may be specific to those who matured in and around the 1960s, rather than enduring across later cohorts.⁵⁸⁴

Wuthnow is able to provide a succinct definition of what religious socialization aims to accomplish in stating, “the effects of religious socialization is that more frequent religious activity as a child leads to more frequent religious activity as an adult, which, in turn, is associated with religious conservatism.”⁵⁸⁵ But this has not been the case among the Baby Boomer generation.

The religiosity of Boomers has been found to be relatively stable compared to previous generations where levels of religiosity increased in the twilight years of one's life. The study by Silverstein and Bengtson found that the majority (56%) of Boomers reported steady levels of religiosity over the past decade, only twenty one percent indicated an increase in religiosity with

⁵⁸² Lars Tornstam, *Gerotranscendence: A developmental theory of positive aging*, (New York: Springer Publishing, 2005), 42.

⁵⁸³ Michael Hout, and Claude S. Fischer, “Why more Americans have no religious preference: politics and generations,” *American Sociological Review* (2002) 67, 165–190.

⁵⁸⁴ Philip Schwadel, “Age, period, and cohort effects on religious activities and beliefs,” *Social Science Research* 40 (2011), 190-191.

⁵⁸⁵ Wuthnow, “Restructuring American Religion: Further Evidence,” 313.

sixty four percent reporting a belief in God with high level of certainty.⁵⁸⁶ Of those that reported an increase in spirituality, they indicated a concern for the religious development of their children or grandchildren as a primary catalyst for the increased interest.⁵⁸⁷

Additionally, Sherkat found that traditional socialization agents, such as parents and school, were most responsible for the religious beliefs and involvement of Baby-Boomers.⁵⁸⁸ Similar to each subsequent generation, Boomers are no more likely to return to religion or attend church later in life. Generally, the majority of Boomers report stable levels of religiosity later in life. “This may be the last generation to have had such widespread exposure to religion in childhood and to have been active religious consumers in their earlier lives—providing another example of how baby-boomers are a transitional cohort, even now in their later years.”⁵⁸⁹

Why Different Generations choose None (Barriers to Faith)

Silverstein and Bengtson predictive model of religious change among Baby Boomers specifies a direct relationship between early religious involvement and religious change. To this they explain,

Examining the indirect effects of childhood religious attendance, we see that greater religious exposure early in life heightened the risk that religiosity increased over the ten-year period by strengthening cognitive and behavioral religiosity. Similarly, greater early exposure lowered the risk of declining religiosity by strengthening both types of religiosity...Those with greater early exposure were more likely to experience religious decline, implying continued moderation of religious commitment in the transition to later life⁵⁹⁰

⁵⁸⁶ Silverstein and Bengtson, “Return to Religion? Predictors of Religious Change among Baby-Boomers in their Transition to Later Life,” 14.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁸⁸ Daren Sherkat, “Counterculture or continuity? Competing influences on baby boomers’ religious orientations and participation,” *Social Forces*, (1998)76, 1087–1114.

⁵⁸⁹ Silverstein and Bengtson, “Return to Religion? Predictors of Religious Change among Baby-Boomers in their Transition to Later Life,” 20.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., 15-16, 19.

In analyzing age, period, and cohort effects on religion, Schwadel provides insights that suggest “the youngest cohorts are more inclined towards biblical literalism than are the immediately post-World War II cohorts.”⁵⁹¹ He continues that, “While biblical literalism declines somewhat across periods, there appears to be a moderate resurgence in biblical literalism among the youngest birth cohorts.”⁵⁹² Recent survey research indicates sixty one percent of those that identify as Christian agree with ideas rooted in New Spirituality, with fifty four percent resonating with postmodernist views, another thirty six percent accepting ideas associated with Marxism, and twenty nine percent believing ideas based on secularism.⁵⁹³ This further confirms that not only are more individuals choosing to not identify with a religion, those that do choose to identify as Christian are experiencing a dilution in the content of their beliefs.

According to Cooperative Congressional Election Study⁵⁹⁴ data the average age of American Nones is just over forty-three years old, squarely in the Generational X cohort. This is much younger than the average age of nearly fifty-two years of Protestants but still old enough to

⁵⁹¹ Philip Schwadel, “Age, period, and cohort effects on religious activities and beliefs,” *Social Science Research* 40 (2011), 190.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, 187.

⁵⁹³ Barna Research Group, “Competing Worldviews Influence Today’s Christians,” May 9, 2017. <https://www.barna.com/research/competing-worldviews-influence-todays-christians/>

⁵⁹⁴ The Cooperative Congressional Election Study is a national stratified sample survey administered to over 50,000 individuals. YouGov defines the survey cycles around around election cycles in the following way, “The survey consists of two waves in election years. In the pre-election wave, respondents answer two-thirds of the questionnaire. This segment of the survey asks about general political attitudes, various demographic factors, assessment of roll call voting choices, political information, and vote intentions. The pre-election wave is in the field from late September to late October. In the post-election wave, respondents answer the other third of the questionnaire, mostly consisting of items related to the election that just occurred. The post-election wave is administered in November. In non-election years, the survey consists of a single wave conducted in the fall.” See, <https://cces.gov.harvard.edu/>

have children in one of the integral generations discussed above for reversing the trend;⁵⁹⁵ however, as Brauer acknowledges, each cohort could behave differently than their predecessors. Where there exist conditions and factors (cultural, economic, etc.) that serve as a catalyst for changes in levels in religiosity, for example, but once those “mechanisms” are set in motion, Brauer argues, “it is more plausible that mechanisms might start or enable a process that takes on its own trajectory.”⁵⁹⁶ As a result making assumptions regarding how a particular rising cohort will act is difficult.

Qualifying Theories Regarding the Increase In Nones

James White proposes three primary catalysts for the rise of the Nones, 1) Secularization (Christianity is losing its place as the dominant worldview), 2) Privatization (spiritual things are increasingly placed in the private arena), and 3) Pluralization (Individuals are confronted with increased ideologies and faith options - which he attributes to increased immigration).⁵⁹⁷ Secularization and secularization theory needs to be briefly addressed and dismissed as the primary catalyst for the rapid growth of Nones in America. Secularization is generally viewed through the lens of what Swatos and Christiano term the “decline in religion thesis.”⁵⁹⁸ The central thesis of secularization suggests that as a society modernizes there will be a resulting, or

⁵⁹⁵ Brian Schaffner; Stephen Ansolabehere; Sam Luks, Cooperative Congressional Election Study, 2019, "CCES Common Content, 2018", <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/ZSBZ7K>, Harvard Dataverse, V1.

⁵⁹⁶ Brauer, “The Surprising Predictable Decline of Religion in the United States,” 18.

⁵⁹⁷ James E. White, *Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), 49-52.

⁵⁹⁸ William H. Swatos and Kevin J. Christiano, “Secularization theory: the course of a concept,” *Sociology of Religion*, (1999) 60, 215.

corresponding, decrease in religious belief and participation.⁵⁹⁹ This secularization perspective predicts that religious participation and belief decline as societies modernize.

Secularization surely does act as a “solvent” as Stephen Dawson alleged;⁶⁰⁰ however, this project assumes the thorough conclusion of Simon Brauer who suggests that his evaluation of Voas’ data revealed that secularization is certainly at play in America, but the findings that there is a decrease in those who could be considered intensely religious and a corresponding increase in those who are not religious show that,

These findings strengthen the plausibility that a general process of religious decline was at play during much of the 20th century in the United States and Europe. Certainly, these findings fit within secularization theory, and could be used to argue that it was abandoned prematurely. But this would neither be easy nor necessary. It would require a clear specification of what secularization means and what subtheories within the breadth of secularization theory should be retained.⁶⁰¹

Though secularization of American culture is not the primary justification for the growing lack of religious affiliation, there are several other commonly proposed reasons that might provide insight into this phenomenon. Interview data from Thiesen and Wilkins-LaFlamme confirm that “the dynamics within religious institutions are not cited as the main reasons in an individual’s choice to disaffiliate,” nonetheless, “once the decision is made these dynamics can at times reinforce it.”⁶⁰² Across the sociological research, there are several reasons

⁵⁹⁹ See Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); See also, Liliane Voyé, 1995. “From institutional Catholicism to ‘Christian inspiration,’” In: Wade Clark Roof, Jackson W. Carroll, and David A. Roozen, (eds.), *The Post-War Generation and Establishment Religion: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 191–206

⁶⁰⁰ Stephen Dawson, “The Religious Resurgence: Problems and Opportunities for International Relations Theory,” *Nations Under God: The Geopolitics of Faith in the Twenty-First Century*, Luke M. Herrington, Alasdair McKay, and Jeffrey Haynes (eds.), (Bristol: E-International Relations, 2015), 24.

⁶⁰¹ Brauer, “The Surprising Predictable Decline of Religion in the United States,” 17.

⁶⁰² Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme, “Becoming a Religious None: Irreligious Socialization and Disaffiliation,” 78.

suggested as serving as stimulants in creating a cultural environment that has made it more acceptable to identify as a None and to disaffiliate from the religion of their family. With at least one in four internet users using the internet to search for and obtain religious or spiritual information,⁶⁰³ Nick Fish, president of American Atheists suggests one contributing factor is that the ever-accessible internet has fueled both question asking and access to answers without the need to test the validity of the sources.⁶⁰⁴ With over half of what Pew calls “Religion Surfers” seeking information regarding other religions but the overwhelming majority (seventy four percent) are very active in their current faith and attend a religious service at least once per week.⁶⁰⁵ This suggests that the internet is not significantly contributing to the rise of Nones.

LGBTQ Equality

A third of Nones polled by the Public Religion Research Institute religion stated it was their “experience of negative religious teachings about or treatment of gay and lesbian people” that influenced them to leave them to leave their childhood religion.⁶⁰⁶ While there has been an overall increase in American Christians who accept homosexuality as normal and believe it should be accepted,⁶⁰⁷ and an increase in Evangelical Protestants that believe the same, there has

⁶⁰³ Elena Larson, “CyberFaith: How Americans Pursue Religion Online,” *Pew Research Center*, December 23, 2001. <https://www.pewinternet.org/2001/12/23/cyberfaith-how-americans-pursue-religion-online/>

⁶⁰⁴ CNN, “There are now as many Americans who claim no religion as there are evangelicals and Catholics, a survey finds,” April 26, 2019.

⁶⁰⁵ Larson, “CyberFaith: How Americans Pursue Religion Online.”

⁶⁰⁶ Jones, Cox, Cooper, and Lienesch. “Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion— and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back,” *Public Religion Research Institute*, September 22, 2019, 6.

⁶⁰⁷ The number of American Christian that believe homosexuality should be accepted increased ten percent from fifty four percent in 2015 compared to forty four percent in 2007. The number of Evangelical Protestants that believe homosexuality should be accepted increased ten percent from twenty six percent to thirty six percent in the same period. See, Caryle Murphy, “Most U.S. Christian groups grow more accepting of homosexuality,” *Pew Research Center*, December 18, 2015. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/12/18/most-u-s-christian-groups-grow-more-accepting-of-homosexuality/>

been a drastic increase in the number of Southern Baptists who believe homosexuality should be accepted as normal as well. While there was a seven percent increase for the entire Southern Baptist Convention between 2007 and 2014, the increase from thirty five percent in 2007 to fifty three percent in 2014 among those 18-29 years of age is the most significant increase among all cohorts and a sharper increase in the number Nones that believe homosexuality should be accepted.⁶⁰⁸ Similarly, Southern Baptists aged 18-29 are nearly twice as likely to favor same sex marriage than the previous cohort and their parent's cohort.⁶⁰⁹ This data reveals the youngest cohorts in the Southern Baptist Convention are getting much closer to mirroring the beliefs of Nones.⁶¹⁰

Although a third of Nones claim the church's position and teaching regarding homosexuality as being an influence for their unaffiliation, it is not a significant enough of a motive for the continued growth of Nones especially given the increasing number of Evangelical Christians who have become accepting of homosexuality.

Politics

Hout and Fischer examined three possible explanations for the rise of the Nones (those who report no religious affiliation, regardless of their belief or behavior). Their three explanations are secularization, demographics, and politics. They reject the secularization thesis for reasons mentioned above, particularly the persistence of religious belief in America. They

⁶⁰⁸ 18-29 yr. = 53% 30-49 yr = 30 50-64 yr = 29% 65+ cohort = 22% See Pew Research Center, "Members of the Southern Baptist Convention," *Religious Landscape Study*, 2014. <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/southern-baptist-convention/>

⁶⁰⁹ 18-29 yr = 42% 30-49 yr = 24% 50-64 yr = 22% 65+ cohort = 13%

⁶¹⁰ Eighty three percent of Nones believe homosexuality should be accepted. An increase of eight percent from 2007.

additionally reject demographic influence since these cannot account for such a rapid increase in religious unaffiliation. This leads them to conclude politics was the primary factor. The growing detachment from organized religion in their view is associated with a backlash against the political powers of the religious right.”⁶¹¹

According to Pew, the second most common reason given by Nones for their lack of affiliation is the position(s) taken by churches on political issues.⁶¹² Currently, Americans have more confidence in the presidency than in religion or the church.⁶¹³ A peculiar reality given Burge’s analysis that the presidency of Trump may be influencing the declining numbers in American Evangelicalism.⁶¹⁴

Schwartz writing on the politicization of Evangelicalism stated that “...the overarching narrative of postwar (Vietnam) Evangelicalism is growing politicization.”⁶¹⁵ A point that Baker and Smith take up and explain that in responding to,

cultural shifts in morality, sexuality, and gender, the religious right politicized these issues and aligned themselves with the Republican Party. Political reaction against secularism, paradoxically, increased the numbers of the nonreligious, especially among

⁶¹¹ M. Hout and C.S. Fischer, “Americans with ‘No Religion’: Why their numbers are growing,” *Sociological Review*, (2002) 67, 165–90. See also, Ariela Keysar, “Shifts Along the American Religious-Secular Spectrum,” *Secularism and Nonreligion*, (2014) 3: 1, pp. 1-16.

⁶¹² Becka A. Alper, “Why America’s ‘nones’ don’t identify with a religion,” *Pew Research Center*, August 8, 2018. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/08/why-americas-nones-dont-identify-with-a-religion/>

⁶¹³ Justin McCarthy, “U.S. Confidence in Organized Religion Remains Low,” *Gallup* July 8, 2019.

⁶¹⁴ See Burge, “Evangelicals Show No Decline, Despite Trump and Nones,” *Christianity Today*, March 21, 2019 where he suggests, “It is too early to say that these evangelical losses were mainline gains; however, if this trend continues or possibly accelerates in the next two years, it would give some credence to the claim that Trump has led to evangelical defections.”

⁶¹⁵ David R. Swartz, “The Evangelical Left and the Politicization of Evangelicalism,” in *American Evangelicalism: George Marsden and the State of American Religious History*, eds. Darren Dochuk, Thomas S. Kidd, and Kurt W. Peterson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 461.

the nonreligious believers. The secular left has since become a voting bloc that agrees on issues of abortion, same-sex relations, and marriage.⁶¹⁶

Some data does confirm the politicization of religion in general and Evangelicalism in particular is a compelling catalyst for the growth of the Nones.⁶¹⁷ Even though Evangelical's traditional alliance with American politics throughout American history is viewed unfavorably by many, political affiliation is an identifier not a cause of unaffiliation.⁶¹⁸ As such, the political involvement of Evangelicals and the alignment of traditionally biblical aims with political agendas has blurred the ability to distinguish the two. This could be remedied by intentional intellectual training through both the institutions of higher education and the family unit.

Socio-Economic Theories

Socio-economic theories have also been provided by some like van Ingen and Moor. The central thesis in these theories is purports that, "People living in insecure conditions are expected to have a heightened need for religiosity that comforts and reassures them."⁶¹⁹ However, this does not seem to hold true for the American context overall. The most recent economic recession occurred in 2008 and there was no notable increase in religiosity or religious affiliation. In fact, the opposite occurred. Both the number of religious Nones continued to increase and the number of Evangelicals, Southern Baptists specifically, continued to decrease.

⁶¹⁶ Joseph O. Baker and Buster G. Smith, *American Secularism: Cultural Contours of Nonreligious Belief Systems*, (New York: New York University Press, 2015),

⁶¹⁷ Alper, "Why America's 'nones' don't identify with a religion."

⁶¹⁸ See Jana Riess, "Why millennials are really leaving religion (it's not just politics, folks)," *Religion News Service*, June 26, 2018. <https://religionnews.com/2018/06/26/why-millennials-are-really-leaving-religion-its-not-just-politics-folks/>

⁶¹⁹ Erik van Ingen and Nienke Moor, "Explanations of changes in church attendance between 1970 and 2009," *Social Science Research* 52 (2015) 561. See also, Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and politics worldwide*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Exclusive Truth Claims

Furthermore, one might think in a pluralistic, postmodern culture⁶²⁰ that the exclusive truth claims central to Evangelical Christianity could be a deterrent to some individuals, but data suggest this is not the case. Though exclusive claims to truth can be viewed unfavorably by some, it is not enough of a significant factor for those who choose to disaffiliate. However, the further away one moves from the religion they disaffiliated with the more exclusivity became a factor for choosing not to return later in life, after having children, for example.⁶²¹

Higher Education

Evangelicals have long been characterized as anti-intellectual and diligent in insulating believers from the influences of secularism that were thought to be rampant at institutions of higher education. Where high school graduates who were Christian that chose to attend a secular university would have their faith assaulted.⁶²² Church historian, Mark Noll highlighted the irony of the idea of an intellectual Evangelicalism in quipping, the scandal of the Evangelical mind is that there is not much of an Evangelical mind at all.⁶²³

The lacking Evangelical intellectual ethos existed throughout most of the twentieth century which led Richard Hofstadter to identify the “evangelical spirit” as one of the prime

⁶²⁰ See Don Lattin, “‘The Vietnam Years’: How the conflict ripped the nation’s religious fabric,” *Religion News Service*, September 8, 2017 where Lattin affirms “...religious, social, and cultural pluralism are important catalysts for unaffiliation and non-affiliation to occur.” <https://religionnews.com/2017/09/08/the-vietnam-years-how-the-conflict-ripped-the-nations-religious-fabric/> Accessed September 27, 2019.

⁶²¹ Thiessen and LaFlamme, “Becoming a Religious None: Irreligious Socialization and Disaffiliation,” 77.

⁶²² This line of thinking is illustrated and addressed in works such as J. Budziszewski, *How to Stay Christian in College*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1999).

⁶²³ Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 11-12.

sources of American anti-intellectualism. Where a humble ignorance has been a far more noble human quality than a cultivated mind.⁶²⁴ In essence, a dumbing of the Christian mind has occurred to the detriment of the Evangelical church and is dissolving institutions of biblical higher education at an alarming rate providing an ever-decreasing number⁶²⁵ of available (credible) colleges and universities that still integrate a biblical worldview across the curriculum.

So what of the Nones and their perception and levels of educational attainment? The most recent data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study suggest that the “nothing in particular” category have lower levels of formal educational attainment,⁶²⁶ but those individuals that do choose to pursue higher education are more likely to be or become religiously unaffiliated. Those that disaffiliated from religion have higher levels of educational attainment. According to General Social Survey data from 1972 to 2012 over sixty percent had completed at least some college compared to the over fifty percent of those who have never affiliated with religion having only attained a high school education or less.⁶²⁷

However, by examining data from the Youth Parent Socialization Panel Study, Darnell and Sherkat were able to surface evidence suggesting that “fundamentalist beliefs and

⁶²⁴ Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, (New York: Vintage Press, 1962), 55-88.

⁶²⁵ See Bobby Ross, “Closing doors: Small religious colleges struggle for survival,” Religion News Service, November 20, 2017. <https://religionnews.com/2017/11/20/closing-doors-small-religious-colleges-struggle-for-survival/>

⁶²⁶ Brian Schaffner; Stephen Ansolabehere; Sam Luks, Cooperative Congressional Election Study, 2019, “CCES Common Content, 2018”, <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/ZSBZ7K>, Harvard Dataverse, V1. Only twenty seven percent of the “nothing in particular” category have at least a four-year college degree (27.1 percent), which is much lower than the others that contribute to the None population where over half of atheists and nearly forty eight percent of agnostics have at least a bachelor's degree.

⁶²⁷ General Social Survey data (Descriptive statistics of General Social Survey Sample 1973-2012 (N= 34,565) compiled by Fenelon and Danielsen, “Leaving my religion: Understanding the relationship between religious disaffiliation, health, and well-being,” *Social Science Research* 57 (2016), 55.

conservative Protestant affiliation both have significant and substantial negative influences on educational attainment above and beyond social background factors.”⁶²⁸ Where the more religiously conservative the individual the less likely that individual would pursue higher levels of education.⁶²⁹ Additionally, and specifically, those that hold the conservative belief of the inerrancy of Scripture appear to also correlate to lower levels of education attainment and performance.

Biblical inerrancy not only has a significant negative direct effect on educational attainment, but inerrancy also influences two key aspects of the educational attainment process: (1) Believers in the inerrancy of scripture are significantly less likely than other respondents to enroll in college-preparatory courses, and (2) such beliefs have a modest negative estimated effect on grade-point average in high school.⁶³⁰

One Pew study on the most and least educated religious groups in America shows Mainline denominations among the most educated and those that identify with the Southern Baptist Convention ranking twenty-third out of thirty religious groups polled. Only nineteen percent of Southern Baptist reported having a four-year degree (eight percentage points below the general U.S. public) and forty six percent having a high school diploma or less.⁶³¹ This echoes Darnell’s and Sherkat’s affirmation regarding the negative consequences fundamentalist-type beliefs have on educational attainment by concluding their “results have revealed that

⁶²⁸ Alfred Darnell and Darren E. Sherkat, “The impact of Protestant fundamentalism on educational attainment,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (Apr., 1997), pp. 306-315.

⁶²⁹ See, Darnell and Sherkat, “The impact of Protestant fundamentalism on educational attainment,” 310-311 where they summarize “conservative Protestants and Biblical inerrantists have significantly lower educational aspirations than other respondents. Conservative Protestants and Biblical inerrantists are also less likely to have taken college-preparatory courses. Additionally, compared to other respondents both conservative Protestants and inerrantists have significantly lower educational attainment in 1973 and 1982.”

⁶³⁰ Darnell and Sherkat, “The impact of Protestant fundamentalism on educational attainment,” 311.

⁶³¹ Caryle Murphy, “The most and least education U.S. religious groups,” *Pew Research Center*, November 4, 2016. The full sample of more than 35,000 U.S. adults surveyed in the 2014 Religious Landscape Study.

fundamentalist orientations significantly retard educational attainment.”⁶³² They continue regarding the negative correlation between familial religious and denominational affiliation arguing, “Parents’ religious orientations and denominations also influence youths’ educational choices. Youths are less likely to take college preparatory courses if parents subscribe to fundamentalism.”⁶³³ Van Ingen and Moor argue from their research that “not only individual-level but also congregational level educational attainment has a negative effect on biblical literalism. This mean that the erosion of religiosity is self-reinforcing (even the lower educated are affected, because they are surrounded by more highly educated individuals).”⁶³⁴ Similarly Darnell and Sherkat conclude that higher education levels have tended to correlate with a decreased view of inerrancy of Scripture which in turn prevents views of the authority and reliability of Scripture to be passed on to their children. They continue, “In contrast, parents from the South and rural areas are more likely to believe that the Bible is the inerrant word of God.”⁶³⁵

Education and Religious Affiliation

Allan Downey compiled data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program that illustrated “the fraction of “Nones” is higher at universities, thirty six percent, than at four-year colleges, twenty six percent, mostly because more colleges than universities are religiously affiliated.”⁶³⁶ Nonetheless, the number of freshman Nones at four-year colleges has tripled in the

⁶³² Darnell and Sherkat, “The impact of Protestant fundamentalism on educational attainment,” 313.

⁶³³ Ibid., 311.

⁶³⁴ Van Ingen and Moor, 567. See also Samuel Stroope, “Education and religion: Individual, congregational, and cross-level interaction effects on biblical literalism,” *Social Science Research* (2011) 40 (6), 1478– 1493. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2011.05.001>.

⁶³⁵ Darnell and Sherkat, “The impact of Protestant fundamentalism on educational attainment,” 312.

⁶³⁶ Allen Downey, “College Freshmen Are Less Religious Than Ever,” *Scientific American*, May 25, 2017. <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/college-freshmen-are-less-religious-than-ever/>

past thirty years. Not surprisingly, religious colleges are more religious, with only 17 percent Nones.⁶³⁷

Higher education and rigorous learning is not counter-productive to religion in general or Christianity specifically. In examining examples from the global context, Tong provides a counter argument that illustrates Singapore's science-oriented education system and associated 'intellectualization' of the population has actually facilitated a growing number of conversions to Christianity. Moving away from traditional Chinese ritual practices towards the more 'rational' Bible teachings of Christianity reflects a shift 'from an unthinking and passive acceptance of religion' to a religion that is believed to be more 'systematic, logical, and relevant.'⁶³⁸

So, what is the most influential factor contributing to the rapid increase in the number of Americans who are choosing to disaffiliate from religion in general and Evangelical Christianity in particular? When Pew data confirms that the primary reason Nones choose not to affiliate with religion is the questioning of religious teaching⁶³⁹ it is becoming clear that Evangelical families have failed in religiously socializing the next generation. Or, in other words, each generation has become less intentional in discipling their children which has resulted in a decreased certainty regarding doctrine and truth claims.

⁶³⁷ CIRP Freshman Survey: 2018, Higher Education Research Institute & Cooperative Institutional Research Program. <https://heri.ucla.edu/cirp-freshman-survey/> The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) is a national longitudinal study of the American higher education system. It is regarded as the most comprehensive source of information on college students.

⁶³⁸ Chee Kiong Tong, *Rationalizing Religion: Religious Conversion, Revivalism and Competition in Singapore Society*, (Leiden: Brill. 2007).

⁶³⁹ Alper, "Why America's 'nones' don't identify with a religion," <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/08/why-americas-nones-dont-identify-with-a-religion/>

Religious Socialization

According to the 2014 Religious Landscape study the overwhelming majority of Nones are not parents. With seventy four percent of the religiously unaffiliated having no children this is an increase of seven percent from 2007.⁶⁴⁰ On the other hand, the majority of Southern Baptists are married with only a small minority that have never been married, interestingly corresponding with the total number of 18-29 year old members.⁶⁴¹ For those in the church that do have children, they are relying on others for spiritual development. Unfortunately, and to the detriment of American Evangelicalism, Barna argues, “A large majority of church members rely upon their church, rather than their family, to train their children to become spiritually mature.”⁶⁴² In examining instances where children actually developed into mature believers Barna found that there had been a symbiotic (not parasitic or consumeristic) relationship between parents and the church that facilitated the spiritual maturation of youth,

In situations where children became mature Christians we usually found a symbiotic partnership between their parents and their church,...The church encouraged parents to prioritize the spiritual development of their children and worked hard to equip them for that challenge. Parents, for their part, raised their children in the context of a faith-based community that provided security, belonging, spiritual and moral education, and accountability. Neither the parents nor the church could have done it alone.⁶⁴³

Barna was writing in 2003. Lamentably, since his empirical exhortation to the church to focus on discipling the next generation Nones have increased by more than one hundred percent

⁶⁴⁰ Pew Research Center, “The Unaffiliated,” *The Religious Landscape Study*, 2014. <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/unaffiliated-religious-nones/>

⁶⁴¹ Pew Research Center, “Members of the Southern Baptist Convention,” *Religious Landscape Study*, 2014. <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/southern-baptist-convention/>

⁶⁴² George Barna, *Revolution*, (Carol Stream: BarnaBooks, 2005), 35.

⁶⁴³ George Barna, *Transforming Your Children into Spiritual Champions*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003).

from approximately fourteen percent in 2000 to over twenty eight percent currently.⁶⁴⁴

Correspondingly, membership in the Southern Baptist Convention churches has decreased by nearly 1.4 million from 2003 to 2018 and baptisms have continued to decrease year over year even though there are more Southern Baptist Churches than ever.⁶⁴⁵ Thom Rainer, President and CEO of LifeWay, expressed regret at the ineffectiveness of the Southern Baptist Convention strategy in hoping new churches would equal more return on evangelistic effort, stating, “It’s heartbreaking to be baptizing fewer people for Christ, even though Southern Baptists have nearly 2,900 more churches than we had a decade ago.”⁶⁴⁶ This decrease in baptisms is not a subtle leak as the more than one hundred twenty thousand fewer baptisms in 2018 than in 2003 clearly depicts a rupture in evangelistic effectiveness. The youngest two generations only comprise approximately thirteen percent of Southern Baptist membership⁶⁴⁷ and approximately seventy percent of them leave the church after graduating high school and do not return.

The stability of the family unit is also important to the success of the religious socialization process. The research of Glass, Sutton, and Fitzgerald found a recurring link between parental divorce, geographic mobility, and changes in religious participation that precipitate religious switching and disaffiliation. They suggest this is particularly true for “Conservative Protestant youth who, overall, come from a more stable religious category.

⁶⁴⁴ Jones, Cox, Cooper, and Lienesch, “Exodus: Why Americans are leaving religion and why they are unlikely to come back,” *Public Religion Research Institute*, (Washington D.C.: PRRI, 2016), 2. Data compiled from General Social Survey, 1974-2012; PRRI Surveys, 2014-2016.

⁶⁴⁵ Data compared from Southern Baptist Convention Annual Church Profile Statistical Summaries for 2003 and 2018.

⁶⁴⁶ Lisa Cannon Green, “Facts and Trends,” *LifeWay*, June 1, 2018.
<https://factsandtrends.net/2018/06/01/worship-attendance-rises-baptisms-decline-in-sbc/>

⁶⁴⁷ Pew Research Center, “Members of the Southern Baptist Convention,” *Religious Landscape Study*, 2014. <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/southern-baptist-convention/>

Disaffiliation from religion, in particular, is characterized by changes in family structure and functioning, such as parental divorce and decreased religious participation, as well as lower involvement in church youth programs.”⁶⁴⁸ They go on to conclude that, “that religious switching is related to changes in social ties and opportunities, which often precede the actual switch.” In other words, the more stable the family environment the more likely it will be that the parents’ faith is successfully transmitted to the child(ren), given the parents are having intentional conversations regarding faith matters.⁶⁴⁹

Brauer clearly illustrates what is occurring in the American religious landscape, “If the pools of parents and peers become less religious, they might instigate further decline in the following cohorts and generations. Finally, national religiosity moderates the effectiveness of parental religiosity, such that initial declines within a religious country might instigate further declines across cohorts.”⁶⁵⁰ Thiessen and Wilkins-LaFlamme continue the case that each generation will continue to become more and more unaffiliated by arguing, “While disaffiliation has (to this point) been an important catalyst for a growing unaffiliated segment, with each generation irreligious socialization will increasingly fuel the growth among religious nones more

⁶⁴⁸ Jennifer L. Glass, April Sutton, and Scott T. Fitzgerald, “Leaving the Faith: How Religious Switching Changes Pathways to Adulthood among Conservative Protestant Youth,” *Social Currents* 2015, Vol. 2(2) 127. For more on the influence of parental divorce and geographical mobility see, Dean R. Hoge, Benton Johnson, and Donald A. Luidens, “Types of Denominational Switching among Protestant Young Adults,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 1995 34:253–8. See also, Richard J. Petts, 2009. “Trajectories of Religious Participation from Adolescence to Young Adulthood,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 2009 48:552–71. For more on the influence of changes in family structure see, Dean R. Hoge and Thomas P. O’Connor, “Denominational Identity from Age Sixteen to Age Thirty-Eight,” *Sociology of Religion* 2004 65:77–85.

⁶⁴⁹ See Mark, *Passing on Faith*, 12, “The security and stability of the parent-child relationship, including the strength of the childhood attachment, informs the stability of future religious beliefs.”

⁶⁵⁰ Brauer, “The Surprising Predictable Decline of Religion in the United States,” 4. See also, Jonathan Kelley and Nan Dirk De Graaf 1997. “National context, parental socialisation and religious belief,” *American Sociological Review* 1997 62(4):639–59.

so than disaffiliation.”⁶⁵¹ The problem of declining affiliation and Evangelical belief and participation in each generational cohort is a direct result of parental deprioritization of intentional child discipleship and investing in maturing critical thinking abilities. The situation is not necessarily a retention problem for Evangelicals but more so a problem with parents’ intentionality in transmitting Christian faith and values as Mark explains,

a fall in young people’s religiosity may be an indication of a problem in transmission rather than a lack of retention. Young people, as a result, may be less religious than the older generation, not because of a value shift in the importance they place on religion, but on the value and importance that their parents and family have placed on passing it on.⁶⁵²

This process is what has been at play in the American religious landscape generally and within American Evangelicalism, the Southern Baptist Convention, specifically and there appears to be no signs of the declines slowing unless churches begin intentionally and strategically investing in parents and children.

Denominational Examination

Amidst claims of current forms of Christianity being intellectually anemic,⁶⁵³ has the American church in fact become unable, through neglect and distraction, to effectively communicate how the robust tenets of the faith once for all delivered to the saints challenges individuals regarding how to create a better world by establishing the Kingdom of heaven here on earth as it is in heaven? Perhaps the present is available for the taking.

⁶⁵¹ Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme, “Becoming a Religious None: Irreligious Socialization and Disaffiliation,” 79.

⁶⁵² Mark, *Passing on the Faith*, 27. See also, David Voas, ‘Explaining Change over Time in Religious Involvement’, in *Religion and Youth*, eds. Sylvia Collins-Mayo and Pink Dandelion (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 29.

⁶⁵³ See Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1966); See also, Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

In providing a robust examination of the religious beliefs of the youngest generation, Generation Z, David Kinnaman provides a clear diagnosis of the waning influence of Evangelical Christianity in America stating, “The dropout problem is, at its core, a faith-development problem; to use religious language, it’s a disciple making problem. The church is not adequately preparing the next generation to follow Christ faithfully in a rapidly changing culture.”⁶⁵⁴

A recent Pew survey asked religious Nones to indicate why they have chosen to disaffiliate from religion and the most common answer given by the majority of those who identified as Atheists, Agnostics, and Nothing in Particular was the questioning of religious teaching as the primary reason for choosing to not affiliate with a particular religion.⁶⁵⁵ This is striking when an overwhelming majority of all Nones (seventy eight percent) were raised in a religion but later chose to disaffiliate from their childhood faith. Of these that were reared in religious homes that later chose to identify as None, about half indicated they no longer believe in the religious teachings of their childhood religion.⁶⁵⁶

Not only are millennials less likely than older Americans to identify with a religion, but millennials who are religious are significantly less likely to belong to a church. Fifty-seven percent of religious millennials belong to a church, compared with sixty five percent or more in older generations.”⁶⁵⁷ Church membership and the resulting doctrinal and discipleship influence

⁶⁵⁴ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 21.

⁶⁵⁵ Becka A. Alper, “Why America’s ‘nones’ don’t identify with a religion.” <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/08/why-americas-nones-dont-identify-with-a-religion/>

⁶⁵⁶ Michael Lipka, “Why America’s ‘nones’ left religion behind,” *Pew Research Center*, August 24, 2016. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/24/why-americas-nones-left-religion-behind/>

⁶⁵⁷ Jeffrey M. Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades,” *Gallup*, April 18, 2019. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/248837/church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx>

of the church is decreasing with each successive generational cohort to where it has become woefully evident in the decreasing numbers of those in America that identify as Evangelical.

Church Leadership

Perhaps a telling reason for the rapid decline in church membership in many denominations is the traditional “come and see” mentality where church leaders think making the church more relevant to a new generation will attract attendees and result in a growth in affiliation and/or conversion. Bishop Stacy Sauls, COO of the Episcopal Church reveals this lingering ineffective strategy in offering his remedy for the rapid rise of the Nones by suggesting, “I think one of things we're learning is that we have to give people of any age a reason to come these days. We can't assume they're going to come just because their parents did.”⁶⁵⁸ This “come and see” strategy has been assimilated by Evangelical church leadership as well with ever-diminishing returns.⁶⁵⁹

The importance of examining church leadership as it relates to the increase of the religiously unaffiliated is twofold. First, a primary reason that those in younger generations are giving for disaffiliating from church is echoed by historian Christian Smith, who suggests “The main reason the young people say they left the church was unanswered doubts and questions. That they had questions, they had doubts; they brought them to the church leaders and they

⁶⁵⁸ Stacy Sauls quoted in Daniel Burke, “Religious leaders respond to the rise of the “Nones” *Religion News Service*, October 10, 2012.

⁶⁵⁹ See Leah Marie Ann Klett, “David Jeremiah warns modern church is entertainment-driven social organization afraid of controversy,” *The Christian Post*, July 21, 2019 Where best-selling author and Evangelical mega-church pastor David Jeremiah admits, “The Church has forgotten what it is supposed to be. We’re not an entertainment service; we’re not here to see how close we can get to what the world does. But there’s so much of the world in the Church and vice versa that we can’t tell a difference. We have to hold to the truth. We have to get nourished. If it’s not happening, you’re a social organization and not a church.”

couldn't get answers."⁶⁶⁰ Even secularist are acknowledging the hunger for truth and certainty characteristic of the younger generations. Robyn Blumner, executive director of the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason & Science, sees the change as a generational trend driven by millennials. "We are seeing the rise of a generation of Americans who are hungry for facts and curious about the world."⁶⁶¹

The diminishing membership numbers in the Southern Baptist Convention could be a result of the statement regarding the ineffectiveness of leadership, "Workers don't quit companies; they quit managers." In a Gallup study regarding church leadership and declining service attendance it was found that those who attend religious services more frequently are more likely to rate their pastor as outstanding compared to those who attend less frequently. The study's author Frank Newport admitted the "correlational data do raise the possibility that those who are staying away from church may be doing so precisely because they are less engaged by their church leaders than are those who attend more frequently."⁶⁶² Moreover, additional data reveals that those that do attend church at least semi-frequently, at least once per month, do so to hear sermons that teach more about Scripture or help connect religion with life (seventy six percent and seventy five percent, respectively).⁶⁶³

⁶⁶⁰ Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁶⁶¹ Robyn Blumer quoted in Neil Monahan and Saeed Ahmed, "There are now as many Americans who claim no religion as there are evangelicals and Catholics, a survey finds," *CNN*, April 26, 2019.

⁶⁶² Frank Newport, "Church Leaders and Declining Religious Service Attendance," *Gallup*, September 7, 2018. https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/242015/church-leaders-declining-religious-service-attendance.aspx?g_source=link_NEWSV9&g_medium=SIDEBOTTOM&g_campaign=item_211679&g_content=Church%2520Leaders%2520and%2520Declining%2520Religious%2520Service%2520Attendance

⁶⁶³ Lydia Saad, "Sermon Content Is What Appeals Most to Churchgoers," *Gallup*, April 14, 2017.

Second, is the fact that Evangelical clergy are aging and with the decreasing membership numbers there will be fewer and fewer who will rise to fill the rapidly vacating shoes of church leadership. According to the 2010 FACT survey, Generally, the younger the leader, the more likely a congregation has grown. Leaders 35 to 39 years old are most likely to be in growing congregations. The problem for the Evangelical church is only fifteen percent of pastors are under forty years of age.⁶⁶⁴

Barna data suggest that “adult church leaders usually have serious involvement in church life and training when they are young.” This means those that are currently serving in leadership roles within Evangelical churches experienced significant involvement in church activities as children, prior to the age of thirteen. Barna goes on to suggest this provides the inference that “the individuals who will become the church’s leaders two decades from now are probably active in church programs today.” Therefore, if families with children younger than thirteen years of age are attending church less and those in the youngest two generations are leaving the church more quickly than previous cohorts it is clear that the Evangelical church is not only facing an emergency of declining membership but also an impending leadership crisis.

Decreasing Membership

American unchurched population has increased from thirty five percent in 2005 to over forty six percent in 2015. It is interesting to note that sixty two percent of the unchurched self-identify as Christian but most alarming is the twenty one percent of the unchurched population being born-again based on their personal theology.⁶⁶⁵ This highlights the diminished importance and influence of the local church in American life.

⁶⁶⁴ Aaron Earls, “How Old are America’s Pastors?” *LifeWay: Facts & Trends*, March 7, 2017.

⁶⁶⁵ See Barna, *America at the Crossroads*, 38-43.

Evangelicals who identify as being born-again have traditionally been a persistent body among the American population typically holding at between twenty two percent and twenty five percent. Burge highlights the historical stability of the Evangelical population and the recent overtaking of the majority by the corresponding upswing in the number of Nones,

The fact that Evangelicals' share of the population remains relatively stable over the last decade is striking given the continued rise of the nones. Evangelicals have been able to replace losses as fast as they are occurring, at least for now. Recent survey evidence has found that nearly 95 percent of born-again Christians stayed that way from 2010 to 2014, compared to just 85 percent of those who said that they were Protestant but not born-again...though they're currently 7.5 percentage points lower than their highest share of the US population: 29.9 percent in 1993, just as the nones began their upswing.⁶⁶⁶

It is not only the membership numbers that has been in decline among American Evangelicals. The traditional beliefs that characterize Evangelicalism has also been ebbing among those that still self-identify as Evangelical.

Decreasing Evangelical Belief

As mentioned above, the Southern Baptist Convention membership data will be leveraged as it has been the largest evangelical denomination in America for several decades. It is assumed this denominational data provides more accurate insights into the beliefs and behaviors of American Evangelicalism for this study. Beneficially, since its formation in 1865, the Southern Baptist Convention has released an Annual Report containing data detailing the performance of the congregations in the Convention. This report provides the necessary empirical data that reveals the crisis for Evangelicalism in America.

⁶⁶⁶ Ryan P. Burge, "Evangelicals Show No Decline, Despite Trump and Nones," *Christianity Today*, March 21, 2019.

“While some young adults who leave church are rejecting their childhood faith, most are choosing to keep many of the beliefs they had, but with a smaller dose of church,” said Executive Director of LifeWay Research Scott McConnell.⁶⁶⁷ Though there are those that retain some of the beliefs from their childhood faith studies are finding that the Christian faith that the youngest generations looks very little like the robust understanding of doctrine of generations previous to the Boomers. David Kinnaman, in explaining data collected on those among the youngest generations who have left the church explained that those who identified with Christianity and regularly shared their faith did not possess a thoroughly Christian worldview themselves. He explained, “We found that the faith that they were trying to spread was, in fact, more akin to moralistic therapeutic deism than to historic Christianity. Few of these youth evangelists could identify a single portion of the Bible as the basis of their faith in Christ.”⁶⁶⁸

Fueling this dilution of belief is the shrinking number of those that hold the Bible to be reliable and authoritative. When Southern Baptists were asked if Scripture should be taken literally the data reveal a significant decrease from 2007-2014 in those likely to take Scripture literally (fifty one percent vs forty one percent). There has been a corresponding increase during the same timeframe in those aged 18-29 years old that claim Scripture is “not the Word of God” (five percent vs fifteen percent). Significantly, young adults aged 18-29 are much less likely (-17%) to take Scripture literally than their preceding cohort, those aged 30-49. Nonetheless, each cohort is less likely than preceding cohorts to take Scripture literally.⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁷ Aaron Earls quoting Scott McConnel in, “Most Teenagers Drop Out of Church as Young Adults,” *LifeWay Research*, January 15, 2019. <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/01/15/most-teenagers-drop-out-of-church-as-young-adults/>

⁶⁶⁸ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 115.

⁶⁶⁹ Pew Research Center, “Members of the Southern Baptist Convention,” *Religious Landscape Study*, 2014. <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/southern-baptist-convention/>

Consequently, there has been an overall decrease in the certainty of belief among Southern Baptists and the decrease has been increasing with each generational cohort. For example, there has been an eight percent decrease (ninety one percent from eighty three percent) in absolute certainty in the existence of God among the 18-29-year-old cohort from 2007 to 2014. This cohort is less likely than all other cohorts to belief in God with absolute certainty (-8%). Where an absolute certain belief in God has held relatively steady with preceding cohorts at or over ninety percent. Additionally, the importance of religion became less important with each subsequent cohort, and much less important for those aged 18-29 than all other cohorts (-9%). Interestingly, as the belief in heaven has experienced relatively no change from 2007 to 2014 (eighty nine percent vs ninety percent) and has remained steady across cohorts, there has been a decrease in those that believe in hell among the 18-29 year cohort (ninety percent vs eighty three percent) during the same period. While only twelve percent of the 18-29-year-old cohort that are members of Southern Baptist Churches do not believe in hell, this is double the preceding (30-49 year old) cohort which is at six percent.⁶⁷⁰

Reasons for Decreasing Membership Numbers

The data is clear that the beliefs of each cohort are becoming less and less Evangelical mirroring Jones' conclusion that each cohort will continue to become more secular leading to continued membership decline in America, "Given that church membership, and religiosity in general, is greater among older adults, the emergence of an increasingly secular generation to

⁶⁷⁰ All data collected from, Pew Research Center, "Members of the Southern Baptist Convention," *Religious Landscape Study*, 2014. <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/southern-baptist-convention/>

replace far more religious older generations suggests the decline in U.S. church membership overall will continue.”⁶⁷¹

Weekly Attendance in Southern Baptist churches has been declining steadily among all generational cohorts. Most significantly, those aged 18-29 became less likely to attend at least once a week from ‘07-’14 (fifty five percent vs forty nine percent). This cohort is also less likely to attend than previous cohorts. Nonetheless, the drop in overall attendance to weekly church services is not only characteristic of the youngest generation. Attendance has been steadily declining with each successive cohort with each cohort less likely to attend weekly than preceding cohort.⁶⁷²

Fortunately, it is not only Evangelicals that are unable to retain adherents. Agnostics and Nones are drastically more likely to defect from their religion to a Protestant religion than the other way around (forty to forty eight percent of Nones and Agnostics vs only ten percent of Protestants). Burge confirms, “Americans who identify as agnostic or “nothing in particular” are four times more likely to change their religious affiliation than Protestants or Catholics.”⁶⁷³ Over the four year period of the CCES survey data collection of the forty percent of Nones that changed their religion nearly twenty percent of them returned to the church and of those thirteen percent changed their religious preference to a Protestant religion.⁶⁷⁴ Though there are a number

⁶⁷¹ Jeffrey M. Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades,” *Gallup*, April 18, 2019.

⁶⁷² Pew Research Center, “Members of the Southern Baptist Convention,” *Religious Landscape Study*, 2014. <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/southern-baptist-convention/>

⁶⁷³ Ryan P. Burge, “Plenty of the ‘Nones’ Actually Head Back to Church,” *Christianity Today*, February 6, 2018.

⁶⁷⁴ Brian Schaffner; Stephen Ansolabehere; Sam Luks, Cooperative Congressional Election Study, 2019, “CCES Common Content, 2018”, <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/ZSBZ7K>, Harvard Dataverse, V1. The data includes a nationally representative sample of 60,000 American adults.

of Nones returning to church over time, the rate at which they return is dwarfed by those that choose to remain unaffiliated. Nonetheless, the fact that many Nones do return to church provides confident hope that something can be done about this American phenomenon. However, to provide a vivid illustration of the significant influence Nones can wield in the American culture, Burge provides the comparison, “Fully 1 in 20 Americans joined this group in the last 10 years. That’s the functional equivalent of every Southern Baptist in the United States becoming ‘nothing in particular.’”⁶⁷⁵

In attempting to identify a cause for the shrinking Southern Baptist Convention, Mohler has suggested that a significant culprit behind the declining membership numbers in the Southern Baptist Convention is the decreased fertility rates in America.⁶⁷⁶ This, *prima facie*, appears to serve as a reasonable explanation given that if fewer adults are having children, then there will be fewer children to join the church as they mature. Though this is not the case among Christians who still have among the highest fertility rates in the nation and have children at a higher level than the replacement rate, second only to Muslims.⁶⁷⁷ This fact magnifies the failure of Evangelical parents in effectively training their children in “the way they should go.”⁶⁷⁸ Nonetheless, an examination of the national fertility rates compared to fertility rates of the religiously affiliated in general and the fertility rates of those women who identify as Christian suggests falling fertility rates is not significantly affecting Christianity as much as it should be

⁶⁷⁵ Ryan P. Burge, “Rise of the ‘nothing in particulars’ may be sign of a disjointed, disaffected and lonely future,” *Religion News Service*, July 3, 2019.

⁶⁷⁶ Albert Mohler, “The Future of the Southern Baptist Convention: The Numbers Don’t Add Up.”

⁶⁷⁷ “Total Fertility Rate by Religion, 2010-2015,” *Pew Research Center*, March 26, 2015.

⁶⁷⁸ Proverbs 22:6.

negatively affecting the religiously unaffiliated populations. Important, there is the research by Hout, Greeley, and Wilde's whose findings illustrate that variable fertility rates can dramatically impact societal-level religious change.⁶⁷⁹

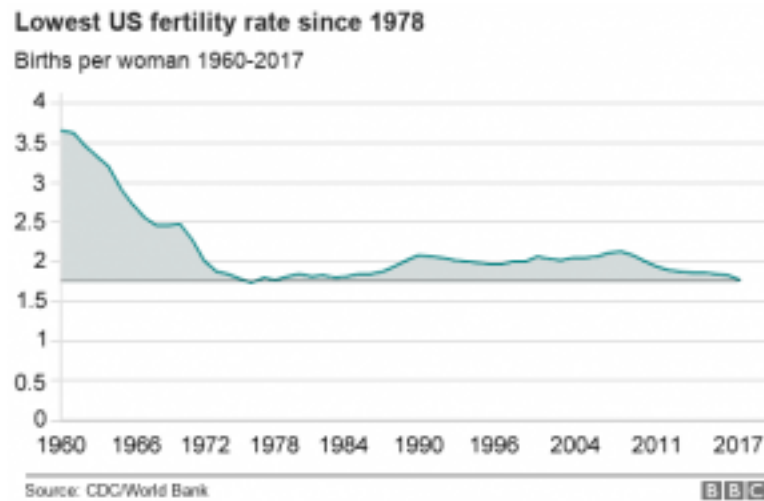


Figure 4.1 U.S. Fertility Rates as measured by the CDC⁶⁸⁰

The group declining fertility rates “should” affect more drastically than Christians is the religiously unaffiliated. The birth rate for this religious grouping is approximately 1.6 children per unaffiliated woman globally and 1.7 children per American unaffiliated woman compared to 2.6 children per Christian woman globally and 2.2 children per woman in the United States.⁶⁸¹

⁶⁷⁹ Michael Hout, Andrew Greeley, and Melissa J. Wilde, “The demographic imperative in religious change in the United States,” *American Journal of Sociology* (2001) 107(2):468–500.

⁶⁸⁰ “US birth rates drop to lowest since 1987” *BBC* May 17, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44151642> Accessed August 29, 2019.

⁶⁸¹ Pew Research Center, “The Changing Global Religious Landscape: Muslims and Christians have more children per woman than other religious groups,” March 31, 2017.

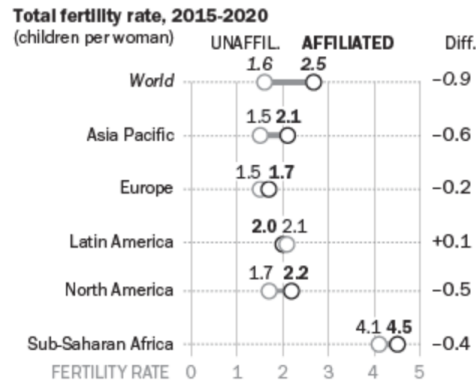


Figure 4.2 Total Fertility Rates - Religiously Affiliated vs. Unaffiliated, 2015-2020⁶⁸²

Additionally, Pew data suggest Christian mothers will continue to have children at a higher rate than the national average where they are projecting “Christian...mothers are expected to give birth to increasing numbers of babies through 2060.” However, again, the decreased birth rate should more significantly affect the religiously unaffiliated category most since, “the total number of births is projected to decline steadily between 2015 and 2060 for all other major religious groups.” Albeit, the negative impact on natural categorical growth on the religious Nones only holds true if religious switching holds steady, which is not the case with those that were raised in Evangelical homes who have now become religiously unaffiliated.⁶⁸³

Additionally, with the characteristic ebb and flow in levels of spirituality throughout life stages, studies have shown that individuals typically experience a peak in religiosity once they become parents.⁶⁸⁴ In fact, religiously affiliated women in general have more children than

⁶⁸² “The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050” Pew Research Center, April 2, 2015. <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religiously-unaffiliated/> Accessed August 10, 2019.

⁶⁸³ “The Changing Global Religious Landscape: Babies born to Muslims will begin to outnumber Christian births by 2035; people with no religion face a birth dearth,” *Pew Research Center*, April 5, 2017. <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/#what-americans-believe-and-expect-about-the-global-size-of-religious-groups>

⁶⁸⁴ Michele Dillon and Paul Wink, *In the Course of a Lifetime: Tracing Religious Belief, Practice, and Change*, (London: University of California Press, 2007).

religiously unaffiliated women.⁶⁸⁵ This means the population of Nones is growing, not by biological growth but by religious switching, changing from their childhood religion to no religion at all; a failure of the church to facilitate the transmission of the faith from the parents to the child(ren).

Evolving Views of Higher Education and Anemic Biblical Higher Education

If Evangelicalism can be synonymous, in most instances, with political conservatism⁶⁸⁶ then the importance of higher education is on the wane among Evangelicals.⁶⁸⁷ While about half of Americans, both conservative and liberal, say college education is having a positive effect in America, recent survey data show that the number of conservatives who view higher education positively has plummeted to become the dominant perspective. In 2009, fifty three percent of conservatives favorably viewed higher education versus thirty five percent who viewed it as having a negative impact in the United States. As of 2019, those numbers have traded places with fifty nine percent of conservatives now perceiving colleges as having a negative effect in America.⁶⁸⁸

Pair this shift in perceived value of a college degree with replaced importance on receiving the necessary training to secure a career that provides financial security (cite) then it is

⁶⁸⁵ “The Changing Global Religious Landscape: Babies born to Muslims will begin to outnumber Christian births by 2035; people with no religion face a birth dearth,” *Pew Research Center*, April 5, 2017. <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/#what-americans-believe-and-expect-about-the-global-size-of-religious-groups> “By 2055 to 2060, just nine percent of all babies will be born to religiously unaffiliated women” compared to thirty five percent of Christian women.

⁶⁸⁶ See, Dalia Fahmy, “7 Facts about Southern Baptists,” *Pew Research*, June 7, 2019. “Southern Baptists are more conservative than the general U.S. public on some social issues, and sometimes even more so than other evangelicals.”

⁶⁸⁷ Kim Parker, “The Growing Partisan Divide in Views of Higher Education,” *Pew Research Center*, August 19, 2019. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/essay/the-growing-partisan-divide-in-views-of-higher-education/>

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid.

easy to see why institutions of biblical higher education are in a dire predicament. The majority of Americans and Evangelicals choose a college or university based on the likelihood of earning a degree that will provide the best odds of obtaining a career that creates a life characterized by financial security. Since most Americans (eighty five percent) and importantly most Evangelicals (sixty five percent) do not think Bible colleges adequately prepare students for careers outside of ministry.⁶⁸⁹ The perception is not much better for Christian universities especially regarding prospective parents' perspectives. Christian parents mirror their prospective student'(s) desire for job preparation and financial security as the top priority in choosing a college or university.

Southern Baptists and Education Attainment

Overall, Millennials and Generation Z are still interested in education. With sixty six percent of Generation Z and fifty two percent of Millennials indicating their top priority in life being finishing their education. Leaving the falling number of Evangelicals that are still interested in higher education generally, and biblical higher education specifically with primarily secular options that may or most probably serve as a catalyst for their falling away from the church.⁶⁹⁰

Van Ingen and Moor's research provides substantial evidence that "tertiary education is clearly the most powerful predictor of changes in church attendance over time."⁶⁹¹ The more educated one becomes, post-high school, the odds of religious switching or disaffiliation occurring increases. This does not suggest that lower levels of education are synonymous with

⁶⁸⁹ Barna Research Group, *What's Next for Biblical Higher Education*, (Ventura: Barna Group, 2017), 28.

⁶⁹⁰ Young Adult Dropout Report 2017, "Church Dropouts: Reasons Young Adults Stay or Go between ages 18-22," *LifeWay Research*, 19.

⁶⁹¹ Erik van Ingen and Nienke Moor, "Explanations of changes in church attendance between 1970 and 2009," 565. Tertiary education is defined as any education pursued beyond the high school level or equivalent.

unaffiliation as CCES data shows the current unaffiliated population has lower levels of educational attainment compared to religious populations. However, this data does suggest that for the religiously affiliated, the more education attained the odds of disaffiliation increase, even if minimally.

The importance of this discussion is the dumbing of the Christian mind has deadened with greater degrees the ability of each successive generation the ability to think critically. Currently, more Americans trust the media⁶⁹² more than the Church and those within the church are ever-increasingly unable to adequately articulate the very basic tenets of the Christian faith. Data provided by Barna confirms the predicament that only ten percent of those classified as born-again Christians hold a biblical worldview. Further, an overwhelming majority (eighty one percent) of Southern Baptists have no college degree and perhaps more alarmingly, eighty six percent of the 18-29 year old cohort have no college degree.⁶⁹³ The shifting of America's religious landscape and the undeniable absence of critical thinking skills among every generation pose insurmountable obstacles to a resurgence of men and women who can confidently articulate truth in various cultural arenas.

Loss of Evangelistic Zeal

Each period of resurgence, especially the Awakenings, was preceded by intense, concerted prayer for God to move in a new way. Perhaps the most obvious activity birthed in each period of increased religious devotion was a zeal for evangelism characteristic not only of

⁶⁹² Wuthnow's research suggests religious liberals are relatively less involved in local congregations as a whole than religious conservatives and somewhat more attentive to newspapers and other media sources. See Robert Wuthnow, "Restructuring American Religion: Further Evidence," 325.

⁶⁹³ Religious Landscape Study, "Members of the Southern Baptist Convention," *Pew Research Center*, 2014. <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/southern-baptist-convention/>

the preachers of the period but also of the laity. Regrettably confirming the poor prognosis of the Evangelical church in America, Mohler summarizes the most recent data that confirmed the continued declining membership as being a direct result of a loss of evangelistic zeal when lamenting, “The most obvious insight is that we do not care as much about reaching lost people as we once did...”⁶⁹⁴

As explained in Chapter 3, the most accurate way of measuring the effectiveness of local congregations is by examining year over year baptismal data which should be most reflective of the number of conversions as a core Evangelical doctrine is “believer’s baptism” where conversion must precede and is a prerequisite of baptismal eligibility. To illustrate the waning effectiveness of Southern Baptist congregations, Clift W. Brannon lamented in the 1995 Southern Baptist Convention meeting that more than 10,000 Southern Baptist Churches failed to report at least a single baptism during the previous year.⁶⁹⁵

The numbers have not gotten any better. The 2018 number is about fifty five percent of the record year for baptisms, 445,725, set in 1972. With twice as many churches in 2018 in the Convention than in 1944: 51,541 vs 24,165 respectively. Southern Baptist baptisms broke the 300,000 plateau in 1948 and remained above that level every year until 2015.⁶⁹⁶ It was after approximately the year 2000 that the number of new churches began surpassing the number of baptisms each year. The reality that there are more Southern Baptist Churches now than ever and fewer baptisms per year than forty years ago when there was only a fraction of the number of

⁶⁹⁴ Albert Mohler, “The Future of the Southern Baptist Convention: The Numbers Don't Add Up,” May 31, 2019. <https://albertmohler.com/2019/05/31/the-future-of-the-southern-baptist-convention-the-numbers-dont-add-up>

⁶⁹⁵ Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1995, Atlanta, GA, June 20-22. 34-35.

⁶⁹⁶ Bob Allen, “Southern Baptists have lost a million members in 10 years,” *Baptist News Global*, June 9, 2017.

churches aggrandizes the anemic zeal for evangelism in the American Evangelical church. The data illustrate the bleak reality that each successive generation has cared less about evangelism with each cohort engaging in evangelistic activities less than their parents' generation.

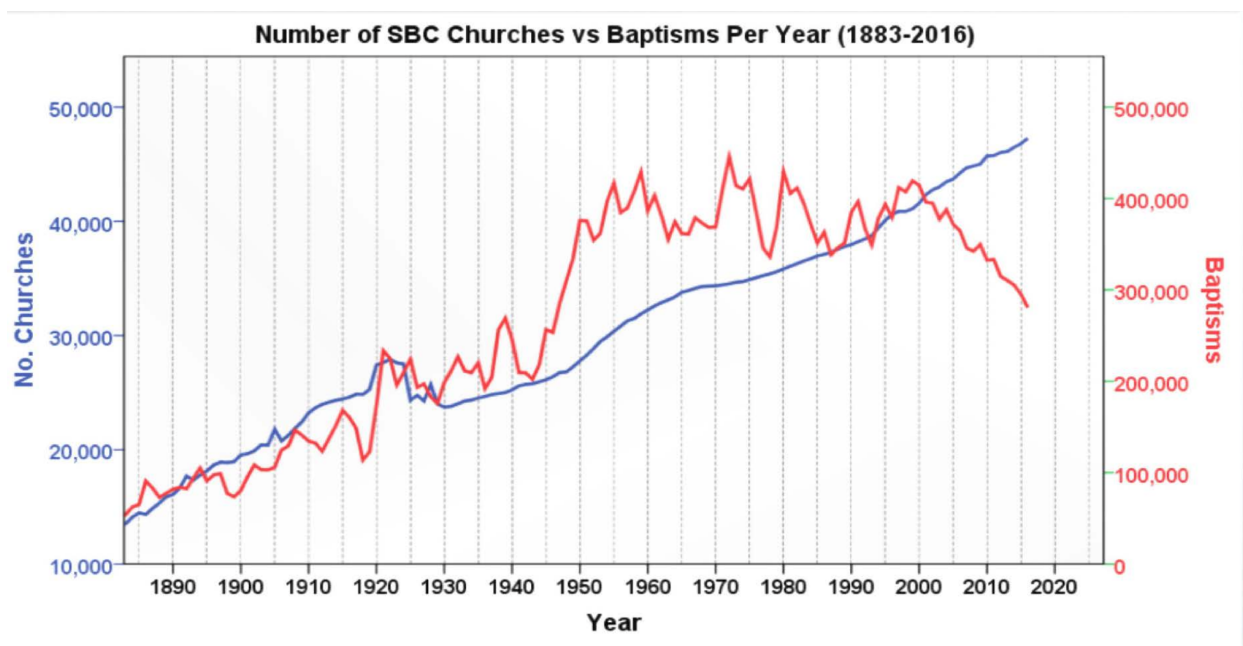


Figure 4.3 Number of SBC Churches vs Baptisms per Year (1883-2016)⁶⁹⁷

Prior to the 1960s the growth rate of the Southern Baptist Convention astronomically outpaced the U.S. population growth rate.⁶⁹⁸ Though membership growth percentage, year over year, had declined steadily since the 1960's falling below five percent growth in 1990 to less than three percent in 2000, membership itself began to experience negative numerical growth more than a decade ago.

⁶⁹⁷ Graph compiled by Bill Day, Data from the Southern Baptist Church *Annual Church Profile*, June 2017.

⁶⁹⁸ Linda S. Barr, *Southern Baptist Handbook 1991*, (Nashville: Sunday School Board, 1992), 9 and the ACP statistical summaries provided by the Strategic Information and Planning Section, Lifeway Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention.

This prolonged reduced growth precipitated the forming of an Evangelism Task Force⁶⁹⁹ in 2017 provided a compilation of recommendations at the 2018 annual meeting. Chairman of the task force, Adam Greenway summarized the collective ethos of the group, "The evangelization of the world remains our top priority as a convention of churches, and the prayer of all of us serving on this task force is that God will use our efforts to help bring us together by renewing our passion for and increasing our effectiveness in bringing people to Christ,"⁷⁰⁰The Task Force provided a list of twelve affirmations and denials precisely defining what evangelism is and is not and a list of eight recommendations for how Southern Baptist churches could accomplish the aim of increasing converts and baptisms. Two recommendations in particular speak to the revisited necessity of evangelizing the next generation and the responsibility of the individual, parents, and churches to do so, recommendation 8a and 8b state,

A) All parents, church leaders, pastors, and denominational entities renew with great urgency the priority of evangelizing the next generations, adapting our methodology without changing our theology. B) God-called evangelists be utilized as a wonderful asset in evangelistic endeavors of various kinds, since while all Christians are called to be personal evangelists, God has always given some individuals unique giftings with respect to evangelism.⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁹ The final report of the task force was presented to the Southern Baptist Convention at the annual meeting in Dallas, Texas on June 12-13, 2018 and contained this description of the groups primary responsibility, "On June 14, 2017, Southern Baptist Convention President Steve Gaines appointed an Evangelism Task Force whose assignment was to investigate the possibilities for renewal among Southern Baptists in evangelistic effectiveness for the third decade of the 21st Century. This Task Force has met three times, prayed together, and talked extensively...The Task Force offers a series of twelve affirmations and denials followed by eight recommendations with the hope that God would look favorably on our Convention and allow us to shine the light of the gospel into the darkness and distress of our world."

⁷⁰⁰ David Roach, "SBC evangelism task force finalizes recommendations," Baptist Press, May 16, 2018. <http://www.bpnews.net/50904/sbc-evangelism-task-force-finalizes-recommendations>

⁷⁰¹ David Roach, "Evangelism task force releases report, recommendations," Baptist Press, June 11, 2018. <http://www.sbcannualmeeting.net/sbc18/news/11/evangelism-task-force-releases-report-recommendations>

The renewed focus on intentional evangelism to the next generations via urgent involvement of the family is reminiscent of the *The Annual Report* for the 1980 Southern Baptist Convention which outlined three primary projects for the Convention as a whole to focus on accomplishing by 1985. One of the three primary projects was to strengthen families through two primary methods: 1). Opening the Word together, which consisted of a three year project to enlist church families in daily Bible study and family worship at home. 2) Marriage: Growing in Oneness, which consisted of a two year project to strengthen husband/wife relationships and bring Christian enrichment to family life.⁷⁰²

Task force member Doug Muntion admitted, “We know that we need a fresh wave of evangelistic passion, but we also need the presence and power of God.”⁷⁰³ Still, some experienced in matters concerning the Southern Baptist Convention believe the efforts and recommendations will do very little to “move the needle on SBC baptism numbers.”⁷⁰⁴ This proposal in 1980 was much more robust of an exhortation for the heightened involvement of the family to evangelize and disciple the next generation than the subpoint dedicated to it by the 2017 Evangelism Task Force. However, the focused strategy in proposed in 1980 failed to produce any lasting fruit. In fact, the vine has continued to wither. “Only disciples who are training, and training others, to follow the narrow Way of Christ will stay the course- and our churches need help to make such disciples.”⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰² Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1980, St. Louis, MO, June 10-12, 39.

⁷⁰³ David Roach, “SBC evangelism task force finalizes recommendations.”

⁷⁰⁴ William Thornton, “Lost in #SBC18 Noise: Evangelism Task Force Report and Recommendations,” *SBC Voices*, June 22, 2018.

⁷⁰⁵ David Kinnaman, *What’s Next for Biblical Higher Education: How Bible Colleges Can Prepare for the Church’s Future*, (Ventura: Barna Group, 2017), 44.

Recent Barna data show that Generation Z teens receive the most spiritual guidance and encouragement from their mothers in six categories.⁷⁰⁶ Interestingly, it was the father and grandparents more so than siblings, friends, other relatives, and other non-relatives who provided the most guidance and encouragement second to the maternal influence. In five of the six categories it was the grandparents that provided more guidance and encouragement than the fathers.⁷⁰⁷ An individual's worldview is typically set by the time they reach the age of thirteen as Barna highlights the significance of this reality,

In essence, what you believe by the time you are 13 is what you will die believing. Of course, there are many individuals who go through life-changing experiences in which their beliefs are altered, or instances in which a concentrated body of religious teaching changes one or more core beliefs. However, most people's minds are made up and they believe they know what they need to know spiritually by age 13. Their focus in absorbing religious teaching after that age is to gain reassurance and confirmation of their existing beliefs rather than to glean new insights that will redefine their foundations.⁷⁰⁸

Echoed by Collins-Mayo "if they are not religiously inclined in their youth, they are unlikely to become so in later years."⁷⁰⁹

The conclusive fact is Christian women are continuing to have children at a higher than national rate and those children are not being successfully evangelized by the family or the church. These children have and are continuing to disaffiliate from the Christianity of their

⁷⁰⁶ 1) Encourages me to go to church 2) Encourages me in other ways 3) Sets an example 4) Talks with me about God's forgiveness 5) Teaches me about the Bible 6) Teaches me about tradition.

⁷⁰⁷ Barna Research Group, "Households of Faith: The rituals and relationships that turn a home into a sacred space," (Barna: 2019).

⁷⁰⁸ George Barna, *Transforming Your Children into Spiritual Champions*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 33.

⁷⁰⁹ Sylvia Collins-Mayo, "The Meaning and Inheritance of Anglican Identity amongst Young People," in *Contemporary Issues in the Worldwide Anglican Communion*, ed. Abby Day (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016), 21-37, 21.

family and/or childhood and are not returning as they reach adulthood as previous generations have.⁷¹⁰

According to Thiessen and Wilkins-LaFlamme disaffiliation is most frequently,

linked back to a family context where each generation progressively became less religious and as a result religion was not that salient during one's upbringing (even if one was exposed to religious belief/practice for a period of time), and often comes to fruition when the individual becomes more independent in mind and body from the original family household (when religion becomes seen as a choice, when intellectual disagreements arise with religion, when the individual enters into contact with less religious friends, and with life transitions).⁷¹¹

America appears to be following the same trajectory as the UK regarding parental interest in passing on their faith to their children. When asked whether they would want their children “to hold the same beliefs about whether or not there is a God or Higher Power as me when they are older”, less than a third (thirty one percent) of British parents agreed, and nearly twice as many (fifty nine percent) disagreed. Passing on faith was not a priority, and this translated into parents' answers when asked whether it was important “to actively pass on beliefs about whether or not there is a God or Higher Power to [their] children” – the same proportion (thirty percent) saying it was important, compared with twice that number (sixty percent) saying that children should make up their own minds on this topic “independently of their parents”⁷¹²

⁷¹⁰ See, Merrill Silverstein and Vern L. Bengtson, “Return to Religion? Predictors of Religious Change among Baby-Boomers in their Transition to Later Life,” *Population Ageing* (2018) 11:9, “While we expect early religious exposure to be related to current religious activities and beliefs, it may be that those who were less religious in childhood are more likely to become more religious between midlife and later life.”

⁷¹¹ Thiessen and Wilkins-LaFlamme, ““Becoming a Religious None: Irreligious Socialization and Disaffiliation,” 77.

⁷¹² Olwyn Mark, *Passing on the Faith*, (London: Theos, 2017) 7.

However, those that attended religious services regularly were much more likely to want to pass on their faith to their children. The same balance was seen when the data were analyzed by attendance: regular attenders⁷¹³ were most likely to want to pass their beliefs on (seventy-seven), non-attenders hardly at all (fifteen percent). Insight can be gained here regarding the importance of intentionality, or lack thereof, of parents regarding intentionally engaging their children in discussions of matters of faith. Data show that more than two thirds of all parents said that they would feel “confident” in having a conversation on the subject with their children, and the same proportion (sixty nine percent) said they would feel “comfortable” in doing so. It was simply that the subject rarely came up, with only forty percent of parents saying they had had a conversation with the aim of passing on their beliefs about whether there is a God or Higher Power with their children – although again the more seriously the parents took their faith, the more likely they were to have spoken about it.⁷¹⁴ It is clear, intensity of belief of the parents and their intentionality in passing on the faith has clear correlations to the levels of spirituality and beliefs of those children as they reach adulthood. Where, “adults who say religion was an important part of their life growing up are more likely to say they now have the same religious affiliation as their parents.”⁷¹⁵

This being the case, it is imperative that the American Evangelical Church begin focusing efforts and discipleship action in evangelizing and discipling the youngest two generations for any hope of stopping the religious bleed and cultivating a fertile environment capable of

⁷¹³ Defined as “Once a week or more often” or “2-3 times a month.”

⁷¹⁴ Mark, *Passing on the Faith*, 8

⁷¹⁵ Alan Cooperman, Gregory A. Smith, and Anna Schiller, “One-in-Five U.S. Adults Were Raised in Interfaith Homes” *Pew Research Center*, Oct. 26, 2016.

producing resurgence. This is a significantly consequential responsibility that should not be pawned off on the church, however. Evangelizing and discipling children is the primary responsibility of the parent. And, when this is done intentionally and effectively, albeit not necessarily dependent upon but in partnership with a local church, children (successive generations) are more likely to stay engaged with the faith that was passed on from their family. As Mark affirmed, “despite the perceived strength of other social and cultural forces, ‘faith’s’ most effective ‘not-so-secret’ weapon in passing on beliefs and practices to the next generation remains parents.”⁷¹⁶

Chapter Summary

It is clear from the research presented here that the current state of American Christianity experienced by contemporary generations is in dire straits compared to previous periods of American religious history. The rapid increase of Nones and the corresponding decrease in those that identify as Evangelical as evidenced by the rapidly diminishing membership and baptism numbers in the Southern Baptist Convention should cause concern that these trend lines might continue growing further apart with the population of Nones continuing to increase and the number of Evangelicals in America continues to dwindle.

The population of Nones in America has outgrown the number of Evangelicals in America in the last five years.⁷¹⁷ Likewise the rate of growth among the None population has significantly outpaced those that are identifying as Evangelical. The problem for Evangelicals is

⁷¹⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁷¹⁷ Neil Monahan and Saeed Ahmed, “There are now as many Americans who claim no religion as there are evangelicals and Catholics, a survey finds,” CNN, April 26, 2019. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/13/us/no-religion-largest-group-first-time-usa-trnd/index.html> Summarizing Ryan P. Burge’s analysis of 2018 General Social Survey data available found in, https://gssdataexplorer.norc.umd.edu/pages/show?page=gss%2Fhelp_variables Compared to the Pew 2014 Religious Landscape study Pew Research Center, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” May 12, 2015.

the rapid increase in those with no religious affiliation is not only dramatically outpacing the growth of those that identify with Evangelicalism, it is apparent the increase of Nones is ignoring generational lines. Indeed, though the increase in those that self-identify as Evangelical is greatest among those younger than 40 years of age (from seventeen percent to twenty one percent from 1972 to 2018 years)⁷¹⁸ that increase is negligible compared to the over one third of those in the Millennial and Generation Z cohorts that have no religious affiliation. There is also a two-fold issue surrounding effective Evangelical leadership in the coming years. Not only are there fewer clergy in the pipeline being trained to lead Evangelical churches,⁷¹⁹ those that are being trained and released to lead churches are failing to provide the answers to the questions attendees are asking.⁷²⁰

Reminiscent of Decker's proclamation that the Nones are "winning," Evangelicalism is rapidly losing influence, relevancy, and interest in each subsequent generational cohort. Though there are several hypotheses proposed by sociologist for this seemingly recent phenomenon such as it being a natural result of the secularization of the American culture, the intermingling of politics and religion, higher education attainment, etc. an examination of the data from the Southern Baptist Convention provides insight into the waning appeal of Evangelical ethos among each subsequent cohort. Moreover, even though Christians, and Evangelicals specifically have higher fertility rates compared to the religiously unaffiliated population that biological growth is

⁷¹⁸ Ryan P. Burge, "Plenty of the 'Nones' Actually Head Back to Church," *Christianity Today*, February 6 2018.

⁷¹⁹ Aaron Earls, "How Old are America's Pastors?" *LifeWay: Facts & Trends*, March 7, 2017.

⁷²⁰ Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

not translating into conversions to Evangelicalism. This confirms that Evangelicals have failed, and it appears are continuing to fail at successfully passing on the faith to their children.

As a result of a loss of evangelistic zeal, fledgling evangelistic efforts, and a diminishing emphasis and interest in biblical higher education it is clear that Evangelical numbers will continue to decline. Consequently, if the recent surge in those that are choosing to identify as religiously unaffiliated continues to increase with the same speed as has been experienced since the last decade of the twentieth century the population of Nones in America will be significantly larger than the population of those that identify as Evangelical.⁷²¹

In this course of this chapter the research presented is vital because there have been periods of significant religious disinterest throughout American religious history; however, and most importantly, religious zeal has rebounded time and time again. What has been presented here highlights the necessity for parents and Evangelical churches to partner in a concerted effort to religiously socialize the next generational cohorts albeit this is no small undertaking. To successfully reverse the current trend Evangelicals must be calculated in their efforts to rigorously train the next cohort of leaders and intent in reaching and training families (mothers and fathers) with the knowledge to be able to effectively pass on the faith and answer the questions of the next generation.

⁷²¹ Concluded from Ryan Burge's analysis of GSS data from 1972 to 2018 that reveals the population of Nones has now surpassed the number of those that identify as Evangelical in America. See, Ryan P. Burge, "Plenty of the 'Nones' Actually Head Back to Church," *Christianity Today*, February 6 2018.

If the average church should suddenly take seriously the notion that every lay member man or woman is really a minister of Christ, we could have something like a revolution in a very short time. - Elton Trueblood

Chapter 5 - Conclusion

The objective of this project has been to evaluate the major periods of American religious history for the purpose of identifying similar periods of religious disinterest and what, if any, characteristics were present that facilitated, encouraged, or resulted in religious resurgence. This historical survey served as the plumb against which the current rapid increase of the religiously unaffiliated could be evaluated in context to ideally suggest if a reversal of the current trend and a resurgence in American Evangelicalism is possible. As explained in Chapter 1 the aim of this project has not been to provide answers to “why” there has been a recent surge in the number of Americans that are choosing to identify as religiously unaffiliated. Instead, the aim has been to examine past periods of high and low religious interest in America which includes the present, rapid increase of religiously unaffiliated to conclude whether a resurgence is possible. As a result of this examination, it has been seen that there have been other periods of high and low Christian affiliation in American religious history. Christianity in America has always shown a resiliency with each ebb reversing into a high tide of religious interest and evangelistic zeal resulting in growing numbers. Corresponding to those surges were increased primacy given to the preaching of the gospel, the authority of Scripture, rigorous biblical education and training, and missionary fervor which has more often than not resulted in civil engagement with the hopes of transforming society.

The research presented here reveals that there have indeed been other periods in American religious history where there was a significantly low interest in Evangelical expressions of Christianity. One such period was the religiously dispassionate in Colonial

America. Though the London Company launched for the New World in 1607 to propagate the Christian religion those that followed the New World had more worldly aspirations, even the clergy. Chapter 2 highlighted estimates that showed only ten percent of Americans were church members in 1776. From there, America experienced a significant increase in membership growth during the nineteenth century that lasted until the late twentieth century. Adherents increased from approximately ten percent at the beginning of the nineteenth century to over half of America being religiously affiliated at the turn of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, the importance of religion was significant to the founding of the new nation though religious affiliation was minimal allowing for significant evangelistic efforts through missions to the new frontier and intentional biblical education through formal education and distribution of literature. This two headed approach obtained its desired results in exponentially increasing the number of churches and qualified clergy in the young nation. With each surge in the intensity of interest in Christianity there was a corresponding increased interest in higher education for training minds to go out and accomplish the Great Commission. Additionally, an increase in evangelistic fervor to the unreached i.e. Indians, Blacks, unchurched resulted from the primacy of preaching in local congregations leading to larger events. Not the other way around. In other words, the emphasis was on the responsibility of the local church not large events.

There have been other periods where interest in religion and Christian, evangelistic zeal has waned but as explained early in this project, religion in America, particularly Evangelical forms of Christianity has been persistent even though intense religiosity is currently declining.

The cause of great ebbs in religious interest and affiliation throughout the history of American Christianity has not necessarily been the secularization of culture, but it has been the secularization of the Church. After the Church experiences a great period of resurgence it has

tended to establish and institutionalize organizations aimed at institutionalizing the primary facets of the resurgence in attempt to secure the moral reform of society. Then, the Church abdicated its responsibility to preach the gospel to the individual for the conversion of the individual so the individual can multiply that new life in the family primarily and society secondarily. This responsibility tends (often but not always) to be abdicated through the process of politicization with hopes that Christian values may be threaded into the fabric of society through legislation. As a result of this abdicated responsibility, there is a diminished importance of the local church and a corresponding diminishing of the authority and reliability of Scripture to speak to the whole life of the individual. Finally, there is a diminished confidence or certainty in religion in general and Evangelical expressions of Christianity specifically.

Regarding the current increase in religious Nones, those that have never affiliated with a religion in their lifetime have not consistently grown as a share of the unaffiliated population. In fact, the greatest growth in the never affiliated relative to the disaffiliated occurred prior to 2000. After 2000, the percentage of respondents who were never affiliated leveled off, whereas the percent who were disaffiliated has grown substantially. This means that the primary threat to Evangelicalism is not the population growth of those who have never affiliated with a religion from either being raised in a non-religious home. Instead, the threat is from those who are leaving Evangelical churches as a result of ineffective religious socialization and parents allowing their children the autonomy to choose to construct their own religious identity.

Currently, disaffiliation is the most common contributor to the increasing number of Nones. As highlighted throughout this project, those that are choosing no religious affiliation are primarily the ones who were reared in religious homes. This confirms the primary mechanism for this ebb in religious interest is the Evangelical church's failure of familial religious

socialization and abandonment of emphasizing the preaching of the gospel, rigorous education which sharpens critical thinking skills and results in more certain beliefs.

The results of intentional religious socialization by successfully passing on the faith to the next generation produces a healthier culture for the gospel to be received. Conclusive evidence has been provided indicating those that disaffiliate from their religion report the poorest mental health and well-being. This data is significant because it parallels what is occurring with American Evangelicalism contributing to the growing population of Nones. The None population is currently growing primarily through religious switching, or disaffiliation, and America has never experienced such low levels of mental health and resulting negative, often catastrophic, consequences.

The current population of those that have no religious affiliation has now surpassed the number of those that identify as Evangelical presenting interestingly precarious scenarios regarding political ramifications which leads to discussions regarding the sanctity of life, abortion, LBGTQ rights, etc. Also, of concern with this rapidly growing population is the quality of mental health among those with no religious affiliation generally and an ambiguous Christian affiliation especially. There is good news however, Nones are drastically more likely to defect from their religion to a Protestant religion than the other way around (forty to forty eight percent of Nones and Agnostics vs only ten percent of Protestants). Though the population of those that identify with Evangelicalism is shrinking as a result of religious switching and many of those becoming religious Nones, hope for the American Evangelical church is not lost. Evangelicalism can rebound but it will not survive by relying on current methods which have resulted in a weakened, almost unrecognizable orthodox theology where currently only a dismal number of the adult born-again possess a biblical worldview.

The opening chapter of this project asked what needs to happen with(in) the American church to prevent further apostasy and initiate a period of resurgence of Evangelical American Christian affiliation? The research presented speaks to the necessity for the Evangelical church to once again dedicate its efforts to clearly communicating biblical doctrine and the necessity of developing critical thinking skills among Evangelicals. This informed thinking must come from rigorously trained clergy who can sufficiently transmit that faith once and for all delivered to the saints through means of intentional discipleship to parishioners and parents so that they can in turn model that faith for the next generation. There has been an apparent failure of the church in intentionally training parents and exhorting them of the necessity of “training” their children in the way they should go or they will depart from it, which is exactly what has been occurring in America for the past two decades.

The alignment of Evangelical convictions with political agendas has created a symbiotic relationship between the church and state that has caused produced a church that has become indiscernible from Republican values. The Evangelical church must cease to abdicate its responsibility to the American government for the transformation of society.

Instead of aiming to influence the morality of American society through electing individuals who construct and communicate campaigns that most closely align with ever-shifting Evangelical convictions, the Evangelical church should begin to communicate once again the necessity of a rigorous education, developing critical thinking skills, and a life devoted to the pursuit of life-long learning. This would allow the church to raise up learned, influential disciples who know how to critically think and how to strategically communicate and apply the gospel in any cultural context.

The research provided here brings the Evangelical to consider whether or not the current trend is simply a natural result of a secularizing culture and is the trend irreversible? If all things continue as they have been in the Evangelical community generally and the Southern Baptist Convention specifically then, yes, the continued rapid decline of American Evangelicalism is indeed inevitable. Nonetheless, as this research has highlighted, though there is a rapid decline in religiosity generally and Evangelical expressions of American Christianity specifically, as American religious history has evidenced, reversal of religious disinterest is not only possible but perhaps, probable. The data and the analysis provided throughout this project suggest that there is not only a possibility of reversing the current trend of a rapidly shrinking population of Evangelicals, but the reversal is probable as history has shown, but how Evangelical churches are training families must change.

The alignment of Evangelical convictions with political agendas has created a symbiotic relationship between the church and state that has caused produced a church that has become indiscernible from Republican values. The Evangelical church must cease to abdicate its responsibility to the American government for the transformation of society.

It must commit itself to the preaching the gospel for the conversion of the individual for the multiplication of that transformational message. This commitment would be a correction of current trends among Evangelical churches to devote considerable resources to production and audio-visual effects to enhance the church experience. As mentioned above, this preoccupation with entertainment-style church service is pushing younger generations away because they are not receiving adequate answers to the questions and uncertainties they carry with them.

As presented above, each subsequent American generational cohort is becoming less religious and each Evangelical generational cohort is becoming less certain of their beliefs and

increasingly less able to accurately communicate traditional doctrines of the Evangelical faith. With the Evangelical church becoming increasingly uncertain of their beliefs there is a corresponding increase in mental health issues with each American generational cohort in general and Evangelical generational cohort specifically. If there is to be hope for a future resurgence of Evangelical influence in America, the church must let go of current approaches and examine its current operation in light of its historical existence.

There is an additional area of further research this research project would like to suggest. This project did not set out to provide a detailed explanation of the mechanisms that will create a resurgence among American Evangelicalism. Nonetheless, to be clear, mechanisms such as prayer, rigorous teaching of Christian doctrine, a high view of the authority of Scripture, certainty of belief, and evangelistic zeal have been present immediately prior to, during, and immediately following each major resurgence in American Evangelicalism. One area of research that is greatly needed is further investigation into the process of religious socialization in the home especially throughout Evangelical history.

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