Liberty University

An Inquiry into the Perceived Effects of Historical Revivalism on the Corporate Worship Behaviors of Modern-Day Fundamental and Independent, Baptist and Bible Churches

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by

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DISSERTATION DEFENSE DECISION

The committee has rendered the following decision concerning the defense for

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1. _____ Full approval to proceed with no revisions. The document should be prepared for submission to the Jerry Falwell Library.

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Abstract

Modern-day, independent Bible and Baptist churches continue to structure their corporate worship services after the pattern of the American revivalists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The purpose of this qualitative study with an ethnographic design is to examine the lived experiences of pastors and church leaders from independent Bible and Baptist churches and seek to understand their perceptions of (1) the purpose of corporate worship, (2) the place of evangelism in corporate worship, and (3) the influence of revivalism upon corporate worship practices. Additionally, historical research about the revivalist movement and its influence on worship behaviors is considered. Several emerging themes identified during the data-gathering process include: (1) *sola Scriptura* in ordering corporate worship; (2) the prominence of preaching, (3) the priority of edification, not evangelism; (4) a compulsion to give altar calls; (5) an ignorance of church history; (6) a reticence toward formal liturgy; and (7) the importance of sincerity. In this research study, attention is given to a biblical understanding of corporate worship—its priority, pattern, and benefits. The findings of this study contribute to the literature addressing the impotence of today's corporate worship by identifying discrepancies between methodology and theology.

Keywords: Revivalism, Fundamentalism, Church History, Corporate Worship, Spontaneity, Liturgy, Charles Finney

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As I complete this journey, I am indebted to several people. First and foremost, I thank the Lord Jesus Christ for giving me this opportunity and enabling me to persevere and finish. With every passing year, I seem to sense in a greater way my inadequacies and Christ's sufficiency. His love, mercy, and grace are abundantly evident in my life. I am blessed.

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Furthermore, as I finish this journey, I am indebted to my parents, Phillip and Dana Yowell—the very first fundamentalists I ever met. Their commitment to ministry, passion for Christ's church, and love for people have always outweighed any loyalty to a movement, leader, or denomination. Their example has taught me more than any institution ever has. The rather unexpected and sudden loss of my mother—on October 23, 2023—happened to fall on the week my literature review was due. Needless to say, it was an unwelcome hurdle. While the reality of heaven and reunion is comforting, I am nevertheless still grieving. With Job, I am learning to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). Although her loss has markedly affected my life, I will continue to carry her passion to know and speak the truth.

Several other people have contributed to the completion of this journey. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my dissertation chair, Dr. Scott Connell, for all of his assistance. From my very first class with him at Liberty, I was convinced that he was a true, kindred spirit. His ever-gracious critiques of my writing and the pep talks over Zoom offered much-needed clarity to my thinking and writing. I am also immensely grateful to my employer Appalachian Bible College and my supervisor Tim Rowe for their support and financial assistance in undertaking this degree. While I did not need something extra to add to my schedule, they graciously adjusted my teaching load and gave me "writing days" at home during two semesters. Furthermore, I extend thanks to my church family at Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Beckley, WV, who faithfully prayed and regularly asked about my progress. Moreover, I am grateful for the patience and kindness of my students at Appalachian Bible College. What a blessing to have their friendship and to experience their zest for ministry and willingness to learn! However, I will not miss that oft-asked question, "Mr. Yowell, are you done with your dissertation yet?"

Finally, I dedicate my research and writing to some of the next generation of fundamentalists: my sons and grandson. With a bit of providential timing, my sons and I completed significant academic pursuits in the Spring of 2024—Gideon with a high school diploma; Solomon with a bachelor's degree; Josiah with a master's degree; and I with my doctorate. To see my sons' pursuit of knowledge and love for truth blesses me and brings me great joy (3 Jn. 1:4). I am humbled (and sometimes surprised) that they would aspire to follow in my footsteps; nevertheless, I continue to pray that they will be faithful to God's calling upon their lives. On March 16, 2024, as I neared the completion of my dissertation, my first grandson, Silas Jack, was born. Although I cannot believe that I am old enough to be a grandfather, I am nonetheless totally exhilarated for this phase of life and look forward to Silas living up to his

namesake by being a faithful companion in ministry (1 Pet. 5:12). I pray that he, too, will have a passion for truth and will boldly proclaim it "in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation" (Phil. 2:15).

I see His footsteps in the way,
And follow them through darkest night,
Unafraid I stumble not,
In the glow of perfect light,
I see.

I walk in footsteps of His love,
And find His light leads on before,
Then He gently turns to me,
Softly whispers, "Trust Me more."
I walk.

Then as I follow in His way,
My path ahead will brightly shine,
For in His path of guiding light,
I find His footsteps first,
Then mine.[1]

—Jonathan Cook

[1] Jonathan Cook, "Footsteps" (Columbus, OH: Beckenhorst Press, 2018).

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Churches in the independent, fundamental tradition are firmly committed to doing things "by the book;" that is, the Bible. Whether it be church polity, ministry methodology, or even the seemingly petty color of the carpet, making the right decisions is taken very seriously. These churches undoubtedly trace their ecclesiastical roots back to the Protestant Reformation with its five Solas, one of which is *sola scriptura*—the doctrinal affirmation that the Bible is a sufficient and infallible source of authority for faith and practice. Besides this historic connection, fundamental churches maintain that the Bible affirms its sufficiency. 2 Peter 1:3 purports that Scripture is a perfectly adequate source for "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (King James Version). Similarly, 2 Corinthians 9:8 declares that God has made "all grace abound" to believers and that they have "all sufficiency in all things" so that they "may abound in every good work." Superlatives in both of these passages are conspicuous and give these churches the confidence that they do have the sufficient resource of the Bible to make decisions in *all* areas of life.

Despite their insistence upon the sufficiency of Scripture for all areas of life, fundamental churches seem to exclude at least one key area of doctrine and practice—their behaviors in corporate worship. Of course, this is rarely overt. Most corporate worship elements are derived directly from Scripture—things like singing, the public reading of God's Word, offerings, the Lord's Supper, and baptism. However, some worship traditions in the fundamental church movement find no basis in Scripture. One contributing factor in these worship behaviors is the influence of the American revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries. These uniquely Christian

phenomena and their charismatic leaders appear to have had a profound effect on the worship behaviors of today's fundamental churches.

Historical accounts affirm some of the subtle, if not dramatic, changes that occurred in church doctrine and practice as a result of the revivals—changes that have been perpetuated in church worship until today. As preachers began to emphasize the free will of man, there was a shift from a Calvinistic viewpoint to more of an Arminian one. Preaching similarly changed from primarily expositional to topical. The theology of conversion also saw variation with an emphasis on public decisions. Revivalists saw it as their responsibility to incorporate "new measures" to convince sinners of their need for salvation through the regular use of altar calls, invitations, and emotional appeals. Furthermore, worship songs had a new focus on sentimentality and personal experience. In worship services, spontaneity was deemed better than anything planned or scripted. Formal liturgies were frowned upon. Emotionalism and dramatic displays were considered authentic, powerful demonstrations of spiritual awakening. In all these ways, and surely more, revivalists markedly changed the landscape of corporate church worship.

Even though recent scholarship may seem to suggest that the revivalists were sincere in their new measures, sincerity has never been a good measurement of truth. Laramie Minga proposes, "Churches that have inherited practices from…[revivalism] but that wish to remain faithful to biblical prescription need to carefully consider whether these new measures actually find precedent in Scripture and church history." [1] In other words, churches need to decide if the sufficiency of God's Word extends even to the specific worship elements and behaviors that are currently practiced in their weekly assemblies. When they do such an evaluation, churches may discover that revivalism as a historic phenomenon has more in common with the pragmatism and

[1] Laramie Minga, "New Forms of Old Measures: Nineteenth-Century New-Measures Revivalists' Understanding of their Methodologies," *Artistic Theologian* 9 (2021): 43–59.

consumerism of modern-day attractional models of worship than it does with the biblical-historical model of worship.

Statement of the Problem

Why churches gather together is a longstanding debate. Is it to worship God or evangelize the lost? Or, is it a combination of the two? Among modern-day independent, fundamental churches, there seems to be a common sentiment—that the church gathers for the primary benefit of the unsaved. Even though few would readily admit it, there is plenty of evidence—altar calls are spoken of as the most important part of the service,[2] the worship service itself is centered around "seekers,"[3] and sermons are primarily evangelistic. From outward appearances, the primary purpose of these services is evangelism. That may seem commendable but when nearly every element of the worship service is focused on "getting people saved," an outsider could easily conclude that exalting God is not high on the church's priority list. Certainly, both biblical directives (evangelism and worship) are essential; however, each has its own sphere of specific application. Corporate gatherings are primarily for the benefit of the saved (as they worship God), while all the rest of life is tasked with "making disciples" (evangelism). Of these two priorities, John Piper explains:

> Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't…. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.[4]

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[2] Faris D. Whitesell, *65 Ways to Give an Evangelistic Invitation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1945), preface.

[3] Jared C. Wilson, *The Gospel-Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 17.

[4] John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 20.

Of course, there is some overlap between evangelism and worship, and there should be a connection between them, too. For example, when worship is rightly prioritized, people *will* get saved. The converse is also true: when people are truly saved, biblical worship is going to become a priority. Nevertheless, today's fundamental churches need biblical clarification on these dual responsibilities. Is there tension between worship and evangelism? Should public gatherings of the church center around the worship of God and the edification of believers? Or, should services be structured around getting people saved?

Furthermore, in this study, it is imperative to contemplate the influence of historical precedent upon current corporate worship behaviors. Despite their settled conviction that God's Word is the sufficient source for all decision-making, many churches in the independent, fundamental tradition appear to give higher authority to historical precedent as it relates to the pattern of their worship services. While precedent should play a role in the church's worship practices, these churches seem to limit the influence of history to the American revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries, and there appears to be no concerted effort to understand how or why revivalism greatly changed patterns of worship. Moreover, why limit precedent to this era of history? For churches who stand in the stream of the Protestant Reformation with its emphasis on the renewal of biblical worship practices, it seems odd that many of these churches display a rather paranoid avoidance (and sometimes even condemnation) of anything that sounds *Reformed* or *Calvinistic*.[5] Corporate worship behaviors that were restored through the influence of the Reformation—practices such as metrical psalm-singing and formal confessions of faith—are rarely used in fundamental churches. These are some of the questions and concerns that this

[5] It is not the researcher's purpose to delve into the doctrinal nuances of Calvinism; nevertheless, fundamentalism's attempt to distance itself from the movement is thought-provoking and somewhat perplexing.

study proposes to consider and answer the question: "Why are churches choosing to use a historic-*revivalism* model rather than a historic-*biblical* model?"

Theoretical Framework

At the outset, this study acknowledges that all good, qualitative research uses an interpretive or theoretical framework as it addresses the meaning individuals ascribe to a social or human problem.[6] While the researcher intends to be an objective observer of behaviors and interpreter of data, he concedes (as all qualitative researchers must) that true objectivity probably is not possible.[7] John Creswell and Cheryl Poth contend, "How we formulate our problem and research questions to study is shaped by our assumptions and, in turn, influences how we seek information to answer the questions."[8] Within this study, certain theological and philosophical presuppositions will inexorably form an interpretive lens for the gathering of data and the interpretation of it. Most notably, this study will be approached with a biblical worldview. Worldview has been defined as "a basic set of beliefs that guide action."[9] Therefore, a *biblical* worldview is a belief system based on the Bible that informs the totality of one's conclusions. At the foundation of such a belief system is the conviction that the Bible was given by God as an inerrant and authoritative source of knowledge. As a Christian with a biblical worldview, the researcher sees the Bible as a standard by which one must test all other truth-claims.[10] While approaching this study with an open mind about what it may reveal, the researcher nonetheless

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[6] John W. Creswell & Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2018), 42.

[7] Creswell & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry,* 356.

[8] Creswell & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 19.

[9] Egon G. Guba, *The Paradigm Dialog* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 1990), 17.

[10] John MacArthur, *Think Biblically!* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 21.

expects that his perception of worship behaviors will be affected by his lifelong commitment to the standard of the Bible.

Purpose of the Study

The main objective of this ethnographic study is to conduct qualitative research to examine (1) the perceptions of pastors and other church leaders from independent, fundamental churches in the United States and (2) what influences their beliefs about, and behaviors in, corporate worship. To meet this purpose, the research will seek to understand the participants' perceptions of (a) the purpose of corporate worship, (b) the place of evangelism in corporate worship, and (c) the influence of historic revivalism upon corporate worship behaviors.

Research Questions

The central research question guiding this qualitative inquiry is: "What are the core beliefs related to corporate worship of church leaders within independent, fundamental churches, and how do these leaders understand and interpret historical precedent upon corporate worship behaviors?" Subquestions for the study include the following: (1) What do church leaders see as the connection between corporate worship and evangelism? (2) How do church leaders describe an ideal worship service? and (3) How do church leaders perceive the influence of historical precedent (specifically revivalism) upon contemporary worship behaviors?

Research Sample and Sampling Technique

For this study, data will be gathered from several church leaders and pastors within fundamentalist churches—independent Bible and/or Baptist churches. As a unique culture-sharing group, these leaders bear the responsibility of governance, which often includes choosing corporate worship elements and behaviors. Because a hallmark of all good qualitative research is

the report of multiple viewpoints that range over the entire spectrum of perspectives,[11] the researcher endeavored to mingle with as many participants as would provide a thorough saturation of data (i.e., when gathering new data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties).[12] However, rather than utilizing a large probability sampling to determine statistical inferences, the researcher used purposeful sampling in selecting people who would display variation about the research problem under examination, hoping to find the widest possible spectrum of beliefs and worship practices that could ensure an accurate picture of the entire group.[13] The sampling was aimed at ensuring that participants could answer general, open-ended questions that helped the researcher understand their experiences and perspectives.

Delimitations of Samples

This study considers both small and large churches in the geographical United States and delimits itself to the perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of church leaders as they relate to corporate worship behaviors. The demographics of the study consist of a multi-ethnic group, ranging in age from about 20 to 90 years old. Because of the historic stance of fundamental churches regarding church leadership, the participants were predominantly male and include pastors, ministers of music, worship leaders, church board members, worship team members, important congregation members, and volunteers. Given the exploratory nature of the study, the researcher considered the components of each church's corporate worship behaviors and how the various leaders understand their role and how they influence the congregation in those behaviors.

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[11] Creswell & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 154.

[12] John W. Creswell & J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches,* 5th ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2018), 186.

[13] Creswell & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry,* 148.

Methodological Design

Research for this study takes a qualitative approach in the form of an ethnography. This methodological approach intends to gain a holistic picture of the study's participants in their natural settings. Given the nature of the central research question, this study is predominantly exploratory—seeking to understand the perceptions, motivations, and experiences of a single culture-sharing group (independent, fundamental church leaders) as they relate to their corporate worship behaviors. Talking directly to people and seeing their behavior up close is a major characteristic of qualitative research and allows the researcher to understand the phenomenon from the participants' perspectives. This research is expected to yield a great diversity of perceptions on the topic; therefore, the study seeks to analyze and understand the data to draw general themes and/or patterns (inductive reasoning).

Instrumentation

Because qualitative researchers typically gather multiple forms of data, tools for this study include (1) observations, (2) interviews, and (3) official documents (including digital sources).[14] First, the researcher conducted observations of (1) regular, corporate worship services (a typical Sunday service) and (2) special services (a revival and/or evangelistic service) at fundamental churches. In this fieldwork, the researcher participated as a worshiper and then documented his experience and observations of the behaviors and elements of worship in these public services. Second, the researcher conducted face-to-face (or Zoom call) interviews with pastors and other church leaders in independent, fundamental churches to hear (1) why they do what they do in corporate worship, (2) their understanding of the purpose of corporate worship and the place of evangelism in corporate worship, and (3) the influence (if any is perceived) of

[14] Creswell & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 160.

revivalism upon today's corporate worship. This open-ended questioning process sought to elicit the personal views and experiences of the participants regarding corporate worship. Finally, the researcher also considered public documents (doctrinal and position statements, blogs, websites, tweets, recordings, etc.) to understand these churches' core beliefs and preferences regarding corporate worship behaviors. In its final product, this study summarizes its research findings, comparing them to relevant literature on the topic, and (using a biblical lens) forms interpretations of the findings to present an agenda for corporate worship reform and renewal.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to an understanding of the factors that maintain the status quo of worship in today's independent, fundamental churches. While these churches readily acknowledge the danger inherent in their reticence to change,[15] they nevertheless are hesitant to adjust long-standing traditions and behaviors. Instead of maintaining a biblical philosophy of worship, they continue to practice corporate worship behaviors that may have lost any or all meaning and/or purpose. This proposed study is significant because it challenges the assumption that "getting people saved" is the primary objective of the gathered church. Many of today's worship practices (while well-intentioned) are an attempt to draw in more people. Instead of focusing on the adoration of God, the church has other priorities. Timothy Pierce observes, "In a world where churches are increasingly focused on getting people in the door, we can lose the element of worship as a function of congregational gatherings. The meeting becomes a matter of preference, rather than a matter of focus."[16] The researcher desires to understand what church

[15] Fundamental churches often joke about the seven last words of a dying church: "we never did it that way before." Yet, they remain rather stubborn in their unwillingness to do things differently.

[16] Timothy, M. Pierce. *Enthroned on Our Praise: An Old Testament Theology of Worship* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2008), 180.

leaders believe is the focus and objective of corporate worship. Is the church's motivation to adore God and declare His worth? Or is there another underlying rationale?

Whenever the church considers the biblical priority of worship and renews its commitment to worship, there *will be* positive, kingdom impact. Being in God's presence is always life-changing, and the church has that distinct privilege in corporate worship. Second Corinthians 3:18 says that believers are "transformed" when they behold "with unveiled face" the "glory of the Lord." In other words, no one who is exposed to God's presence will remain the same. Furthermore, throughout the Old Testament, God's prophets urge the Israelites to consider their worship and the heart attitude behind it. In Isaiah 1:11, the prophet recounts the Lord's message to the people: "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?... I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats." It is a familiar refrain. While the Lord certainly was not rejecting the rituals that he himself had instituted, he was expressing his desire for obedient *and* sincere worship. It is this same kind of worship that Jesus spoke of in His conversation with the woman at the well (John 4). So then, worship behaviors are important, as well as the attitudes and motivations behind them. If today's church is willing to evaluate current worship trends and heed the clear parameters of God's Word, there can be revival and blessing in our churches and country (2 Chron 7:14).

Definitions of Key Terms

Fundamentalism—Research for the study focuses on churches within modern-day, independent, fundamental churches in the United States—a movement often referred to as *fundamentalism*. Because the term *fundamentalist* has many different shades of meaning, a delineation is necessary. The word itself refers to that which is essential, foundational, or central.

The use of the word in the context of a church group probably stems back to an early 20th-century publication, *The Fundamentals*, which sought to defend historic Christianity against the attack of liberal ideology. The movement that flowed from this was primarily composed of churches that desired to remain steadfast to these *fundamentals* of the faith. Most of these churches also desired to be autonomous—free from any abusive denominational control. In simplest terms, fundamentalists today still believe that "fundamental doctrines are definitive for Christian fellowship," and they "refuse Christian fellowship with all who deny fundamental doctrines."[17] This study focuses on independent Bible and Baptist churches that still adhere to the title of *fundamental*.

Corporate Worship Behaviors—By *corporate worship behaviors*, the researcher means the actions performed and/or encouraged within public worship services, as well as the motivation behind those actions. In its research, this study considers specific elements of public worship—such as prayer, reading of Scripture, preaching, altar calls, and music. But also, the content of those elements is considered: the lyrics of the songs, the subjects of the messages, the wording of altar calls, etc. These unique actions and the motivations behind these actions form the boundaries of this study.

Assumptions of the Study

Due to the nature of this study (exploratory, qualitative) and its theoretical framework (biblical worldview), several assumptions are proposed. Paul Leedy, Jeanne Ormrod, and Laura Johnson define an assumption as "a condition that is taken for granted, without which the

[17] Central Baptist Theological Seminary, "On Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism," accessed October 17, 2021, https://centralseminary.edu/on-fundamentalism-and-evangelicalism.

research project would be pointless."[18] In the tradition of good qualitative studies, it is recognized that complete objectivity is not possible. Therefore, this study assumes the following: (1) interview participants gave truthful portrayals that offer reasonably accurate indicators of their actual behaviors and motivations in corporate worship (2) observed worship behaviors effectively reveal what is normative (i.e., when the researcher is not present); (3) the scope of the research sample is representative of the broader spectrum of independent, fundamental churches; and (4) research participants have a settled conviction about the priority of corporate worship, as well as the sufficiency of Scripture for "all things." These inherent beliefs, expectations, and values lead the study to draw certain conclusions.

Limitations

While this proposed study offers several potential benefits to the field of worship, it is not without its limitations. First, although the researcher proposes a purposeful sampling to generate accurate and specific findings, there is the possibility that the findings are nevertheless imprecise. The dynamics of church leadership and membership are always difficult to understand and/or explain. In a democratic organization (like a local church), one may legitimately wonder, "Who's really in charge?" While the leadership appears to have the greatest influence, it may be a wealthy or powerful church member who ultimately controls what takes place in the congregation. Therefore, including only church leadership as participants in the study may have hindered the researcher from obtaining an accurate picture of worship behaviors and the motivations behind those behaviors.

[18] Paul D. Leedy, Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, and Laura Ruth Johnson, *Practical Research Planning and Design* 12th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2016), 4.

Second, as with many qualitative studies, the small, purposeful sampling of this proposed study may have contributed to some limitations. While the researcher intended to select participants who would display variation in an attempt to find the widest possible spectrum of beliefs and worship practices to gain an accurate picture of the entire group, the findings of the study are not likely representative of *all* churches in the independent, fundamentalist tradition. Churches are unique and complex institutions with their own democratically chosen preferences and convictions about corporate worship behaviors; therefore, what is revealed in this study may or may not be indicative of the greater independent, fundamental church movement. Furthermore, the researcher's personal relationship with those engaged through purposeful sampling may raise concerns about the participants' willingness to be honest and straightforward concerning their beliefs about and behaviors in corporate worship. For example, the participants may be more inclined to respond with what they perceive to be correct or expected. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the researcher's emic perspective and experience in fundamentalist churches enhanced his ability to ask probing questions that reveal underlying motivations behind initial statements. These potential limitations related to purposeful sampling are further mitigated through intentional reflexivity throughout the study, as the researcher (1) talks about his own beliefs and experiences in corporate worship, (2) explains how his interpretation of the data is shaped by his life experiences, and (3) acknowledges the unique voice and perspective of the study's participants.[19]

Finally, a third limitation of this study is the ever-changing nature of worship methodology and practice. History bears out the fact that worship behaviors change over time. What was once considered *worldly* or *unscriptural* somehow eventually made its way into

[19] Creswell & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 229.

mainstream worship practices. Of course, the worship wars in recent decades were a result of this ubiquitous tension in worship practice. Therefore, to study a dynamic field (like corporate worship behaviors) is to gain only a momentary evaluation of current, accepted practices—an evaluation that is sure to change. Instead of being liabilities, it is anticipated that all of these elements (and potential limitations) contribute to the intrinsically qualitative nature of the proposed study.

Qualifications of the Researcher

The researcher's upbringing and life experiences especially qualify him for the nature of this study. Having grown up as a pastor's son in the *independent, fundamentalist* church tradition, the researcher is well acquainted with the worship behaviors, traditions, and leadership dynamic within the movement. Additionally, he received a bachelor's degree in Bible/Theology at Appalachian Bible College and undertook graduate studies at Northland International University—both historic, fundamentalist institutions. Also, the researcher served as a senior pastor of an independent, Bible church for 17 years. Therefore, it is expected that his perceptions of independent, fundamental churches have been shaped by his lifelong proximity to them. While no church or leader is free from imperfection, the researcher generally had positive experiences growing up, being educated, and pastoring in *fundamentalist* establishments. He does not write out of bitterness or with a vengeful motive;[20] rather, he simply desires to report what he has seen, heard, and experienced. These life experiences, instead of being detrimental, enhance the researcher's contribution to the subject matter at hand. Admittedly, due to his closeness to fundamentalism (both as a child and adult), the researcher brings certain biases to

[20] Recent works have spoken critically about the "fundamentalist" church movement, and the researcher is not seeking to deny their experiences or claims. He is simply stating that his experience has been vastly different.

this study. While it is expected that a study of this nature would have a degree of objectivity, the researcher freely admits that his experiences shape the collection of data and the interpretation of that data. Nevertheless, this proximity to the study group gives the researcher unique access and provides an overall advantage to an honest interpretation of data.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Revivalism has been well-established in the literature as a unique biblical, national, psychological, religious, and social phenomenon. Its historical and national impact, doctrinal shifts, and charismatic leaders have had the attention of writers for some time and will probably continue to do so for years to come. Jerald Brauer contends, "Probably as many scholarly books have been written on aspects of revivalism in the United States as on any religious topic, apart from books on Jesus."[1] Understanding this literature is key to understanding the impact the movement has had on current-day worship beliefs and behaviors. This summary examines the historical literature on the American revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries—commonly referred to as the First and Second Great Awakenings—that serves as the foundation for the dissertation.

The first section focuses on literature that defines revivalism as both a psychological, social, and spiritual phenomenon. It focuses on the ever-changing definition of revivalism throughout the First and Second Great Awakenings, and the phenomenon's rather important connection to corporate worship behaviors. The second section of this literature review considers some of the primary doctrines that undergird revivalism, assuming that theology (what one believes) significantly informs and shapes philosophy (why one believes) and methodology (what one does). The third section considers literature examining some of the profound effects of the movement on corporate worship methodology and practices—both initially and today. Finally, the last section provides a rationale for additional literature in the field by explaining how this study continues from the edge of past research and fills a unique niche in the continuum

[1] Jerald C. Brauer, "Revivalism Revisited," *The Journal of Religion* 77, no. 2 (April 1997): 268.

by seeking to understand the unique effect of revivalism on current-day worship behaviors in fundamental and independent Baptist and Bible churches.

Defining the Phenomenon of Revivalism

An Ever-Changing Definition

A starting point for any study of revivalism is defining the phenomenon; however, that is not an easy task because the terms *revival* and *revivalism* have had various shades of meanings throughout modern history. Before a formal and comprehensive definition can be proposed, there must be a historical consideration of the terms. Within the literature on the topic, there almost appears to be a concerted effort to document and explain how revival has been distinctively perceived in different eras of history and in what ways the understanding of the term has morphed over time. Understanding these perceptions and definitional distinctions is essential to this study because it (1) reveals the somewhat subjective nature of the topic and (2) explains the perennial controversy that surrounds it within the scholarly community.

Miraculous and Surprising

During the period of the First Great Awakening, many of the early American preachers spoke of and wrote about the phenomenon of revival as a miraculous work of God, a welcome and seemingly unexpected period of spiritual awakening and renewal in the church. Around 1712, the Congregationalist pastor Solomon Stoddard (1643–1729) of Northampton, MA, described such occurrences as "special seasons wherein God doth in a remarkable manner revive religion among his people."[2] Although the term *revival* is not a biblical term, Stoddard uses it

[2] Iain Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism,1750–1858* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), xvii.

descriptively, but he was not the first to do so. Cotton Mather (1663–1728), in his *Magnalia Christi Americana* (published in 1702), uses the word *revival* to describe a sovereign outpouring of grace that resulted in the uncommon addition of many to the church.[3] Other preachers of this era communicate a similar understanding. For instance, minister Robert Fleming (1630–1694) speaks of an "extraordinary out-letting of the Spirit" and of "an appearance of God and downpouring of the Spirit."[4] Additionally, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), the grandson and successor of Solomon Stoddard, in his well-known essay *A Faithful Narrative on the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton* (1736), sought to explain and defend the rather unexpected and amazing nature of what took place among his local congregation in Massachusetts. Terms like *remarkable*, *surprising*, and *astonishing* pepper Edwards' work, revealing that the well-known preacher was pleased but genuinely shocked by the exceptional moving of God's Spirit among the people.[5] To be sure, in Edwards' thinking, revival was not something that was humanly planned and orchestrated; rather, it was wholly a work of God. Certainly, Edwards *was* an essential participant. His preaching—especially his "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" message—is legendary and surely was a crucial element in calling people to respond to God's Word. Nevertheless, Edwards (in his own words) maintained the sovereignty of God in initiating and orchestrating extraordinary spiritual awakenings, while human effort merely played a secondary role. Throughout the literature of the era of the First Great Awakening, such descriptions abound.

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[3] Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana, Books I and II*, ed. Kenneth B. Murdock and Elizabeth W. Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 237.

[4] Murray, *Revival*, 374.

[5] Jonathan Edwards, *Select Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume I* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 7–13.

Nearly a hundred years after Edwards and well into the Second Great Awakening, some continued to view revival primarily as a miraculous act of divine grace.[6] Asahel Nettleton (1783–1844), a theologian and evangelist, speaks of revival as a divine "shower of blessing" over which preachers had no more control than the farmer had control over a shower of rain.[7] Nettleton's biographer and friend, Bennet Tyler (1783–1858), writes, "Dr. Nettleton never held out to churches the idea that they could 'get up a revival,' or that they could have a revival at any time. It is true that he set before them the encouragement which God has given to humble and fervent prayer. But he always maintained that a revival of true religion depends on the sovereign interposition of God."[8] Nettleton, like Edwards, recognized the responsibility of churches to pray for revival as well as the responsibility of preachers to proclaim the gospel with clarity; however, he firmly believed that it was the Lord who ultimately brought revival—sometimes more dramatically and overtly than at other times. For this reason, many considered revival a "surprising" event. Laramie Minga explains, "The work [of revival] was surprising in that men did not practice means outside of the ordinary ones of faithful gospel proclamation and prayer or attempt to fulfill experiential conditions, yet sinners were awakened in large numbers. Therefore, when this awakening emerged, the work was overwhelmingly attributed to God."[9]

Within the literature, it is evident that many denominational leaders (during both the First and Second Great Awakenings) consistently viewed the phenomenon of revival as an

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[6] William G. McLoughlin, Jr., *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1959), 32.

[7] McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 32.

[8] Bennet Tyler, *Memoir of the Life and Character of Rev. Asahel Nettleton, D.D.* (Boston: Congregational Board of Publication, 1855), 204.

[9] Laramie Minga, "New Forms of Old Measures: Nineteenth-Century New-Measures Revivalists' Understanding of Their Methodologies," *Artistic Theologian* 9 (2021): 44.

unexpected, yet favorable work of the Lord—one entirely independent of any special, human means. In the July 1803 edition of the *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine*, an article describes the prevailing view among Presbyterians.

> In most northern and eastern Presbyteries, revivals of religion of a more or less general nature have taken place. In these revivals, the work of divine grace has proceeded, with few exceptions, in the usual way. Sinners have been convinced and converted by the still small voice of the Holy Spirit,—have been brought out of darkness into marvelous light, and from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, without any remarkable bodily agitations, or extraordinary bodily agitations or extraordinary affections. In this calm and ordinary manner, many hundreds have been added to the church in the course of the last year; and multitudes of those, who had before joined themselves to the Lord, have experienced times of refreshing, from his presence.[10]

First-hand accounts abound in other denominations, too, consistently describing the revivals as happening in this "usual way." As pastors faithfully preached in the normal course of worship, an unexpected outpouring of God's blessing suddenly became evident. Iain Murray contends,

> The facts are indisputable. A considerable body of men, before the Second Great Awakening, preached the same message as they did during the revival but with vastly different consequences—the same men, the same actions, performed with the same abilities, yet the results were so amazingly different! The conclusion has to be drawn that the change in the churches after 1798 and 1800 cannot be explained in terms of the means used. Nothing was clearer to those who saw the events than that God was sovereignly pleased to bless human instrumentality in such a way that the success could be attributed to him alone.[11]

Planned and Expected

Despite the common perception throughout the First Great Awakening of revival as a miraculous and somewhat surprising event, this prevailing view appears to shift considerably over time. One of the first preachers to articulate a change in definition was the Rev. Calvin Colton (1789–1857) who purported that revival could be categorized into two different types: the

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[10] William Speer, *The Revival of 1800* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1872), 66.

[11] Murray, *Revival*, 127–28.

old and the new. In his *History and Character of American Revivals* (1832), Colton explains that the old revival was largely mysterious, coming "directly from the presence of the Lord, unasked for, unexpected."[12] However, Colton believed that a new type of revival was manifesting itself, one characterized by "human instrumentality."[13] In straightforward language, Colton writes:

> I have intimated, that the more ordinary character of revivals of religion in the United States, *formerly*, was a visitation of the Spirit of the Lord upon a community, unexpected, and apparently unasked. God did not seem to wait for instrumentality in its common visible forms. But *now*, the ordinary character of the same events is the divine blessing upon measures concerted and executed by man, where the instruments are obvious [emphasis original].[14]

The shift in definition could not be more clearly stated. Old revivals were surprising interventions by God, while new revivals were to be expected through the use of human means or measures. Colton goes so far as to say that the new revivals were "principally brought about" through human action.[15] Such language betrays a major shift in philosophy, as well as theology. While Colton does not disregard the element of the divine in revival, he does lean heavily toward human effort, and by doing so, he appears to blame preachers for the lack of revival.

> That common apology for indolence, which clothes itself with the sanctity of a resignation to the divine will—"we must wait for God's time"—has been too often and too long employed in the United States, in application to the coming of Revivals of Religion. But it is now getting to be more generally understood, that to wait for God's time, in this matter, is not to wait at all;—and that sitting still, or standing still, is not the submission of piety, but an expression of the sloth and recklessness of unbelief. Revivals of Religion now—at least to some extent—are not simply regarded, as things to be believed in, as possible with God, and then resigned to God, as though man had nothing to do with them; but they are laid out as fields of labour, in which it is expected man will

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[12] Calvin Colton, *History and Character of American Revivals of Religion* (London: Frederick Westley and A. H. Davis, 1832), 2.

[13] Colton, *History*, 4.

[14] Colton, *History*, 8–9.

[15] Colton, *History*, 9.

> be a co-worker with God. They are made matters of human calculation, by the arithmetic of faith in God's engagements.[16]

Indeed, Colton's reasoning appears sound. If revival is dependent upon human action, then the absence of revival can be attributed to the failure of men to act. For this reason, Colton devotes an entire chapter of his book to the "Means of Originating and Promoting Revivals." To be clear, when Colton asserts that the old revivalists believed in a revival where "man had nothing to do," he grossly misrepresents their position. As referenced above, Edwards and other early preachers did view themselves as co-workers with God in revival through the usual means of prayer and preaching, yet they were still surprised when revival came. Colton, on the other hand, understood the phenomenon as being largely dependent upon human action; therefore, revival was to be planned and expected. His written work is significant because this rather dramatic shift in the understanding of revival is plainly articulated for the first time.

Other revivalists, primarily those within the era of the Second Great Awakening, would take Colton's philosophy considerably further. One of the most vocal proponents of planned and expected revival was Charles Finney (1792–1875). Within the literature, it is well-established that the famous and rather controversial preacher ultimately brought some drastic (and far-reaching) changes to the field. In 1835 (three years after Colton's book), Finney published his well-known treatise *Lectures on the Revival of Religion*—a how-to manual intended to explain and defend his particular understanding of revival. In contrast to many in the previous generation of revivalists, Finney believed that if preachers would follow a set pattern, revival was certain to take place. In his *Lectures*, Finney alleges that revival is "not a miracle, or dependent on a miracle, in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means—as much so as any other effect produced by the application of means… A revival is as

[16] Colton, *History*, 5–6.

naturally a result of the use of the appropriate means as a crop is of the use of its appropriate means."[17] Like Colton, Finney (to an even greater degree) leaned toward a man-engineered approach. Once again, the change is quite overt. Instead of viewing revival as "a surprising work of God" (the oft-used phrase of Edwards), Finney proposed and sincerely believed that a strategically orchestrated meeting could produce guaranteed results. McLoughlin, comparing Edwards and Finney, explains, "One saw God as the center of the universe, the other saw man. One believed that revivals were 'prayed down' and the other that they were 'worked up.'"[18] Surely, it was a basic philosophical and theological shift—one that is evidenced in Finney's vocabulary and methodology. Moreover, Finney, like Colton, placed blame on the shoulders of the church for a lack of revival. Writing in a chapter entitled "When to Expect a Revival," Finney charges, "You see why you have not a revival. It is only because you do not want one."[19] Such thinking and rhetoric permeate Finney's writings. His "new measures"[20] revivalism, as it would popularly be dubbed, became the dominant view by the mid-nineteenth century.

Recent scholarship suggests that Finney was sincere in his new measures,[21] and the preacher's writings demonstrate how he sought to defend their use by biblical and historical precedent. His motive seems benign, even good: everything was done to get more converts. Through the use of human measures—protracted (or extended) meetings, colloquial language in preaching, naming individuals in public prayer, and the "anxious bench" for convicted sinners—

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[17] Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1898), 172.

[18] McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 11.

[19] Finney, *Lectures*, 36.

[20] Leonard I. Sweet, "The View of Man Inherent in New Measures Revivalism," *Church History* 45, no. 2 (June 1976): 206.

[21] Minga, "New Forms," 43–59.

Finney demonstrated his sincere desire to persuade people into the kingdom. When his methods were initially met with criticism, Finney took a decidedly pragmatic defense, challenging his critics, "Show me the fruits of your ministry; and if they so far exceed mine as to give me evidence that you have found a more excellent way, I will adopt your views… Yet the results justify my methods."[22] Elsewhere, Finney defends his new measures: "When the blessing evidently follows the introduction of the measure itself, the proof is unanswerable that the measure is wise."[23] Finney's insistence that results justify methods reveals his underlying philosophical motivation. Despite his admission that revival requires "the blessing of God,"[24] his ministry, writings, and legacy lean heavily toward human means. In Finney's mind, "If men had to be persuaded into the Kingdom, then persuade them, he would."[25] Yet, despite Finney's apparent sincerity, his methods, as well as the philosophy behind them, need a biblical critique.

Revival vs. Revivalism

In his book *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism*, Iain Murray provides a thorough account (from primary sources) of the First and Second Great Awakenings and proposes a rather thought-provoking distinction between *revival* and *revivalism*—as the title of his book would suggest. Although the terms are often used interchangeably, Murray offers a necessary contrast. Observing the ever-changing perception of revival that progressed from the First Great Awakening to the Second, Murray maintains a

[22] Charles G. Finney, *Charles G. Finney: An Autobiography* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1908), 83.

[23] Finney, *Lectures*, 189.

[24] Finney, *Lectures*, 13.

[25] William H. Cooper, Jr. *The Great Revivalists in American Religion, 1740–1944* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010), 72.

dissimilarity between true *revival* (a God-initiated renewal of purity and power) and mere *revivalism* (a man-centered, emotional manipulation to secure conversions). He contends that many "fail to recognize the all-important distinction between religious excitements, deliberately organized to secure converts, and the phenomenon of authentic spiritual awakening which is the work of the living God."[26] Murray's work is substantial because (1) it summarizes and expands what other writers in the field have observed and (2) it affirms the legitimacy and reality of a God-initiated revival within the church.

First, throughout the literature, it is significant that Murray is not alone in his observations. Several authors seem to recognize the necessary distinction that must be made between genuine revival and mere revivalism. In her *Triumph of the Laity*, Marilyn Westerkamp describes the revivals of the Scots-Irish and their similarity to the Great Awakenings of North America. Her primary attention seems to be on the related ritual behaviors between the movements in both hemispheres. Surely, the phenomenon of revival entails social and theological components (as discussed elsewhere in this literature review); however, Westerkamp's focus is on the similarity of cultic[27] and ritualistic components. She speaks of the behaviors that are associated with revivalism, by which she means "rituals focused upon conversion and characterized by a highly charged emotional and physical, supposedly spontaneous, response to deliberate, organized efforts to stimulate that response."[28] To Westerkamp, *this* is revivalism and should not be confused with genuine revival. Others concur. Robert David Smart identifies a similar contrast stating, "Revival[ism] has often been associated

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[26] Murray, *Revival*, xix.

[27] Although the word *cultic* has a negative connotation in the contemporary understanding, Westerkamp uses it in a broad sense referring to patterns of ritualistic behavior related to organized religion and public worship.

[28] Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity: Scot-Irish Piety and the Great Awakening, 1625–1760* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 28.

with a humanly engineered series of meetings to convert the unsaved and with a fanatical experience that has little to do with the gospel and biblical theology."[29] Nevertheless, Smart also offers the alternative: "Revival is a sovereign gift from God in which, for a special season, His normal and true work of advancing His kingdom is sped up or quickened so that more is accomplished through His servants in a shorter period of time."[30] Furthermore, William McLoughlin in the opening chapter of his well-known *Modern Revivalism* contrasts the divine results of a genuine "awakening" [31] (i.e., a revival) with the "new techniques,"[32] "emotional excesses"[33] and "false converts"[34] of manufactured revivalism. In other words, McLoughlin seems to suggest that the term *revival* has been so jaded by the outward trappings of *revivalism* that it is of little meaning and value. Finally, in 1973, researcher Kenneth Hylson-Smith wrote an in-depth analysis of revivalism from both a sociological and religious perspective. His rather extensive Ph.D. dissertation[35] takes a phenomenological approach and outlines helpful parameters by initially describing *revivalism* in rather general terms as a highly personal, emotional, and spiritual experience. Although he does not distinguish between the terms *revival* and *revivalism* as Murray does, Hylson-Smith articulates the necessity of making a "distinction

[29] Robert Davis Smart, Michael A. G. Haykin, and Ian Hugh Clary, eds., *Pentecostal Outpourings: Revival and the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), ix.

[30] Smart, Haykin, and Clary, *Pentecostal*, ix.

[31] McLoughlin, *Modern*, 8.

[32] McLoughlin, *Modern*, 11.

[33] McLoughlin, *Modern*, 14.

[34] McLoughlin, *Modern*, 14.

[35] Kenneth Hylson-Smith, "Studies in Revivalism as a Social and Religious Phenomenon, With Special Reference to the London Revival of 1736–1750," PhD diss., Leicester University, 1973, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses (UMI U417315).

between revivalism and similar phenomena which differ from it in certain essential ways."[36] He carefully distinguishes revival from other religious traditions such as "reform movements, 'enthusiasms,' and evangelism"[37]—traditions that are potentially humanly engineered. In contrast to these, Hylson-Smith recognizes (like Murray) that revival is "largely spontaneous,"[38] "genuine,"[39] and seemingly "divine."[40] In addition, while there seems to be wide agreement on the subjective and emotional nature of the religious phenomenon, Hylson-Smith warns against the perception that intense, spiritual emotionalism and sensationalism are what define revival. He offers the following specialized definition, which provides a beneficial parameter for the current study. Revival is:

> A sudden, largely spontaneous, marked and sustained increase in the extent and intensity of the commitment of a number of individuals within a religious tradition in a particular geographical area to the beliefs and practices of their faith; a sudden increase in the concern of such members of a religious tradition for the conversion to a similar faith of those at the time either outside it, or only nominal members of it; and an accompanying increase in the fervour and intensity of the corporate religious life of those concerned. This is accompanied by a sudden marked increase in the numbers of new commitments (conversions) to the same religious faith of those within the revival from among those previously outside it, or only nominal members of the religious tradition within which the revival occurs. It often entails certain features coming into prominence in the individual and corporate life of those involved, which are normally minimally present, or totally absent in the religious tradition concerned; features which are associated with the original emergence of the religious tradition, and with its nascent individual and corporate life.[41]

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[36] Hylson-Smith, "Studies," 16.

[37] Hylson-Smith, "Studies," 18.

[38] Hylson-Smith, "Studies," 16.

[39] Hylson-Smith, "Studies," 70.

[40] Hylson-Smith, "Studies," 8.

[41] Hylson-Smith, "Studies," 16.

Hylson-Smith's comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon provides valuable insight for the current study by affirming the distinction that Murray and others make between a genuine, God-initiated revival and the less-desirable, manufactured revivalism.

Not only is Murray's work compelling because it summarizes and expands what other writers have observed, but *Revivals and Revivalism* is also a seminal work because it acknowledges both the possibility and legitimacy of genuine revival. Throughout his historical account of the First and Second Great Awakenings, Murray confirms and celebrates the surprising yet favorable work of God manifested in the church through seasons of revival. Although he surely resists that which is "merely emotional, contrived or manipulated,"[42] Murray is not antagonistic to revival. To be sure, the main thesis of Murray's book is that "American history was shaped by the Spirit of God in revivals."[43] Other writers in the field agree. Frank Beardsley begins his *A History of American Revivals* by saying, "The history of revivals is the history of the church."[44] Jerald Brauer also contends, "Every Protestant denomination has been influenced…by the phenomenon [revival], and the two largest groups, Methodists and Baptists, were created by it."[45] Some have even gone so far as to posit that revival is the very soul of biblical faith. For instance, Timothy Smith argues, "Revivalism is the essence of Christianity from its earliest days and traces an unbroken line from the biblical injunction 'you must be born again' through Paul's conversion, Augustine, the great reformers, the Wesleys, Whitefield, to the

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[42] Murray, *Revival*, xx.

[43] Murray, *Revival*, xx.

[44] Frank Grenville Beardsley, *A History of American Revivals* (New York: American Tract Society, 1912), 1.

[45] Brauer, "Revivalism Revisited," 268.

Great Revival, and the revivalists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."[46] Murray agrees with these writers. In the past, the church has profited from seasons of revival; furthermore, Murray contends, revival is needed today. In his concluding chapter, he writes:

> Our need of revival is indeed very great today. Once more men claim, as Voltaire claimed two centuries ago, that the world is seeing the twilight of Christianity. But it is not any kind of revival that we need. Before his death in 1963, Dr. A. W. Tozer had come to this conclusion: "A widespread revival of the kind of Christianity we know today in America might prove to be a moral tragedy from which we would not recover in a hundred years." With thankfulness, we can believe that another kind of Christianity is reappearing in the English-speaking world and that in connection with a history which had been long largely forgotten. Contact between the bones of a prophet and a corpse was once God's way of bringing man back to life (2 Kings 13:21) and handling the records of which we have sought to make use in these pages can have a similar effect.[47]

Far from being opposed to the phenomenon, Murray longs to see a truly profitable and God-initiated revival in the contemporary church.[48]

A Social Component

In defining revivalism, it would seem necessary to understand its connection to the social and political environments in which it operates. Surely, the phenomenon has had profound and lasting effects on the United States (the primary geographical region of the current study). William McLoughlin in his *Modern Revivalism* contends that each of the great awakenings in American history "coincided with an intellectual and social reorientation in such a way as to

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[46] Brauer, "Revivalism Revisited," 269.

[47] Murray, *Revivalism*, 387.

[48] Although it is beyond the scope of the current research study, there is an urgent need for independent and fundamental churches to have a more robust and biblically accurate understanding of revival. In his book *Revival* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1987), Martyn Lloyd-Jones offers a comprehensive, yet practical, look at biblical revival. He communicates, first, the contemporary church's urgent need for revival as evidenced by an overall lack of spiritual vitality. Then, similar to Murray's work, Lloyd-Jones specifies that true revival is largely a supernatural work (instigated by God), supported through biblical preaching and humble prayer, and completely independent of emotional manipulation. His book is an essential resource for any who want biblical clarity on this oft-misunderstood topic.

awaken a new interest in the Christian ethos which underlies American civilization. And in each case, the awakening has produced significant alterations in the definition of that ethos and its relationship to American life."[49] Likewise, in *The Democratization of American Christianity*, Nathan Hatch convincingly describes how Christianity became embedded (primarily through the revivals of the Great Awakenings) in the cultural foundation of America, making religiosity an enduring trait of the nation.[50] Furthermore, regarding revivalism's impact on American society, Mark Noll, in his *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, writes:

> The conversion of the population in the early United States by Methodists, Baptists, and like-minded innovators is one of the great stories in American Christian history. In 1790 something like only 10 percent of Americans professed membership in a Christian church. By the time of the Civil War, the proportion had multiplied several times. The active labors of the revivalists was the reason why.[51]

Several other authors concur on the profound impact of revivalism on America, and these effects will be considered below. Nevertheless, there appears in the literature to be a counter effect—not only did revivalism influence America, but American ideals and culture also had a very pronounced effect on shaping revivalism (as well as the evangelical church). In his *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, Mark Noll cites the well-known Alexis de Tocqueville, who observed the unique qualities of American Christianity:

> When in 1835 Alexis de Tocqueville published *Democracy in America*, a book growing out of a lengthy tour of the States, he wrote that "there is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America." Tocqueville was struck, however, not just by the simple fact of Christianity but by its character. "In France," he wrote, "I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom marching in opposite directions. But in America, I found they were intimately united and that they reigned in common over the same country." Generations

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[49] McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 8.

[50] Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (Yale University Press, 1989).

[51] Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Chicago: Eerdmans, 2022), 53, ProQuest Ebook Central.

> of historians have seconded Tocqueville's conclusions. Antebellum America was a distinctly religious land, but it was religious in a distinctly American way.[52]

Despite the commonalities between the French and American revolutions, Tocqueville was amazed at the differences. Noll's statement about the "distinctly American way" of religion is particularly arresting. He distills Tocqueville's observations to an interesting conclusion:

> Tocqueville put his finger on the essential matter. Unlike Europe—where Christian communities were often aristocratic, elitist, and traditional, and where the churches were increasingly alienated from the common people—in America, Christian churches were populist, democratic, and libertarian, and the churches were strongly identified with the common people.[53]

In light of these observations, it seems evident that a thorough definition of revivalism must include a consideration of American cultural and political dynamics and how those features affected the phenomenon, which (in turn) had a pronounced effect on the church and nation.

American revivals, while not singular in their occurrence, do nonetheless have a markedly nationalistic identity. Noll explains, "Christian churches have always undergone periods of revival, so there is nothing new about the presence in America of revival as such. What was new after about the mid-eighteenth century was the way in which revival loomed as the dominant theme defining the nature and purposes of the church for Americans."[54] Noll goes on to describe how this distinctly nationalistic spirit specifically shaped revivalism in several ways. First, in a uniquely American way, historical revivalism tended to define everything through the lens of "democratic individualism."[55] In his article "Roots to Evangelical Worship: American Democracy and Camp Meetings," Scott Aniol explains:

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[52] Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2019), 149, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[53] Noll, *The Scandal*, 56.

[54] Noll, *The Scandal*, 52.

[55] Noll, *The Scandal*, 53.

> America's democracy altered Christianity considerably… Americans became known for a kind of "rugged individualism" and distrust of systems of authority or anything that resembled class distinctions. Individuals expected to have a say in how they lived and what they believed, and these sentiments contributed to the development of American culture as well, especially in the church.[56]

To be sure, this "rugged individualism" can be seen in revivalism's bent toward a rather brazen antitraditionalism. Once again, Noll expounds:

> Revivals called people to Christ as a way of escaping tradition, including traditional learning. They called upon individuals to take the step of faith for themselves. In so doing, they often left the impression that individual believers could accept nothing from others. Everything of value in the Christian life had to come from the individual's own choice —not just personal faith but every scrap of wisdom, understanding, and conviction about the faith.[57]

These appeals to individualism are seen in the leadership and preaching of revivalism. Noll explains, "Revival promoted a new style of leadership—direct, personal, popular, and dependent much more on a speaker's ability to draw a crowd than upon that speaker's place in an established hierarchy."[58] Daniel Pals observes this in the style of George Whitefield: "The very thing that…accounts for his success [was] a deeply populist frame of mind. Almost every one of Whitefield's sermons is marked by a fundamentally democratic determination to simplify the essentials of religion in a way that gives them the widest possible mass appeal."[59] This appeal to each individual's right was so pervasive that Noll contends, "[Revivalism] became the dominant

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[56] Scott Aniol, "Roots to Evangelical Worship: American Democracy and Camp Meetings," Religious Affections Ministries, November 13, 2019, https://religiousaffections.org/articles/articles-on-worship/roots-of-evangelical-worship-american-democracy-and-camp-meetings/#identifier_0_24700.

[57] Noll, *The Scandal*, 54.

[58] Noll, *The Scandal*, 52.

[59] Daniel L. Pals, "Several Christologies of the Great Awakening," *Anglican Theological Review* 72 (1990): 412.

religious force in American Protestantism in large part because it…so effectively expressed the country's democratic spirit."[60]

Second, Noll contends that historical revivalism has a distinctly American identity because of its historical emphasis on humanitarian pursuits. Once again, it is Tocqueville who observed an unusual generosity and benevolence among the Americans. He writes:

> I must say that I have often seen Americans make great and real sacrifices to the public welfare; and I have remarked a hundred instances in which they hardly ever failed to lend faithful support to each other. The free institutions which the inhabitants of the United States possess, and the political rights of which they make so much use, remind every citizen, and in a thousand ways, that he lives in society. They every instant impress upon his mind the notion that it is the duty, as well as the interest of men, to make themselves useful to their fellow creatures; and as he sees no particular ground of animosity to them, since he is never either their master or their slave, his heart readily leans to the side of kindness. Men attend to the interests of the public, first by necessity, afterwards by choice: what was intentional becomes an instinct; and by dint of working for the good of one's fellow citizens, the habit and the taste for serving them is at length acquired.[61]

As the Great Awakenings progressed, this perceived "duty" to care for the "interests of the public" became a defining trait and motivation of revivalism. Timothy Smith notes this shift in emphasis:

> The rapid growth of concern with purely social issues such as poverty, workingmen's rights, the liquor traffic, slum housing, and racial bitterness is the chief feature distinguishing American religion after 1865 from that of the first half of the nineteenth century. Such matters in some cases supplanted entirely the earlier pre-occupation with salvation from personal sin and the life hereafter. Seminaries reorganized their programs to stress sociology. Institutional churches and social settlement work became prominent in the cities. Crusades for the rights of oppressed groups of all sorts absorbed the energies of hundreds of clergymen.[62]

Likewise, Noll observes this social emphasis in the ministry of Lyman Beecher (1775–1863):

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[60] Noll, *The Scandal*, 60.

[61] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, translated by Henry Reeve (Champaign, IL: Project Gutenberg, 1999), 86, EBSCOhost.

[62] Timothy J. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Gloucester, MA: Abingdon Press, 1957), 148.

> Through the efforts of Beecher and people with his vision, the country saw the founding of the American Board for Foreign Missions (1810), the American Bible Society (1816), the Colonization Society for liberated slaves (1817), the American Sunday School Union (1824), the American Tract Society (1825), the American Education Society (1826), the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance (1826), and many more organizations. Such agencies gave Christianization in the national period a long-lived institutional influence that earlier revivals had not produced.[63]

Revivalism essentially came to be viewed as a powerful social force. Indeed, several voices within the historical literature express the belief that revival was the only means of reforming society. For example, Smith observes that "the editor of the Baptist *Watchman and Reflector*…insisted in the year 1857 that legislation alone could not 'reach down to the root of our social evils.' For this, he wrote, 'moral and Christian power must be invoked…The great panacea is the gospel of Christ.'"[64] Additionally, Albert Barnes (1798–1870) in an article entitled "Revivals of Religion in Cities and Large Towns" bemoaned that sin was ingrained in the very core of society and needed to be rooted out. He writes, "One sin is interlocked with others and is sustained by others… The only power in the universe which can meet and overcome such combined evil is the power of the Spirit of God. There are evils of alliance and confederation in every city which can never be met but by a general revival of religion."[65] Similar sentiments are voiced by some of the later revivalists, too. George Marsden observes this belief in the famed Dwight L. Moody:

> Moody was quite ambivalent toward American culture and its prospects. He never gave up, for instance, the nineteenth-century American evangelical hope that the republic of virtue could be saved by the revival. "Revival," he declared in 1899, in a statement that might just as well have come from Timothy Dwight or Lyman Beecher at the outset of

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[63] Mark A. Noll, *The History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 155–56, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[64] Smith, *Revivalism*, 151.

[65] Smith, *Revivalism*, 152.

> the Second Great Awakening in 1801, "is the only hope for our republic, for I don't believe that a republican form of government can last without righteousness."[66]

Joel Carpenter draws a similar conclusion about Moody:

> During the McKinley-Bryan presidential contest, he [Moody] chided a fellow evangelist who said that he had no political outlook because his citizenship was in heaven. 'Better get it down to earth for the next sixty days,' Moody told him. Still, Moody believed that revivalism was a more powerful engine for social renewal, and his urban campaigns were aimed at achieving such results.[67]

Such statements and behaviors demonstrate the form of revivalism that had come to prevail in America. Noll describes it as "activistic, immediatistic, and individualistic"[68]—traits that are distinctly shaped by American democracy and ideals.

Finally, in seeking to understand the social component of revivalism, it seems imperative (in light of this study's demographic) to consider its apparent connection to fundamentalism. Fundamentalism's historical relationship to and preoccupation with revival is well-documented. George Marsden in his influential *Fundamentalism and American Culture* traces the origin of the movement back to its "revivalist tradition,"[69] contending that "fundamentalism was always a sub-species of the larger revivalist movement."[70] Furthermore, Marsden makes the connection between fundamentalism and American culture, writing, "Fundamentalism has always had political implications. One of the several dynamics shaping early fundamentalists was a sense of alarm over the demise of Christian culture. National revival, they urged, was the only adequate

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[66] George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 38, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[67] Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 118.

[68] Noll, *The Scandal*, 54.

[69] Carpenter, *Revive Us*, 5.

[70] Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 38.

response. Salvation of souls, they affirmed, would restore righteousness to the culture."[71] In his *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism*, Joel Carpenter describes some modern trends in fundamentalism (1920s to 1950s) and seems to pick up where Marsden leaves off with a consideration of the social influence of the movement. He expounds:

> Fundamentalists have felt a strong "trusteeship" for American culture. Much more than holiness or Pentecostal evangelicals, fundamentalists have involved themselves in cultural politics. The mythic chords of "Christian America" have played loudly in their memories, and their periodic public crusades have displayed their determination to regain lost cultural power and influence. Even when fundamentalists have expressed their alienation toward American cultural trends and advocated separation from worldly involvement, their words have been more those of wounded lovers than true outsiders. They have seen themselves as the faithful remnant, the true American patriots.[72]

Presumably, the means of caring for and reforming American culture was not through overt political action (although there are examples of that within fundamentalism) but rather the salvation of souls. Carpenter contends that fundamentalists have historically adhered to a "revivalist individualism, which stressed that the regeneration of individuals was the surest way to bring lasting reform."[73] Further, Carpenter explains, "[The] revivalist tradition…promised its adherents tremendous power for social transformation if they would simply stick to the task of evangelization.… Revivalism was a potent weapon in the war for America's soul, indeed the only one that fundamentalists fully trusted."[74] Despite these observations, Ernest Robert Sandeen in *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* strongly resists the reduction of fundamentalism to mere social reform, insisting that a more intellectual

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[71] Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 232.

[72] Carpenter, *Revive Us*, 5–6.

[73] Carpenter, *Revive Us*, 118.

[74] Carpenter, *Revive Us*, 119.

and theological motivation characterizes the movement.[75] In his bibliographic notes, Carpenter does acknowledge a needed balance, writing, "The complex world of fundamentalist social and political ideas and activity is still in need of exploration and analysis."[76] Nevertheless, the literature seems to establish a compelling connection between fundamentalism and revivalism.

A Connection to Worship Behaviors

Finally, throughout the literature, several writers, in seeking to define revivalism, have observed that the unique, historic phenomenon can be identified (and, in essence, defined) by its methods of corporate worship. In her book *Citizens of Zion: The Social Origins of Camp Meeting Revivalism*, Ellen Eslinger describes revivalism as "one of nineteenth-century America's most important forms of public worship."[77] While historic revivalism was certainly much more than a worship service, Eslinger suggests that the movement (particularly what the movement had become by the years of the camp meetings) was known by its distinct manner of public assembly. Moreover, her observations articulate a common theme in the literature—that revivalism drastically changed traditional church worship styles. Many historical writers describe a new form of worship springing from revivalism. Nathan Hatch, in *The Democratization of America*, devotes an entire chapter to the Second Great Awakening, painting it in some rather unflattering terms (contrary to the common historical narrative); nevertheless, Hatch recognizes the powerful effect the movement had on worship behaviors suggesting, "The heart of the movement was a revolution in communications, preaching, print, and song; and these measures

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[75] Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 201.

[76] Carpenter, *Revive Us*, 287.

[77] Ellen Eslinger, *Citizens of Zion: The Social Origins of Camp Meeting Revivalism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), xi.

were instrumental in building mass popular movements."[78] Similarly, Sandra Sizer devotes her entire book, *Gospel Hymns and Social Religion*, to the consideration of a "new complex of religious practices which dissolved the earlier [ones]."[79] Such statements are common descriptions in the literature—when describing the era of the great American revivals, writers often speak of those who had "joined to worship together."[80] Clearly, the movement can be defined by its worship.

Analyzing the Theology of Revivalism

Several significant works within the literature on historical revivalism contribute to an essential analysis of the doctrines that undergird the movement. While some have criticized the abundance of theological analysis and the overemphasis on its influence on revivalism,[81] their censure is probably without warrant. Few within the broad circle of evangelicalism[82] would contest that theology (what one believes) informs philosophy (why one believes) which, in turn, produces methodology (what one does). Ultimately, theology is more than simply a theoretical foundation—it is something that colors every facet of one's life and ministry. To be sure, the

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[78] Hatch, *The Democratization*, 226.

[79] Sandra S. Sizer, *Gospel Hymns and Social Religion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), 51.

[80] Eslinger, *Citizens*, xi.

[81] Brauer, "Revivalism Revisited," 270.

[82] The researcher would affirm R. Albert Mohler's definition of evangelicalism—"Evangelicalism refers to that movement of Christian believers who seek a conscious convictional continuity with the theological formulas of the Protestant Reformation… Evangelicalism is a movement of confessional believers who are determined by God's grace to conserve this faith in the face of its reduction or corruption, even as they gladly take this gospel to the ends of the earth in order to see the nations exult in the name of Jesus Christ" (See R. Albert Mohler, *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, Andrew David Naselli and Collin Hansen, eds. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011], 74–75).

Of significance to this study: many historians date the birth of the modern evangelical movement to the early decades of the First Great Awakening. See Robert W. Caldwell III, *Theologies of the American Revivalists from Whitefield to Finney* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 11.

seemingly pointless debates of ivory tower theologians eventually find practical expression in everyday life. Therefore, any study of historical revivalism—when defined as a social, religious, and psychological *behavior*—must (at the outset) consider the presuppositions of the people involved with the movement. Within this study, these core beliefs help to explain the significant changes in worship behaviors—in other words, why they did what they did. Of course, while it is nearly impossible to discern motives, outward behaviors are accurate indications of inward beliefs. For this reason, Scripture frequently warns believers that behavior flows out of the "abundance of the heart" (Matt. 12:34, ESV) and that it is essential to diligently "watch over" one's mind (Prov. 4:23; Phil. 4:8).

In light of this study's overriding purpose to consider the effects of historical revivalism, this section of the literature review is necessary to provide further corroboration that there were sweeping changes to thought, and therefore practice, within American evangelicalism. This section begins with an intentionally broad overview—a general consideration of the doctrinal shift that occurred during the early years of American church history. What follows is a more in-depth analysis of several specific doctrines that appear to have had a rather dramatic effect on church methodology. Finally, this section will consider the tendency (of some historical preachers and theologians) to take doctrinal distinctives to extreme applications.

A General Shift in Doctrine

Observant students of American church history discern a gradual yet definite theological shift from historical Calvinism toward a more Arminian theology during the First and Second Great Awakenings. To be sure, the two systems of theology have existed alongside one another for some time and have generated much debate and division. What author Alan Sell calls the

"Great Debate" continues to rage today,[83] as defenders of the "five points" (on both sides) engage one another in writing and rhetoric. It is not the purpose of this study to attempt an explanation of these polarizing theological traditions or even to take sides in the ongoing discussion; nevertheless, it would seem obvious that these contrasting viewpoints play a key role in (1) the progression of and (2) the contemporary understanding of revivalism; therefore, these doctrinal observations, though fairly general, are critical to the current study to explain some of the methodological changes that took place.

Written sermons and biographical accounts affirm that many, if not most, of the early revivalists were decidedly Calvinistic. Of course, this cannot be stated too broadly—there were outliers. Surely, the conservative brand of Arminianism widely popularized by the well-loved Wesley brothers is an exception. Curt Daniel contends that they developed a "more conservative and evangelical Arminianism."[84] Regardless, the literature has wide agreement on the explicitly Calvinistic beginnings of the Great Awakenings. Caldwell claims, "The primary revivalists of the First Great Awakening, such as Gilbert Tennent, Jonathan Edwards, Jonathan Dickinson, and Samuel Davies,…preached a deeply pietistic form of Calvinism that they inherited from their Puritan predecessors."[85] Daniel agrees, making an important connection between the theologians of the old and new worlds. He explains that it was Calvinists who, during the reign of Elizabeth I (1533–1603) in England, pushed for reform to purify the Church of England from Romanist

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[83] Alan P. F. Sell, *The Great Debate: Calvinism, Arminianism, and Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983.

[84] Curt Daniel, *The History and Theology of Calvinism* (Leyland, England: Evangelical Press, 2019), 66.

[85] Robert W. Caldwell III, *Theologies of the American Revivalists from Whitefield to Finney* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 6.

doctrines and practices.[86] Later, these Puritans (later called Separatists) made their way to the new world in search of religious freedom. Daniel describes the historic event:

> The Mayflower reached Plymouth Bay in November 1620 and landed where they decided to settle on December 26. The first governor was John Carver (1576–1621), a Puritan. The first year was rough—about half of the settlers died. When God answered their prayers, they showed their gratitude at the first Thanksgiving feast in October of 1621.
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> The nearby Massachusetts Bay Colony was formed along similar lines. The governors were decidedly Puritan in outlook: William Bradford (1590–1657) and John Winthrop (1588–1649). The Pilgrim Fathers set up a semi-theocracy similar to that in Geneva in the days of Calvin but without the Presbyterian ecclesiology. The Puritan Pilgrims saw themselves as a covenantal community akin to Old Testament Israel and referred to their colony as "a city on a hill" (Matthew 5:14). As more immigrants arrived, the main issue was how to accommodate them into the Puritan community without compromising doctrine or practice.[87]

It seems evident that these early American theologians—many of whom would influence the leaders of the First Great Awakening—willingly ascribed to the title of Calvinist.

Despite these early beginnings, several authors observe a gradual progression in doctrinal beliefs. Ellen Eslinger claims, "Within decades, the dominant Protestant theology in America changed from Calvinism to Arminianism—from perceiving human nature as abominable and therefore salvation as possible only through God's unmerited gift of grace, to perceiving salvation as God's gift to all who seek it."[88] Daniel makes a similar observation, largely centered around the shift between the First and Second Great Awakenings. He explains:

> Around 1790, a new revival began that is usually called the Second Great Awakening. Perhaps because America was much larger—the United States had won the Revolutionary War and began to spread westward—it affected more people than the First Great Awakening and lasted longer. However, while the first one was led almost entirely by Calvinists, the second was led in part by Arminians.[89]

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[86] Daniel, *The History*, 58.

[87] Daniel, *The History*, 115.

[88] Eslinger, *Citizens*, 214.

[89] Daniel, *The History*, 123.

Moreover, McLoughlin, in the opening chapter of his *Modern Revivalism*, deftly chronicles this apparent shift from one doctrinal tradition to the other. His comments, though lengthy, are a valuable summary of the progression, as well as the possible impetus behind it.

> The Calvinistic, or neo-Calvinistic, theology of Edwards and the other leading figures of the first great awakening…maintained…the doctrine that salvation was granted to the elect only by the arbitrary and sovereign grace of God. But the boost which the American and French Revolutions gave to the rationalistic ideals of the Enlightenment, particularly to the belief in the dignity of man and the benevolence of nature and of nature's God, seriously undermined the hold of the pessimistic doctrines of Calvinism upon the average American. In the opening phase of the second great awakening, associated primarily with the boisterous camp meetings of Kentucky and Tennessee from 1795 to 1810, the optimistic free-will theology of Methodist Arminianism was preached side by side with the Calvinistic predestination of the Presbyterians and Baptists. Yet these camp meeting exhorters were so intent upon saving souls that they were not particular about the fine points of theology and the two views began to run together. Moreover, though the intense emotionalism of the camp meetings masked the fact, it was evident after 1800 that the element of surprise was fast disappearing from revivalism. In its place appeared the carefully organized and pragmatically contrived techniques which Finney was to consolidate into modern mass evangelism.
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> The second phase of the second great awakening, from 1810 to 1825, saw Calvinism undermined in a far more subtle way by the learned theological speculations of Timothy Dwight, Lyman Beecher, and Nathaniel W. Taylor, who carefully reinterpreted the old dogma to suit the new intellectual climate. These years also saw the final breakdown of the established church system in New England, a fact which greatly heightened the interest of the Congregational clergy in the promotion of a more modern type of evangelism.
>
> Finney's career and writings in the years 1825 to 1835 constituted the third and final phase of the second great awakening. He helped to knock the last props from under the old Calvinist system and to establish in its place the Arminianized Calvinism called evangelicalism. In the process he firmly established a coherent rationale for the new tradition of worked-up revivals and securely harnessed the spontaneous, ecclesiastically schismatic force of frontier revivalism to the institutionalized church system in America's rapidly expanding western towns and eastern cities.[90]

Although McLoughlin's comments begin to offer some critical evaluation of the changes, he nonetheless provides significant historical details about the changing theological positions of the

[90] McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 12–13.

primary leaders within the Great Awakenings. Additionally, McLoughlin's remarks affirm that the ever-changing philosophies of the day had a significant impact on nearly every aspect of daily life, including religious practice. Regardless of which theological tradition one prefers, it seems fairly clear that a preference for Arminianism begins to dominate the mainstream of evangelicalism by at least the midpoint of the Second Great Awakening; and with this change in theological understanding, there were considerable changes to doxological practice.

A Revival Theology

Moving from the general shift to the more specific, Robert W. Caldwell III, in his *Theologies of the American Revivalists*, attempts to explain the particular belief systems of preachers throughout the First and Second Great Awakenings and how those doctrines pointedly shaped their unique approaches to the phenomenon of revival. In the introduction to the book, Caldwell writes,

> In the period of 1740–1840, American evangelicals thought deeply about conversion and the nature of religious revivals. The great prominence of revivals in the landscape of North American Protestantism compelled evangelical theologians to address a host of issues associated with them: the theological and experiential nature of human redemption, the proper balance of divine and human activity in the conversion process, the analysis and authentication of true religious experience, and the ways in which a preacher calls individuals to Christ.[91]

Caldwell's observations underscore, once again, the inevitable connection between belief systems and behavior. Because these preachers were intellectually convinced of certain dogmas, their manner of preaching, methods of evangelism, and even behaviors in corporate worship were demonstrably affected. Caldwell's book is particularly beneficial because he categorizes *revival theology* into three distinct doctrines—salvation, conversion, and preaching.

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[91] Caldwell, *Theologies*, 4.

Doctrine of Salvation

First, and perhaps of primary importance, preachers of the First and Second Great Awakenings articulated their beliefs about the doctrine of salvation. To those who affirm the authority and sufficiency of the Bible, this is surely a fundamental issue. Little discussion is needed here on the doctrine of salvation because a large majority of revivalists in the evangelical tradition (of both the First and Second Great Awakenings) seem to agree in their preaching and writing. While the differing doctrinal traditions emphasize particular nuances of response and preparation (as discussed below), they do each seem to agree on (1) the necessity for and (2) the divine provision of salvation—i.e., spiritual deliverance from sin, death, and hell. For example, in describing the similarity of beliefs between John Wesley (an Arminian) and George Whitefield (a Calvinist), Murray remarks, "[Both] believed that God commands all men to repent and believe the gospel; both showed that Christ is to be preached with compassion to all men; both taught human responsibility and insisted that sin alone is the cause of man's ruin; both knew that God is longsuffering towards all, 'not willing that any should perish.'"[92] While these preachers were active during the First Great Awakening, their views on salvation are fairly consistent with others throughout the era of both Awakenings. Even the rather progressive Charles Finney upheld that salvation was a divine gift saying, "Unless God interpose the influence of his Spirit, not a man on earth will ever obey the commands of God."[93] Surely there is much variation on the practical outworking and timing of God's providential ordering and man's necessary response regarding salvation; however, among the revivalists, there is a general agreement on the necessity of these components.

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[92] Murray, *Revival*, 178.

[93] Finney, *Lectures*, 9.

Doctrine of Conversion

Second, in Caldwell's understanding, the doctrine of conversion is a key component in one's revival theology. To be sure, revivalists throughout the era of the First and Second Great Awakenings seem to agree on the necessity of spiritual conversion when defined as a "turning from one way of life to another, in this case from non-Christian to Christian life."[94] Despite this consensus, however, there is much disagreement on the understanding of *when* and *how* that takes place. Furthermore, within the literature, there appears (once again) to be a progression of understanding, with a rather pronounced variation of meaning between the First and Second Great Awakenings. Of course, Murray and McLoughlin seem to recognize this foundational difference; however, two other authors speak convincingly about this somewhat overt change in the doctrinal understanding of conversion and its implication upon methodology. Wm. Loyd Allen's "Being Born Again—And Again, and Again: Conversion, Revivalism, and Baptist Spirituality" and Bill Leonard's "Getting Saved in America: Conversion Event in a Pluralistic Culture" offer insight into the changing perception of spiritual conversion in American evangelicalism. Both writers offer a general summary of the historical shift, and both narrow down the shift to two, primary viewpoints among the American revivalists.

Early views of conversion—pietistic and mystical

First, beginning with the preachers of the First Great Awakening, Allen and Leonard observe a highly personal and somewhat mysterious view of conversion. Allen refers to this as the "mystical motif." He explains, "The converts, usually in solitude, experience spiritual transformation as something done *to* them rather than something done *by* them. God is the

[94] Bill J. Leonard, "Getting Saved in America: Conversion Event in a Pluralistic Culture," *Review and Expositor* 82, no. 1 (1985): 112.

initiator, the convert the surprised recipient, who after relatively long periods of spiritual struggle is suddenly transformed [emphasis original]."[95] Much like the experience of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40) or the Apostle Paul (Acts 9:1–9), spiritual conversion is viewed as an intensely personal affair, a process (sometimes lengthy) precipitated by the intervention and conviction of the Holy Spirit and realized in a decisive, salvific moment—whenever, wherever, and however that may occur. Leonard hypothesizes that it was the Puritans, the first evangelicals in America, who (because they rejected the sacramental nature of conversion in Catholicism and Anglicanism) spoke of the conversion experience in highly personal terms and as a transaction in which God was the primary author and agent.[96] Additionally, Jerald Brauer suggests that this particular view of spiritual conversion may have been a reaction to the Reformers. He explains, "The stress on personal appropriation of salvation tended to outweigh the classical Reformation's emphasis on the givenness, the objectivity of God's action in salvation."[97] In contrast, the mystical view of conversion is highly subjective, leading Lofland and Skonovd to conclude that it resists analytical characterization.[98]

This mystical view of conversion appears throughout the literature describing the era of the First Great Awakening, but perhaps most prominently in the writings of Jonathan Edwards. In his oft-referenced treatise *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*, Edwards describes his understanding of conversion. Leonard explains:

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[95] Wm. Loyd Allen, "Being Born Again—and Again, and Again: Conversion, Revivalism, and Baptist Spirituality," *Baptist History and Heritage* (Summer/Fall 2010): 28.

[96] Leonard, "Getting Saved" 114.

[97] Jerald C. Brauer, "Conversion: From Puritanism to Revivalism," *The Journal of Religion* 58, no. 3 (July 1978): 234.

[98] John Lofland and Norman Skonovd, "Conversion Motifs," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 20, no. 4 (December 1981): 377.

> In the "Narrative," Edwards charted the process he observed: the sense of dependence on God's "sovereign power," the deep conviction of sin and helplessness, the terror over one's lost condition, the justice of God in condemning the depraved sinner, the recognition that God was gracious, and ultimately that such grace had been provided to the individual.[99]

All of these elements seem, in Edwards' thinking, to play a necessary role in conversion but with God's somewhat mystical involvement being central. Similar to his view of revival as surprising and unexpected, Edwards understands conversion to be a sovereign and mysterious work of God, too. Yet, to be certain, there is a personal, human component. Caldwell explains, "Edwards prominently featured the human will in his theology. Though he was a staunch Calvinist, he so closely aligned divine and human agency in his work that it is often hard to distinguish between the two."[100] Nevertheless, there was a mystical, nearly unexplainable element to Edwards' view of conversion. Of efficacious grace, he writes, "We are not merely passive in it, nor yet does God do some and we do the rest, but God does all and we do all. God produces all and we act all. For that is what he produces, our own acts. God is the only proper author and fountain; we only are the proper actors."[101] While Edwards' commentary may appear puzzling to some, it is obvious that he intends to maintain a balanced, moderate view. Finally, in his somewhat mystical estimation of conversion, Edwards articulates the time factor. He writes, "Many continue a long time in a course of gracious exercises and experiences…and none knows how long they would continue so were they not helped by particular instructions. There are undoubted instances of some who have lived in this way for many years together."[102] For this reason, Robert Coleman

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[99] Leonard, "Getting Saved," 116.

[100] Caldwell, *Theologies*, 58.

[101] Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 21: Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith*, ed. by Sang Hyun Lee (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 251.

[102] Edwards, *Select Works*, 38.

explains that Edwards, in the revivals of Northampton and the neighboring villages in 1733, encouraged those disturbed because of their sins to go home and discuss their problems among themselves in small groups.[103] Believing conversion to be a highly personal experience primarily prompted by the sovereign intervention of God, Edwards felt confident that individuals could "work out" their "own salvation" (Phil. 2:12, ESV). Edwards and other early revivalists (especially those with Puritan and Calvinistic leanings) commonly describe this somewhat mystical view of spiritual conversion in their writings.

Perhaps Leonard provides the best-articulated summary of the mystical view, in the following quotation:

> Puritanism bequeathed an important legacy to the process of getting saved in America. The Puritans were among the first to require conversion experience of all who would claim Christian faith and church membership. They delineated a morphology of conversion within the context of their own form of Calvinist theology. God was the author and agent. Sinners were relatively passive participants in whom sovereign grace was infused, bringing that regeneration which activated repentance and faith. At no time was the will so free as to pray a prayer by which grace was instantaneously received. Conversion occurred less as decisive event than as reasonably discernible process. Grace might be given long before it was consciously recognized. Such grace was validated not by absolute assurance—doubt might come—but by the ability to persevere in discipleship.
>
> The Puritans also provided a theological vocabulary for describing the conversion process. Such terms as regeneration, election, and predestination remained a part of the theological language of those who modified or completely rejected Calvinism itself.[104]

Leonard maintains many of the elements of spiritual conversion that Edwards and others articulate, but he also begins to identify some of the contrasts between the two, primary theological traditions. While both sides seem to use the same vocabulary, there is a different

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[103] Robert E. Coleman, "The Origin of the Altar Call in American Methodism," *The Asbury Journal* 12, no. 1 (1958): 20.

[104] Leonard, "Getting Saved," 117–18.

understanding of the terms. These diverse understandings would certainly impact the language of preaching and the behaviors of corporate worship.

Later views of conversion—revivalistic and communal

In contrast to the mystical view of conversion, Allen describes a "revivalist conversion motif,"[105] a view that appears to predominate evangelical thinking and methodology throughout much of the Second Great Awakening. He explains this as "a brief conversion event with sudden onslaught and great emotional depths of fear and guilt yielding to joy in the midst of the social pressure of a highly aroused crowd lifted to ecstatic heights by communal rituals of music, movement, exhortation, and touch."[106] The changes are rather obvious. First, in the revivalistic motif, the immediacy of conversion appears to be crucial. Leonard explains, "An increasing number of handbooks on revivals appeared by mid-nineteenth century. In addition to instructions for conducting revivals, these manuals usually contained case studies on conversions. Consistently, they stressed the need for sudden, immediate conversion—still a process—but radically shortened."[107] For example, Colton writes, "The more sudden the conversion, then, the better. Immediate repentance, on the present instant, is the only safe course—the very and the only requisition of the Gospel."[108] Colton's description of immediacy as the "only" way was a direct challenge to the Puritan view of conversion described above. Charles Finney, too, expressed a similar view, denying that a lengthy process was necessary for conversion. In one sermon, Finney states, "An idea has prevailed in the church, that sinners must have a season of

[105] Allen, "Being Born," 32.

[106] Allen, "Being Born," 31.

[107] Leonard, "Getting Saved," 120.

[108] Colton, *History*, 213–14.

protracted conviction, and that those conversions that were sudden were of a suspicious character. But certainly 'this persuasion cometh not from God.' We nowhere in the Bible read of cases of lengthened conviction."[109]

Contrary to Finney's protestations, the possibility of immediate conversions was not entirely rejected by the former generation of revivalists. Bernard Weisberger explains that while the Puritan fathers of New England assumed that the process of spiritual conversion was a lengthy one, they did recognize that it could happen quite quickly, too. Weisberger explains,

> God could, if he chose, convert one sinner in a flash—as he had done with Saul of Tarsus—or three thousand, as He had done on the day of Pentecost. Sometimes, instead of causing the seed of rebirth to mature gradually, sinner by sinner, He might shower His grace simultaneously on whole congregations of lost souls. Overnight, the church membership could make a dramatic upward surge. Testimonies of conversion would pour thick and fast into the delighted ears of ministers, hastening to welcome crowds of new sheep into the fold. When such things happened, churchmen knew that they were experiencing a "revival of religion."
>
> A revival was a joyful thing. It was also an extraordinary thing—a miracle within a miracle. For conversion itself was a supernatural affair. The Holy Spirit purged away the corruptions of a soul and changed it from black to white. It was clearly a work of God outside the sequence of natural events, even when it took years. When the work of grace occurred in a flash, it was even more visibly a divine intervention. A true believer, watching such a conversion, trembled at the nearness of God.[110]

Both generations believed in the possibility of immediate conversions; but while the older generation saw them as the exception, the newer generation preferred them to be the norm. Surely, the fundamental difference between the generations is obvious: instead of expressing concern over the *legitimacy* of one's salvation experience (regardless of when, where, and how), the new revivalists began to express concern over the *immediacy* of one's salvation event.

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[109] Charles G. Finney, *Sermons on Important Subjects* (New York: John S. Taylor, 1836), 38.

[110] Bernard A. Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River: The Story of the Great Revivalists and Their Impact upon Religion in America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958), 28.

Second, the revivalist motif demonstrates a dramatic change in the environment of conversion (i.e., where conversion typically takes place). Rather than viewing conversion as an intensely personal and solitary affair (regardless of place and time), preachers began to communicate their preference for *public* conversions—primarily "within the context of an emotionally aroused crowd."[111] Nowhere is this proclivity more evident than in the camp meeting revivalism of the Second Great Awakening. Originating with the Presbyterians, the camp meeting format provided the opportunity for large crowds to gather publicly. Murray explains:

> [The camp meeting] was initially a development brought about only by a practical necessity. Following the Scottish tradition, the Lord's Supper was administered infrequently in Presbyterian churches, but the occasion was marked by special services which were often attended by visitors from other congregations who would be offered hospitality for the four or five days of the communion season. When numbers increased these services had to be held in the open air, and once the revival began the provision of hospitality became entirely inadequate. Wagons and tents were therefore brought into use for overnight shelter. At the communion services held at Gasper River in July 1800, M'Gready made it known beforehand that visitors should come prepared to camp on the ground. Attendance at these services was unprecedented, some traveling distances of forty or even 100 miles, and the communion season became "the camp meeting."[112]

Due to their initial success, the camp meetings were quickly emulated by other denominations, most notably the Methodists and Baptists. While the well-known Kentucky camp meetings of Red River and Cane Ridge are typically remembered for their seemingly spontaneous nature and unconventional emotional displays, they also made a significant contribution to the evangelical understanding of spiritual conversion. Primarily citing the example of McGready at Red River, Eslinger observes a distinct change. She explains:

> The primary function of the Presbyterian sacramental occasion began a subtle but unmistakable shift, from administering the sacrament to saving souls. An evangelical concern had always characterized the event, but was now elevated to greater prominence.

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[111] Lofland and Skonovd, "Conversion," 380.

[112] Murray, *Revival*, 151–52.

> Ritually, the event remained a sacramental occasion, but it was now accompanied by a rite of personal transformation—the product, apparently, of Methodist influences and acquiesced to by Calvinist Presbyterians in the interest of gaining converts.[113]

Initially, as Eslinger explains, an emphasis on evangelism "remained a sidelight to the primary focus on the communion table. It was even rarer for conviction to lead directly to rebirth. That event, if it occurred at all, was the gift of God rather than the outcome of a minister's urgent pleas. It tended to occur privately, after much Bible study, prayer, and moral reform."[114]

However, this traditional understanding of conversion began to change. Eslinger explains:

> Placing greater emphasis on spiritual rebirth during the sacramental occasion inevitably heightened its emotional level. Conviction of one's sinful nature raised feelings of remorse, shame, fright, and, most of all, helplessness. Convicted persons cried, moaned, and sank weakly to their knees. And now…increasing numbers of them were doing so in each other's presence, contributing further pressure.[115]

Quite overtly, conversion began to assume a new identity. Eslinger observes:

> Spiritual crisis became a group event. Particularly indicative of the camp meeting's integrative function, people did not experience renewal and conviction randomly, as wholly autonomous individuals. They did so rather in a patterned fashion, in accord with others… [The] entire transformation from conviction to conversion was condensed into a single event. An individual could arrive a sinner and leave a saint.[116]

Others observe a similar collective quality in the camp meeting view of conversion. Allen contends that the camp meetings used "forms of music, movement, and mutual participation with others in certain ritual actions designed to rightly order the potential convert's desires so that the unspeakable reality of the divine may be perceived."[117] While the camp meetings surely brought some positive changes to the realm of corporate worship and spiritual community, it seems

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[113] Eslinger, *Citizens*, 197.

[114] Eslinger, *Citizens*, 218.

[115] Eslinger, *Citizens*, 218–19.

[116] Eslinger, *Citizens*, 225.

[117] Allen, "Being Born," 34.

obvious that they also had a rather pronounced effect on the evangelical church's view of spiritual conversion as typically being communal rather than solitary.

Finally, the revivalist view of conversion has a direct connection to its proponents' presuppositions about the human will. Not surprisingly, it is the famed evangelist Charles Finney who boldly and frankly articulated his views on human will and, in doing so, rather significantly shaped evangelical thinking on spiritual conversion. Finney insisted upon the immediacy of the conversion event because he believed sinners could simply change their minds and be saved. In his controversial sermon entitled, "Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts," Finney asserts that mankind must rely on his free will to "change the governing preference" of his life and be saved by his "own voluntary act."[118] "Governing preference" seems to be a favorite phrase of Finney's—a shorthand way of referring to the free will of every human being. Another sermon excerpt uses similar wording:

> I will show you what is intended in the command of the text. It is that man should change the governing purpose of his life. A man resolves to be a lawyer; then he directs all his plans and efforts to that object, and that, for the time is his governing purpose. He directs all his efforts to that object and so has changed his heart… It is apparent that the change now described, effected by the simple volition of the sinner's mind through the influence of motives, is a sufficient change, all that the Bible requires. It is all that is necessary to make a sinner a Christian.[119]

Using rather dogmatic language, Finney challenges the traditional view of spiritual conversion—a change of mind is "all" that is necessary for conversion. While he attempts (at times) to offer a biblical balance between God's providential working in the heart and man's responsibility to act, Finney nevertheless leans heavily toward human effort. Quoting again from "Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts," Finney says of conversion:

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[118] Finney, *Sermons*, 29.

[119] Quoted by Murray, *Revivals*, 244.

> The act is his own act [the sinner's], the turning is his own turning, while God by the truth had induced him to turn; still it is strictly true that he has turned and has done it himself. Thus you see the sense in which it is the work of God… The Spirit of God, by the truth, influences the sinner to change… But the sinner actually changes, and is therefore himself, in the most proper sense, the author of the change.[120]

The change in thinking is overt. Cooper contends, "It is obvious…that Finney is not completely satisfied with the role God plays in the view of conversion he presents; the role of the Holy Spirit seemed to be less and less."[121] Once again, this view of conversion is a dramatic departure from the historical Puritan view. James Johnson explains,

> From the orthodox standpoint Finney's messages were very radical for he openly repudiated the main tenets of Calvinism. The Calvinist theology, said Finney, led to a fatalistic conception of life. It caused men to believe that they could do nothing for themselves but must wait for God to save them in due time, if He so chose. If men were elected to be saved, the Holy Spirit would eventually convert them. Finney's messages were designed to combat traditional Calvinism by arousing men to the idea that they were sinners by choice and could only change the situation by exercising their own wills… Finney was no more successful than was Jonathan Edwards in harmonizing human responsibility with the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God, but he rejected the concept of total depravity in favor of the doctrine of free will.[122]

Rather than viewing mankind as being born fundamentally wicked and without the natural ability to change his condition, Finney believed in the sovereignty of the human will. Throughout his preaching, Finney urged sinners "to obey God's reasonable command and make their own hearts new at once"[123] because "another moment's delay and it may be too late forever."[124]

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[120] Finney, *Sermons*, 22.

[121] Cooper, *The Great*, 80.

[122] James E. Johnson, "Charles G. Finney and a Theology of Revivalism," *Church History* 38 (1969): 343.

[123] Cooper, *The Great*, 81.

[124] Finney, *Sermons*, 41.

In his final analysis of the revivalist motif, Leonard raises some rather thought-provoking questions and challenges the somewhat established, modern view of conversion. First, he proposes that the church must distinguish between conversion *event* and *experience*. He writes:

> Perhaps we must learn to think of conversion event not as a transaction we fulfill but as one step on the continuum of conversion experience as the way of faith, an experience of grace which surrounds us, recognized or unrecognized, from the moment we enter the world. Some, nurtured from the beginning, will say yes to that grace in such basic ways as to make decisive events almost unrecognizable. Others, foreign to grace early on receive it dramatically along the way, as if it had never been there before. Some combine elements of both. All may have [a] valid conversion experience, though different types of conversion events.[125]

Leonard's proposed distinction is thought-provoking. Surely, conversion, from the *human* viewpoint, is a transaction completed at a specific moment. Colossians 1:13 affirms that believers have been "delivered…from the domain of darkness and transferred…to the kingdom" (ESV) of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the apostle John says, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13, ESV). Both New Testament writers use language that describes conversion as a precise event happening in real-time and as something about which believers can have assurance. While Leonard does not deny these descriptions, he does purport that conversion is more than a mere decision or transaction. Furthermore, Leonard clarifies that a biblical understanding of conversion must also acknowledge a *divine* component. This is his second point of application. Leonard insists (1) that the sovereignty of God must remain central in a biblical understanding of conversion and (2) that the conversion event must have tangible manifestations in the convert's life. He writes, "Conversion begins with God; it is a mystery of grace which places emphasis on a pilgrimage of faith. The end result of conversion is living faith, not completion of some

[125] Leonard, "Getting Saved," 125.

transactional requirement."[126] In Leonard's thinking, distilling conversion to one moment, decision, or prayer tends to undermine the mystery and activity of the Holy Spirit as the author of salvation. Once again, Leonard contends that conversion is more than the satisfaction of a "salvific requirement."[127] It involves other aspects such as ethics, discipleship, and character—i.e., spiritual conversion results in a changed life. Finally, Leonard challenges the modern church to determine if its understanding of spiritual conversion is shaped more by American culture than by biblical imperative. He asks:

> Do we lead persons in praying *the prayer* [emphasis original], in moving toward a conversion event? Yes, sometimes, but cautiously, and we continue to ask the question: Is it possible that a practice appropriate for presenting the gospel in one era has in another time become so encrusted with cheap grace and pluralistic confusion as to require abandonment lest it do more harm to the gospel than good?[128]

In his final analysis, Leonard explains, "Our task is to discover or rediscover a theology of conversion experience which challenges the easy transactional grace of cultural conversionism."[129] Leonard's comments are especially relevant to a study of the revivalism of the Great Awakenings, where the language describing conversion seems to be shifting.

Doctrine of Preaching

Alongside the doctrines of salvation and conversion, Caldwell explains that the doctrine of preaching is a third component of the revivalists' theology. Undoubtedly, there's a connection—what one believes about salvation and how to be converted will inform and shape how and what one communicates through the avenue of preaching. While the art of homiletics

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[126] Leonard, "Getting Saved," 125.

[127] Leonard, "Getting Saved," 124.

[128] Leonard, "Getting Saved," 125.

[129] Leonard, "Getting Saved," 124.

has surely morphed over time, this section of the literature review is primarily concerned with the *content* of the revivalists' preaching, not their *style* and *technique*.[130]

Early preaching

Among the early revivalists, Caldwell suggests that it is difficult to disguise the "Calvinistic scaffolding" that frames much of their preaching.[131] Nonetheless, there was an intensely personal component to their preaching as well. He explains:

> The moderate evangelical leaders of the First Great Awakening valued their Calvinist theological heritage, and they merged that with a strong emphasis on piety, devotion, and religious experience. In their minds Calvinism should not just be embraced intellectually; it should be experienced, felt, and known in the heart. Because of this, their revival preaching sought to enliven the heart and touch the religious experiences of those listening. Piety, or a robust sense of religious devotion, thus characterized their Calvinistic proclamation.[132]

To reduce the preaching of the early revivalists to mere intellectualism is deficient research; however, several key doctrines consistently appear in their preaching and writing.

First, the early revivalists preached about the total depravity of the human nature. Believing that conviction (the awareness of one's inability) was a necessary prerequisite to spiritual conversion, many of these early preachers directly addressed the intellect to convince people about the atrocity of their sin. As articulated above, these preachers believed that conversion was typically a lengthy process; however, they also were convinced that the necessary beginning point of this process was personal conviction of sin. Caldwell explains, "[They] concluded that sinners must come to experience the oppressiveness of sin in their lives and yearn for salvation in Christ before they are thoroughly prepared to repent and believe the

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[130] Some of the dramatic changes that revivalism brought to preaching *style* and *technique* will be considered later in this literature review.

[131] Caldwell, *Theologies*, 15.

[132] Caldwell, *Theologies*, 20.

gospel. Thus conviction was a vitally important prerequisite to salvation."[133] For example, the preacher Jonathan Dickinson (1688–1747) writes, "I cannot see how any person…can receive the Lord Jesus Christ upon gospel-terms, till he is at least brought to some sensible apprehension of the misery of his present state, and of his absolute necessity of a Saviour."[134] Other preachers agree. Samuel Buell (1716–1798) writes, "[It] doubtless holds true that until Sinners see the Sinfulness of Sin, their lost State by Nature, the spirituality of the Law, their unworthiness of divine Mercy, they will not come to Christ for Salvation; nor are they like to have a Discovery of his Fullness and Glory."[135] This understanding is common among the early revivalists. For this reason, their preaching tended to emphasize the doctrines of the moral law, original sin, and election—all to inculcate a personal sense of conviction.[136]

Second, the preaching of the early revivalists seems to be focused on the supernatural work of regeneration. To be sure, informing the intellect was a necessary component of preaching to bring about conviction of sin; however, mere intellectual assent to the truths of the gospel was not sufficient in the minds of these preachers. They often spoke of conversion as the mind being "savingly enlightened."[137] Consistent with their view of conversion as a somewhat mystical work of God, these preachers communicated the supernatural nature of regeneration. For example, the great revivalist George Whitefield (1714–1770) said, "In order to make Christ's redemption complete, [it is necessary] that we should have a grant of God's Holy Spirit to

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[133] Caldwell, *Theologies*, 21.

[134] Jonathan Dickinson and Benjamin Colman, *A Display of God's Special Grace in a Familiar Dialogue Between a Minister and a Gentlemen of His Congregation* (Boston: Rogers and Fowle, 1742), 13.

[135] Samuel Buell, *A Faithful Narrative of the Remarkable Revival of Religion, in the Congregation of East-Hampton, on Long-Island, Part of the South Division of the Province of New-York* (Glasgow: John Bryce, 1768), 46.

[136] Caldwell, *Theologies*, 41.

[137] Caldwell, *Theologies*, 32.

change our natures and so prepare us for the enjoyment of that happiness our Saviour has purchased by his precious blood."[138] In other words, sinners were not able to simply change their minds and be saved; they needed a fundamental change of nature first. Likewise, Jonathan Dickinson uses similar terminology, describing the miraculous phenomenon of conversion as one who came to a "lively view," a "realizing sight," or a "sensible discovery" of "divine things."[139] All of this rhetoric communicates the central role of God in conversion and even suggests a degree of human passivity. But, to be sure, these early revivalists did see a human component in conversion. In fact, Caldwell asserts, "Their sermons overflowed with earnest calls to sinners to exert themselves on behalf of their salvation."[140] Once again, Dickinson preaches:

> Search and try whether you have these gracious influences of the Spirit in your soul, or not. Set apart time on purpose. You will do well to take the help and assistance of some good book, that most plainly and clearly sets the genuine marks of the new creature before you; and to your self-examination join fervent prayer, that God would graciously shew you your state as it is. In this way a truly sanctified person will be like[ly] to discover that he is such.[141]

Because they viewed salvation as a wholly supernatural work of God, these early revivalists appear hesitant to offer their listeners any form of assurance in their preaching. Caldwell explains, "For them, the experience of conversion did not commence with one's decision for Christ… Rather, it began when one discerned new principles of spiritual life within the heart… These principles…cannot be the product of human decision or natural principles; they can only

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[138] Quoted in Caldwell, *Theologies*, 31.

[139] Jonathan Dickinson, *The True Scripture-Doctrine Concerning Some Important Points of Christian Faith* (Elizabeth Town, NJ: Shephard Kollock, 1793), 125–27.

[140] Caldwell, *Theologies*, 25.

[141] Caldwell, *Theologies*, 40.

be wrought in the soul by God's direct supernatural intervention."[142] This work of regeneration is foremost in the preaching of the early revivalists.

Later preaching

With the progression of doctrinal thinking throughout the First and Second Great Awakenings, the theological content of preaching underwent some substantial changes as well. While there are some significant commonalities (e.g., the necessity of conviction, an appeal to the intellect, etc.), it seems obvious that there are some rather prominent differences as well. At the risk of oversimplifying, this marked difference can be demonstrated in the preaching of Charles Finney. Finney's doctrinal beliefs, which are well-documented throughout the literature, demonstrate the marked changes that occurred in the substance of evangelical preaching, especially among the later revivalists.

To begin, it is quite evident that Finney was entirely antagonistic to Calvinistic doctrines. Although licensed and ordained as a Presbyterian minister, he (in his own words) took every opportunity to oppose traditional reformed doctrines.[143] He writes, "Wherever I found any class of person were hidden behind these dogmas, I did not hesitate to demolish them, to the best of my ability."[144] Finney's beliefs and preaching were a vast departure from the traditional, Reformed doctrines of depravity and regeneration. Cooper observes:

> Rarely will you find a sermon by Finney that does not attack Calvinism at some point. His messages were designed to combat traditional belief by arguing that men were sinners by choice and could easily change the situation by exercising their own free wills.

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[142] Caldwell, *Theologies*, 29.

[143] While there are differences between *Calvinism* and *Reformed doctrines*, the terms are essentially used here as synonyms because Finney opposed both. Calvinism historically refers to the five points that make up the TULIP acrostic; while Reformed doctrines encompass those but would also include distinctive views on infant baptism, ecclesiology, and eschatology.

[144] Charles Finney, *Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney: Written by Himself* (New York: A. S. Barnes & Company, 1876), 59.

> Man's only inability was his voluntary unwillingness to do what he ought to do about his sins. Responsibility was commensurate with ability. God never would, nor could He, demand of us what we are unable to do. What held sinners back from salvation was their own obstinacy and lack of determination. People were endowed by nature with all the powers of moral agency and what was required of them was not an alteration of these powers but a usage of them in the service of their Creator.[145]

Ultimately, Finney would outright deny the doctrine of original sin and depravity. Murray explains:

> [Finney] made clear that the whole idea that an unregenerate man was governed by a fallen nature was wrong. Men, he declared, are not governed by natures, either fallen or holy… It was Adam's *will*, not his supposed nature, that controlled his actions and, Finney declared, what was true of Adam remained true for all men; a decision of the will, not a change of nature, was needed for anyone to be converted.[146]

Rather than explaining regeneration as a sovereign and supernatural work of God, Finney argued in his preaching that the human act of repenting and believing *is* the act of regeneration.[147] Caldwell explains, "[In Finney's preaching,] to get a new heart is not something sinners are to wait for God to accomplish in them, nor is it the result of God's creative renovation of their souls. It is merely changing the moral orientation of their lives."[148] In his sermon "Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts," Finney says, "A new heart is the [sinner's] choice of Jehovah as the supreme ruler."[149] In other words, sinners not only have the ability to change their hearts, but they are also under the moral obligation to get a new heart, convert, and regenerate themselves.[150]

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[145] Cooper, *The Great*, 70.

[146] Murray, *Revival*, 244–45.

[147] Caldwell, *Theologies*, 193.

[148] Caldwell, *Theologies*, 194.

[149] Finney, *Sermons*, 10.

[150] Caldwell, *Theologies*, 194.

While Finney's beliefs appear to have progressed gradually over his lifetime, there were marked effects upon his preaching—the motive as well as the content. Caldwell explains:

> Deep down he [Finney] was a pragmatist, a man of action who channeled his energies toward evangelistic ends. He did have an intellectual side—his legal training gave him the ability to define terms with precision and handle subtle distinctions—yet the entire shape of his theology, from the minute details of human ability to the superstructure of God's moral governance over creation, had one thing in view: evangelistic action.[151]

Finney went so far as to say that the primary "aim" of all preaching should be to "convert [one's] congregation."[152] Largely motivated by his view of the human will, Finney's preaching was intended to persuade his listeners to change their minds and be saved. If (in Finney's estimation) the human will has the ability to repent and believe the claims of the gospel, then the preacher's responsibility is to do whatever is necessary to remove any hindrances that keep sinners from exercising that ability. In his *Lectures on Revivals*, Finney writes about preaching: "If possible, melt him [the sinner] down on the spot. When once you have got a sinner's attention, very often his conviction and conversion is the work of a few moments. You can sometimes do more in five minutes, than in years or a whole life while he is careless or indifferent."[153] Cooper observes the changing intention of the preacher: "His job was no longer primarily to interpret and expound the truth of the Scriptures. His role was to persuade people to act on their convictions using whatever means at his command; to sway (perhaps even manipulate) people into making the right choice for whatever reason."[154]

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[151] Caldwell, *Theologies*, 171.

[152] Finney, *Lectures*, 213.

[153] Finney, *Lectures*, 162.

[154] Cooper, *The Great*, 70–71.

A Tendency Toward Extremes

Finally, in analyzing the theology of revivalism, it is necessary to observe the extremes to which some preachers and theologians take their doctrinal convictions. Among secular historians and anthropologists, this is an oft-observed tendency—a metaphorical pendulum swing from one extreme to another. For example, one generation—reacting to the supposed excesses and zeal of the previous generation—develops convictions and adopts methods that are completely antithetical to the former. Ostensibly, a similar phenomenon occasionally takes place within the history of American evangelicalism. Several authors seem to identify these pendulum swings and the tendency toward undue extremes in the era of the American Great Awakenings. For example, McLoughlin, in his opening chapter "The Church Almost Revolutionized" attempts to summarize and explain the marked shift between the "old systems"[155] and the "new tradition."[156] He consistently uses the word *reorientation* to describe the second generation's rather successful attempt to undermine the former generation, thus creating a vast schism between somewhat diverse viewpoints. Also, in describing the methodology of Charles Finney, McLoughlin explains that the preacher "inaugurated a new era in American revivalism. He not only developed new techniques for promoting conversions and a new style for pulpit oratory, but he transformed the whole philosophy and process of evangelism."[157] Further, McLouglin contends, "From the outset of his career, his [Finney's] manner, methods, and theology were subjects of violent controversy."[158] With all of these descriptions, McLoughlin indicates a metaphoric

[155] McLoughlin, *Modern*, 9.

[156] McLouglin, *Modern*, 13.

[157] McLoughlin, *Modern*, 11.

[158] McLouglin, *Modern*, 27.

pendulum swing—a dramatic shift in theology and methodology that is often communicated throughout the literature describing the First and Second Great Awakenings.

To begin, there appears to be a rather pronounced awareness, and even a condemnation, of those who were allegedly hyper-Calvinists.[159] In other words, they took the historical doctrines to unnecessary and dangerous extremes. About the turn of the century, Cooper observes, "[Those] who held to a strict Calvinism…seemed more and more out of place in growing America. The very idea that God would arbitrarily elect some people to salvation and pass over others in their sinful condition was repugnant to the sense of fair play and individualism growing in the American frontier culture."[160] Although the general doctrinal tradition was decidedly Calvinistic (as discussed above), some began to take the Reformed doctrines to inordinate extremes. Beardsley describes them as,

> [They] which looked askance upon all attempts to effect the regeneration of men. God's sovereignty rendered inconsistent any man-made attempts for the salvation of others. It was presumptuous to undertake anything of the kind. Regeneration was a divine work to be wrought independently of any human agency. The salvation of sinners being determined by God's elected grace, human efforts looking to that end were not only needless but useless. God knew who would or would not be saved, and in his own good time, and in accordance with his own good purposes he would gather the elect into his kingdom. The strength of the church was to "lie still."[161]

Moreover, David Engelsma in his *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel* identifies this extreme perspective:

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[159] Both Engelsma and Murray (*Revival*, 315) suggest that accusations of "hyper-Calvinism" are often attacks upon historical Calvinism itself. Engelsma writes, "In most cases the charge 'hyper-Calvinism' is nothing but a deceptive attack upon Calvinism itself. Someone hates Calvinism or the uncompromising, consistent defense of Calvinism. Yet he hesitates to attack Calvinism openly and forthrightly. Therefore he disguises his attack as an attack on hyper-Calvinism and hyper-Calvinists" (see David J. Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel: An Examination of the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel*, 3rd ed. [Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing, 1980], 9).

[160] Cooper, *The Great*, 56.

[161] Beardsley, *A History*, 163–64.

> Hyper-Calvinism is the denial that God in the preaching of the gospel calls everyone who hears the preaching to repent and believe. It is the denial that the church should call everyone in the preaching. It is the denial that the unregenerated have a duty to repent and believe. It manifests itself in the practice of the preacher's addressing the call of the gospel, "repent and believe on Christ crucified," only to those in his audience who show signs of regeneration and, thereby, of election, namely, some conviction of sin and some interest in salvation.[162]

Some evidence of this extreme form of Calvinism can be seen in the historical accounts. For example, around the midcentury, Francis Wayland (1796–1856), a church minister, recalls (with a bit of tongue-in-cheek):

> One member of my church was a very high Calvinist—higher a great deal, I apprehend, than Calvin himself. He did not consider me "clear in the doctrines." He himself was perfectly clear, and was, so far as a good man could be a thorough fatalist. He was very unwilling to have me invite sinners indiscriminately to repent and believe. His family were amiable and intelligent, but entirely worldly. I believed it to be my duty to converse with them on the subject of religion, and did so, but with very little success. The next time I saw their father, he plainly, though very kindly, told me that he did not wish any one to converse with his children on religion; for if they were elected, they would certainly be converted; if they were not elected, talking to them would only make them hypocrites.[163]

Unquestionably, some took these extreme views: (1) denying the obligation of sinners to repent and believe, (2) failing to invite indiscriminately all sinners to hear the gospel, (3) rejecting the necessity of evangelism, and (4) discouraging robust, foreign missionary involvement.

Despite the appearance of these extreme Calvinist positions, the record of history seems to indicate that these were the exception—i.e., outside of the realm of historic evangelicalism. Murray explains, "It is not to be denied that hyper-Calvinism had some existence in the United States at the beginning of the nineteenth century but its features can be readily recognized and

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[162] David J. Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980), 15.

[163] Francis Wayland and H. L. Wayland, *A Memoir of the Life and Labors of Francis Wayland*, vol. I (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1868), 197.

they were not those of any of the Baptist leaders."[164] Nevertheless, accusations were hurled. Baptists, with their historically Calvinistic leanings, were said to be against evangelism and labeled "anti-revival" men. Charles Finney argued that Calvinistic beliefs "crippled true gospel ministry and made evangelistic success practically impossible."[165] In the preface to his *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, Finney writes, "To a great extent the truths of the blessed gospel have been hidden under a false philosophy."[166] Then, throughout the book, Finney goes on to peddle his particular system of theology as a superior means of reaching the lost. Nevertheless, Murray argues that such accusations are simply contrary to the facts of history because Baptists (despite their Calvinistic beliefs) have been historically marked by "aggressive evangelism."[167] He writes, "There is a great weight of evidence to sustain the assertion that definite Calvinistic beliefs did not inhibit evangelism among the Baptist churches before the 1830s."[168] For example, no historic Calvinistic confession of faith has ever upheld the error that evangelism was not the duty of every believer.[169] Murray explains:

> The Baptist leaders believed as much as the Presbyterians that "God requires us to labor, and to use the means which he has appointed; and it is only in connection with those efforts that we are authorized to expect those influences of the Spirit without which all our efforts will be in vain." They were persuaded that Christ authorized them to "invite sinners indiscriminately to repent and believe."[170]

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[164] Murray, *Revivalism*, 317.

[165] Murray, *Revivalism*, 290.

[166] Finney, *Lectures*, vi.

[167] Murray, *Revivalism*, 315.

[168] Murray, *Revivalism*, 316.

[169] A good example of this is the Articles of Faith of the Mississippi Baptist Association (1806). The document clearly articulates the classic points of Calvinism without negating the importance or requirement of evangelistic fervor.

[170] Murray, *Revivalism*, 317–18.

Further demonstration of the Baptists' high regard for evangelism throughout the era of the Great Awakenings can be seen in their hearty involvement in foreign mission work, primarily their magnanimous support of pioneer missionaries like William Carey and Adoniram Judson. Despite some unfortunate (and rather limited) examples of hyper-Calvinism among the Baptists, a fervor for evangelism and the support of foreign missions generally permeate their history and give sufficient evidence that the Baptists were careful to avoid any passivity in the proclamation of the gospel.

To be clear, there were extreme views on the opposite end of the doctrinal spectrum, too. Some who rejected the classic points of Calvinism displayed a fanaticism that was outside the realm of evangelical orthodoxy. First, regarding conversion, Leonard identifies some who maintained "a hyper-Arminian conversion event which placed salvation almost entirely in the hands of the sinner and his or her free will, but cut it off from the process of sanctification by making it a once and for all event."[171] As early as 1844 in his book *The Anxious Bench*, John Nevin observes this tendency and complains that proponents of the new measures believed, "Conversion is everything, sanctification nothing."[172] This type of decisionism assured converts of immediate conversion (regardless of the presence of faith and repentance) and popularized the mantra "once saved, always saved." Second, some Ariminians advocated for an extreme "Christian perfection," an apparent point in sanctification where the impulses of sin are entirely relieved. Primarily through the influence of the Wesley brothers, select Methodist preachers and revivalists encouraged their congregations to seek this state of sinlessness. Caldwell explains:

> The Methodist doctrine of Christian perfection, though often misunderstood, derives from a rather simple theological logic inherent in the doctrine of sanctification. If, as Scripture

[171] Leonard, "Getting Saved," 124.

[172] John W. Nevin, *The Anxious Bench* (Chambersburg, PA: The Publication Office of the German Reformed Church, 1844), 60.

> declares, Christians have truly been set free from sin by Christ, then why place limits on the degree of sinlessness a believer can experience? Why constantly remind Christians, as Calvinists do, that the active presence of sin will ever disturb their pilgrimage this side of heaven when Scripture appears to present a different picture? Paul declares that Christians are "dead to sin," "freed from sin," and "crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth [they] should not serve sin" (Rom. 6:2, 7, 6). John notes that whoever is "born of God doth not commit sin; for his sin remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 Jn. 3:9). Jesus himself calls his disciples to be "perfect, even as [their] Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Surely these declarations were not merely theoretical ideals that are out of reach for Christians, but real possibilities that Christians can experience now…
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> To the Methodist mind, these texts implied that Christians can reach a point in their sanctification, through rigorous mortification and the infilling of God's Spirit, where the impulses of sin are essentially muted or placed into a state of hibernation.[173]

Accompanying this extreme view of sanctification, some Methodists maintained that true believers could "fall from grace"—i.e., lose their salvation—if they failed to pursue and attain the upward call of holiness. Again, Caldwell explains:

> Theologically, the doctrine of falling away from grace derived from their [the Methodists'] emphasis on free will. The freedom to embrace or resist Christ prior to conversion must continue after conversion for the simple reason that grace does not nullify human free agency. If this is true, then it implies that true converts can, in the exercise of their freedom, genuinely reject the grace they enjoy, resist it to the point of hardening, and be damned as a result.[174]

While debates continue over the matters of sanctification and eternal security, these Methodist perspectives can easily be viewed as extreme stances on foundational doctrines. Finally, as considered throughout this literature review, the theology and methodology of Charles Finney are often described as unwarranted extremes. For example, Finney's particular views on depravity and spiritual conversion, as discussed above, are widely considered aberrations from balanced truth. Moreover, Finney's brand of revivalism, as articulated throughout his writings, is

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[173] Caldwell, *Theologies*, 138–39.

[174] Caldwell, *Theologies*, 142–43.

often characterized as having a fanaticism, emotionalism, and manipulation that are outside the realm of normative, church behavior.

Considering the Profound and Lasting Effects of Revivalism

Among church and secular historians, there is considerable research and writing about the political and social impact of revivalism. For instance, Nathan Hatch's *The Democratization of America* is undeniably a seminal work. In his extensively researched and well-written book, Hatch provides a historical analysis of the transformation of American religious practices from the colonial period to the early 19th century. His main thesis is that Christianity underwent a profound shift from hierarchical and institutionally controlled structures to more democratic and populist forms—a shift that seems to align with the broader ideals of American democracy. Hatch's work is especially relevant to the current research study because he stresses the impact of revivalism, especially the Second Great Awakening, in reshaping different aspects of social life in America. Of the profound impact of revivalism, Hatch observes:

> Religious historians have breathed a collective sigh of relief at the Second Great Awakening's unexpected appearance at the turn of the nineteenth century. For them, revivalism rescued the infant nation from the brink of disaster. Christians, faced with church decline in settled communities and moral chaos on the frontier, sought to muster a counteroffensive. They rediscovered revival and forged it into a heroic weapon. Thus, most historical accounts conclude, the revival became the dominant theme in antebellum history, the key to the pervasive Christianization that impressed Tocqueville, the wellspring of reform, the cornerstone of a righteous empire—in short, a powerfully integrating and cohesive force.[175]

Despite this rather glowing description of the impact of revivalism on America, Hatch may be offering a somewhat facetious or overinflated view of the movement. To be sure, near the end of his book, he offers an apparent caveat, a seemingly more realistic view:

> Most historians giving an account of religion in the early republic point to the force of revivalism or the Second Great Awakening as the decisive causal factor in a complex

[175] Hatch, *The Democratization*, 62.

> situation. The danger in this approach is to make revivalism, like the Reformation, a great watershed that stops inquiry into the historical process exactly where it should begin. An abstract category of interpretation has displaced the quest to locate events, the meaning of documents, and the motivations of historical actors in their original historical sockets. Relying on revivalism as a principal agent of change has obscured the achievements of flesh-and-blood leaders and their dramatic strategies to forge new movements.[176]

While acknowledging the significant influence of revivalism on both the American church and society in general, Hatch warns against reductionism—that is, attributing societal change solely to revivalism while ignoring other potential factors. The caution is necessary because (in a study such as this) it is tempting to blame history for contemporary problems and overlook precipitating factors. Nonetheless, Hatch's work is thought-provoking and a valuable resource for American and church historians. Other significant works consider the substantial impact of revivalism on American politics and society. Timothy Smith's *Revivalism and Social Reform* describes "the part which religion really played in our country's development."[177] Smith explains that during the period right after the Civil War, "a widespread aspiration for Christian perfection complemented in many ways the social idealism which endeavored to reform the drunkard, free the slaves, elevate womankind, and banish poverty and vice from the country. Exuberant churchmen rededicated themselves to the dream of making America a Christian nation."[178] Moreover, Sandra Sizer's *Gospel Hymns and Social Religion* is significant in the literature, too, because the author proposes that revivalism was "a social religion [that] embodied a novel approach to religious practice and a new set of conceptual tools for understanding the religious

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[176] Hatch, *The Democratization*, 222.

[177] Smith, *Revivalism*, 9.

[178] Smith, *Revivalism*, 15.

life of the individual and its relationship to society as a whole."[179] Sizer's work specifically describes the significant impact of the gospel hymn on America's view of domesticity.

Throughout the literature, there is also an attempt (though a bit limited) to move beyond the historic and social influence of revivalism and understand its enduring impact on the methodology of the evangelical church. Surely, the above-mentioned works are significant to the current study because they undergird its primary thesis: that revivalism has had a profound and lasting effect. However, this section of the literature review is primarily concerned with the influence of revivalism on the evangelical church and how that influence continues to the present day—particularly its influence on corporate worship behaviors. Jerald Brauer contends,

> Every Protestant denomination has been influenced, pro or con, by this phenomenon... Revivalism touched and frequently transformed every dimension of Protestantism in American life. Its absolute insistence on the necessity and centrality of the "new birth" and the creation of new techniques to achieve it shaped Protestant piety. All expressions of that piety—cult; ritual; forms of worship including preaching, prayer, and hymnology; associational structures; forms of religious leadership both clerical and lay; theology, and ethics both personal and public—were shaped by revivalism.[180]

Like Brauer, many writers directly acknowledge the impact of revivalism on every facet of American religious life. Others focus more specifically on its influence on corporate worship behaviors. Frank C. Senn, in his *Introduction to Christian Liturgy*, contends, "The American frontier camp meetings, first organized by Presbyterians as communion gatherings, produced a new ecumenical form of worship.… This form of worship became pervasive in Protestant churches and replaced or altered traditional denomination orders."[181] Ellis agrees: "Revivalism

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[179] Sizer, *Gospel*, 51.

[180] Brauer, "Revivalism Revisited," 268.

[181] Frank C. Senn, *An Introduction to Christian Liturgy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 28–29.

came to dominate Evangelical worship in the USA." [182] Likewise, James White argues that a new worship tradition was formed by revivalism and adopted by "most of the traditions of Protestant worship." He claims that this new tradition "provided a 'black hole' that tended to swallow up many of the distinctive characteristics of previous traditions."[183] Despite these authors' assertions, relatively few studies are solely devoted to the effects of the phenomenon on corporate worship behaviors—although, throughout the literature, this is generally assumed to be the case. Throughout the section below, the emphasis is on revivalism's effect upon (1) the spirit of corporate worship, (2) the music of corporate worship, and (3) the preaching of corporate worship.

On the Spirit of Corporate Worship

To begin, it is generally assumed throughout the literature that historical revivalism brought some profound and lasting changes to the spirit of corporate worship. Admittedly, the Great Awakenings were characterized by *revival* services—i.e., special, corporate gatherings devoted to evangelism and spiritual renewal among God's people—therefore, it is expected that the spirit and behavior of these services would be vastly different from a weekly worship service. As Murray observes, "A revival is, by its very nature, bound to be attended by emotional excitement."[184] However, the format, emotionalism, and even the elements of these services began to be emulated in the regular, Sunday assemblies of evangelical churches. Overall,

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[182] Christopher J. Ellis, *Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 63.

[183] James F. White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 178–79.

[184] Murray, *Revival*, 163.

historical revivalism brought both (1) a spirit of spontaneity and (2) a spirit of evangelism to the corporate worship gatherings of the church.

Spirit of Spontaneity

Despite the carefully orchestrated nature of corporate gatherings within revivalism—primarily due to the widespread use of Finney's new measures—the movement would ultimately contribute a noticeably spontaneous flavor to the worship service. Many historical accounts describe revival services (primarily those of the Second Great Awakening) as "boisterous, chaotic, and emotional."[185] Some of the earliest records of camp meetings describe them as having "a level of disorganization and emotional intensity alien to Presbyterian liturgy and disturbing to more conservative church adherents."[186] While some of this was surely coordinated, the overall perception was that of a spontaneous occurrence. A similar spirit is seen in the methodology of Dwight L. Moody. McLoughlin explains, "It was one of Moody's conscious purposes to make his meetings as unlike the regular church services as he could without resorting to outright secularization. It was because the average church service was so dull and formal."[187] To rejuvenate dead churches, Moody sought to bring a more spontaneous atmosphere to the worship service by adopting a dramatic oratory style and actively encouraging audience interaction throughout his sermons.

To be sure, a degree of spontaneity has always characterized the worship of the free church tradition.[188] Christopher Ellis, in his book *Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of*

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[185] Eslinger, *Citizens of Zion*, xii.

[186] Eslinger, *Citizens of Zion*, 206.

[187] McLoughlin, *Modern*, 241.

[188] Ellis quotes Ernest Payne's definition of "free church": "Freedom from State connection and control, freedom from essential dependence of a priestly succession, freedom from fixed liturgical forms, freedom of

Worship in Free Church Tradition, observes that Baptists[189] have historically been known for their "freedom from fixed liturgical forms."[190] He explains, "This freedom is the freedom of local congregations to order their own gatherings for worship; it is the freedom of spontaneity which is open to the extempore guidance of the Holy Spirit; and it is the freedom of a particular worshipping community to respond to the reading and preaching of Scripture addressed to them as God's living Word."[191] Surely, informal or spontaneous worship was viewed by Baptists as a sign of sincerity in contrast to the apparent pretense of a formal, liturgical service. Ellis explains that Baptists typically expressed concern for worship that had a "devotional intent."[192] In other words, "They are more concerned with what we might call 'spirituality' than the details of liturgical ordering."[193] Greg Scheer agrees, suggesting:

> Evangelicals are historically anti-ritual and anti-liturgical. This is, in part, a result of a focus on heartfelt piety in worship. Repeated rituals are too austere to support that goal. Liturgical patterns are not explicitly mandated in Scripture, making them seem the "vain repetition" of human invention. In the final analysis, ritual and liturgy simply seem too "Catholic." Protestants, and especially Evangelicals, have defined themselves over and against Roman Catholics and other "cultural Christians," and their worship follows suit.[194]

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conscience and inquiry." See Christopher J. Ellis, *Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 26.

[189] While the focus of this research study is not solely on historical Baptist worship, Baptists are considered to be the forebears of modern-day independent and fundamental churches; therefore, an analysis of historical Baptist worship practices is essential to this study.

[190] Ellis, *Gathering*, 27.

[191] Ellis, *Gathering*, 27.

[192] Ellis, *Gathering*, 72.

[193] Ellis, *Gathering*, 72.

[194] Greg Scheer, "Contemporary Praise and Worship Music," in *Hymns and Hymnody: Historical and Theological Introductions*, vol. 3*, From the English West to the Global South*, eds. Mark A. Lamport, Benjamin K. Forrest, and Vernon M. Whaley (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), 294.

While this general disregard for liturgical structures may not have been primarily motivated by the revival movements, evangelical churches were undoubtedly drawn to the trend of spontaneity, and they embraced it in a greater way because it appealed to their sense of personal piety and sincerity in the context of corporate worship.

Some, within the literature, speculate that a spirit of spontaneity in corporate worship is connected to revivalism's failure to distinguish between "private devotion and public worship."[195] Certainly, there is a difference. Terry Johnson rather convincingly describes the contrast, suggesting that public worship is generally more "subdued and austere" than "physically demonstrative."[196] He argues that the Psalms of the Old Testament frequently describe "personal *emotions* and *actions* which are not necessarily intended to be acted out in public worship [emphasis original]."[197] Johnson maintains that Scripture makes distinctions between public and private worship and that believers must do the same. Of significance, Sandra Sizer in her *Gospel Hymns and Social Religion* identifies a blurred distinction between private and public expressions in the worship practices of the Second Great Awakening. She speaks of revivalism as a "social religion, a new complex of religious practices which dissolved the earlier Puritan distinction between private and public religious exercises."[198] In studying revivalist practice, Sizer finds "an increased interest in prayer, testimony, and exhortation"[199]—public worship behaviors that are inherently personal. Generally speaking, in private, people tend to

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[195] Ellis, *Gathering*, 86.

[196] Terry L. Johnson, *Reformed Worship: Worship That Is According to Scripture* (Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 2000), 63.

[197] Johnson, *Reformed*, 63.

[198] Sizer, *Gospel*, 50–51.

[199] Sizer, *Gospel*, 50.

behave without inhibition; however, in a public context, they are more reserved in their expressions of emotion. However, with the Second Great Awakening, Sizer contends that these social norms substantially changed. To prove her assertion, Sizer quotes an editorial letter that Lyman Beecher (1775–1863) wrote to the London *Christian Observer*. Beecher writes:

> Should we therefore, in our zeal, strip religion of the mildness, and kindness, and courtesy of civilized decorum, and exhibit her in alliance with all the repellances and roughnesses of uncultivated humanity, as well might the bodies of the valley of vision have been animated and sent forth in all their deformity before the skin came upon them. True religion makes men courteous, and produces those salutary rules of civilized intercourse which distinguish Christian from savage nations.[200]

Many of the older generation, like Beecher, saw these changes as "the breakdown of all order, morality, and civilization."[201] Sizer notes, "Such sentiments were common among the older evangelicals. It is interesting to contrast their models of order, based on a notion of 'civilization' which has European overtones (decorum and courtesy, and the primary contrast being between 'Christian' and 'savage' nations) with that of later ones."[202] Ironically (despite the revivalists' efforts to bring life and spontaneity to corporate settings of worship through the inclusion of private expressions of emotion), some argued that personal piety was suffering as a result. William Sprague writes:

> There is [a] danger that the social exercises which the church may establish during a revival, may lead to…some degree of disregard [for] the duties of the closet. Especially if these occasional exercises are greatly multiplied, the time which is requisite for attending them beside other duties of a more secular nature, may leave but little opportunity for self-communion, reading the scriptures, and private prayer; and there is reason to fear that, sometimes at least, the Christian makes a compromise with his conscience for at least a partial neglect of these latter duties, by calling to mind his exemplary diligence and constancy in respect to the former. And besides, there is no doubt that it lays his powers under far less contribution, to be engaged in a constant round of social exercises which are fitted to excite the mind, than to enter into his closet and commune with

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[200] Sizer, *Gospel*, 62.

[201] Sizer, *Gospel*, 61.

[202] Sizer, *Gospel*, 191.

> himself, and apply the truths and precepts of the gospel for the regulation of his affections and conduct. It is to this practical error, I doubt not, that we are to attribute in a great degree, the fact, that many Christians, who engage with much interest in a revival, still seem to turn it to so little account as it respects their own personal piety. Nothing is more certain than that the neglect of closet duties, whatever other duties may be performed, must wither the believer's graces, and render his Christian character sickly and inefficient.[203]

While Sprague's comments directly address the wise use of one's time, he reveals that the church had blurred the distinction between private and public worship. Additionally, Sprague indicates that these changes were primarily driven by revivalism. Sizer agrees: "Revivals… embodied a set of practices which bridged the (formerly private) experience of conversion and the communal activities of devotion, leading to church membership. They were clearly *social* practices [emphasis original]."[204] Sizer's perspective on revivalism as a "social religion" and her observations about the distinct changes in private and public behaviors are compelling and shed light on the movement's preference for spontaneity.

Historical revivalism's preference for spontaneity in corporate worship can be seen in several ways. First, the free expression of emotion (primarily through physical movement and vocal outbursts) was tolerated and even encouraged. Indeed, such visceral responses were viewed as authentic manifestations of the Spirit's filling and were believed to be clear demonstrations of spiritual renewal or awakening. During the era of the Second Great Awakening, Murray explains the Methodist tendency "to treat such things as loud emotion, shouting, sobbing, leaping, falling, and swooning as though they were 'the true criteria of heartfelt religion.'"[205] Eslinger documents a similar understanding among the camp meeting

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[203] William B. Sprague, *Lectures on the Revivals of Religion* (Albany: Webster & Skinners, 1832), 192–93.

[204] Sizer, *Gospel*, 66.

[205] Murray, *Revival*, 183.

revivalists, who primarily saw the physical response of "falling" as an indication of divine working. She explains:

> Convicted persons cried, moaned, and sank weakly to their knees. And…increasing numbers of them were doing so in each other's presence, contributing further pressure. Moreover, the transformation was suddenly signaled by "bodily exercises," physical expressions of spiritual agony seemingly beyond conscious control. Although bodily exercises might take a variety of forms, the most common during this period was falling suddenly to the ground, "as if shot." Persons convinced of their sinfulness, or "convicted" by a sense of their sinfulness and need for God's mercy, would fall limply to the ground. The afflicted often lay for hours, at varying levels of stupor. Some of those who succumbed could pray, some could only moan in spiritual agony, and some appeared to be unconscious… Most persons who fell claimed an inability to feel any physical pain, "and when recovered, they could relate everything that had been said or done near them." People were symbolically falling "dead to sin," submitting themselves to God in hope that he would send his saving grace and revive them to begin a new spiritual existence. Afterward, they claimed a profound spiritual transformation, often giving testimony to all who would listen. Numerous observers insisted that it was "neither common fainting, nor a nervous affection."[206]

This seemingly unexplainable "falling" soon morphed into other more bizarre behaviors. Eslinger continues:

> The falling that occurred at the early camp meeting has been almost completely overshadowed in modern historical studies by more extreme "bodily exercises," such as dancing, barking, running, rolling, and—the most notorious of all—the jerks. A person captured by the jerks would shake, or jerk, rapidly. As the head snapped back and forth, sometimes so rapidly that the person's facial features appeared blurred, a quick cry or help might be uttered. Both saints and sinners might succumb. And though the movement seemed violently strong, subjects rarely experienced any pain or injury.

Despite the particular manifestation, emotional and physical responses that were seemingly unexplainable and beyond conscious control came to be regarded as demonstrations of sincerity and an indication of supernatural intervention within the worship meeting. While surely over time, less overt expressions of emotion became commonplace among more conservative

[206] Eslinger, *Citizens*, 219.

evangelical churches—crying, laughing, raising one's hands, or shouting "Amen"—these actions continue to be viewed as outward measurements of acceptable worship.[207]

Second, revivalism encouraged spontaneity in corporate worship through the use of public testimonies. Sizer explains that the "telling of [personal] conversions and exhorting others was a common practice, and that the testifiers were regarded by others as models to be imitated."[208] Finney, in his oft-quoted *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, claims that the "looks and lives and warnings" of the converted (i.e., their testimonies) "tend to promote the conversion of their impenitent friends."[209] Flowing out of their new social religion, proponents of the public testimony believed that it was needed "to create a community of intense feelings, in which individuals underwent similar experiences (centering on conversion) and would thenceforth unite with others in matters of moral decision and social behavior."[210] Even the more moderate revivalists began to encourage the use of public testimony with a similar pragmatism. For example, Sprague warned that "private Christians" had the responsibility of "counsel and instruction" in public gatherings to awaken sinners. To be sure, Sprague contended that personal "example" was a necessary means of the Holy Spirit to engender conviction through the means of "sympathy."[211]

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[207] Terry Johnson rather convincingly explains why "physically demonstrative" actions in the Psalms are not intended to be normative in the context of the corporate gathering of believers; i.e., they are not acceptable. He contends, "In [corporate] worship there is much that we recall in which at that moment we are not meant to engage." See Terry L. Johnson, *Reformed Worship: Worship That Is According to Scripture* (Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 2000), 64.

[208] Sizer, *Gospel*, 53.

[209] Finney, *Lectures*, 326.

[210] Sizer, *Gospel*, 52.

[211] Sprague, *Lectures*, 4–5, 83–86.

Third, revivalism promoted spontaneity in corporate worship through the practice of extemporaneous prayer. Christopher Ellis explains that "free and unscripted" prayers have been a part of Baptist worship from its inception.[212] He contends that it was the influence of the Puritans and their "devotional concerns of openness and dependence upon God"[213] that greatly influenced Baptist worship practices, including prayer. For example, in his essay "I Will Pray with the Spirit," the well-known Puritan John Bunyan (1628–1688) writes, "Here is the life of Prayer, when in, or with the Spirit, a man being made sensible of sin, and how to come to the Lord for mercy; he comes, I say, in the strength of the Spirit, and cryeth, *Father*… That one word spoken in Faith, is better than a thousand prayers, as men call them, written and read, in a formal, cold, luke-warm way."[214] Believing prayer to be a necessary means of moving the sphere of the religious affections, the Puritans avoided any attempts to stimulate it externally through a prayer book.[215] Significantly, revivalism also placed great importance on outwardly spontaneous, unscripted, and emotive prayers. Sizer purports that in addition to public testimony and exhortation, prayer is one of the fundamental forms of "social religion" [216] used by revivalism "in orchestrating 'sympathy' and 'feeling' to bring others to conversion."[217] Not surprisingly, it is Finney who articulates these views on prayer so plainly. Sizer relates:

> All of his descriptions of the practice of prayer…emphasized the intensity of experience. The petitioner was "bold" in importuning God, (Finney sometimes called it "agonizing prayer") and great "travail of soul"… Such intense mental concentration and pouring out

[212] Ellis, *Gathering*, 105.

[213] Ellis, *Gathering*, 103.

[214] John Bunyan, *The Doctrine of Law and Grace Unfolded and I Will Pray with the Spirit,* vol. 2, *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, ed. Richard L. Greaves, (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1976), 252.

[215] Ellis, *Gathering*, 113.

[216] Sizer, *Gospel*, 129.

[217] Sizer, *Gospel*, 54.

> of one's desires often involved violent gesticulation and other bodily activity (the "violent gestures" and "boisterous tones"…). But more important, according to Finney, was the role of this kind of prayer in creating a particular atmosphere, a kind of community of feeling…with the entire congregation. For in the prayer of faith, Finney said, the Holy Spirit "prays for us, by exciting our faculties"; there is created "a bond of union between Christ and the Church"; one is brought into "sympathy" with God; and it "cements the hearts of Christians" one to another. Prayer results in a sort of communal union, defined in terms of a common feeling or excitement of mental faculties brought about by the Holy Spirit.[218]

In Finney's thinking, the corporate experience of demonstrably emotive prayer was essential; "intensity of experience" and lack of preparation were key components. Outward expressions became the necessary indicator of this spontaneous and heartfelt kind of prayer. Undoubtedly, these views on prayer were controversial and considered a departure from orthodox corporate worship behaviors. Sizer recounts a resolution that was passed in the 1827 New Lebanon (New York) conference—a meeting designed to bring congregants to an agreement on the use of new measures. Concerning corporate prayer, the resolution read: "Audible groaning in prayer, is in all ordinary cases, to be discouraged; and violent gestures, and boisterous tones, in the same exercise, are improper."[219] Nevertheless, despite the controversy and initial attempts to regulate it, unscripted prayers came to dominate worship practice in evangelical churches because they typified the traits of sincerity and spontaneity that evangelicals preferred.

Spirit of Evangelism

Not only did revivalism encourage a spirit of spontaneity, but it also produced a new spirit of evangelism in corporate worship settings. Once again, the camp meeting format of the Second Great Awakening largely contributed to this new emphasis. Although they were

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[218] Sizer, *Gospel*, 58.

[219] Sizer, *Gospel*, 55.

originally designed as a "sacramental occasion"[220] (i.e., a celebration of the Lord's Supper for believers), the camp meetings rather quickly became devoted to the "salvation of souls."[221] In time, this evangelistic emphasis became (for numerous reasons) the driving motive for all church gatherings. In his article entitled "The Baptist Influence on Revival Music/The Revival Influence on Baptist Music," David Music observes the change:

> In earlier times, the principal meeting of Baptist churches was for the purpose of worship—the Christian meeting his or her God in a corporate setting. Evangelism almost surely happened as part of these occasions, but it was usually a by-product rather than the expected result. When the church experienced corporate evangelism, it was most often in the context of a "social meeting"—that is, a meeting that was held apart from the stated worship times of the church.
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> The revival movement of the late nineteenth century, however, produced a radical change in the underlying philosophy of the Baptist service. While no one would have claimed or admitted that they were abandoning worship, the thrust of the principal services began to move more and more in the direction of evangelism. Essentially, the Sunday morning service became like a single service during a revival meeting. The question was not "Did the Christian meet God today?" but "Did the unbeliever meet God today?" Elements that had not previously been common in Baptist worship, such as the public invitation, were borrowed from the revival service and became a standard fixture. The service now had a distinctly different but easily measurable objective: to have people "walk the aisle."[222]

As Music observes, the distinction between special *revival* service and weekly *worship* service became blurred, revealing a foundational, philosophical change. Historically, Christian worship services were structured—like those of ancient Israel—around the appropriate response of believers to God. Allen Ross explains, "[Throughout the Old Testament, the] worshipper was expected to be a believer, a member of the covenant community, one of the 'faithful people of God.' This assumption form[ed] the basis of all the instructions for worship."[223] Therefore, both

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[220] Eslinger, *Citizens*, 206.

[221] Eslinger, *Citizens*, 206.

[222] David W. Music, "The Baptist Influence on Revival Music/The Revival Influence on Baptist Music," *Baptist History and Heritage* 45, no. 3 (2010): 42.

[223] Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 297.

Judaic and Christian worship services were structured accordingly—not around potential converts, but as the believer's expression of praise. However, revivalism brought a rather pronounced change.

Several writers within the literature seem to identify this subtle shift in the church's motive for public meetings. First, although their books are primarily devoted to the liturgy of corporate worship, Bryan Chapell and Robbie Castleman recognize and warn against the prevailing motive of evangelism in the typical worship service. Chapell cautions, "In order for us to think of worship in *gospel* terms, we need to be careful not to think only in *evangelistic* terms [emphasis original]."[224] Instead of structuring worship around the unsaved, Chapell contends that a "gospel-shaped" liturgy is mainly concerned with believers and their response to God. He explains that church leaders should design "their orders of worship to communicate the truths of Scripture, touch the hearts of worshipers with the implications of the truths, and then equip believers to live faithfully in the world as witnesses to those truths."[225] Castleman also observes, "Many services of worship today have a pronounced tendency to devolve into entertainment for the flock, becoming merely functional evangelistic meetings for the seekers."[226] Like Chapell, he proposes a structure to worship that is more "biblically theological and less personally therapeutic."[227] Furthermore, in a more recently published book, *Biblical Foundations of Corporate Worship*, Scott Aniol observes, "For some today, the main purpose for which they gather is evangelism—every service is designed to bring in seekers and move them toward

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[224] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 21.

[225] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 21.

[226] Robbie F. Castleman, *Story-Shaped Worship: Following Patterns from the Bible and History* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 19.

[227] Castleman, *Story-Shaped*, 20.

conversion."[228] He goes on to explain how believers, unlike unbelievers, are uniquely qualified to worship because they have been cleansed, and they collectively form the temple, a place of worship. In light of these observations, Aniol convincingly argues:

> Corporate worship is for believers. Only those who have access to God, those who are brought near through Christ, are members of the household of God and part of the temple. Only believers can commune with God. Therefore the primary purpose of the corporate worship gathering is for believers to meet with God. Now, this does not mean that we forbid unbelievers from being there. As Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 14, believers gathering to meet with God is profoundly evangelistic. But when unbelievers come, they come as observers, not as participants, and never do we design what takes place in the corporate church gatherings based on what unbelievers want, any more than what took place in Israel's temple was based on what uncircumcised pagans wanted. Corporate worship is for believers to meet with God.[229]

Ellis traces this trend toward evangelism in corporate worship throughout the history of the Baptists. He writes, "Urban churches in the early nineteenth century initiated evening services which in turn became occasions for 'fishing for sinners,' as distinct from the morning service which tended to concentrate on the edification of the saints."[230] Further, Ellis observes the examples of Dwight Moody, Ira Sankey, Billy Graham, and Willow Creek Church, who had an impact on some Baptists to be concerned that "worship should be a vehicle of evangelism."[231] Finally, John Armstrong, in his article "The Mad Rush to Seeker Sensitive Worship," makes a significant contribution to this discussion by connecting evangelistically-driven worship to the influence of historical revivalism. He writes,

> The whole "seeker-sensitive" approach presumes that the Lord's Day church gathering is principally for recruiting the unchurched, or evangelizing the lost. This idea can be traced to the "revivalism" of 19th century American experience, where the focus during this era was then moved from the church gathering to worship God, to be edified, to receive the sacraments and to enjoy fellowship with Christ and one another, to "drawing the net," or

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[228] Scott Aniol, *Biblical Foundations of Corporate Worship* (Conway, AR: Free Grace Press, 2022), 27.

[229] Aniol, *Biblical*, 38.

[230] Ellis, *Gathering*, 97.

[231] Ellis, *Gathering*, 97.

> getting decisions from the lost. This new "seeker-sensitive" approach is just a sharper and more carefully defined (dare we say, "neatly packaged") version of the same approach. It is clearly not Biblical.[232]

Though somewhat dated, Armstrong's observations are nonetheless relevant. While the fad of "seeker-sensitive" worship has nearly disappeared from debate within the church, the philosophical impetus behind it has been perpetuated—namely, the presupposition that corporate worship gatherings are primarily for evangelism.

Certainly, the goals of evangelism and worship are not incompatible. As Aniol affirms above, corporate worship should be "profoundly evangelistic."[233] Others, throughout the literature, uphold this balanced perspective. Their observations are worth considering. In June 2001, Timothy Keller, in defense of the outwardly successful and ever-controversial "seeker-sensitive" worship movement, wrote an article that proposes a biblical balance, which he calls "evangelistic worship." Keller contends, "Churches would do best to make their 'main course' [Sunday worship] an evangelistic worship service."[234] Challenging the idea that corporate worship is primarily for believers, Keller cites the preachers of the Great Awakenings (primarily George Whitefield and John Wesley) who were "remarkable innovators"[235] in appealing to the unchurched. For example, Keller claims that the preaching of Whitefield was "racy and popular yet pointed toward the transcendent and holy God."[236] There's the purported balance—an innovative appeal to unbelievers (racy and popular) tempered with a commitment to worship (the

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[232] John H. Armstrong, "The Mad Rush to Seeker Sensitive Worship," *Modern Reformation* (Jan/Feb 1995): https://www.modernreformation.org/resources/articles/the-mad-rush-to-seeker-sensitive-worship.

[233] Aniol, *Biblical*, 38.

[234] Timothy Keller, "Evangelistic Worship," Redeemer City to City, accessed October 11, 2023, https://redeemercitytocity.com/articles-stories/evangelistic-worship.

[235] Keller, "Evangelistic."

[236] Keller, "Evangelistic."

transcendent and holy God). Then, Keller claims, "Whitefield and Wesley did not become instruments of revival by simply being great expository preachers and renewing historic worship."[237] In other words, Keller suggests that modern-day church leaders should not expect a commitment to preaching and worship to bring church renewal; they must balance those priorities with evangelism. While Keller freely admits that the great evangelists were not attempting to "replace worship," he does fail to acknowledge that revivalism did ultimately have a significant impact on weekly worship services. Nevertheless, his biblical observations about the evangelistic drive of worship are compelling. He presents a thoroughly compelling, theological basis for evangelistic worship citing several passages from the Old and New Testaments. His observations, seemingly absent from other writers, offer a necessary balance to this study.

> God commanded Israel to invite the nations to join in declaring his glory. Zion is to be the center of world-winning worship (Isaiah 2:2–4; 56:6–8). "Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the Lord… So the name of the Lord will be declared in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem when the peoples and the kingdoms assemble to worship the Lord" (Ps. 102:18). Psalm 105 is a direct command to believers to engage in evangelistic worship. The psalmist challenges them to "make known among the nations what [God] has done" (v. 1). How? "Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts" (v. 2). Thus believers are continually told to sing and praise God before the unbelieving nations (See also Psalm 47:1; 100:1–5). God is to be praised before all the nations, and as he is praised by his people, the nations are summoned and called to join in song.
>
> Peter tells a Gentile church, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). This shows us that the church is challenged to the same witness that Israel was called to—evangelistic worship. A key difference: in the Old Testament, the center of world-winning worship was Mt. Zion; but now, wherever we worship Jesus in spirit and in truth (John 4:21–26), we have come to the heavenly Zion (Heb. 12:18–24). In other words, the risen Lord now sends his people out singing his praises in mission, calling the nations to join both saints and angels in heavenly doxology. Jesus himself stands in the midst of the redeemed and leads us in the

[237] Keller, "Evangelistic."

> singing of God's praises (Heb. 2:12), even as God stands over his redeemed and sings over us in joy (Zeph. 3:17).[238]

Despite Keller's thoroughly compelling defense from Scripture, he goes on to create some ambiguity in the discussion by suggesting that the "worship experience" must "be attractive" and "intelligible" to unchurched audiences. Without defining these terms, Keller seems to suggest (if not directly encourage) that churches format their worship services around the preferences of the unsaved—a philosophy that lacks any Scriptural support. Nonetheless, Keller's commitment to balance is beneficial, adding a necessary component to the ongoing debate.

Several other writers offer a healthy tension between worship and evangelism. In his classic *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, John Frame insists on the necessity of corporate worship that is evangelistic. He writes:

> First Corinthians 14 emphasizes the importance of conducting worship, not in unintelligible "tongues," but in language understandable to all. Even an unbeliever, when he enters the assembly, should be able to understand what is taking place, so that he will fall down and worship, exclaiming, "God is really among you" (v. 25). So, worship has a horizontal dimension as well as a vertical focus. It is to be God-centered, but it is also to be both edifying and evangelistic. Worship that is unedifying or unevangelistic may not properly claim to be God-centered.[239]

Even Aniol, despite his insistence that worship is only "for believers,"[240] agrees, stating that the church should not "forbid unbelievers from being there."[241] Certainly, both directives—worship and evangelism—can take place within the context of corporate gatherings. Nevertheless, returning to Armstrong's article, the author contends that the real sphere of evangelism is not the gathered church (i.e., regular Sunday worship services). He writes:

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[238] Keller, "Evangelistic."

[239] John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*: *A Refreshing Study of the Principles and Practice of Biblical Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1996), 8.

[240] Aniol, *Biblical*, 38.

[241] Aniol, *Biblical*, 38.

> While we try to entice the world to come to church to hear the Gospel, the New Testament proclaims a powerful church worshipping God [will be] going out into the world in order to reach the lost (cf. the Book of Acts). True revivals have historically proved again and again, if they prove anything at all, that a revived and healthy church reaches a dying and lost world through its own awakened people.[242]

Terry Johnson offers further perspective, stating, "Congregations sometimes assemble for other purposes, such as to hold evangelical meetings... But during the time designated for worship, the church should limit itself to those activities that can legitimately be considered devotional exercises. The integrity of the worship service should not be undermined by otherwise worthy ends."[243] Undoubtedly, evangelism is a worthy and mandatory pursuit. Further, it should be a byproduct of corporate worship; however, evangelism must never be the primary purpose or motivation in the worship service.[244]

On the Music of Corporate Worship

Besides its impact on the overall spirit of corporate worship, revivalism also brought some changes to the realm of corporate worship music. Undoubtedly, the phenomenon of revival had an intensely positive effect on church music by encouraging hearty congregational singing. Paul Hammond suggests that the Second Great Awakening especially bolstered corporate involvement "in the same way that all important religious revivals have stimulated church song."[245] Musician and historian Nathaniel Gould (1781–1864) agrees, stating, "The awakening of the public mind to the subject of music, twenty-five years ago [ca. 1828], was nearly

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[242] Armstrong, "The Mad."

[243] Johnson, *Reformed*, 14.

[244] Warren Wiersbe, *Real Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 15.

[245] Paul Garnett Hammond, "Music in Urban Revivalism in the Northern United States, 1800–1835" (DMA diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1974), 55, ProQuest (7422660).

coincident with extensive revivals of religion."[246] Likewise, Thomas Hastings (1784–1872), associate and music leader of the famed Charles Finney, wrote and publicly spoke about the substantial role music played in revival settings. He was a strong advocate for singing schools "so organized as to call forth the piety, as well as the musical talent of the country."[247] Further, in an address before the Central Musical Society of New York, Hastings asserted that "revivals of religion had been attendants on singing school[s]."[248]

Although music (as a biblically patterned element of corporate worship) has always been prominent in the worship behaviors of evangelical churches, it began to assume several new functions during the era of the American Great Awakenings. Instead of primarily being a distinct element in the liturgy used to express praise to God (Ps. 150) and to "teach and admonish" believers (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), music began to serve some less lofty purposes: (1) to entertain or excite and (2) to prepare and manipulate.

Entertainment and Excitement

Surely, music, due to its inherently aesthetic qualities, can entertain its listeners; however, its primary function within corporate worship has historically not been personal enjoyment. Nevertheless, several firsthand accounts in the literature reveal the rather performance-based quality that music began to assume in the evangelical church during and after the Second Great Awakening. In their travelogue entitled *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches* (1835), two Congregationalist ministers from Europe describe their impressions of the religious practices and the state of Christianity in the United States. They write:

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[246] Nathaniel D. Gould, *History of Church Music in America* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1853), 131.

[247] Thomas Hastings, address before the New York State Central Musical Society, August 1831, quoted in Robert Samuel Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College* (Oberlin: Oberlin College, 1943), 14.

[248] Robert Samuel Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College* (Oberlin, OH: Oberlin College, 1943), 14.

> The singing, generally, and universally with the Congregationalists, is not congregational. It is a performance entrusted to a band of singers, more or less skillful; and, as such, may sometimes afford one pleasure, but as an act of worship, it disappoints you greatly; at least, if you have been accustomed to the more excellent way. You have the sense of being a spectator and auditor; not of a participant.[249]

A similar description of worship is given by Francis Wayland (1796–1865) in his *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches*. He states, "We select our music and hire our performers for the sake of pleasing those who spend their evenings at the opera, while the taste of a man whose soul is melted by Mear and Old Hundred, is sneered at."[250] In other words, the traditional hymns and psalm tunes were being abandoned (and even mocked) in favor of more appealing music.

Nowhere is this philosophical change in music's function within corporate worship more evident than in the practices of the revivalist Charles Finney. Firmly believing that "new measures" were necessary to create excitement and ensure results, Finney surely capitalized on the entertaining quality of music. Scott Aniol observes:

> Finney found the newly emerging pop culture as the perfect tool for creating exciting experiences because it was immediate and it stimulated excitement. Finney urged those writing and leading music in his meetings to look to the advertisers of the day for inspiration. This new way of thinking affected not only the content and style of worship and music, but it transformed the view of the church and its worship. Music for church services was chosen based on whatever would create an exciting atmosphere for unbelievers or believers.[251]

Further evidence of Finney's penchant for entertainment is demonstrated in the design of his Broadway Tabernacle (1836) in New York City. The revivalist wanted an intentionally concert-type layout with a raised stage, amphitheater-style seating, and the prominent placement of the

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[249] Andrew Reed and James Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches, Volume II* (London: Jackson and Walford, 1835), 114–15.

[250] Francis Wayland, *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman and Co., 1857), 38.

[251] Aniol, "Roots."

choir elevated in front facing the audience. All of these design choices were startlingly innovative for the time but were intentionally used to make the space audience-oriented to facilitate performance. Of the structure, Jeanne Kilde purports, "The spatial arrangement strongly alluded to the sovereignty of the audience through its seating arrangement and its roots in the popular culture of entertainment."[252] Further, Finney's methodology of liturgy revealed his motivation to entertain. Kilde explains,

> Thomas Hastings, [Finney's] music director at the Broadway Tabernacle, integrated his own organ voluntaries and professional choir performances into evangelical services. Quartet choirs composed of two male and two female soloists, paid either by the performance or, more often, hired on an annual salary by a congregation, were increasingly in demand in the 1840s and by the 1850s were fixtures in middle-class churches.[253]

Without a doubt, music (as entertainment) fits well with Finney's motivation to use any means to motivate and move his audience.

Another significant contribution to the new function of music (as entertainment) within corporate worship was the creation of an idiom called the gospel song. Eskew and McElrath in their well-known text on hymnology explain:

> Just as the rural camp meeting in the early decades of the nineteenth century produced its popular hymnody, the urban revivals in the latter decades of this century brought forth a body of popular church song—a type known as the gospel song or the gospel hymn. The use of these terms to refer to this body of revival hymnody can be traced to two popular collections, Philip P. Bliss's *Gospel Songs* (1874) and Bliss and Ira D. Sankey's *Gospel Hymns and Sacred Songs* (1875).[254]

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[252] Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theater: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 45.

[253] Kilde, *When Church*, 134.

[254] Harry Eskew and Hugh T. McElrath, *Sing with Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Hymnology* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1980), 176.

Musically, the gospel song "reflects much of the simple musical style of contemporary [19th century] popular song."[255] Once again, due primarily to the influence of the new measures revivalism, church composers began to offer a musical style that emulated the popular music of the day to attract and entertain audiences. Without a doubt, the lyrics of the gospel songs reflected a significant change from the objective psalms and hymns; nevertheless, the music itself diverged from historical norms by reflecting the music of entertainment. Music explains:

> This was the period of Johann Strauss, Jr., John Philip Sousa, Stephen Foster, and Gilbert and Sullivan, and the gospel song reflected the influence of the waltz, march, minstrel show tune, sentimental ballad, and operetta. The gospel song became the "typical" revival music of the late nineteenth century because it contained a simple text that avoided theological sophistication in favor of direct appeal for salvation or renewed commitment, linked with a popular musical style that appealed to the masses. The gospel song was intended for immediate appeal and quick consumption, and was aimed principally at the unconverted or backslider.[256]

One newspaper of the day, the *Nation*, noted that the gospel songs "while written to religious words, are made attractive by many secular contrivances… Determine the pleasure you get from a circus quickstep, a negro minstrel sentimental ballad, a college chorus, and a hymn all in one and you have some gauge of the variety and contrast."[257] While several of the early revivalists of the Second Great Awakening began to use the appealing gospel song to garner an audience, it was the later preachers who capitalized more fully on popular forms of music, as well as other secular means of promotion. Anna Nekoa observes:

> Music played a key role in the marketing and evangelizing strategies of popular evangelists, who often advertised their revivals in the entertainment section of the newspaper. In the second half of the nineteenth century, preacher Dwight Moody relied on emergent capitalist business models to create widely popular urban revivals, first in England and then in the US. Recognizing the emotional power of music in religious experience, Moody teamed up with singer Ira Sankey, who "[sang] the gospel" via songs

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[255] Eskew and McElrath, *Sing*, 42.

[256] Music, "The Baptist," 40.

[257] McLoughlin, *Modern*, 234.

> by Fanny Crosby and P.P. Bliss and who placed the singing of new and old hymns on par with preaching, the central event of a revival experience. Popular demand for the music prompted Sankey to publish a series of sacred song collections that sold millions of copies and helped coin the term "gospel song"… In the beginning of the twentieth century, Billy Sunday's musician and song leader, Homer Rodeheaver, was the first to "mimic" pop music styles in an effort to draw people to the faith… Rodeheaver recognized that people would want to be able to sing this sacred music outside of revivals and he deliberately wrote songs that drew on popular musical styles of the day, making them easy to learn and remember so that people "could whistle and sing [them] wherever they might be."[258]

All of these observations are thought-provoking and further indicate that music was helping to fulfill the motivations of the revivalists.

A further demonstration that music was now fulfilling a new function—that of entertainment—is the perceived dichotomy that was articulated between historical hymns and the newly composed gospel songs. Paul Garnett Hammond observes an attempt, within the Second Great Awakening, to distinguish between the "lower class of revival hymnody" and the "corpus of hymns normally sung in worship."[259] David de Bruyn explains, "The gospel songs became the basis of best-selling hymnals, and such was the popularity of these gospel songs that publishers of more established hymnals felt constrained to include some of them, with an accompanying apology in the introduction for carrying sub-standard hymnody."[260] For example, in the preface to his *Village Hymns for Social Worship*, evangelist Asahel Nettleton (1783–1844) writes:

> There is a numerous class of hymns which have been sung with much pleasure and profit in seasons of revival, and yet are entirely destitute of poetic merit… I am satisfied from observation, as well as from the nature itself of such hymns, that they must be ephemeral. They should be confined to seasons of revival; and even here, they ought to be introduced with discretion… A book consisting chiefly of hymns for revivals…would be utterly unfit for the ordinary purposes of devotion.[261]

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[258] Monique Ingalls, Carolyn Landau, and Tom Wagner, eds., *Christian Congregational Music: Performance, Identity and Experience* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 118–19.

[259] Hammond, "Music," 58.

[260] David de Bruyn, "Early Beginnings of Pentecostal Worship," Religious Affections Ministries, accessed October 21, 2023, https://religiousaffections.org/articles/articles-on-church/early-beginnings-of-pentecostal-worship.

Nettleton's admission that "revival songs" were of inferior quality, yet appropriate outside of the realm of Sunday worship, is considerable. It indicates that Nettleton, despite being a moderate proponent of revivalism, viewed the revival services as something less than typical worship services. Apparently, Nettleton also recognized the changing function of music—from a channel of appropriate worship to a form of passing entertainment.

Preparation and Manipulation

Second, primarily through the revivals of the Second Great Awakening, music began to assume another new function in corporate gatherings—it was used to prepare listeners for the sermon and manipulate them to respond. Presumably, as considered above, many of the changes that came to the field of worship music were primarily motivated by the overall change in the purpose of the gathering. Music explains, "If the goal of the service is for the initiated to have communion with God, the music can be that of an 'insider'—one who knows the ropes, so to speak, and has some experience with Christian song. On the other hand, if the goal is to attract and convert the unbeliever, then the music must be of a more popular and secular twist."[262] Because the primary motive in the gathering had changed to evangelism, there were tangible modifications made to the music as well to prepare and manipulate sinners to respond to the gospel.

To begin, it seems imperative to observe the revivalists' belief in the emotional power of music to create an atmosphere and prepare the listener. Sizer explains that "the prevailing

[261] Asahel Nettleton, *Village Hymns for Social Worship* (New York: Elisha Sands, 1826), vi.

[262] Music, "The Baptist," 42.

conceptions of the nineteenth century" affirmed that music "naturally expressed feeling."[263] Some surely attempted to elaborate a complex theory of musical meaning, connecting certain emotions to tempo, scale degrees, and keys. However, Sizer contends, more often "one finds simply the assertion that music has the power to awaken deep affections."[264] For instance, preacher Henry Fish (1820–1877) writes, "God is pleased to accompany it [music] with the energy of the Holy Spirit. He made us to be moved by singing. The soul is a many-stringed lyre, which he touches while working in us. Hence, the influence of sacred song is to refresh, stimulate, and ennoble the mind."[265] In light of these prevailing views, music began to assume a more prominent role in corporate worship. Sizer contends that music "occupied a special place…in the powers of 'energy' and 'influence' which surrounded the religious life."[266] However, even as early as the eighteen hundreds, critics were beginning to condemn the use of music to excite and manipulate a congregation. For example, William Woodward (ca. 1770–1837) in his *Surprising Accounts of the Revival of Religion* (1802) warns about the overuse of singing that encouraged a high degree of emotionalism. He writes:

> In time of preaching, if care is taken there is but little confusion: when that is over, and the singing, and praying and exhorting begins, the audience is thrown into what I call real disorder. The careless fall down, cry out, tremble, and not infrequently are affected with convulsive twitchings. Among these the pious are very busy, singing, praying, conversing, falling down in extacies, fainting with joy.[267]

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[263] Sizer, *Gospel*, 132.

[264] Sizer, *Gospel*, 133.

[265] Henry C. Fish, *Handbook of Revivals: For the Use of Winners of Souls* (Boston: James H. Earle, 1874), 302.

[266] Sizer, *Gospel*, 133.

[267] William W. Woodward, *Surprising Accounts of the Revival of Religion* (Philadelphia: William W. Woodward, 1802), 53.

Firsthand accounts like this seem to affirm the emotional sway of music and its contribution to the atmosphere of the revival service. Cooper observes how the evangelist Dwight L. Moody intentionally utilized music to these ends:

> The service always began with a half-hour of congregational singing, in itself somewhat of an innovation. An even greater innovation, one that would become standard practice for revivalists after 1875, was the employment of a professional soloist song leader to accompany the revivalist from place to place. Ira Sankey had the useful knack of composing gospel songs that were easy to learn and fun to sing. Nearly all of his songs contained a refrain or chorus which the congregation could quickly pick up from the choir. The impact was to set the stage for the entire evening.[268]

Gradually, this new function of music found its way into the mainstream, as evangelical churches began to adopt Moody's format for their regular, Sunday morning worship services.

Additionally, throughout the literature (primarily that of the later revivalists), music appears to function as a means of manipulating the listeners to respond to the sermon. Paul Hammond explains, "The necessity of providing encouragement for a definable conversion experience inevitably engendered a transformation in the musical practice of revivalism."[269] Several writers agree. McLoughlin contends, "The whole quality of hymnody was revised by Romantic Christianity, for it was recognized that through songs and poetry, it was possible to reach many hearts not touched by sermons."[270] Similarly, Weisberger observes how the revivalists "discovered that it was easier to sow the seed when the emotions were harrowed by music."[271] Also, during the early camp meetings, Eslinger observes that people responded to

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[268] Cooper, *The Great*, 125.

[269] Hammond, "Music," 41.

[270] William G. McLoughlin, ed., *The American Evangelicals, 1800–1900: An Anthology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 19.

[271] Weisberger, *They Gathered*, 198–99.

music "more frequently than under the preaching of the world."[272] Nowhere is this manipulatory power of music more clearly demonstrated than in the revival methodology of Dwight L. Moody. McLoughlin explains:

> Moody, having made his usual plea for those who were willing to be saved to rise in their seats and then to come forward to the inquiry rooms, would motion to Sankey; Sankey would gently sound a chord on the organ, and the choir would sing "Softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling," or "Only trust him, only trust him now," as the penitents walked down the aisles. These songs were called "invitation hymns" and were specifically written for the purpose of coaxing people out of their seats and into the inquiry rooms. They pleaded with the sinner, hypnotically tugging him forward by repeating over and over again the words "come," "trust," "now" as he debated with his conscience."[273]

Thus, a new genre of hymnody was created. Through both words and music, these songs were intentionally designed (in keeping with the philosophical changes of the revivalists) to influence the listener to respond to the sermon.

On the Preaching of Corporate Worship

Preaching the Word of God has typically held a position of prominence in the corporate worship of the evangelical church, especially those within the free church tradition.[274] However, the manner of delivery appears to have undergone some changes through the influence of revivalism. This section of the literature review is primarily concerned with changes in the *style* of preaching rather than its *content*. Ellis maintains a beneficial distinction between the two, suggesting that the written text of a sermon may be quite different from the actual event of preaching. He suggests, "It is possible to read the script of a sermon and yet have no clear idea as to what the preaching event was like. The words may be the same, but the personality of the

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[272] Weisberger, *They Gathered*, 198–99.

[273] McLounglin, *Modern*, 239.

[274] Ellis, *Gathering*, 33.

preacher and the level of enthusiasm with which the words were delivered or received will affect the nature of the preaching event."[275] This distinction is essential. While the content of preaching was surely affected by changing doctrinal convictions (as considered above), it is evident that the oratory technique was also altered. In summarizing these changes in technique, Jason Cherry explains:

> In 1776 many Congregational ministers throughout New England still preached traditional sermons filled with doctrinal content befitting the Puritans. These sermons, which emphasized precise theology, were often written out word-for-word and delivered in a correspondingly tedious manner. But during this time traditional preaching was rivaled with a growing form of vernacular preaching that was easier to listen to. Vernacular preaching replaced complicated logic and theological subtlety with personal eccentricity and emotional overtures. Such preaching was more accessible for those who lived outside of educated society.[276]

Ellis likewise observes this general shift, suggesting that early preaching in evangelicalism was based on "Protestant didacticism."[277] In other words, preachers were primarily driven by a concern for intellectual content, regardless of the quality or style of delivery. Horton Davies agrees, stating that preaching was "the most consciously intellectual and apologetic element in the service of worship."[278] Nevertheless, there was a change. Later preachers,[279] Ellis observes,

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[275] Ellis, *Gathering*127.

[276] Jason Cherry, *The Culture of Conversionism and the History of the Altar Call* (Athens, AL: JEC Publishing, 2016), 29.

[277] Ellis, *Gathering*, 69.

[278] Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England: From Watts and Wesley to Martineau, 1690–1900* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 96.

[279] While these changes are particularly noticeable in *later* preachers, there are notable exceptions. For example, Mark Noll describes the preaching of Whitefield: "Whitefield did not read his sermons like most well-educated ministers of his century but rather spoke directly to the audience. His style drove home the message that it was not formal education or prestige in society that mattered most but the choice of the individual for or against God. In contrast to his later campaigning for the British Empire, Whitefield does not seem to have thought about the political implications of such a style, but his form of public speaking, and the implicit message of his ministry, moved in a democratic direction" (see Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019], 102, ProQuest Ebook Central).

were driven to have a "less formal preaching style."[280] For example, the silver-tongued Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) once said, "I wish to lay the formalities of the pulpit aside and talk to you as if you were in your own houses."[281]

Not surprisingly, these changes in homiletical technique are most evident in the preaching of Charles Finney. Within the literature (primarily that of Finney himself), it is apparent that the revivalist had an aversion to scripted sermons. During the revivalist's lifetime, students training for the ministry were typically taught to write out their messages and read them verbatim. However, in his *Memoirs*, Finney expressed his intense disapproval:

> Students are required to write what they call sermons, and present them for criticism; to preach, that is, read them to the class and the professor. Thus they play preaching. No man can preach in this manner. These so-called sermons will of course, under the criticism they receive, degenerate into literary essays. The people have no respect for such sermons, as sermons. This reading of elegant literary essays is not to them preaching. It is gratifying to literary taste, but not spiritually edifying.[282]

Ever the pragmatist, Finney maintained that scripted sermons lacked "real eloquence"[283] and prevented the natural expression of sincerity and emotion that would effectively convince sinners of their need for a Savior. In his *Lectures on the Revival of Religion*, Finney claims:

> Before the Gospel can take general effect, we must have a class of *extempore*[284] preachers, for the following reasons: (1) No set of men can stand the labor of writing sermons and doing all the preaching which will be requisite. (2) Written preaching is not calculated to produce the requisite effect. Such preaching does not present truth in the right shape. (3) It is impossible for a man who writes his sermons to arrange his matter, and turn and choose his thoughts, so as to produce the same effect as when he addresses

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[280] Ellis, *Gathering*, 130.

[281] Ellis, *Gathering*, 130.

[282] Finney, *Memoirs*, 90.

[283] Finney, *Memoirs*, 90.

[284] Finney uses an archaic word, which means to speak or do something without preparation. It is where we get the modern-day word *extemporaneous*.

> the people directly, and makes them feel that he means them…No doubt written sermons have done a great deal of good, but they can never give to the Gospel its great power.[285]

In other words, written sermons are an inferior means of communication and cannot bring the results of revival because they limit the Word of God. Finney would propose: We "can never have the full meaning of the Gospel, till we throw away our notes."[286]

To counter the perceived status quo of scripted sermons, Finney practiced and encouraged others to develop a new style of worship oratory—one that was full of natural emotion, gestures, and spontaneity (i.e., without a written text). To deliver a sincerely emotional sermon, Finney insisted that preachers emulate good actors,[287] freely using gestures that communicate the earnestness of their beliefs. He wrote, "Let [a minister] speak as he feels, and act as he feels, and he will be eloquent."[288] To Finney, words alone were not sufficient. There needed to be emotion behind them, and that emotion could only be effectively communicated through vocal inflection, physical gestures, and facial expressions. The man himself was known for his "dramatic showmanship, coarse and inflammatory language, and the desire for 'excitements.'"[289] Undoubtedly, these traits colored Finney's public speaking and on occasion earned the preacher public criticism. The July 1878 *Congregational Quarterly* facetiously reported that "the substance of Mr. Finney's views is that the qualifications of a minister are want of learning, want of thought, want of notes; that he shall speak without schooling, without

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[285] Finney, *Lectures*, 206.

[286] Finney, *Lectures*, 208.

[287] The irony of Finney's comparison can't be missed; actors memorize their lines from a written script. They are not really speaking extemporaneously.

[288] Finney, *Lectures*, 202.

[289] Cooper, *Great*, 71.

thinking, and without writing."[290] Nevertheless, Finney maintained his convictions and urged other preachers to move beyond the written page to extemporaneous speaking in the pulpit.

Further demonstration of the dramatic changes in preaching style, consistent with that of Finney, can be seen in the practices of the well-known Dwight L. Moody (1837–1899). Like Finney, Moody preferred a more spontaneous and somewhat unplanned style of delivery. McLoughlin observes, "With shrewdness and yet with sincerity, Moody capitalized upon his own lack of education and training. 'Oh, I'm sick and tired of this essay preaching; I'm nauseated with this 'silver-tongued oratory' preaching. I like to hear preachers and not windmills.'"[291] Seeing himself as a rejuvenator of dead churches, Moody sought to wake up churches by breaking down the perceived division between clergy and laity. He had the all-important knack of making his audience feel that he was one of them.[292] By emulating the style of street preachers, politicians, and entertainers, Moody infused his speaking with humor, personal anecdotes, and tear-jerking stories. McLoughlin claims, "The rapidity with which he jerked his audiences from tears to laughter to solemnity and anxiety was the essence of his pulpit technique."[293] Moody's preferred style of delivery is consistent with Nathan Hatch's description of the subtle change from "genteel and doctrinal sermons" to "vernacular preaching" during and immediately after the years of the American Revolution.[294] Hatch explains, "This was an age of communication entrepreneurs who stripped the sermon of its doctrinal spine and its rhetorical dress and opened it to a wide spectrum of fresh idioms: true-to-life passion, simplicity of

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[290] C.T.M., "Mr. Finney on Ministerial Culture," *The Congregational Quarterly* 20 (1878): 406.

[291] McLoughlin, *Modern*, 241.

[292] McLoughlin, *Modern*, 242.

[293] McLoughlin, *Modern*, 240.

[294] Hatch, *The Democratization*, 133.

structure, and dramatic creativity. Most noticeable were the uses of storytelling and overt humor."[295] Moody surely capitalized on these components and contributed to the general changes in the oratory style of evangelical preachers.

Finally, it would seem evident that revivalism had a profound effect on the preaching of corporate worship through the inclusion of altar calls or public invitations. Corresponding with the new motive for corporate worship (evangelism) and a new function of music in corporate worship (manipulation), altar calls culminated the preaching portion of the service and encouraged the listeners to respond in a physical way to the preaching of God's Word. In his book *The Great Invitation*, Erroll Hulse effectively defines the practice:

> It matters little whether we use the expression "the appeal," "the invitation system," "the public pledge" or "the altar call." In essence, all involve a call at the conclusion of meetings for people to come to the front to express their willingness to accept Christ, for salvation, to show rededication, to receive healing, or to give themselves to service, or for any other reason. The term "altar call" is generally used to convey the idea of inviting people forward even if there is not a literal altar for them to come to.
>
> We read of an "altar" being erected "unto the Lord in the forest," in 1799. This was placed in front of the pulpit. Upon closer examination, it appears that in fact the altar was a seat which some nicknamed "the mourners' bench." Mourners or penitents were invited to the altar if they were enquiring about the way of salvation. Their coming forward indicated that they were penitent.
>
> Later Charles Finney regularly used what was called "the mourners' bench" or "anxious bench"—a pew in the front of the church reserved for those coming forward, so that they might be counseled there, or alternatively taken into an enquiry room.[296]

To be sure, altar calls have taken many forms. Raising one's hand, walking the aisle, kneeling at the stage, and going to a specially designated seat or room are all variations on the same theme; however, the common denominator is some physical action that either demonstrates or leads to a mental decision.

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[295] Hatch, *The Democratization*, 138.

[296] Erroll Hulse, *The Great Invitation* (Hertfordshire, England: Evangelical Press, 1986), 7.

Within the literature, some resist the idea that altar calls find their origin within the First and Second Great Awakenings.[297] For example, Hawkins and Queen contend that "the spirit and essence of public invitations have been practiced in many different forms since humans first sinned against God… The Bible recounts numerous occasions in which God and His messengers publicly called people to obey Him immediately in the Old and New Testaments alike."[298] Likewise, Mark Tolbert admits, "In their current form, evangelistic invitations are of relatively recent origin, but the spirit and principle of the public evangelistic invitation is evident in the Bible."[299] All three of the above-mentioned authors seek to demonstrate the historical practice of invitations by citing numerous Scriptural examples of public calls to respond. For instance, they cite God's call to Adam in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:6–21), Joshua's challenge to the Israelites in the Promised Land (Josh. 24:14–25), Elijah's speech on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs. 18:20–39), John the Baptist's exhortations (Lk. 3:7–18), Jesus' preaching about the kingdom (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:14–15), Paul's appeal to King Agrippa (Acts 26:27–29), and many others. Purportedly, these examples of public calls demonstrate that the invitation system predates revivalism.

While there seems to be some ambiguity on the origin of the altar call,[300] there is wide agreement that the method—as a distinct element within the corporate worship service—was

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[297] R. Alan Street, *The Effective Invitation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1984), 81.

[298] O. S. Hawkins and Matt Queen, *The Gospel Invitation: Why Publicly Inviting People to Receive Christ Still Matters* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2023), 1–2.

[299] Mark Tolbert, "Invitations with Integrity," *The Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 90.

[300] In his Ph.D. dissertation, R. Scott Connell identifies some of the earliest references to the usage of the altar call in Baptist history. With limited written accounts, it is difficult to pinpoint the first appearance of the practice. However, Connell observes, "A deliberate altar call is an emerging element of worship as Baptist worship enters the twentieth century. It seems likely the ethos for this stems from the influence of the great awakenings, Sandy Creek, and camp meetings. Jarvis Street almost certainly employed one during Thomas' pastorate and Walnut Street probably did the same. However, gospel presentation in a manner that unbelievers could hear and respond to has been a consistent aspect of Baptist worship since the earliest days in Philadelphia. This is reflected in their holding separate services for communion that were for only…church members (e.g., believers). Even those churches

commonly used and popularized by Charles Finney. Nevertheless, some deny that Finney was the originator of the method. Street asserts, "Critics of the public invitation claim that its usage can only be traced back to the ministry of Charles G. Finney (1792–1875). Such an accusation is historically incorrect."[301] This is probably true; however, the use of altar calls cannot be definitively traced back much further than the 18th century—i.e., the era of Finney's life and ministry. Iain Murray, in his book *Revival and Revivalism*, explains:

> The origin of this procedure [altar calls] is obscure. It was unknown in England, but the term reveals the Church of England background of its first promoters, who referred loosely to the end of a church building, in front of the communion table, as the altar. Before the end of the eighteenth century, in some congregations of the Methodist Episcopal Church the innovation had been introduced of inviting "mourners" to come to the front, metaphorically, "to the altar."[302]

Admittedly, Finney may not have been the inventor of the practice, but (as Murray and others point out) the record of history shows that altar calls did gradually make their way into the mainstream of evangelical thinking and practice right before and during the lifetime of the evangelist. Furthermore, and without a doubt, it was Finney who devised the "anxious bench," the precursor to the modern-day invitation. In his own words, Finney explains:

> At Rochester, if I recollect right, I first introduced this measure… I made a call, I think for the first time, upon all that class of persons whose convictions were so ripe that they were willing to renounce their sins and give themselves to God, to come forward to certain seats which I requested to be vacated, and offer themselves up to God, while we made them subjects of prayer.[303]

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that did not include a formal altar call presented the gospel in a manner that the unbeliever could hear and understand, and from which he or she could potentially be converted" (see R. Scott Connell, "The Impact of Gospel Content on the Shape of Corporate Worship in Select Baptist Churches in North America Circa 1650–1910" [Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015], 356–57, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global #3707355).

[301] Street, *The Effective*, 81.

[302] Murray, *Revival*, 185.

[303] Charles G. Finney, *An Autobiography* (Westwood, NJ: Barbour, 1990), 192.

Thus, Finney did at least contribute to both the origin and popularity of this evangelistic technique. Nevertheless, there are many historical accounts[304] of others who utilized the altar call and helped bring it into widespread use; and while the method has taken many variations over the years, it continues to remain a part of the worship behaviors in many evangelical churches.

While tracing the origin of altar calls is a complex task, seeing the rather controversial nature of the method (right from its inception) is fairly obvious. Despite its initial acceptance and seeming success, the method was not without criticism. In his booklet, *The Anxious Bench*, John Nevin (1803–1886) denounces the method as "revival machinery, solemn tricks for effect, decision displays at the bidding of the preacher, genuflections and prostrations in the aisle or around the altar, noise and disorder, extravagance and rant, mechanical conversions, justification by feeling rather than faith, and encouragement ministered to all fanatical impressions."[305] Others expressed dismay and even condemnation at the lack of biblical support for the use of "new means," which included altar calls. In a highly visible publication, preachers Lyman Beecher (1775–1863) and Asahel Nettleton (1783–1844) debated the propriety of "new measures."[306] Beecher communicated initial support of them, believing they could be effective in promoting religious awakenings. However, Nettleton was critical of the new methodology and expressed concern that it could lead to false conversions and superficial religious experiences. Similarly, in another account, pastor and professor Samuel Miller (1769–1850) alleged that the altar call promoted "the rapid multiplication of superficial, ignorant, untrained professors of

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[304] See Coleman, "The Origin," 19–26.

[305] Nevin, *The Anxious*, 28–29.

[306] Lyman Beecher and Asahel Nettleton, *Letters of the Rev. Dr. Beecher and Rev. Mr. Nettleton on the "New Measures" in Conducting Revivals of Religion* (New York: G. & C. Carvill, 1828).

religion."[307] On the other hand, proponents of the new measures, in their defense, took a decidedly pragmatic approach, describing their methods for obtaining public decisions as "nothing more than the effort to secure action—however small—which would place men in the way of repentance and faith."[308] In defense of the altar call, James Porter (1808–1888) insists:

> In order to do this [bring a sinner to Christ], he must be induced to take up his cross, and *follow* Christ. All these measures have a direct tendency to bring him to this point. And till he is so broken down, so contrite and teachable as to submit to these or any other prudential means, that are harmless in themselves, and are recommended to him, he cannot be saved. He shows a pride and stubbornness, inconsistent with the submission of genuine penitence, and needs to have his heart probed to the bottom rather than mollified with ointment [emphasis original].[309]

In other words, public altar calls were essential (1) to bring sinners to the point of conversion and (2) to identify those who were not humble enough to be saved. Others defended the altar call saying, "If only *some* souls are saved by the use of the new measures, we ought thankfully to own their power, and give them our countenance [emphasis original]."[310] Murray includes the following account:

> R. L. Dabney reports an example…from a conversation between a new-measures evangelist and one of his hearers. Surely the preacher could not be blind, said his hearer, to the failure of many of the professed conversions? "Of course not; we are not fools," said the evangelist. "Why then," asked the enquirer, "do you employ these measures?" The answer was: "Because a few are truly converted, and make stable, useful Christians; and the rest when they find out the shallowness of their experience, are simply where they were before."[311]

Such pragmatic reasoning is common throughout the literature in defense of the altar call.

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[307] Sprague, *Lectures*, 41.

[308] Arthur S. Hoyt, *The Pulpit and American Life* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921), 159.

[309] James Porter, *Revivals of Religion: Their Theory, Means, Obstructions, Uses and Importance with the Duty of Christians in Regard to Them* (Boston: Charles H. Peirce, 1849), 99.

[310] Murray, *Revival*, 367.

[311] Murray, *Revival*, 367.

Indeed, controversy (by itself) does not establish a negative judgment on altar calls; however, it does suggest that the technique was initially viewed as new,[312] and therefore something that necessitated biblical critique. For example, Nevin, in his dissenting critique of the "anxious bench," states that he intends to make a "free inquiry in the merits of the anxious bench, as it has been enlisted extensively of late years in the service of religion."[313] Undoubtedly, Nevin believed this to be a *new* practice, not something that had been used in preceding generations. While it is not the researcher's intention to commend or censure the use of invitations in the context of corporate worship, it does seem significant that the practice is of relatively recent origin—as an element of American culture. Both sides of the debate would agree here.[314] Therefore, as a new inclusion in corporate worship, the practice does deserve a thorough, biblical evaluation because Paul admonishes the church to "test everything; hold fast what is good" (1 Thess. 5:21, ESV).

Contributing to the Research of Revivalism

The Edge of Current Research

Many of the above-mentioned researchers delve deeply into revivalism as a unique, historic phenomenon and seek to understand the significant changes that resulted from it (in both church doctrine and practice), but they stop short of any in-depth analysis of how the movement has continued to have a profound effect on today's churches—specifically, churches in the independent, fundamental tradition. No overt attempt has been undertaken to make a connection

[312] Of course, proponents of "new measures" resisted the idea that their methods were new and sought to defend their practices by claiming biblical support and citing historical precedent.

[313] Nevin, *The Anxious*, 11.

[314] Tolbert, "Invitations," 90; Murray, *Revival*, 365.

between revivalism and contemporary corporate worship behaviors. Hylson-Smith's dissertation considers revivalism in rather specific terms, but primarily as a sociological and psychological phenomenon. Although he does not consider any possible contemporary connections, Hylson-Smith does provide an understanding by which to view the modern-day perpetuation of revivalist behaviors in corporate worship. Also, Iain Murray's seminal work, although it does not make a specific correlation between revivalists and modern-day worship behaviors, does help to make sense of how the church got where it is today and is an excellent springboard to identify changes in the worship landscape of the 18th and 19th centuries and how those changes have been perpetuated to today. Additionally, David Robert Denis' master's thesis, while a valiant effort to reveal some of the inconsistencies in Baptist doctrine and practice, falls short of making the connection with revivalism. Furthermore, Matthew Cook's Ph.D. dissertation on the "impact of revivalism" is broad and quite relevant to contemporary issues; nevertheless, his primary focus is the Antebellum South and the more immediate and direct impact of the revivalist movement in the years directly following its appearance. None of these writers, nor any others, address the contemporary significance of the dramatic shifts in Baptist doctrine and worship practices that occurred because of revivalism and its well-known preachers.

Filling a Niche

Of course, simply documenting the shift in doctrine and practice that occurred as a result of the American revivals does not constitute a unique contribution to the field of worship history. Much writing and research have detailed these changes, and in reality, the changes are somewhat apparent to one who considers the accounts of history. Nevertheless, recognizing these changes *and* explaining how and why they are maintained today is a gap in the research field. No academic study appears to exist at the time of this research that attempts to understand the

current-day perpetuation of revivalist methods in the context of corporate worship. No study attempts to understand why church leaders today are insistent upon continuing this phenomenon's unique corporate worship behaviors in church history. What sets this dissertation apart from other studies on the impact of revivalism is that it seeks to understand the experiences and motivations of current church leaders in independent, fundamental churches and why they continue to adhere to methods (1) that find their origin in the revivalism movement of previous generations and (2) that have no compelling basis in Scripture. This study fills a significant lacuna in the research field by revealing what philosophies motivate fundamental churches to use certain behaviors in corporate worship.

Evaluation is always good. Today's worship practices need to be held up to the standard of God's Word. If church leaders claim the sufficiency of God's Word for "all things" (2 Pet. 1:3, ESV) *and* that God's Word gives clear instruction on "how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God" (1 Tim. 3:14–15, ESV), then they have the warrant to evaluate current worship practices and discard those that find no biblical precedent.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

The main purpose of this ethnographic study is to conduct qualitative research to examine the beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of pastors and other church leaders from independent, fundamental churches in the United States to understand what influences their convictions about certain behaviors in corporate worship. While these church leaders tend to have high regard for the sufficiency of Scripture in informing life choices and regulating corporate worship, their methodology in corporate worship often has other prevailing influences. As demonstrated in the literature review, there are significant theological, historical, and practical components that should inform the church's worship practices. It is the goal of this research study to investigate these interconnected themes among the beliefs and practices of modern-day, independent and fundamental churches. This chapter provides a detailed description of (1) the research design and inquiry methods used in this study—a focused, qualitative ethnography; (2) the role of the researcher as primary data collection instrument; (3) the concern for ethical safeguards; (4) the boundaries of the study including its participants, setting, sample, data collection strategies, and data analysis procedures; and (5) the study's attention to validity and reliability.

Restatement of the Research Questions

This qualitative research study answers the following central question: "What are the core beliefs related to corporate worship of church leaders within independent, fundamental churches, and how do these leaders understand and interpret historical precedent upon corporate worship behaviors?" Subquestions for the study include the following: (1) What do church leaders see as the connection between corporate worship and evangelism? (2) How do church leaders describe

an acceptable worship service? and (3) How do church leaders perceive the influence of historical precedent (specifically revivalism) upon contemporary worship behaviors?

Qualitative Research Design

In this study, a qualitative approach is used for gathering data and the interpretation of that data. This particular research paradigm provides a distinctive and in-depth understanding of human perceptions and behaviors, offering insights that go beyond numerical data, engendering an intriguing consideration of complex social phenomena. Creswell and Creswell describe it:

> Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data.[1]

In simplest terms, qualitative research is conducted because a problem or issue needs to be explored.[2] It is primarily an investigative process whereby the researcher seeks to make sense of a problem by understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to the problem. Instead of relying solely on measurable or numerical data, qualitative researchers focus on personal accounts that reveal how individuals think or respond. Creswell and Poth clarify, "[Qualitative] researchers keep a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or writers from the literature."[3] To accomplish this end, the researcher (as the key instrument in qualitative research) personally collects data from the participants primarily through interviews and observations. These are

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[1] John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), 4.

[2] John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Design* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), 45.

[3] Creswell & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8.

open-ended forms of data in which the participants share their ideas freely, not constrained by predetermined scales or instruments.[4] Due to the complexity of the problem, qualitative researchers seek details that can only be gained by talking directly with people. Through this face-to-face interaction (typically taking place over an extended period), researchers desire "to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study."[5]

Despite these observations, good qualitative research is not *solely* dependent upon the perceptions of the study's participants; it is also (1) grounded in the literature and (2) uniquely shaped by the researcher himself (his prior knowledge, experience, and predispositions).[6] First, Creswell and Poth underscore the importance of the existing literature and clarify that the literature should "be fully reviewed and used to inform the [research] questions."[7] Likewise, Leedy and Ormrod contend that qualitative researchers "must have a firm grasp of previous research related to their research problems and questions so that they know what to look for and can separate important information from unimportant details in what they observe."[8] Second, the researcher himself adds another component to the process of qualitative research. Creswell and Poth frequently speak of the researcher as "situating" himself or herself as an inquirer within the study.[9] As the primary instrument of the data collection, the researcher will inevitably be

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[4] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 181.

[5] Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 45.

[6] Bonnie L. Yegidis, Robert W. Weinbach, and B. M. Morrison-Rodriguez, *Research Methods for Social Workers*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 123.

[7] Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 50.

[8] Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research Planning and Design*, 12th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2016), 229.

[9] Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 49–51.

influenced by his background, interests, culture, and experiences—all of these factors have the potential to shape the direction of the study and the interpretation of the data. Leedy and Ormrod explain that qualitative research includes "many judgments" due to the researcher's own "predispositions, expectations, biases, and values." They conclude, "True objectivity probably isn't possible in qualitative research."[10]

Finally, qualitative research can be distinguished by its distinctive approach to forming a conclusion and presenting the findings of the study. To begin, in its final product, qualitative research offers a rich, detailed description of the participants and setting involved. Within the literature, this is described as writing "lushly"[11] or using "thick description."[12] In the context of qualitative research, Norman Denzin purports that thick description "presents detail, context, emotion, and the web of social relationships… [and] evokes emotionality and self-feelings… The voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard, made visible."[13] To accomplish this, the researcher reports the data in words (primarily those of the participants) and mental pictures rather than numbers. Dana Miller explains, "Data are not quantifiable in the traditional sense of the word."[14] To compensate for factors that cannot be easily measured (human emotion, perception, and intuition), qualitative research provides detailed descriptions that offer validation and transferability to the reader. Second, qualitative research is distinctive

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[10] Leedy, Ormrod, and Johnson, *Practical Research*, 356.

[11] Erving Goffman and Lyn H. Lofland, "On Fieldwork," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 18, no. 2 (July 1, 1989): 131.

[12] Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Interactionism*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2001), 99.

[13] Denzin, *Interpretive*, 100.

[14] Dana Miller, "The Experiences of a First-Year College President: An Ethnography" (PhD diss., Graduate College of the University of Nebraska, 1992), 8, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses (9237670).

because it avoids generalization and presents rather specific findings. Due to the intent of this research design, only particular individuals, sites, or phenomena are considered. Its underlying purpose is not to generalize findings.[15] Graham Gibbs warns about "generalizing beyond the groups and settings examined."[16] Similarly, Creswell and Creswell contend that "Particularity rather than generalizability is the hallmark of good qualitative research."[17] Miller concurs, stating that qualitative research uses idiographic interpretation. In other words, she explains, "attention is paid to particulars, and data is interpreted in regard to the particulars of a case rather than generalizations."[18] Finally, qualitative research is distinctive because it primarily uses inductive reasoning to analyze the data to form a conclusion. Creswell and Creswell explain, "Qualitative researchers typically work inductively, building patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information."[19] Rather than relying on existing theoretical frameworks, qualitative researchers seek to analyze data to identify recurring themes or patterns to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Ethnographic Research Design

Additionally, this study uses an ethnographic research design. Creswell and Creswell define ethnography as "a design of inquiry coming from anthropology and sociology in which the researcher studies the shared patterns of behaviors, language, and actions of an intact cultural

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[15] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 202.

[16] Graham R. Gibbs, *Analyzing Qualitative Data* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2007), 100.

[17] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 202.

[18] Miller, "The Experiences," 7–8.

[19] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 181.

group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time. Data collection often involves observations and interviews."[20] Ethnography, as a method of inquiry and research design, finds its origin in comparative cultural anthropology studies conducted by several early 20th-century anthropologists who took the natural sciences as a model for research.[21] However, rather than relying solely on traditional scientific approaches, these researchers gathered first-hand data from previously unknown cultures (to the researchers) by immersing themselves for significant lengths of time within those cultures. In their description of an ethnography, Creswell and Poth assert that culture is "inferred from the words and actions of members of the group…It consists of what people do (behaviors), what they say (language), the potential tension between what they do and ought to do."[22] Therefore, within an ethnographic study, identifying and articulating a holistic perspective of the subject's culture becomes the researcher's primary task. As this qualitative research method has morphed over time, several defining features emerged: (1) a focus on and description of a single, culture-sharing group, (2) the reliance on observations and interviews for data collection, and (3) a conclusion formulated to understand the meaning of the behavior and interaction of the culture-sharing group.[23]

Although Creswell and Poth suggest that an ethnography "focuses on an entire culture-sharing group," they acknowledge that a "cultural group may be small (a few teachers, a few social workers)."[24] Others have termed this a "focused" ethnography—a study that concentrates

[20] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 13.

[21] Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 90.

[22] Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 95–96.

[23] Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 90–91.

[24] Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 90–91.

on a particular aspect, group, or phenomenon within a broader cultural context. Sarah Stahlke Wall distinguishes it from classic ethnography:

> Interviews, long-term participant observation, field notes, and document analysis are regarded as classic features of ethnography. Researchers are traditionally thought of as neutral, distant, reflective observers and it is assumed that ethnography is best conducted by researchers that are not part of the cultural group to make it easier for the researcher to see what is happening in the setting. In traditional ethnography, researchers typically do not enter the field with a formally specified research question. Focused ethnography, on the other hand, is typified by short-term or absent field visits, an interest in a specific research question, a researcher with insider or background knowledge of the cultural group, and intensive methods of data collection and recording such as video or audio-taping.[25]

Hubert Knoblauch[26] and Wall[27] concur, stating that a focused ethnography studies a unique situation or phenomenon within a specific context among a small, defined group. Likewise, Cruz and Higginbottom define the method as the "involvement of a limited number of participants."[28] Additionally, Richards and Morse explain that a focused ethnography considers "groups of participants who share some feature or features…In such studies, participants may not know one another, but the researcher focuses on their common behaviors and experiences….This enables the researcher to apply the assumptions from the shared culture."[29] Finally, Polit and Beck refer to focused ethnography as "microethnography," describing it as "exhaustive, fine-grained studies

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[25] Sarah Stahlke Wall, "Focused Ethnography: A Methodological Adaptation for Social Research in Emerging Contexts," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 16, no. 1 (2015): 4.

[26] Hubert Knoblauch, "Focused Ethnography," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 6, no. 3 (2005), https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-6.3.20.

[27] Wall, "Focused."

[28] Edward Venzon Cruz and Gina Higginbottom, "The Use of Focused Ethnography in Nursing Research," *Nurse Researcher* 20, no. 4 (March 2013): 38.

[29] Lyn Richards and Janice M. Morse, *Readme First for a User's Guide to Qualitative Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2013).

of either small units in a group or culture or specific activities in an organizational unit."[30] As these descriptions and the name itself suggest, a focused ethnography intends to hone in on a specific research question, theme, or group. It is guided by a clear and particular research question.

The above-mentioned features of a *focused* ethnography have particular relevance to the current research study in several ways and affirm that this is the best approach for understanding church leaders' core beliefs about worship. First, since the study concentrates on (1) a rather specific shared cultural behavior (corporate worship) and (2) the beliefs of a particular group (pastors and church leaders) within a larger cultural context (independent and fundamental churches), a focused ethnography is suitable. Edward Cruz and Gina Higginbottom's description of a focused ethnography as "problem-focused and context-specific"[31] easily fits the trajectory of the current study. Because the researcher is mainly concerned about the perceptions and experiences of corporate worship among church leaders, his data collection (participant interviews) is primarily focused on this group of individuals, and his research question narrowed down the theme of the interview questions. Second, a focused ethnography is particularly appropriate for this study because it is not long-term, and it relies heavily on participant interviews that provide primary data for analysis. Within the current study, the researcher's interviews took place over a relatively short period.[32] Furthermore, the short duration of research was compensated for by "intensive methods of data collection and recording."[33] Finally, a

[30] Denise F. Polit and Cheryl Tatano Beck, *Nursing Research: Generating and Assessing Evidence for Nursing Practice* (Philadelphia: Wolters Kluwer Health/Lippincott Wiliams Wilkins, 2012), 224.

[31] Cruz and Higginbottom, "The Use," 38.

[32] November 7, 2023–December 23, 2023

[33] Wall, "Focused."

focused ethnography is appropriate for the current study because of the researcher's proximity to the cultural group being studied. Wall explains:

> Researchers are traditionally thought of as neutral, distant, reflective observers and it is assumed that ethnography is best conducted by researchers that are not part of the cultural group to make it easier for the researcher to see what is happening in the setting. Focused ethnography, on the other hand, is typified by…a researcher with insider or background knowledge of the cultural group.[34]

For all of the above-mentioned reasons, a focused ethnography is particularly appropriate for this study. It has been proven to be an effective method to hone in on a specific research question among a select group of individuals.

Role of the Researcher

As acknowledged throughout this methodology chapter, the role of the researcher in qualitative inquiry is paramount. As the primary data collection instrument, the researcher is positioned within the study, as well as within his writing. He must communicate a degree of self-understanding concerning his biases, values, and experiences because these factors will inevitably color every aspect of the study.[35] Nevertheless, his contributions to the research setting can be useful and positive rather than detrimental.[36]

In this particular study, the researcher's perceptions about corporate worship have surely been shaped by his personal experiences. As conveyed in the study's introduction, the researcher grew up as a pastor's son in the independent, fundamental church tradition. He also received his college education (a bachelor's degree in Bible Theology and a Master of Ministry degree) at historic, fundamental institutions. From September 1996 to December 1998, he served as a

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[34] Wall, "Focused."

[35] Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 229.

[36] Miller, "The Experiences," 16.

minister of music at an independent Bible church; and from January 1999 to May 2016, he served as a senior pastor at an independent Bible church. Most recently (July 2018–present), he has been employed at Appalachian Bible College[37] serving as the chair of the music department and teaching a variety of courses in music, worship, and ministry. In light of this prolonged time in the field of fundamentalism and proximity to corporate worship, the researcher is well acquainted with the behaviors, traditions, and leadership dynamics within the movement. As a music minister and senior pastor, he was responsible for preparing and leading corporate worship, organizing weekly liturgies, and choosing worship styles. Furthermore, he was keenly aware of the ubiquitous tension in the field of corporate worship between contemporary trends and long-standing traditions. These experiences surely enhanced the researcher's awareness, knowledge, and sensitivity to the challenges of worship ministry and assisted him in working with this study's interview participants. In light of these life experiences, the researcher did not approach this study as an aloof outsider or as an "omniscient, distanced"[38] researcher; rather, his experiences gave him a true insider emic perspective—a defining trait of all good qualitative and ethnographic research.[39]

Due to his previous experiences of living and working within fundamentalism in the realm of corporate worship, the researcher certainly brings biases to this study. Despite his intention to be objective, these biases have the potential to shape the way he views and interprets the data. Nevertheless, the researcher has sought to maintain an awareness of his predispositions, questioning assumptions at every stage of the research and striving for objectivity while

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[37] On its website, the college identifies itself as "independent; non-denominational and fundamental, primarily serving with Baptist and Bible churches."

[38] Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 228.

[39] Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 91–92, 94.

remaining cognizant of the impossibility of complete detachment.[40] He has undertaken this research study with an open mind, recognizing that there is a great variety of perspectives on corporate worship. These are not easy decisions because the potential for conflict is immense as evidenced by the worship wars in recent church history. The researcher has undertaken this study with the perspective that pastors and church leaders must have a meaningful biblical and historical foundation for corporate worship behaviors.

Boundaries of the Research Study

Participants

Participants for the current study were sought from independent and fundamental Baptist and Bible churches. Inclusion criteria include the following: (1) pastor or church leader in an independent and fundamental Baptist or Bible church; (2) located in the United States; and (3) willingness to complete an online screening questionnaire, sign a consent form, and participate in an hour-long interview (in-person or video-call). Participation in the research study was solicited from qualifying pastors and church leaders through direct conversations, email, and social media (X and LinkedIn).

Setting

Participants were sought from churches in the United States in the following regions: Midwest, Southeast, Northeast, and Southwest. The thirteen volunteers, the participants in this research study, were from the following states: Alabama, Illinois, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia.

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[40] Leedy, Ormrod, and Johnson, *Practical*, 356.

Sample

In keeping with the qualitative research design, the researcher used a purposive, non-probability sampling method to strategically recruit participants with informed perspectives and experiences related to corporate worship. Creswell and Poth explain that purposive sampling "means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study."[41] As articulated above, the inclusion criteria provided a fairly limited sample. Within this study, the researcher intentionally targeted select pastors and church leaders who were serving in independent, fundamental Baptist and Bible churches. The perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of this select group of individuals are especially relevant to the current study. This sampling is aimed at ensuring that the participants can answer general, open-ended questions that (1) will provide rich, in-depth information and (2) will contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the effects of historical revivalism on modern-day corporate worship behaviors.

Ethical Considerations

In qualitative studies, ethical considerations are especially important because the researcher is dealing with human subjects. Miller contends, "The researcher has an obligation to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the informant(s). To an extent, ethnographic research is always intrusive."[42] Due to the rather limited sample of the participants in this study, considerations of anonymity and protection are paramount. Although the expected risks from participating in this study are minimal (equal to the risks one would encounter in everyday life), the researcher intentionally used traditional protections. Approval for the study was requested

[41] Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 148.

[42] Miller, "The Experiences," 17.

from the Institutional Review Board of Liberty University, and an exemption was granted (see Appendix “”). Furthermore, several safeguards were intentionally employed during and after the research phase to protect the rights of the informants. First, the research objective was articulated in writing in the invitation email so that potential participants clearly understood the topic of the study and the methods of data collection. Second, no forms of coercion were used to secure participants. After an initial email, each potential participant voluntarily contacted the researcher, and all participants who met the inclusion criteria were invited to participate. As an incentive, David de Bruyn’s booklet *Some Things to Consider Including in Your Church Service* was offered to participants if they completed the interview. The nominal amount of the remuneration did not impart any form of compulsion to participate. Third, after the initial contact and interested response, qualified participants were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix F) affirming that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time during the study without repercussions. Qualified participants were also given a list of interview questions to consider beforehand. Fourth, during the data collection phase, private settings were used. In-person interviews were held at a coffee shop in a private meeting room (separated from the public spaces with a door), and online interviews (video calls) were held in the researcher’s private office. Fifth, no forms of deception were intentionally used in the collection of data. Sixth, after the research interviews were conducted, verbatim transcriptions were made available to the participants to verify the accuracy of the information. Participants were also asked to contribute additional information if they desired. Finally, in the data analysis phase, several measures were taken to ensure the confidentiality of data and the anonymity of the study’s participants. In the data analysis and the final reports, a coding system was utilized to conceal identities. Additionally, geographical places and specific church names were not used.

Participants were also protected from harm through secure data storage. All data from the interviews was stored and password-protected on the researcher's Google Drive.

Data Collection Strategies

As articulated above, this research study primarily gathered data utilizing semi-structured interviews with volunteer participants. Before initiating this data collection, the proposed interview protocol, data collection methods, and analysis methods were submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Liberty University for approval, and an exemption was granted (see Appendix G). Data were collected from November 7, 2023, through December 23, 2023. During this period, thirteen interviews were conducted with pastors and church leaders from fundamental and independent, Baptist and Bible churches. Eleven open-ended, exploratory questions were used to guide the interviews (see Appendix A).

Phase 1: Preparation

Preparation for this qualitative, ethnographic research study included soliciting participation from qualifying pastors and church leaders through direct conversations, email, and social media (X and LinkedIn). Potential informants were invited to participate in a research study whose purpose was to examine the perceptions of pastors and other church leaders from independent Baptist and Bible churches and consider what influences their beliefs about corporate worship. They were asked to take part in a single audio- and/or video-recorded, hour-long interview (in-person or video call). Inclusion criteria were given, and a link to a screening questionnaire. Interested parties who contacted the researcher and completed the online screening questionnaire were emailed (1) a consent document, (2) a link to a Google Sheet document to schedule an interview time, and (3) a list of the interview questions to reflect on before the interview.

Phase 2: Collection

Two instruments were used to gather data. First, as described above, a preliminary questionnaire (for screening) was used to verify each potential participant's eligibility regarding the study's inclusion criteria. This preliminary questionnaire (see Appendix B) gathered the following information about the potential participants: (1) name, (2) age range, (3) vocational ministry involvement, (4) name of their church, (5) the church's denominational affiliation, and (6) contact information. This initial questionnaire was distributed and recorded via Google Forms. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants. During this second phase of data collection, thirteen volunteers participated in real-time, face-to-face interviews. In keeping with Fetterman's description of the qualitative interview process, the researcher used a semi-structured interview with pre-planned yet open-ended questions.[43] Based on the study's central research question, eleven interview questions guided the interview (see Appendix A). Questions about (1) modern-day corporate worship behaviors, (2) biblical commands about corporate worship, and (3) historical influences on corporate worship allowed the participants to open up and articulate their personal perceptions, convictions, and experiences of corporate worship. Throughout the interview, the researcher sought to probe each response when appropriate to elicit more information or to ask for clarity about what each participant said.[44] Interviews were captured visually and recorded audibly via Google Meet video conferencing. Audio-only recordings were conducted with in-person interviews. All interviews were

[43] David M. Fetterman, ed., *Ethnography: Step-by-Step* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2020), 65.

[44] Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 123.

transcribed. All study data were securely stored (as previously discussed under ethical considerations).

Validity and Reliability

Throughout the data collection phase of this research study, the researcher took tangible steps to ensure the validity and reliability of his methods and findings. Creswell and Creswell offer an important distinction between *validity* and *reliability*: "Qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, whereas qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and among different projects."[45] Both standards are essential and are meaningfully demonstrated in this research study.

Validity

To begin, this research study reflects a high degree of accuracy because it employs several, validity procedures—strategies that are consistently described throughout the literature on good qualitative research.[46] First, this study uses triangulation, i.e., converging data from diverse perspectives.[47] Uwe Flick, Enrst von Kardorff, and Ines Steinke contend that triangulation can include the combination of data drawn from different perspectives or people.[48] Among the participant interviews of this study, several conflicting opinions surfaced about the required, biblical elements of worship. The researcher's attention to and explanation of these

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[45] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 199.

[46] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 200–201.

[47] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 200–201.

[48] Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardorff, and Ines Steinke, eds., *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, trans. Bryan Jenner (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2004), 178.

divergent views confirm his desire to mitigate any personal biases and provide a more comprehensive view of corporate worship. Second, this study demonstrates validity by applying a rich, thick description of its research findings. Creswell and Creswell clarify, "This [type of] description may transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences….When qualitative researchers provide detailed descriptions of the setting,…the results become more realistic and richer. This procedure can add to the validity of the findings."[49] Third, validity is confirmed in the current study through the researcher's transparency and commitment to reflexivity. Creswell and Poth explain:

> Qualitative researchers today acknowledge that the writing of a qualitative text cannot be separated from the author… How we write is a reflection of our own interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to research. All writing is "positioned" and within a stance. All researchers shape the writing that emerges, and qualitative researchers need to accept this interpretation and be open about it in their writings.[50]

From the very beginning of this study (in the introduction under the heading Qualifications of the Researcher) as well as in the section above (The Role of the Researcher), the researcher acknowledges his past experiences and biases, and he freely admits that his interpretation and approach to the study are influenced by these components. Finally, the use of an external auditor offers another level of validity to the current research study. Creswell and Creswell define an auditor as: "[One who] is not familiar with the researcher or the project and can provide an objective assessment of the project throughout the process of research or at the conclusion of the study."[51] The researcher solicited and secured Susan R. Quindag, dissertation chair in the School of Education at Liberty University and director of On Q Educational Consulting, to fill the role

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[49] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 200.

[50] Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 228.

[51] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 201.

of an external auditor. Quindag served as an impartial and experienced evaluator, scrutinizing the research methodology, data collection, methods, and analytical procedures employed in the study. Her evaluation (1) affirms that the researcher adheres to established ethical guidelines and academic standards and (2) offers an additional layer of credibility to the study.

Reliability

As defined above by Creswell and Creswell, reliability in qualitative research is identified by a study's consistency and stability.[52] These essential characteristics are displayed in the current study, first, through a commitment to professionalism and accuracy in the data collection. High-quality recordings and detailed transcriptions were made of the participant interviews; these transcriptions were checked for accuracy. Second, reliability is demonstrated in this study through its thorough documentation of processes. Interview protocols and procedures are included in the appendices so that others can emulate them in similar studies. Third, reliability is demonstrated through the careful and consistent use of codes. The researcher was careful not to shift the meaning of codes during the process of coding and continuously compared data with the codes. Finally, reliability is verified in the current study through its connection to significant authors in the field and past qualitative research studies. Throughout his study, the researcher quotes professionals in the field of qualitative research to confirm that his approach is "consistent across different researchers and among different projects."[53] Among the writers in the field, John W. Creswell, David Creswell, and Cheryl Poth are well-recognized and provide information that is up-to-date and consistent with historical norms. Throughout this

[52] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 201.

[53] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 199.

study, the researcher cites these authors to provide corroboration that his methods are within the realm of standard, qualitative research practices. Additionally, the researcher considered other qualitative ethnographies and based his research and approach on their works. For example, Dana Miller's "The Experiences of a First-Year College President: An Ethnography"[54] provides a framework for the current study. Also, Michael Wilburn's "Educational Philosophy, Church Proximity, and Academic Standards in Church-Based Theological Education"[55] has particular relevance to the current study with its focus on religious establishments and a rather focused sample. Finally, Lisa Winchester's "Interruptions and the Novice Emergency Nurse: A Focused Ethnography,"[56] although in an unrelated field, provides a practical example of how a focused ethnography is used to target a rather limited group of participants and elicit their particular perceptions and experiences.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this study is to examine the beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of pastors and other church leaders from independent, fundamental churches in the United States to understand what influences their convictions about certain behaviors in corporate worship. First, a *qualitative approach* to research was chosen for this study. Due to its distinctive approach to complex social phenomena among a particular culture-sharing group, qualitative design is particularly appropriate as it relies on somewhat subjective, personal accounts and perceptions rather than measurable or numerical data. Second, because this study (1) focused on a single,

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[54] Miller, "The Experiences."

[55] Michael Lee Wilburn, "Educational Philosophy, Church Proximity, and Academic Standards in Church-Based Theological Education: A Phenomenological Study" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses (10982879).

[56] Lisa Ann Winchester, "Interruptions and the Novice Emergency Nurse: A Focused Ethnography" (PhD diss., University of Northern Colorado, 2023), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses (30485575).

culture-sharing group, (2) relied primarily on observations and interviews for data collection, and (3) provided a detailed description of the behaviors and interactions of members of that culture, an *ethnographic design* was also chosen. Third, the current study was intentionally a *focused* ethnography because (1) the cultural group under examination was relatively small, (2) the period of examination was not long-term, and (3) the researcher had close proximity to the cultural group under examination. To gain data for the study, pastors and church leaders from independent and fundamental Baptist or Bible churches in the United States were recruited through social media, electronic communication, and solicitation to participate. Standard ethical concerns were discussed and implemented. Data collection was through a preliminary questionnaire and interviews, while data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. Finally, an intentional adherence to validity and reliability was maintained throughout all phases of data collection and analysis.

Transitioning from the exploration of relevant literature in chapter two and the explanation of the theoretical framework in chapter three, chapter four provides an elucidation of the empirical investigation. While the methodological design and historical foundation are essential, chapter four traverses into the heart of the study—the research findings. Having gained relevant data from the research participants, the researcher describes their firsthand experiences and perspectives, as well as the research context. Furthermore, chapter four explains the patterns and themes that emerged from the data and offers a nuanced explanation of the perceptions and beliefs that undergird modern-day corporate worship behaviors in modern-day, independent Baptist and Bible churches.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

Introduction

As articulated in chapter three, the main purpose of this qualitative, focused ethnographic study is to understand the perceptions and beliefs about corporate worship of church leaders and pastors in independent and fundamental, Baptist and Bible churches. Throughout both the data collection and data analysis stages, the researcher focused on identifying elements that contribute to these core beliefs and perceptions, as well as any underlying assumptions. At the outset of the study, a background questionnaire was designed for potential research participants to verify preliminary eligibility to take part. Then, based on a review of the literature, a semi-structured interview, utilizing open-ended questions, was designed and administered. Its purpose was to uncover and understand the participants' understanding of (1) the primary purpose of the gathered church; (2) the influence of the Protestant Reformation and the American revivals on corporate worship behaviors; (3) the biblical standards for acceptable worship; (4) the required elements of corporate worship; (5) the disadvantage and/or benefit of liturgy; (6) the place of gospel invitations in corporate worship; and (7) the role of evangelism in corporate worship.[1] In the data collection stage, the research participants were interviewed, pseudonyms were chosen, and interviews were transcribed. Afterward, in the data analysis stage, a thematic analysis was employed to reveal themes. Based on the data analysis, a framework was developed to distinguish between *things said with conviction* and *things said with hesitancy*. Within these two broad categories of responses, several themes emerged in the data analysis: (1) *Sola Scriptura*;

[1] See Appendix A for the interview questions.

(2) the prominence of preaching; (3) edification, not evangelism; (4) compelled to give invitations; (5) ignorance of history; (6) reticence toward liturgy; and (7) the role of sincerity.

A graphic overview of the research findings (see figure 1) is included to simplify the data by making it visually intuitive and accessible for understanding patterns and variations. Furthermore, this chart is beneficial to show contrasts, as well as connections, between the primary themes and subthemes. Nevertheless, this chart (as well as the other charts in this chapter) is merely a visual representation of the findings (qualitative data) and is not intended to infer any statistical conclusions or interpretations. As a qualitative study, this research is primarily focused on the quality of the participants' answers, not on statistical quantities.

Participants

Participants for this research study were sought from independent and fundamental Baptist and Bible churches. Inclusion criteria included the following: (1) pastor or church leader in an independent and fundamental Baptist or Bible church; (2) located in the United States; and (3) willingness to complete an online screening questionnaire, sign a consent form, and participate in an hour-long interview (in-person or video-call). In keeping with the qualitative research design, the researcher used a purposive, non-probability sampling method to strategically recruit participants with informed perspectives and experiences related to corporate worship. Additionally, as a focused ethnography, the research participants were intentionally limited to a small, well-defined group—one that could concentrate on a particular aspect (worship behaviors) within a broader cultural context (independent, fundamental churches). In keeping with these parameters, thirteen pastors and church leaders participated in the study. They are from the following states: Alabama (1), Illinois (2), Missouri (1), Ohio (1), Pennsylvania (2), and West Virginia (6). Eleven serve as a pastor, one as an assistant pastor, and one is a church

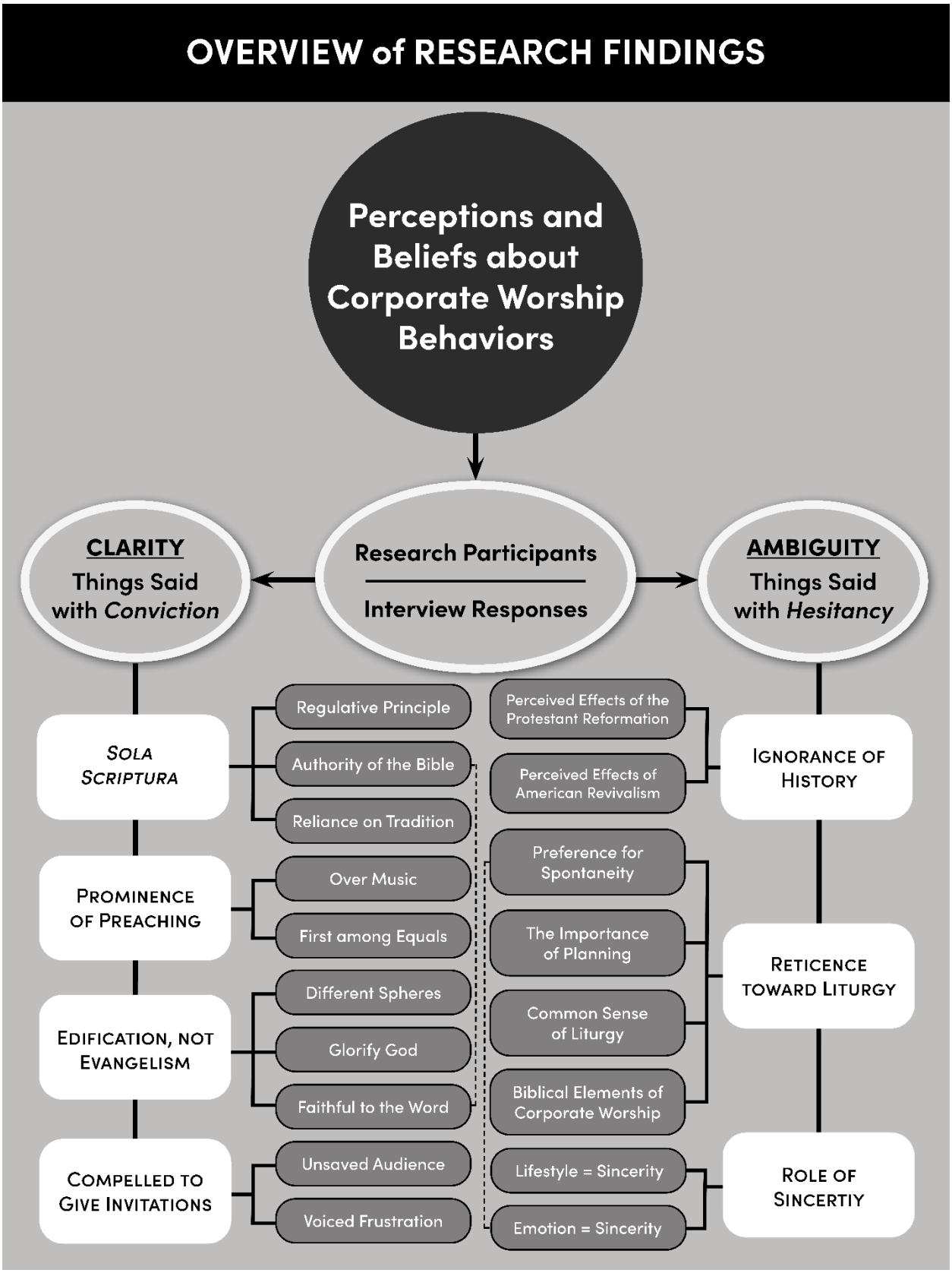

Figure 1. Overview of Research Findings

leader. Seven of the participants serve in independent Bible churches, and five of the participants serve in independent Baptist churches. One participant describes his church as "Bible and Baptistic, [but] not affiliated with any fellowship." Twelve of the participants fall in the 18–64 years old range, while one participant is over 65 years old. To ensure anonymity, specific names and details concerning the research participants and their places of ministry are not revealed in this study. See figure 2.

Thematic Analysis

Within this study, the researcher utilized a thematic analysis of the data to begin the process of understanding and communicating the underlying meanings, experiences, and perspectives of the study's participants. Having thoroughly read the transcripts and listened to the interview recordings, the researcher began to identify and label segments of data (phrases, sentences, or paragraphs) with descriptive themes (or codes) that seemed to capture the key ideas or concepts expressed by the interviewees. Seeking to follow Creswell and Creswell's process of proceeding "with a short list [of codes],"[2] the researcher began with six broad categories; however, after an extended review of the data, these initial codes were expanded to fifteen recurring topics and patterns. In considering these codes, the researcher saw a significant distinction between them. Statements made by the participants in response to the interview questions seemed to fall under two, broad categories: (1) clarity—things spoken with conviction and (2) ambiguity—things spoken with hesitancy. As a qualitative study, not only *what* the participants said but *how* they said it seems to have particular relevance in answering the study's primary research question. Under these two broad categories, seven main themes emerged. First, under clarity—things spoken with conviction , four themes emerged: (1) *sola Scriptura*; (2) the

[2] Creswell & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 190.

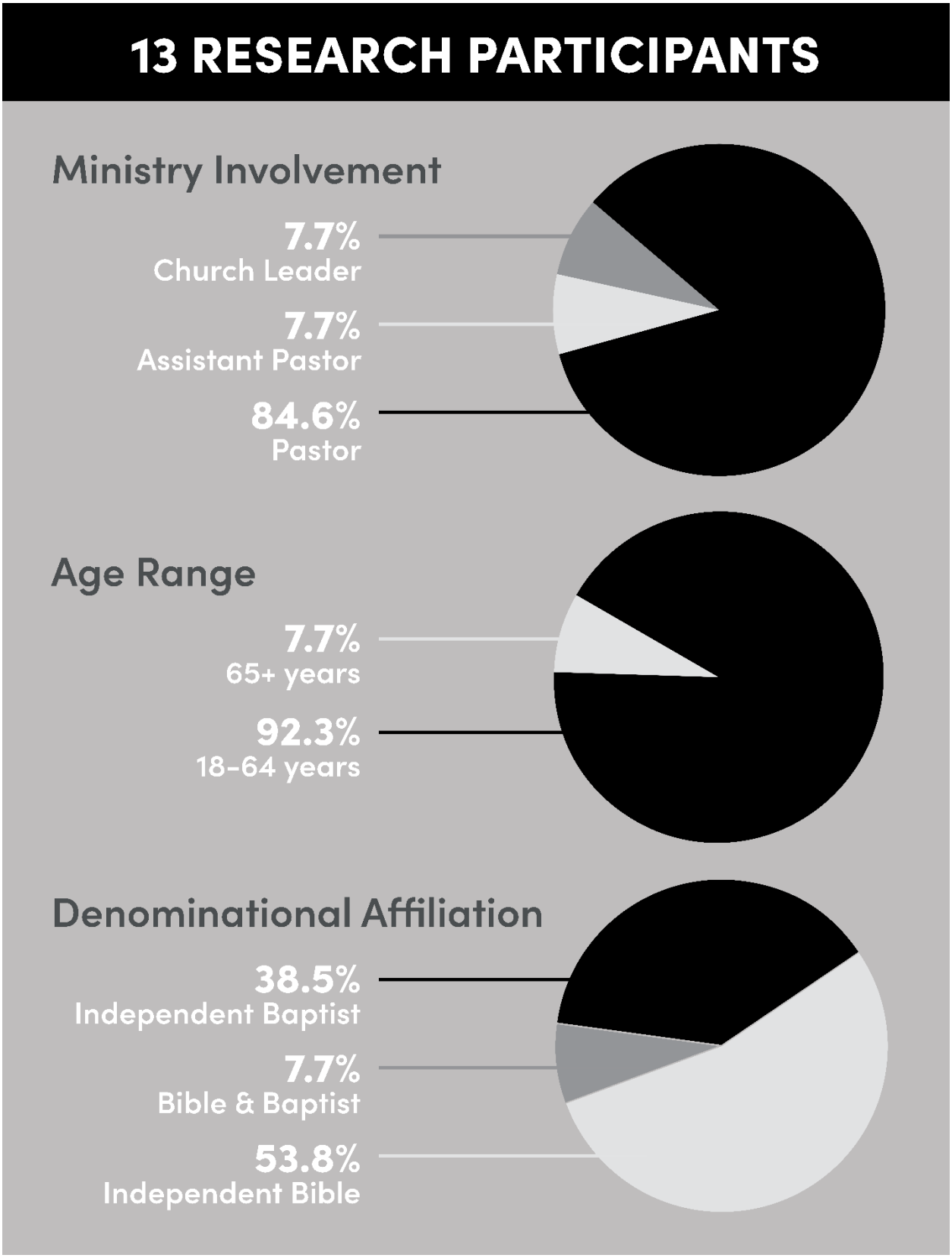

Figure 2. Thirteen Research Participants

prominence of preaching; (3) edification, not evangelism; and (4) compelled to give invitations. Second, under ambiguity—things spoken with hesitancy, three themes emerged: (1) ignorance of history, (2) reticence toward liturgy, and (3) the role of sincerity. Within each of these seven themes, several subthemes also emerged. In the following section, these overarching patterns, themes, and subthemes are described and supported using the participants' words. Finally, it is imperative to state that this chapter seeks to offer an objective report of the data gained through the research process. No commentary or evaluation is offered. Interpretation of the data and conclusions are drawn in chapter five. By thematic *analysis*, the researcher is merely (1) offering an overview of the participants' responses and (2) organizing the data into recurring patterns for examination.

Clarity—Things Said with Conviction

First, in response to the interview questions, the participants said some things with a high degree of clarity and conviction. Among these confident responses, four themes become apparent: (1) *sola Scriptura*; (2) the prominence of preaching; (3) edification, not evangelism; and (4) compelled to give an invitation.

Sola Scriptura

A commitment to the centrality of Scripture in governing corporate worship behaviors appears as a theme among the participant responses. *Sola Scriptura*, a Latin phrase that translates as "Scripture alone," is a foundational principle within historical Protestant Christianity, primarily derived from the Reformation. Succinctly stated, the principle emphasizes the belief that the Bible is the sole authority for the church's doctrine and practice. Specifically, in the context of corporate worship, *sola Scriptura* maintains that the content and structure of worship must be derived directly from the Word of God. This has been a historical trait of Baptist and

Bible churches in the independent, fundamental tradition; therefore, its prominent appearance in this study is no surprise.

Several of the participants rather adamantly express their deep-seated belief that corporate worship, first and foremost, must be structured by Scripture. To begin, Participant #6, in seeking to describe his perceptions of the changes that occurred in church worship as a result of the Protestant Reformation, explains that the church "went from sacramentalism to a focus on the Word of God because obviously…*sola Scriptura*." Later, he explains this principle meant that everything in corporate worship began to be "measured against Scripture. So the question [became,] 'Is it in accordance with Scripture?'" Among many of the interview participants, this concern for the overarching primacy of Scripture in worship consistently emerged as a settled conviction. Participant #7 says, "Everything should be filtered through the Scripture." Likewise, Participant #5 asserts that the church must ask, "Does the method of worship match the Scripture?" Then, he asserts, "We've got to go back to the text of Scripture to see what I'm doing and what we are doing corporately in this congregation…is it, 'thus saith the Lord'?" Finally, Participant #10 likewise articulates the importance of Scripture in informing every detail of corporate worship, suggesting that all of the elements must be "word-driven, truth-driven." He quotes the mantra, "Sing the Word. Read the Word. Pray the Word. Preach the Word." In other words, not only are the elements and actions of corporate worship specified by God's Word, but also the very words used in administering those elements should be the language of Scripture. Therefore, according to Participant #10, the Bible must "dominate corporate worship."

Two of the interview participants sought to articulate the necessity of *sola Scriptura* by referencing the Regulative Principle. First articulated by the Reformers (John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli), this principle specifies that the church may only include elements of worship that are

explicitly commanded by Scripture. It stands in contrast to the Normative Principle of worship, which Participant #7 explains, "if the Bible doesn't restrict it,…I can do anything I want." In contrast, however, Participant #7 suggests that there are "some things" in worship that the Bible regulates. In other words, the church should "do something in a particular way." Similarly, Participant #6 describes the difference between the two perspectives:

> The Lutherans had their normative principle, which said if it's not condemned in Scripture they can do it. The Reformers went further with the regulative principle and said if it's in Scripture you can do it—if it's not in Scripture, you can't do it. And those were good. I mean…the reformed principle I think is fundamentally pretty good—the regulative principle.

Both interviewees spoke in positive terms about the Regulative Principle, suggesting that it assisted the church in filtering its worship practices through the lens of Scripture.

Even though each one did not specifically use the exact words, all of the participants in this research study seem to prioritize the principle of *sola Scriptura*. Having a fundamental belief that worship is merely an appropriate response to the revelation of God, the participants attempt to infuse their observations and comments with Scripture (i.e., the revelation of God). By their answers (taken directly from Scripture), each participant displays (1) a deep affinity for and (2) a settled commitment to the Bible as the sole authority for corporate worship behaviors. For example, Interview Question #3 asks the participants, "How can you determine if acceptable worship is taking place?" Participant #8 states, "[To] know what's acceptable [in corporate worship] we have to evaluate what we're doing in light of what God's Word describes as acceptable." Furthermore, Participant #10 asserts, "Worship is a response to the revelation of who God is," suggesting that, without the Bible, worship is not possible. Among all of the interview participants, to ground corporate worship solely on the direct words of Scripture

appears to be a given—an established fact, something assumed though not necessarily articulated.

Despite the above, a few participants readily admit that their worship behaviors are decidedly set in tradition without a specific biblical precedent. For example, when asked about the importance of the order of worship elements, Participant #11 responds, "I can tell you *our* order. We have the same order every Sunday [laughs]." In other words, their worship order follows a rather predictable pattern in each service. He goes on to explain how they tend to rely on tradition and other pragmatic reasoning for the ordering of worship. Likewise, Participant #2, when asked about the order of worship elements, willingly confesses, "I'm in a rut. I do what I do. Don't mess with me… I totally admit I'm stuck in a rut. I have a form for planning our services, and it's [always] in that order. So I just fill in the blanks." Similarly, Participant #6 admits that the choice of worship order and the lack of variation is primarily due to "my nature than anything else." He concludes that the congregants "like the simplicity of it [the order of worship]…and so it's worked out." Finally, Participant #5 expresses a reliance on tradition and personal preference in choosing a worship order. Regarding preaching, he says:

> Often times it's put last—probably pragmatically—because it's the last thing on someone's mind as they walk out and at least that's traditionally what I have been surrounded with all the years growing up in Baptist churches and being a part of a Baptist church, too. I have been a part of some services where the message was toward…the middle…and then you had some singing and prayer and announcements and stuff. I like that. I thought that was okay, but historically I don't think we have any biblical reasoning.

Despite having a rather settled conviction about the importance of God's Word in the ordering of corporate worship, some participants admit that they have a reliance on tradition.

Prominence of Preaching

Second, among the interview responses, the prominence of preaching emerges as a significant theme in the corporate worship behaviors of independent and fundamental, Baptist and Bible churches. Most of the interviewees are in agreement that, in the words of Participant #1, "preaching has to be the most important." Such statements of candor are commonplace. Participant #2 upholds the "centrality of the pulpit" in corporate worship. Participant #5 says, "I would obviously put a priority on truth…in the preaching and teaching of God's Word." Participant #6 says that "first and foremost…expository preaching" should be the norm. Participant #8 suggests that the entire worship service must be "building up to the sermon." Participant #9 opines, "One of the biggest factors…is the preaching of God's Word." Participant #12 requires, "The importance has to be on the Word of God being presented." Some seek to propose support for the prominence of preaching. One interviewee, Participant #6 offers historical support from Martin Luther: "The highest form of worship is the preaching of the Word." Others offer biblical support. For example, Participant #7 references 1 Corinthians 7:28–31, explaining that the Apostle Paul admonishes the church to "covet the best gifts." By this, Participant #7 says, "It seems as though there would be priority in some of the exercises of some of the gifts, and that those would probably be the ones that were related to the ministry of the word"—i.e., preaching.

The prominence of preaching in corporate worship markedly emerged as the researcher asked Interview Question #5—"Are some elements of worship more important than others?" In their answers, several interview participants imply and even directly allege that preaching is more important than music. For instance, Participant #2 claims, "If we were going to cut something, the music would get cut before the preaching." Additionally, Participant #6 suggests

that the "preaching and teaching of the Word of God" are "absolutely necessary to biblical corporate worship" because, he claims, in studying the New Testament it is surprising "how little emphasis there is on singing…in the corporate setting." He explains, "I don't think that that's because we shouldn't do it [sing] or that it's not important, but I do find it interesting that it's not emphasized." As examples, he cites the books of Acts and 1 Corinthians where "there's a lot of talk about…what is done in the corporate worship," yet music "doesn't appear in those passages." These Scriptural observations seem to shape this participant's views about the importance of preaching over music. Admittedly, Participant #6 concedes that his views may be a reaction because music "has become too important in the corporate worship service and it's really in many cases…replacing preaching, and so they'll sing for thirty minutes and they'll have a twenty-minute kind of Ted Talk." Another interviewee also turns to the New Testament to defend the priority of preaching over music. Participant #2 purports that preaching and prayer are "probably the most important aspects" of corporate worship because of "the strength with which Paul addressed them in the pastorals." He explains, "It's almost, I think, that they are more of a directive than singing is. But I think in the pastorals as he directed Timothy and Titus to lead the churches, it's pretty clear that he wanted the Word of God preached." Likewise, Participant #5, in defending the priority of preaching over music, says:

> I don't sing my messages every week…The method of lecture and preaching and proclamation does seem to have a little bit of priority even in the ministry of Jesus. It doesn't say he went from multitude to multitude singing the Psalms. It says he went preaching the kingdom and repentance and proclaiming truth, and the longest sermon that we have…it is obviously an oral giving of a message in Matthew 5, 6, and 7 and [it] is…a messagethat probably took over several hours if not all afternoon and all day and that's the pattern Jesus had—the priority of preaching. [It's] the pattern both of Jesus, Acts, and then…Timothy and Titus and the churches…, and I think historically we have connections that it was done in oral fashion of speaking not singing.

Participant #12 offers a similar line of reasoning, saying, "Jesus taught the people, and he preached to them. And…for whatever reason it says *preaching*. If that said *singing*, then I think our services would look all different. Like, maybe we would have it oriented more around singing." He did specify that singing must "support the emphasis" of the priority of preaching; nevertheless, his comments did place a higher level of importance on the preaching.

Despite the above-mentioned preferences, some participants, while upholding the necessity of preaching, were unwilling to order it above other Scriptural elements of corporate worship. For example, Participant 8 admits that he could not "necessarily say that any one of those elements [of biblical worship] is more critical or less critical…I don't know that I could necessarily prioritize them." Participant #10 seems to concur yet explains, "To the degree that the Word is central to all of them, they are all valid; and I wouldn't exalt one over the other." However, he did go on to clarify his statement concerning music: "If music wasn't Word-centered, then it would be less valuable than Word-centered preaching. It doesn't gain its value because it is music. It gains its value because it is Word-centered music or truth-centered—God-glorifying." Finally, it should be noted that two participants, while maintaining the prominence of preaching in corporate worship, nevertheless seem to express their preference with some hesitancy. For instance, Participant #7 admits that he "wrestled" to answer which elements in corporate worship were more important than others; and although he assumes "ministering the Word" (preaching) to be primary, he refuses to be "exactly dogmatic" about his preference. One other participant appears particularly hesitant on this point as well. Participant #9 says, "I guess as I look at that Acts 2 passage, they [the elements of worship] all seemed pretty important." He continues, "I would want to say 'yes'…I believe that the preaching of the Word is the thing…I

don't want to…leave out… There is an aspect where I think that [preaching] is the highest priority but maybe I could almost say it's like a first among equals. They're all important."

Although they did not always provide biblical reasoning for their preference, it was rather evident that most participants feel strongly about the prominence of preaching in the context of corporate worship. Despite a small degree of ambiguity in a couple of the participants' expressions, the overwhelming majority of the interview participants communicated that the preaching of God's Word in corporate worship must be prominent. This is spoken as a settled belief, a deeply held value—one on which they are unwilling (for the most part) to compromise.

Edification, not Evangelism

Under Interview Question #1, the researcher asks the participants to answer the following: "What is the primary purpose of the church and how is that accomplished in corporate worship?" Fairly consistently and quite straightforwardly, the participants voice a primary concern for edification, not evangelism, in the context of corporate worship services. In other words, to them, the primary purpose of the church in corporate worship settings is to encourage *believers* toward spiritual growth not to attract and proselytize *unbelievers*. Participant #2 specifies that the "church [in its worship services] is for believers; it is the called-out ones." He offers a rather detailed description of the purpose of the gathered church:

> We are believers, and we are there together [at church] to, first and foremost, to bring glory to God. We are there for edification, to be encouraged—out of mandate that we not forsake our assembling together. It is the platform through which the "one anothers" are exercised… In that context, we worship together. So I think that's the high purpose of the church—that it is believers gathered together in Jesus' name to encourage one another, build up one another, and to worship God in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a common perception: the gathered church is primarily for believers. Participant #5 voices, "Corporate worship is first and foremost for believers,…to edify one another, encourage one another in growth, to teach truth and doctrine. And, all of that comes, I believe, first in

corporate worship. The church, when it gathers together, is for believers." Likewise, Participant #6 agrees: "Corporate worship is for believers." Similarly, Participant #4 suggests that corporate worship "is about people…[becoming] like Christ… It focuses on the truth of who God is, and it gives us [believers] the opportunity then to respond to his greatness in appropriate ways." Others weigh in with similar views. Participant #7 uses the word *edification* to identify the church's purpose, citing 1 Corinthians 14 where "Paul used that word over and over—let all things be done unto edification or for edifying." However, Participant #9 prefers the term *discipleship*, which he defines as "the broad picture of learning." He specifies that the "primary purpose [of the church] is to make disciples, and I think that happens Sunday morning at 11 o'clock.… Our goal is that people are coming in and we are assuming most if not all are potentially believers, and we want them to grow." Finally, Participant #12 uses another synonym for edification. He says, "The purpose of the church is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry." Later, he would reiterate, "The church is about equipping the saints." He defines the term *equip* in the following way: "to encourage the saints and see them grounded" and "taking people wherever they're at and helping them take the next steps." Despite using different terminology, these participants agree that the church gathers primarily for the benefit of believers—for their spiritual edification.

While edification and evangelism were not necessarily communicated as opposing pursuits, several interview participants indicated the greater importance of edification in the context of corporate worship. When questioned about the connection between corporate worship and evangelism,[3] they consistently communicate that evangelism is a byproduct of worship, not its primary goal. To begin, Participant #1 alleges, "Worship is not a means of evangelism." He

[3] Interview Question #11: What is the connection between worship & evangelism? How should the church approach evangelism within its corporate worship practices?

warns, “I feel a church that uses worship practices as a form of evangelism…[is] prostituting the act of worship… Changing our worship to try to draw people in…[is] a never-ending slope.” Similarly, Participant #3 cautions, “If you’re depending on worship to be a tool to reach the world, and the world typically…misunderstands what worship even is; then, I think we’re going to have a very difficult time getting to the heart of being evangelistic in our worship.” Furthermore, he adds, “No one is saved by worship… People are saved by the gospel.” Another interviewee, Participant #12, observes the changing motivation in Baptist churches. He says, “So much of the Sunday morning service [in the past] was a seeker service, and the messages were always salvation… [It] was about evangelism, and I’ve since decided that I don’t like that model.” Nevertheless, others speak more positively about the connection between worship and evangelism. Participant #2 says, “Corporate worship, to me, can be a powerful form of evangelistic expression.” Moreover, Participant #4 says, “Worship…should fuel evangelism. If we are proclaiming the truth of who God is [and] we are understanding that better, that should ultimately move us to want to share with others.” Several reference 1 Corinthians 14:23–25 to describe evangelism as a byproduct of corporate worship. For example, Participant #5 explains, “There’s a verse there [in 1 Corinthians 14] that talks about when an unbeliever…is in the presence of believers. He ought to be convicted at what he sees and what he hears from the truth of God’s Word, but that is a byproduct of standing on the truth.” Participant #10 has a similar understanding: “A byproduct of worship done well is gospel proclamation… In other words, the goal in the service is not the evangelism of the lost. The goal in the service is the proclamation of Christ and His worth. And so, it should have an evangelistic byproduct.”

Finally, in explaining the connection between worship and evangelism, some speak definitively about the unique sphere of each pursuit. Participant #7 explains, “Generally, I have

(in my mind) divided it like this: edification takes place in the church service, and evangelism takes place outside of the church service." Participant #6 declares a similar distinction: "I would say evangelism fundamentally is something that should be going on outside of corporate worship. In other words, I don't think the goal is to invite everybody to church so they'll hear the gospel. I think the goal is for people to go out and to actually preach the gospel, share the gospel." With their comments, both participants try to avoid the creation of a rigid dichotomy between evangelism and edification. For instance, Participant #6 clarifies, "I'm not saying they [unbelievers] shouldn't come to church… Obviously, we have children that aren't saved; you have visitors that come that are unsaved; you have people that are in the church that are members of the church who aren't saved—you might not know who they are, but I'm sure they're there." Also, Participant #7 explains that when unbelievers come to a worship service, "they can still get saved in there." While most interview participants affirm the superiority of edification over evangelism in the context of corporate worship, some feel compelled to offer this distinction: evangelism may take place in the gathering of the church; however, its primary sphere is generally outside of the walls of corporate worship.

Although "edification, not evangelism" consistently appeared as the overriding theme, two subthemes seemed to emerge alongside it: "glorify God" and "faithful to the Word." First, although the majority of participants are insistent about the priority of edification, they are quick to clarify that the church's ultimate purpose is to glorify God. Before attempting to articulate the church's purpose, Participant #2 says, "We have this broad sweeping statement [in Scripture] to bring glory to God." Also, Participant #6 claims "I would say, first of all, obviously, in a general way, the purpose of the church is to glorify God." Participant #7 concurs that the church's prevailing goal is "the glory of God," basing his belief on Ephesians 3:21—"unto him be glory in

the church by Christ Jesus." In addition, Participant #10 observes a significant connection between God's glory and edification. He says:

> I see Christ's mission for his church as the way I would state the purpose of the church. So I kinda shift it and say, the church's purpose is Christ's purpose for his bride in this age. And I would say his purpose is doxological. His purpose is to glorify the Father by building his church… I take the words at the beginning of John 17, "Glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you by giving eternal life to as many as you have given Him." So, Christ building his church is how he is primarily glorifying the Father in this age. So, would say, the mission of the church is to, like Christ, glorify the Father through the growth of the church. But, it's got to be the advance of the gospel and the growth of the church that is doxological.

Participant #5 also assumes a connection between glorifying God and edifying believers: "Worship is for God [His glory], and we benefit from it [edification]." Although each of these interviewees sees edification as the intended goal of the gathered church, each was intentional about God's glory being the overriding factor. Second, being "Faithful to the Word" seems to emerge as another subtheme alongside "Edification, not Evangelism." In attempting to articulate the church's purpose to glorify God and edify believers, a couple of participants voiced a concern that the church must merely be faithful to Scripture. For example, Participant #10 contends that when a church is "doxological" in its intent, it is going to be "Word-driven, Word-centered." In other words, to bring glory to God the church must only have a concern for Scripture, not any other well-intentioned motive (i.e., evangelism or edification). Participant #6 voices a similar understanding saying, "We glorify God most when we simply obey him…when we do what he says we should do in corporate worship, so that our fundamental goal in corporate worship is to be faithful to what he has told us to do. He's given us examples." Both participants conspicuously appear to avoid the word *edification*; suggesting that if the church simply obeys Scripture, it will ultimately glorify God, edify believers, and evangelize unbelievers.

Compelled to Give an Invitation

Despite insisting on a rather intentional emphasis on edifying believers and glorifying God in the context of corporate worship, several interview participants express a compulsion to give a gospel invitation at some point in the delivery of sermons. Participant #4 explains, "I always—some way, somehow—no matter what…we're working through as far as Scripture is, and I try to present the Gospel in some way and give people a chance to respond to that. So I think it should be mentioned, and there should be an invitation." Further, he explains that the Gospel should be "sown throughout" the sermon, but "not dominate." Participant 5 maintains that an invitation is necessary because "there is a physical response that is required…and an outward confession that is required." Furthermore, he contends that "part of the church's responsibility is to proclaim the Gospel and to evangelize by pointing people to the cross." Others feel this compulsion more keenly with an awareness of who is in attendance at a given service—particularly those whom they regard as unsaved. For instance, Participant #7 explains, "I will often challenge [at the end of the sermon], especially if I think that there are unsaved people who might be there. I'll challenge them or I'll tell them, 'I'll be at the door when you're leaving if you need to talk to me.'" Also, Participant #8 explains:

> If somebody comes to our church that isn't usually there—in a church this little—you notice, and so it has (whether intended or not) an impact on what you're saying in the sermon… I feel the conviction that I need to make sure that at some point in my sermon…in some form or another [to] include the gospel that Jesus Christ came to die for sinners. He shed his blood to pay for our sins. He rose from the grave, and it is by grace through faith in Jesus that you can go to heaven. I'm not going to restructure my entire sermon, but…I want to be able to say, "I tried…I offered an invitation; that I offered an opportunity."

Participant #9 admits that he needs to "say this [the Gospel] more." He adds, "In a smaller church…if there's a lot of new people there, it might not be a bad idea to call for some type of, level of [response]." Additionally, Participant #12 relates, "In most every sermon I preach,

there's always some element that is pretty clearly pointing to the gospel, and if I'm certain there are unsaved people there, I might take a few more minutes to talk about how this directly ties into Christ." One participant, even when expressing doubt over the efficacy of public invitations, reveals an inner compulsion to offer them. Participant #2 says, "There's rarely a public invitation [after the sermon]…and it's true people criticize me for that and they want that to happen. But I'm no good at them. Nobody ever comes forward. I mess them up. I'm not embarrassed to do it. I just feel like I'm no good at it." Despite this voiced frustration, most participants communicate an inner compulsion and even outer coercion (at times) to offer a public invitation to salvation in corporate worship settings.

Summary

"Clarity—things said with conviction" emerges as a broad category in the analysis of participants' beliefs and perceptions about corporate worship behaviors. Participants express some convictions with noticeable passion and an unwillingness to compromise. When it comes to corporate worship, pastors and other church leaders communicate some strong views and intransigent positions. Underneath this broad category of "clarity—things said with conviction," four themes—*sola Scriptura*; the prominence of preaching; edification, not evangelism, and compelled to give invitations—are also uncovered. The influence of these themes is evident as participants sought to communicate their enthusiasm for and commitment to certain aspects of corporate worship in the church.

Ambiguity—Things Said with Hesitancy

Under a second broad category of responses to the interview questions, the participants said some things with a degree of hesitancy. Through both their exact words and manner of communication, interviewees seemed cautious to speak definitively. Even by their admission,

they spoke of personal preferences in corporate worship that do not have biblical support but are simply based on inclination and/or tradition. Among these more ambiguous views, three themes emerge: (1) an ignorance of history, (2) a reticence toward liturgy, and (3) the role of sincerity.

History

Ignorant of church history

First and perhaps most prominently, several of the interview participants express a degree of hesitancy to talk about church history—specifically, the Protestant Reformation and the First and Second Great Awakenings in the United States. In answer to Interview Question #2—"What impact did the Protestant Reformation have on corporate worship practices?"—Participant #1 says, "I knew you would ask me some history questions. I am the world's worst history [student]." Later, in response to Interview Question # 7, he responds, "I don't know how the American revivals changed [corporate worship]. I don't know. I mean, I've heard of the American revivals, but I don't know what actually happened in them. You'd have to enlighten me there." Likewise, Participant #2 responds, "I'm no church historian…I forgot everything I had in…American church history class." Participant #3 confesses, "I am not into the history of that. I can make assumptions,…but I would be very ill-prepared to speak to the issue of the Reformation in relationship to worship." About the historical singing of Psalms in corporate worship, Participant #4 confesses, "I'm personally not real familiar with that." Participant #7 places the blame on himself: "I haven't read much about American revivals." Participant #8 similarly answers with some hesitancy: "Without going back to my college stuff and rereading…just off the top of my head…" In response to both historical questions, Participant #9 repeatedly says, "I don't know" and concludes with "I don't have any historical knowledge." Finally, Participant #10 offers the common sentiment: "I'm not a historian." Also, regarding

historical "formal liturgies," he acknowledges, "I'm not familiar [with them]." Within each of these responses, the researcher senses a great deal of hesitancy and even a bit of embarrassment on the part of the participants. These perceptions suggest that the interview participants do value the profound effect of historical events on the modern-day church, and they feel somewhat guilty for their lack of education and/or failure to remember.

Influence of the Protestant Reformation

Despite expressing feelings of inadequacy, all of the participants did communicate their perceptions about the impact of the Protestant Reformation on corporate worship behaviors (see figure 3). To begin, they see a general return to the sufficiency and authority of Scripture in the context of corporate worship. Participants #4, #6, #10, and #12 speak about the Reformation's "focus" on Scripture, which led to a renewed emphasis in worship on the reading and preaching of the Bible rather than a reliance on church tradition. Participants #5 and #9 refer to this as a return to the "true Gospel," emphasizing the doctrine of salvation as a significant change in the language of corporate worship. Second, because they see a general return to Scripture resulting from the Reformation, some participants also observe a rejection of unbiblical traditions in corporate worship. Participant #6 asserts:

> It [the Reformation] meant the removal of a lot of the traditions and superstitions that had so much developed around Catholicism. So, the whole sacramental system and the sensual things that were really part of the system including obviously the focus on the mass…but also even the veneration of bones and many weird things that they were doing. So, I think a lot of that obviously dropped off.

Participant #12 sees a similar result suggesting that a return to Scripture, as seen in the Reformation, "would tend to strip away Roman Catholic liturgy or practices that were extra-biblical…unbiblical practices and approaches to worshipping God." Third, several participants note the significant change in language from Latin to the tongue of the people. Participant #1

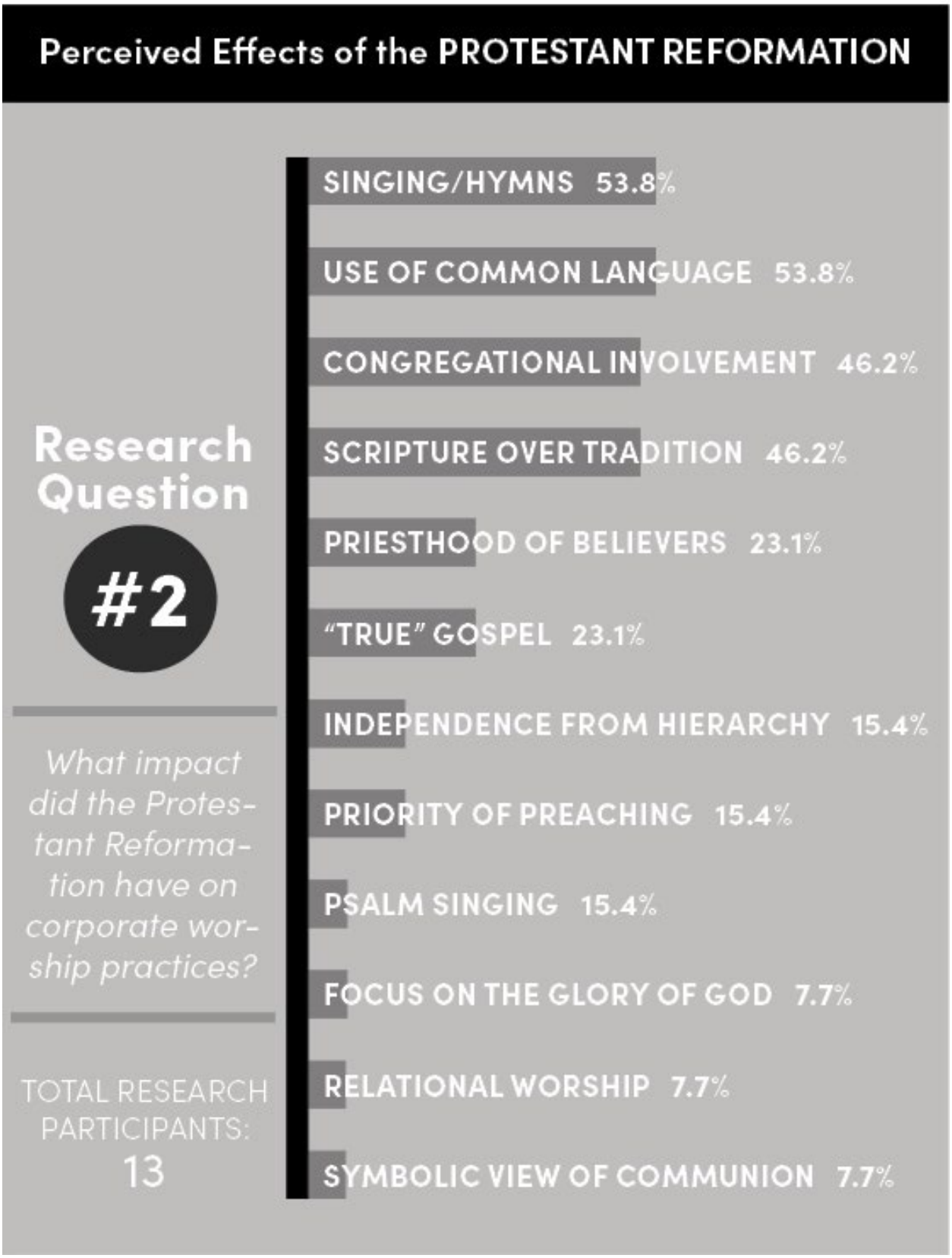

Figure 3. Perceived Effects of the Protestant Reformation

says, “The Reformation gave them [the common people] that opportunity to get back to…participating…by actually reading the Scriptures [and] singing songs in their own language that they understood.” Also, Participant #4 sees the “use of everyday language for worship” as a major change. Likewise, Participant #5 identifies “the translation of the Bible…out of Latin” as a pivotal moment in church history. Moreover, Participant #11 asserts, “One of the biggest things of the Protestant Reformation was…they could read the Bible now in English, and in reading the Bible, they could understand some principles they didn’t see happening in the church.”

Surely, this change to the “tongue” of the people led to greater congregational participation in corporate worship. Several interviewees perceive a blurred distinction between clergy and laity as a positive result of the Reformation. For example, Participant #2 observes, “One of the significant ramifications of the Reformation would be [that] the clergy/laity split was minimized. You now had the priesthood of believers emphasized, and so now that changes everything about who you are in a worship service…not going through a priest, but I have direct access to God.” Participant #4 agrees that the Reformation “encouraged the laity to become more participants.” Additionally, Participant #8 suggests that the Reformation acknowledged “the priesthood of the believer in the corporate worship service as opposed to it being restricted to observing what the priest did and simply being a recipient of whatever he felt like dispensing.” Finally, this renewal of congregational involvement in worship is demonstrated through the music of the Reformation. Many interviewees see this as another significant impact of the movement on today’s worship behaviors. Several speak of the appearance of “congregational singing” as a beneficial result of the Reformation. Participant #6 relates the influence of Luther: “I’m always fascinated by how Luther really started writing hymns and how his hymns actually are almost like a seed of all the kind of hymns that were written after him. It’s an interesting

study just to look at his hymns. But that certainly was a change—the congregational singing." Participant #12 agrees: "Luther…had a good understanding perhaps of hymnology or the role of song in worship." Participant #7 adds, "Luther seemed to use music to his advantage to help people understand principles…and even I think for evangelism for even some illiterate people because it was easily remembered."

Influence of the American revivals

Furthermore, in response to Interview Question #7, several of the participants express their perceptions of how the American revivals changed corporate worship practices (see figure 4). To begin, three interviewees feel that there is a significant difference between the First and Second Great Awakenings, and they communicate a somewhat negative influence of the Second Awakening on the worship behaviors of the church. Participant #2 answers, "Out of the revivals came a louder, more entertaining and emotional kind of preaching that stirred the audience and moved them to decision making… I think…that came out of the Second Great Awakening." Moreover, Participant #5 compares the two Awakenings: "The First Great Awakening…there was a call for repentance. There was a call for decision-making, but you don't have the emphasis on come-forward revivals and walking the aisles like you did in the Second Great Awakening." Participant #10 adds, "The First Great Awakening was more theologically grounded with guys like Edwards and Whitefield." Other participants, while not distinguishing between the two Awakenings, express a similar perception that emotionalism came to be a primary concern in corporate worship. Participant #4 believes that the American revivals brought an "emphasis on subjective experience." He admits, "It's not totally bad, but I can also see where it's led to some of the issues that we have today in the church." Participant #5 suggests that there was a new

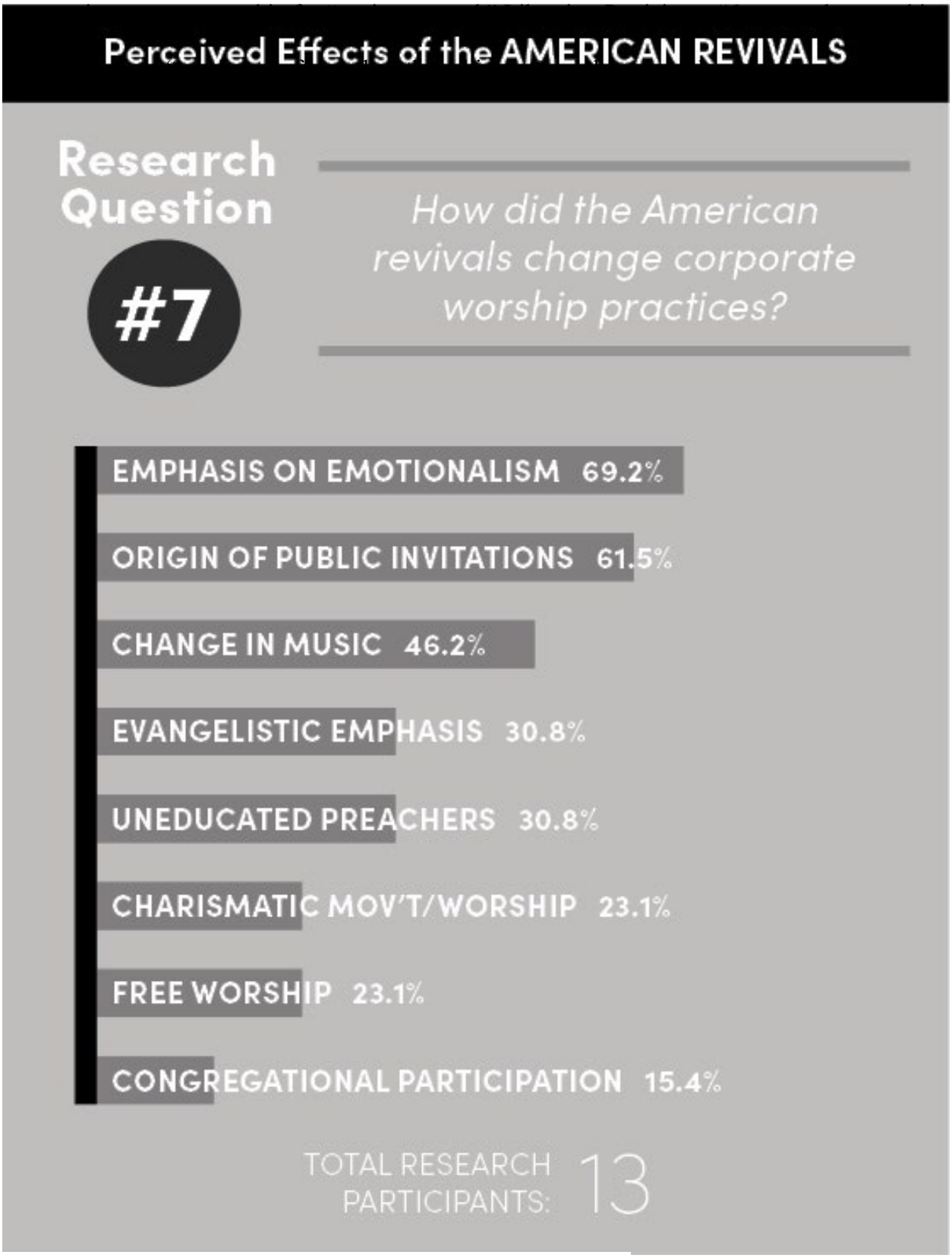

Figure 4. Perceived Effects of the American Revivals

emotion." Moreover, Participant #12 believes that "emotionalism" crept into the worship (particularly the preaching) through the influence of American revivalism. Two participants, however, see "emotion" as a potentially positive effect. Participant #8 contends that the revivals helped to "reignite the passion of the people and [their] participation." Participant #10 cites Jonathan Edwards, saying, "I understand that Edwards did writing on justifying the revival as the work of the Spirit and working through emotionalism and theology." Nevertheless, Participant #10 adds, "I've heard the Second Great Awakening was less biblical, more emotional, less theologically driven." Furthermore, in connection to emotionally driven worship, Participants #2, #5, and #6 believe that emotionally demonstrative worship and the "charismatic movement" was born out of revivalism. Participant #6 says, "I still think he [Charles Finney] created more of an emotionalism that still, I think, is with us today. It's been the foundation for, I think, what happened with the charismatic phenomenon. It's become an extreme now in many cases." Similarly, Participant #5 asserts, "Finney really brought a method…that open[ed] the door to a lot of abuses to people barking and falling… I think we're still seeing…today in a negative fashion through the charismatic movement."

Also, among the research participants, there seems to be wide agreement that the American revivals brought a new focus on evangelism in the corporate worship service. Participant #7 sees this change: "I think that the [worship] service became more evangelistic… There was more of a focus on evangelism and not just edification." Participant #8 warns, "I kind of recognize that in the revival movement that the invitation and the conversion experience became almost hyper-emphasized… You had to have an invitation for everybody to come forward and be born again every Sunday." Participant #10 paints it in a more positive light, suggesting that the revivals brought to the worship service an "evangelistic joy and emphasis."

Flowing out of a new emphasis on evangelism, several interviewees believe that the "altar call" finds its origin in the American revivals and came to be an essential part of the worship service. Participant #2 speaks of the creation of the "altar" and "crying benches"—places where convicted sinners were called to make a "public decision." Participant #3 speaks of this as "the greatest impact" of American revivalism on the worship service. In agreement, Participant #7 contends that "public decisions" gained a place of prominence in the service. Finally, Participant #12 contends that "invitations" were part of a new methodology primarily promoted by Charles Finney. To be sure, several of the interviewees reference Finney as a driving force behind many of these changes in corporate worship. Participant #2 states, "Who is that evangelist that we can't stand? Finney!...[He] had a significant impact on this idea of making a decision and calling for an invitation and moving the people to public decision making." Participants #3 and #5 likewise credit the infamous Charles Finney for the new evangelistic focus in corporate worship. Participant #6 explains some of the dramatic changes: "There was much more of a desire to produce some kind of an effect in the service as opposed to just teaching the Word faithfully and praising God. It became much more of a desire to produce an effect… Finney and others became almost psychologically manipulative."

Lastly, several of the research participants perceive the American revivals to have had a significant and positive influence on the music of corporate worship. Participant #4 contends that the writing of new "hymns" came to the "forefront" which "boosted again congregational participation and congregational singing." Likewise, Participant #5 sees "rich music" and "hymns [that] came from God truly working in people's hearts" as positive effects of the American revivals. Participant #9 speaks highly of the hymns of the Wesley brothers, saying, "I know that's affected us…certain songs [like] 'And Can It Be.'" Additionally, Participant #11

commends the American revivals for bringing "sweet sounding music" to corporate worship, as opposed to the archaic "fourths and fifths" of Renaissance harmony. Regarding church music, he says, "I think that the American revivals started a movement in the church to get away from the formalism of the Roman Catholic background. There's nothing like freedom to express without being boxed into one style." Finally, Participant #10, although he speaks about the positive influence of the songs of revivalism, confesses, "It seems to me, I would say, that it's possible they moved worship to less theologically grounded hymnology… In the early 20th and 19th century there was the new gospel songs being written… I can't really say that it pushed emotionalism, but that might be."

Liturgy

Second, several interview participants seem to express a degree of uncertainty about the order of elements in corporate worship. Their expressed beliefs seem to indicate a preference for flexibility in the ordering of corporate worship; however, at times, this preference is communicated with hesitancy and, by their admission, without any clear, biblical reasoning.

Reticence toward formality

When asked about the order of elements in corporate worship and the historical identification of independent Baptist and Bible churches as *nonliturgical*, several of the participants seem to equate orders of worship with unnecessary formality. In other words, to prescribe to a planned order is communicated as a negative thing. To begin, some interviewees see a connection between mainline denominationalism and ritualistic worship. For instance, Participant #1 says, "Baptists…[have] always been 'of the people.' It's a very grassroots denomination. It's not high society…[like] the Episcopals and the Catholics… Therefore, the meetings are more laid back, less formal… Liturgy would be very stuffy to them. Very

inhibiting." Similarly, Participant #3 describes a contrast between "Catholicism…[i.e.,] ritualistic formula worship" and "a more relational type of worship." Participant #6 also warns against anything "liturgical" because it "comes from Roman Catholic sacramentalism." Nevertheless, Participant #2 admits, "The fundamentalist movement is a reaction to denominationalism. So anything that smacked of denominationalism or their orders of service or the way they did the service was definitely pooh-poohed." Participant #3 agrees, saying, "[We] distance ourselves from the perception of being Catholic. I think that's the biggest issue." Moreover, Participant #12 purports, "The mainline churches took a good thing—the creeds—and subtly allowed those creeds to replace the fresh study of the Word." Once again, anything formal (i.e., the corporate reading of doctrine) is deemed mechanical—lacking sincerity and devotional fervor—and is seen as an unfortunate connection to denominationalism. Furthermore, citing his upbringing in Baptist churches, Participant #12 retells:

> The fact that I was actually out of college before I heard the Nicene Creed…probably wasn't good. But it was for a good reason that we never talked about those things because I now know there are churches that that's part of what they do every time they walk in [to church]…you recite the Nicene Creed, then it becomes meaningless.

Without making a connection to denominationalism, several other participants express the belief that liturgy promotes worship that is emotionless and lacks sincerity. Participant #4 asserts that following a prescribed liturgy is "just kind of going through the motions." Additionally, Participant #5 suggests that worship "steeped in so much liturgy" is "so mechanical." He explains, "The Baptist[s] historically rejected that." Also, Participant #8, in explaining why Baptist and Bible churches are historically nonliturgical, says, "It's a desire to prevent some of that staleness that can come from a liturgy…[using] words that most people don't use all that often. So, they're reading it but not really comprehending what they're saying." Therefore, he concludes, "Baptist churches tend to avoid it [liturgy] just to avoid things becoming routine."

Finally, Participant #3 asserts, “I don’t want to be a liturgical church that has no personal interaction with God.” Although not always clearly articulated or defended with Scripture, many participants feel a general reticence toward liturgy, equating it with mainline denominationalism and a lack of sincerity and passion in corporate worship.

Preference for spontaneity

Seemingly flowing out of this reticence toward any kind of denominational liturgy, several interviewees communicate a preference for spontaneity in corporate worship settings—that is, an inclination toward freedom in planning corporate worship—because it contributes to sincere, heartfelt worship. However, once again, in keeping with the overall theme of “Things Said with Hesitancy,” many spoke about spontaneity with a degree of uncertainty. For example, when asked Interview Question #6—“Is the order of worship elements important? Why or why not?”—Participant #7 concedes, “I have a question mark written there because I don’t know that I could actually answer as far as why or why not” (see figure 5). Despite some hesitation in answering, several participants feel that spontaneous worship is to be preferred over planned worship. To begin, Participant #1 confesses, “I’m kind of a little bit of a rebel in this category, and most of our older preachers and leaders don’t like this. But, I prefer there to be a variety that is done different ways in each service. It keeps it fresh… I do think it’s important that the order may be even spontaneous at times.” Participant #2 similarly uses the word *spontaneous* to describe corporate worship, and he adds that it should be “extemporaneous”—i.e., spoken or done without preparation. Participant #6 suggests that “there is a certain latitude” that church leaders have in planning worship; Participant #7 agrees, “There’s some latitude in the way that we can do it.” Others more clearly articulate how spontaneity, they believe, contributes to the spirit of acceptable worship. For instance, Participant #4 relates how spontaneous worship plays

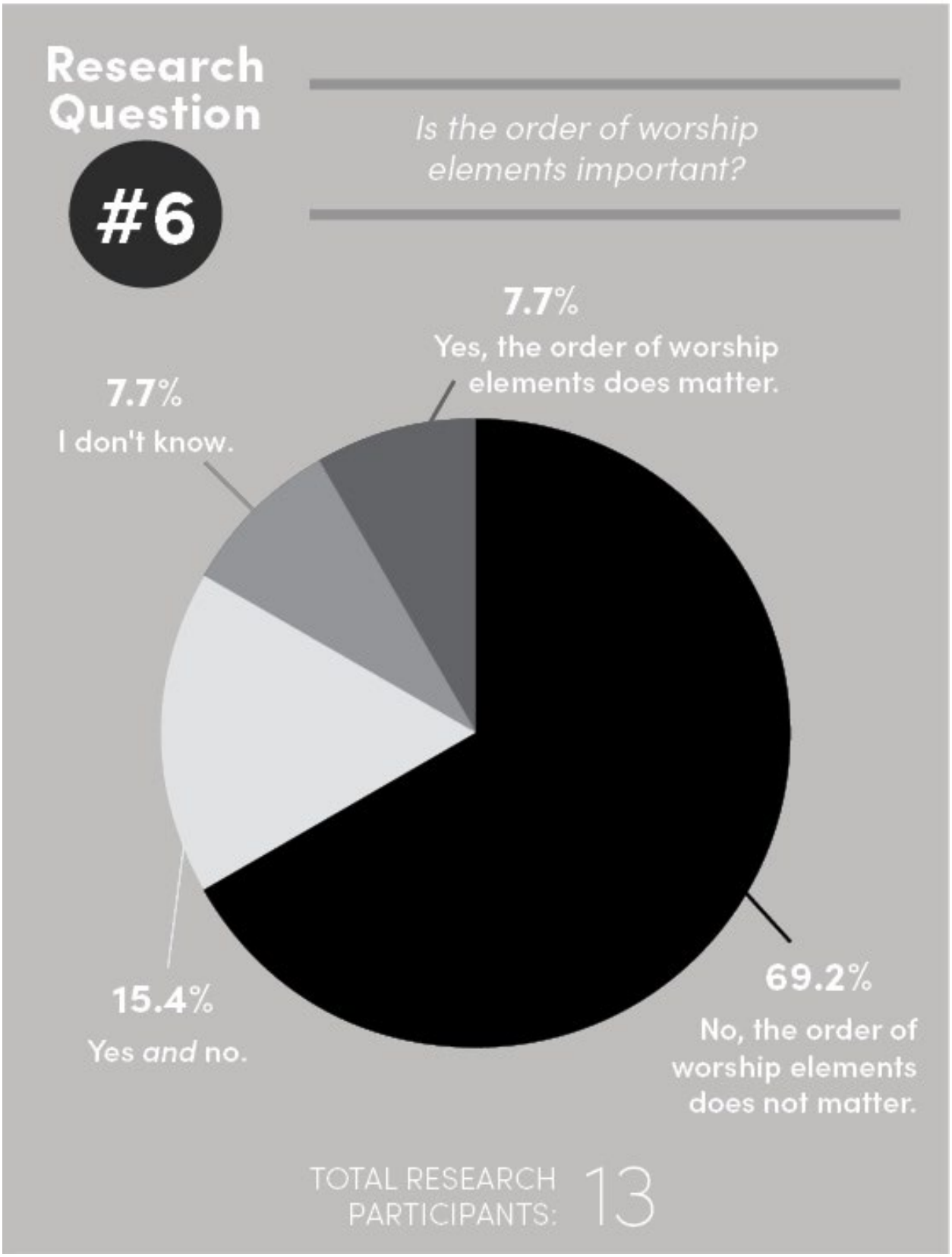

Figure 5. Order of Worship Elements

a role at his church. He says, “I see value in mixing things… People get locked into routine. And so we purposely set out to disrupt that to a point, and sometimes it would just be small things and how we did changing the order of the service but there were a few occasions where God just laid it on my heart [to change the order]…. We’re not as willing to experiment with the order of things as maybe we should be… It can be too binding when we get stuck on order.” Along the same lines, Participant #8 maintains that a level of spontaneity is essential to “maintain freshness.” Despite communicating a preference for spontaneity in corporate worship, one participant suggests free worship is often disguised as a failure to plan. He says, “A lot of guys use that spontaneity to cover their lack of preparation. They’ll even say this: ‘God led me. The Holy Spirit’s leading.’ No, the fact of the matter is you’re making this up as you go.”

Finally, it is significant that a majority of the research participants (12 out of 13) communicate (in varying degrees) that the order of worship elements is not important. In answering Interview Question #6—“Is the order of worship elements important?”—the following responses were given:

> “I don’t think the order’s important.” (Participant #1)
>
> “In Scripture, no orders of service are present… I don’t think there’s a biblical model of an order of service.” (Participant #2)
>
> “It matters if you’re doing it the wrong way…but not really.” (Participant #3)
>
> “I guess I would go with ‘no.’ [Order is not important.]” (Participant #4)
>
> “I think the order is not as necessarily important… Sometimes we hold to a very rigid order in our services that is not necessarily required.” (Participant #5)
>
> “I think it’s interesting that God doesn’t set in the Scripture ten steps to an ordered service.” (Participant #6)
>
> “I don’t know that I could actually answer.” (Participant #7)
>
> “I don’t think the Bible gives a mandate of how you’re to do it.” (Participant #9)

> "Yes and no." (Partcipant #10)
>
> "I don't think there is a prescribed order." (Participant # 11)
>
> "At the end of the day, I would have to say biblically, it's not really important." (Participant #12)
>
> "I don't know that I can exactly put those [elements of worship] in a hierarchy… To me, it doesn't matter a whole lot I guess." (Participant #13)

While some of the responses were more ambiguous—two respond with a variation of "yes *and* no"—it is evident that the majority of participants, at the very least, prefer a degree of freedom to design worship services (1) apart from a Scripturally mandated order and (2) under the Spirit's leading and the congregation's cues.

Importance of planning

Despite the above-mentioned subthemes of "reticence toward formality" and "preference for spontaneity," several interviewees also communicate the importance of planning in the context of corporate worship. In other words, some speak favorably about the contemporary need for a more intentional development of worship services within independent Baptist and Bible churches. First, although there appears to be an overriding aversion toward formality in corporate worship, some of the research participants speak positively about liturgy when simply defined as a structured order for corporate worship. Participant #7, in considering the identity of Baptist and Bible churches as nonliturgical, declares, "I frankly think that we would probably do well to have some of that [liturgy]." He offers a biblical reasoning:

> That [liturgy] comes from the…Psalms… [Historically, they] used certain psalms on different occasions. And they used the same ones repeatedly, the songs of the ascent as far as in their preparation for the annual feasts. I mean we [Baptists] are rather random [in our worship services] other than when it's Easter we sing Easter songs and Christmas we sing Christmas songs.

In other words, Participant #7 sees a more structured design in corporate worship as beneficial, as opposed to a more "random" service order. Two other participants paint liturgy in a positive light. Participant #6 references the Presbyterians who "tend to be more liturgical…but in some ways, it's good… They have an order, and there is a logic there that makes sense." Furthermore, Participant #12 speaks favorably about planning for corporate worship. Although he initially answered Interview Question #6[4] with a "yes *and* no" response, he did conclude that "There is importance in the order of worship," contending that worship must be prepared and ordered accordingly:

> To plan a service is not an indication you're not trusting the Spirit's power. So, fully trusting the Word in the Spirit is not contrary to careful planning. "Lord, we're seeking you. What text do you want me to be sharing? What music do you want?" So, the planning is not devoid of dependence on the Word. These are not contradictory…I think the Lord is a Lord of order and plan, and He plans on things from before the Creation of the world, and He has a sequence in which He's doing things. Why shouldn't we? As His image bearers, we should be people planning in order.

Participant #2 agrees: "I would say he [the Holy Spirit] doesn't work through lack of planning nearly as much as he works through planning." Likewise, Participant #6 suggests that the church must follow Paul's admonition to the church in 1 Corinthians to do "all things…decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40).

Common sense of order

Also, emerging as a subtheme under "liturgy," several research interviewees speak about the "common sense of order" in corporate worship settings. Although many agree that Scripture offers no clear orders of worship, some of the research participants indicate that there should be a logical progression in the worship service. Participant #3, citing the Old Testament examples of worship, explains:

[4] Is the order of worship elements important?

> Most people aren't ready just to walk into the presence of the Lord. There is a process by which the priest went to the Holy of Holies. They didn't just walk in and go right to the Holy of Holies, and I think (in like fashion) as pastors, we have to sort of navigate that pathway by which there is the washing. There is the offering of incense. There is the sacrifice. There is the acknowledgment of the changing of the clothes, and the whole nine yards that prepares us for that in a way.

Others agree, suggesting that there is a preparation for worship that makes sense. Participant #2 asserts, "I would not want to just start preaching." Later, he adds, "I think there is something to drawing the people into the service when they come in. Who knows what mindset they're in?… I think we need to think about drawing them in and helping them get their minds clear and their hearts settled." In considering the place of preaching in worship, Participant #10 asks, "Is the congregation prepared to receive? Is there a fertile soil? Is there preparation to hear it? And I'd like to think that [the] other elements are appropriate to prepare the congregation." As a means of preparation, Participant #6 suggests, "Music has a very important part to play from the standpoint of setting the tone of the service and preparing hearts to hear the Word."

Throughout the research interviews, several participants express the idea that common sense dictates the order of worship. Participant #5 states that the order of worship is chosen "pragmatically" for its effect on the worshipers. Participant #9 agrees, stating that the elements of worship are ordered in "more of a pragmatic" way. Participant # 8 explains, "We want to try to give each element [of worship] its due consideration and maximize the potential." Finally, Participant #6 claims, "There is obviously a logic and order to any service." Furthermore, he consistently uses the word *simple* to describe worship that makes sense. He says, "We keep it really simple… The Baptist and Anabaptist tradition…was to go back to the simplicity of the New Testament model." Many of the above-referenced statements suggest (despite their hesitancy to affirm it in Interview Question #6[5]) that the order of worship *is* important. Although

[5] Is the order of worship elements important?

little Scriptural corroboration is given, these research participants seem to feel that there is a logical order of progression—an order dictated by common sense.

Elements of worship

Finally, as a subtheme under "liturgy," there is a wide spectrum of answers offered in response to Interview Question #4—"What elements of worship do you feel are biblically required?" Among the interviewees, thirteen unique elements are given: (1) baptism, (2) benediction, (3) communion (the Lord's Supper), (4) corporate reading of Scripture, (5) drawing near to God, (6) fellowship, (7) giving, (8) meditation, (9) music/singing, (10) prayer, (11) preaching/teaching, (12) public testimony, and (13) special music (see figure 6).

Sincerity

Some of the research participants convey some hesitancy and ambiguity about the role of sincerity in corporate worship. Interview Question #3 asks the participants, "How can you determine if acceptable worship is taking place?" In response, several participants seem to consider sincerity as all-important. Participant #3 explains that worship "begins at the heart level and if it doesn't begin at the heart level then that's not true worship." Later, he suggests that sincerity in worship is more important than any other factor. He says, "The heart response [in worship] is of the greater priority because if it's not genuine it doesn't really matter if it's even true." However, some hesitancy is expressed because he adds, "I'm not trying to put the heart of man above the truth of God, but the reality of it being genuinely from the heart of man, I think is something the Lord is looking for." Additionally, Participant #5 asserts the importance of sincerity: "Worship starts in the heart first." He offers some biblical support:

> We have examples in the Old Testament where they were bringing sacrifices. They were doing all the quote-unquote right things…outwardly [but] God says (through the prophets), "I haven't accepted anything because your heart's not there." I think Jesus is

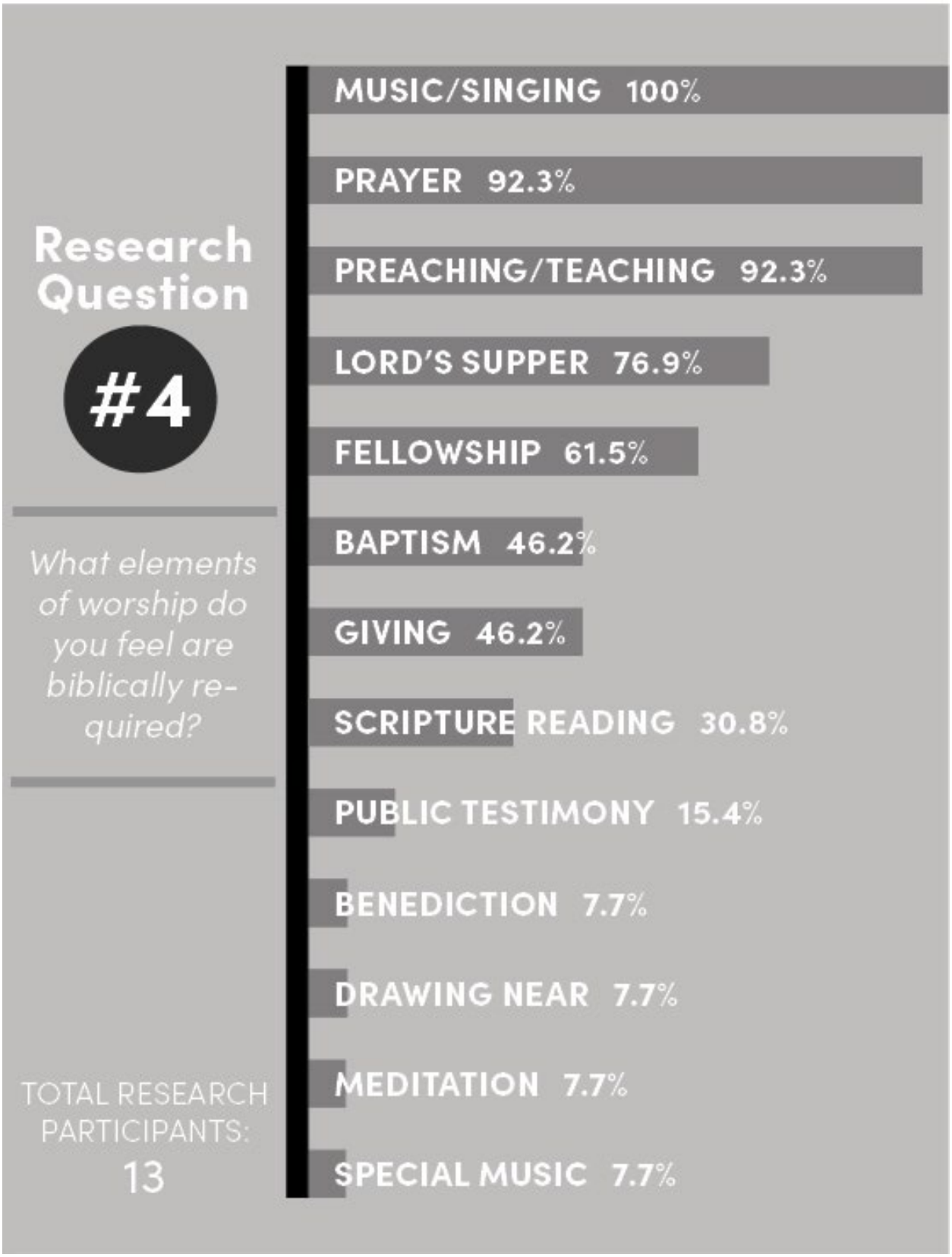

Figure 6. Biblical Elements of Corporate Worship

> touching on that with the Pharisees as well. So there's a balance. We've got to be real careful that we don't hold too much emphasis on outward measures or signs.

Participant #10 agrees, suggesting that worship must entail "an integrity between my outside expression and who I really am on the inside." He continues, "I'd say sincerity is important to the degree that over and over again the Lord rebukes hypocritical worship." Nevertheless, he does offer a caveat: "Sincerity would not be the lone measurement [of acceptable worship]. That is to say,…you could be sincerely wrong… The Lord doesn't accept somebody merely because they thought they were sincere."

Other participants seek to offer a response that connects sincerity to a person's lifestyle. In other words, to have acceptable worship there must be tangible results in the life of the worshiper. To begin, Participant #2 asserts, "A life of obedience has to be the end result of my worship." He cites John 14:21, "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me" (English Standard Version). Participant #6 describes a similar understanding of acceptable worship. He asks:

> How sincere and how faithful are the people…in their personal lives? So if you see people coming to church who are singing and praying and doing all these things, but then they go home and they live like the world, that's not true worship—even if you're following a form. So it has to be a sincere worship from the heart—from people who are changed by the power of God. And, that's hard to measure, but I think to some degree you can see it from the standpoint of whether or not your people are living…the way they should be—whether they're showing the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. And, I think that ultimately you can't escape looking at that because ultimately worship apart from a changed heart is an abomination.

Participant #9 similarly asserts that it is the "fruits of their life" that reveal "true worshipers of God." He agrees that this is true "sincerity," a requirement for acceptable worship as explained by Jesus in John 4. Finally, Participant #12 also believes that an accurate measurement of acceptable worship is its effect upon the worshipers. In other words, if "the Word of God is being clearly taught, if it's being supported in the songs (that are also teaching)," then the

"saints" will be equipped. This will be truly sincere worship. Once again, there is a significant connection between sincerity and the personal lives of the worshipers.

Finally, a few of the interviewees expressed some connection between the overt expression of emotion and acceptable worship. Participant #1 speaks of emotional expressions in worship like "crying," "laughing," and "shouting" as "primal responses to what is actually happening." He says, "To me, any of that's an acceptable response." He asserts that these expressions are "acceptable worship because the people are showing their emotions." However, he does draw a line, saying, "When it gets to the point that it's distracting other people from worship and they're paying attention to you rather than the message of the song, the message, the sermon, or their own emotions; then that's a place a line needs to be drawn." Further, Participant #11 believes acceptable worship can be measured by several outward, emotional responses—saying "Amen," "clapping of hands," spontaneous "testimonies," and "praying out loud." Additionally, he contends that the "tone" of one's voice reveals sincerity. He says, "I could always tell by the tone. Not just what they say, but the tone of the voice in the way they say it." For a comparison of the differing perceptions of how acceptable worship is deteremined, see figure 7.

Summary

"Ambiguity—things said with hesitancy" emerges as a second broad category in the analysis of participants' beliefs and perceptions about corporate worship. Regarding certain influences upon corporate worship behaviors, participants speak with evident cautiousness and trepidation. Among these guarded responses, three themes emerge: (1) an ignorance of history, (2) a reticence toward liturgy, and (3) the role of sincerity.

Figure 7. Measurements of Acceptable Worship

Conclusion

Within this research study, the exploration of pastors' and church leaders' perceptions and beliefs about corporate worship behaviors uncover (1) two broad categories of statements, (2) seven themes, and (3) eighteen subthemes. "Clarity—things said with conviction" and "ambiguity—things said with hesitancy" emerged as the two broad categories of participant responses.

First, under "clarity—things said with conviction," participants confidently express their beliefs about corporate worship. Four themes emerge as deeply seated beliefs. The interviewees overwhelmingly affirm (1) the importance of *sola Scriptura*—a reliance on the Bible alone for worship practices; (2) the prominence of preaching over other elements of worship; (3) the necessity of edification, not evangelism in the context of corporate worship; and (4) a compulsion to offer gospel invitations in corporate worship settings. Several subthemes emerged underneath these primary themes: (1) the regulative principle; (2) the authority of the Bible; (3) a reliance on tradition; (4) the importance of preaching over music; (5) preaching—a first among equals; (6) different spheres for edification and evangelism; (7) glorifying God as a primary motivation in worship; (8) faithful to the Word,;(9) unsaved audiences in corporate worship settings; and (10) voiced frustrations about altar calls. Analysis reveals that the participants feel strongly and communicate freely their convictions concerning these issues related to corporate worship.

Second, under the category of "ambiguity—things said with hesitancy," the research participants express some perceptions and beliefs with a degree of caution and with a sense of uncertainty. This category of statements revealed three primary themes: (1) an ignorance of history; (2) a reticence toward liturgy; and (3) the role of sincerity. To begin, the participants

overwhelmingly express feelings of inadequacy regarding their knowledge of and/or ability to remember church history. This perceived inadequacy was manifested in two subthemes, which are tied directly to the study's primary research question.[6] Participants felt inadequate in their knowledge of (1) the effects of the Protestant Reformation and (2) the effects of the American revivals. While they did offer some perceptions about the influence of these historic movements on corporate worship behaviors, the participants were extremely tentative in their responses. Next, the research participants express a degree of reticence toward liturgy. Their responses here yield several subthemes: (1) a preference for spontaneity; (2) the importance of planning; (3) the common sense of liturgy; and (4) the biblical elements of worship. While preferring a degree of extemporaneity in corporate worship settings, participants also communicate the importance of planning and the common sense of an organized order of worship. With a high degree of unanimity, they can list seven biblically required elements of corporate worship—music, prayer, preaching, the Lord's Supper, baptism, giving, and Scripture reading (see figure 6). Finally, the research participants are hesitant in their responses about the role of sincerity in corporate worship behaviors. Within their responses, two subthemes emerge. Several seem to equate sincerity in worship with (1) a lifestyle of obedience, while others felt that sincerity in worship should be equated with (2) the display of emotion.

The above-mentioned categories, themes, and subthemes reveal the perceptions and beliefs of the pastors and church leaders interviewed regarding corporate worship behaviors, which contributes to an understanding of this study's primary research question. Furthermore, the participants' responses, both verbal and nonverbal, help to answer this study's subquestions: (1) What do church leaders see as the connection between corporate worship and evangelism?

[6] What are the core beliefs related to corporate worship of church leaders within independent, fundamental churches, and how do these leaders understand and interpret historical precedent upon corporate worship behaviors?

(2) How do church leaders describe an acceptable worship service? and (3) How do church leaders perceive the influence of historical precedent (specifically revivalism) upon contemporary worship behaviors? While the interpretation of these responses and the conclusions drawn concerning them will be discussed in the following chapter, the data gleaned in this collection stage of research reveals a consistent pattern of belief among the culture of independent, fundamental church leaders.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Introduction

Overview of the Study

The research concern for this study is presented in chapter one, specifically the need to investigate the perceptions and beliefs of pastors and church leaders concerning corporate worship behaviors among independent and fundamental, Baptist and Bible churches. In the introduction, the researcher proposes a possible connection between historical revivalism and the corporate worship behaviors of these churches. Despite claiming to have a high regard for the authority and sufficiency of Scripture in informing life choices and regulating corporate worship, these church leaders appear to have a methodology that is informed by other prevailing influences. While there are significant historical and practical components that inform and shape the church's worship practices, God's Word should have preeminence. Considering this perceived discrepancy, the goals of this research study are (1) to investigate the components that shape corporate worship behaviors, (2) to identify the core beliefs of church leaders, and (3) to understand how those beliefs shape the philosophy and methodology of corporate worship. The following central research question is proposed: "What are the core beliefs related to corporate worship of church leaders within independent, fundamental churches, and how do these leaders understand and interpret historical precedent upon corporate worship behaviors?"

Description of the Methodology

In chapter three, the researcher explains the particular methodology used for this research study. First, a *qualitative approach* to research was chosen. Due to its distinctive approach to complex social phenomena among a particular culture-sharing group, qualitative design is

particularly appropriate to this study as it relies on somewhat subjective, personal accounts and perceptions rather than measurable or numerical data. Furthermore, a qualitative approach methodology is well-suited to this study because it is (1) primarily dependent on face-to-face interaction with research participants, (2) thoroughly grounded in the literature, and (3) uniquely shaped by the researcher's knowledge, experience, and predispositions. Second, an *ethnographic design* was also chosen for this study because it (1) focuses on a single, culture-sharing group, (2) relies primarily on observations and interviews for data collection, and (3) provides a detailed description of the behaviors and interactions of members of that culture. Additionally, the current study is intentionally a *focused* ethnography because (1) the cultural group under examination was relatively small, (2) the period of examination was not long-term, and (3) the researcher had close proximity to the cultural group under examination. To gain data for the study, pastors and church leaders from independent and fundamental Baptist or Bible churches in the United States were recruited through social media, electronic communication, and solicitation to participate. Standard ethical concerns were discussed and implemented. Data collection was through a preliminary questionnaire and interviews, and data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. Finally, an intentional adherence to validity and reliability was maintained throughout all phases of data collection and analysis.

Synopsis of Chapter Five

In this final chapter of the dissertation, the researcher offers some conclusions about the possible connection between historical revivalism and contemporary worship behaviors. A summary of the findings from both the literature review and the research interviews is presented and correlated to the study's central research question to demonstrate that revivalism has had a lasting impact on the evangelical church. Subsequently, this chapter proposes several practical

implications for pastors and church leaders regarding (1) the importance of education, (2) the place of sincerity in corporate worship, (3) the purpose of the gathered church, (4) the inconsistency of gospel invitations, and (5) the biblical necessity of liturgy. Finally, in this chapter, suggestions for future study are offered

Summary of Findings

To answer this study's central research question—what are the core beliefs related to corporate worship of church leaders within independent, fundamental churches, and how do these leaders understand and interpret historical precedent upon corporate worship behaviors?—several means of investigation were undertaken. In this section of the conclusion, the researcher provides a final analysis and explanation of the data gathered from the literature review and the research interviews.

Findings of the Literature Review

Following chapter one's introduction, chapter two laid a necessary foundation for the study with a thorough review of the literature that describes historical revivalism. Three primary categories of data emerge that provide insight into the study's central research question: (1) the definition of revivalism, (2) the theology of revivalism, and (3) the profound and lasting effects of revivalism.

The Definition of Revivalism

First, this literature review examined sources that define the phenomenon of revivalism. This is a difficult task because the terms *revival* and *revivalism* have had various shades of meanings throughout modern church history; nevertheless, a consistent pattern seems to emerge from the literature. Early American preachers—primarily those of the First Great Awakening—

tend to describe revival as a somewhat surprising yet miraculous work of God; however, later preachers—represented primarily by the famed Charles Finney—view revival as dependent upon human action and something to be planned and expected. Within the literature that defines the historical phenomenon, this change in the fundamental definition of revival is articulated clearly by Iain Murray in his *Revival and Revivalism*. The distinction that Murray observes in history between man-driven *revivalism* and a God-initiated *revival* is thought-provoking and contributes to an understanding of this study's thesis.

The Theology of Revivalism

Second, the literature review of chapter two examines the theology of historical revivalism. Because one's theological presuppositions have a direct influence on one's behavior patterns, a thorough consideration of the core beliefs of the revivalists was essential. To understand why they did what they did (their methods), one must first understand what they believed to be true. As revealed by the literature, there was a general shift in doctrine throughout the era of the First and Second Great Awakenings—most notably, the doctrine of conversion. Earlier preachers viewed spiritual conversion as intensely personal and somewhat mystical, typically occurring privately as a result of God's direct intervention in an individual's life; however, later preachers preferred spiritual conversion to be a communal event, largely instigated by revivalistic preaching and revealed by a sinner's willingness to make some type of public demonstration. This fundamental belief about conversion affected corporate worship behaviors.

The Profound and Lasting Effects of Revivalism

Finally, the literature review of chapter two considers several resources that describe the profound and lasting effects of revivalism. There is wide agreement among church and secular

historians that revivalism had an enormous impact on the political and social fabric of America. Nevertheless, this research study was primarily focused on the phenomenon's influence on the evangelical church (specifically the independent, fundamentalist tradition) and how that influence continues to the present day—particularly its influence on corporate worship behaviors. Broadly speaking, revivalism contributed to corporate worship settings, an atmosphere that is decidedly spontaneous and evangelistically-driven. Flowing out of this new *spirit* of corporate worship, there were tangible changes to the *behaviors* of corporate worship, too—specifically music and preaching. Positively, the movement bolstered hearty congregational singing; however, it also negatively influenced the perceived function of music in public worship. Rather than simply being a vehicle for the praise of God (Ps. 150) and the edification of believers (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), worship music began to fulfill other purposes like entertainment, engagement, preparation, and manipulation. Last, it is evident throughout the literature that revivalism also had a dramatic effect on the preaching of corporate worship. Formal, scripted sermons with an emphasis on intellectual learning were replaced by extemporaneous messages primarily focused on emotional and evangelistic impact. Furthermore, the art of preaching underwent a drastic change through the addition of altar calls or public invitations—a distinct part of the service, popularized by the revivalists, that culminated the service and encouraged the worshipers to respond in a physical way to the preaching of God's Word.

Findings of the Research Interviews

Furthermore, in chapter four, the researcher provides an overview of the findings from the research phase of the study—i.e., what data was gathered through the participant interviews. As explained in this chapter, the study's central research question is answered through the

exploration of pastors' and church leaders' perceptions and beliefs about corporate worship behaviors. Among the interview responses, five deep-seated beliefs emerged and summarized what these pastors and church leaders believe about corporate worship. First, the research participants overwhelmingly asserted *the necessity of Scripture* in governing the elements of corporate worship and in directing the act of corporate worship. In other words, they believe that Scripture tells the church what to do and how to do it. Through both words and nonverbal cues, the participants displayed a deep affinity for and a resolved commitment to the Bible as the sole authority for corporate worship. Second, in keeping with the necessity of Scripture, the research participants also communicated *the priority of preaching* in corporate worship. It is spoken of as the most important element of corporate worship, even taking precedence over other biblically required elements (singing, giving, praying, etc.). Third, in attempting to explain the primary purpose of corporate worship, the research participants articulated *the aim of edification*. Despite the somewhat evangelistic motivation of worship popularized by historical revivalism, these participants communicated a primary concern for edification in the context of corporate worship. To them, the gathered church is primarily for believers. Fourth, the pastors and church leaders of this research study maintained *the centrality of the Gospel* in times of corporate worship. Although narrowly defined by some of the participants in evangelistic terms, the gospel is believed to be a necessary element in corporate worship, expressed primarily through public invitations or altar calls. While others expressed some hesitancy in required altar calls, they nonetheless felt that some type of gospel structure was necessary. Finally, in the research interviews, many of the participants communicated strong beliefs about *the freedom of structure* in the corporate worship service. Consistent with many of the changes brought about through revivalism, these leaders preferred a degree of extemporaneity in corporate worship. They

consistently expressed the belief that sincerity is best communicated in corporate worship through an order of worship that is free and not fixed.

Implications

Several conclusions and implications for practical application may be drawn from the research and findings of this study. While it is not the intention of this research study to reflect negatively on fundamental, independent churches nor to offer an analysis of the entire movement, there are nevertheless several applications to corporate worship behaviors that can be drawn for positive impact.

The Importance of Education

First, as the findings of Interview Questions #2 and #7 reveal, pastors and church leaders feel a profound sense of inadequacy regarding church history and its impact on modern-day worship behaviors. Several factors could potentially play a role in this perceived ignorance. There may, indeed, be a legitimate lack of knowledge due to memory loss or limited education (whether formal or informal). However, as this study's literature review demonstrates, this lack of knowledge cannot be blamed on the absence of high-quality historical resources. There are a plethora of good books in the field. For example, Iain Murray's *Revival and Revivalism* and William McLoughlin's *Modern Revivalism: Charles Finney to Billy Graham* are considered seminal resources on the history and influence of revivalism, while Joel Carpenter's *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* and George Marsden's *Fundamentalism and American Culture* are compelling accounts on the history of the independent, fundamentalist church movement. These should be required reading for all pastors and church leaders. Additionally, some related texts (written in more recent years) include the works of Mark Noll, most notably his *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*. Knowing history is

an important aspect of church leadership. The Bible is sufficient to address all matters of "life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3); however, it does admonish leaders to consider carefully the "old paths" and make decisions accordingly (Jer. 6:16–20). Bryan Chapell offers a healthy balance:

> We consider the history [of the church] because God does not give all of his wisdom to any one time or people. Slavish loyalty to traditions will keep us from ministering effectively to our generation, but trashing the past entirely denies God's purposes for the church on which we must build. If we do not learn from the past, we will lose insights God has granted others as they have interacted with his Word and people.
>
> Always we are to be informed by tradition; never are we to be ruled by it. The Word of God is our only infallible rule of faith and practice, but an unwillingness to consider what previous generations have learned about applying God's Word discloses either naïveté or arrogance. God intends for us to stand on the sholders of those faithful before us. He gives us a mission for our time, but he also gives us a history to prepare us for our present calling.[1]

In light of the abundance of resources available to today's church leaders, to claim ignorance of history is to disregard the existence of quality sources to remedy this concern.

Nevertheless, despite their claims of limited knowledge and memory regarding historical events, nearly all of the research participants spoke freely and somewhat frankly about their perceptions of the impact of the Protestant Reformation and the American revivals on the worship practices of today's church. In other words, they had strong opinions about events and influences for which they readily admitted they had limited knowledge. These responses could simply be an example of the well-known Dunning-Kruger bias—those with limited knowledge of a given subject tend to express their opinions decidedly.[2] Wanting to be perceived as knowledgeable in the research context, the participants may have felt compelled to speak with

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[1] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 16.

[2] Justin Kruger and David Dunning, "Unskilled and Unaware of it: How Difficulties in Recognizing One's Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-Assessments," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77, no. 6 (1999): 1121–34.

authority despite a lack of information. Moreover, this perceived sense of inadequacy could also reveal a degree of false humility on the part of the interviewees. In other words, they may, in fact, be more educated and knowledgeable about church history than they appear or are willing to admit. For example, a majority of the interviewees mentioned and seemed to be keenly aware of the negative influence of Charles Finney on corporate worship behaviors. Participant #2's statement—"Who is that evangelist that we can't stand? Finney!"—is especially memorable and significant because it reveals a rather specific knowledge about this historical figure and his influence on church behaviors. Ironically, Finney's penchant for emotionalism, spontaneity, and evangelistically-driven worship has been emulated by many churches that identify as fundamentalists. Regardless, the participants' admission of limited historical knowledge coupled with their apparent willingness (and even eagerness) to make judgments about historical figures and movements is thought-provoking and suggests, at the least, that education is lacking.

While ignorance of church history (whether actual or merely perceived) may be attributed to an individual's refusal to educate himself through reading, part of the blame may also fall on fundamentalist institutions of higher education—the places where pastors receive their initial preparation and education for ministry. Admittedly, a student's failure to learn or ability to be successful cannot always be blamed on his teachers or education; however, the prevalence of this perceived shortcoming and the candor with which is spoken indicate that this is an issue that warrants a deeper investigation. Among fundamentalist institutions of higher education, a simple perusal of program course requirements shows a potential gap in ministerial education. Although these institutions have certain general education requirements for history courses (e.g., Western Civilization, United States History, etc.), there are relatively few required courses that are primarily devoted to church history—e.g., courses about the Protestant Reformation, the Great

Awakenings, church councils, etc. Perhaps, the perceived inadequacy among pastors and other church leaders regarding history is an oversight at the level of higher education institutions—a shortcoming that could be easily remedied through a more robust curriculum that includes an emphasis on (or at least a more intentional exposure to) church history.

Finally, a feeling of inadequacy among pastors and church leaders regarding church history suggests that the fundamental church movement needs to encourage the value of education (especially church history) and foster an environment of mutual learning in the church. Unfortunately, fundamentalists have been historically known for a deemphasis on formal education, as evidenced by the rather unflattering epithet of the movement—"no fun, all damn, no mental."[3] From the perspective of outsiders, the movement's commitment to a biblical standard of holy living has been incorrectly perceived as "no fun," and its historical practice of evangelistically-motivated preaching is viewed as "all damn." However, the accusation that the movement is divorced from reason (i.e., "no mental") should be concerning because faith, biblically defined, is dependent upon knowledge (Rom. 10:17). To place revelation (God's written Word) and reason (man's ability to think and make judgments) on opposite ends of the spectrum is dangerous. One of the research interviewees, Participant #12, mentions this tendency among fundamentalists, suggesting that a negative effect of American revivalism is that "we inherited a bit of anti-education." He went on to describe the common sentiment that "seminary is cemetery." In other words, graduate-level education, fundamentalists contend, tends to produce ministers who are intellectually superior yet spiritually dead. While such perceptions are broad generalizations and are not the opinion of every fundamentalist, this false dichotomy

[3] Douglas R. McLachlan, *Reclaiming Authentic Fundamentalism* (Independence, MO: American Association of Christian Schools, 1993), v.

between devotional fervor and academic excellence has been widely perpetuated and has presumably led to the current state of the movement.

To remedy this mindset, several applications seem *apropos*. First, fundamentalism must allow and participate in robust and productive debate. Statements like "if you believe in 'such and such,' then you're just wrong" are not very compelling, nor do they foster an environment of education or Christlike tolerance. Instead, church leaders need to demonstrate a spirit of humility, being willing to hear and answer questions on issues that are deemed controversial. Open and kind-spirited dialogue—the kind that the apostle Paul exemplifies throughout the book of Acts—fosters intellectual growth, critical thinking, and effective communication.

Additionally, church leaders should welcome honest critique and a higher level of accountability, recognizing that these are necessary parts of their role within the church (Jas. 3:1). Second, to encourage the value of education and foster an environment of mutual learning in the church, fundamentalism must recognize the importance of training believers in *how* to think not merely *what* to think. This is a matter of educational philosophy. Historical fundamentalism, with its intense drive for doctrinal purity and ecclesiastical separation—well-intentioned pursuits—has, at times, cultivated a cult-like, brainwashing view of education. Instead of leading adherents to develop personal convictions through the diligent study of the Bible and the application of sound hermeneutics, fundamentalists rely heavily on authoritarianism with an emphasis on strict discipline, rote memorization, and unquestioning compliance. Nowhere is this proclivity more obvious than in fundamentalist institutions of higher education requiring students to affirm preferential nuances of doctrine (e.g., eschatology, ecclesiology, etc.) to receive a diploma. While unity on primary doctrines is essential, demanding uniformity seems to (1) contradict a sound philosophy and methodology of

education; (2) confuse the difference between biblical conviction and personal preference—in other words, determining over what things the church will divide; (3) reveal an ignorance of church history where differences on secondary doctrines were tolerated; (4) encourage outward conformity without the critical engagement of the heart; and (5) border on an abuse of spiritual authority. Finally, to foster an environment of mutual education, fundamentalism must practice a greater magnanimity toward the younger generation. Indeed, the above-mentioned applications are related to this issue and reveal the failure of the church to encourage and build meaningful relationships between disparate age groups. Admittedly, the tension between generations is a perennial issue in church history, and both sides of the age spectrum are culpable; nevertheless, identifying this shortcoming and overcoming them are essential for the health and success of the modern church (Titus 2:3–5; 1 Tim. 5:2; 1 Cor. 11:1).

The Place of Sincerity in Corporate Worship

While this research study's participants seem to recognize the importance of sincerity in corporate worship, several interviewees mistakenly believe that sincerity is the most important indicator of acceptable worship. For example, Participant #3 explains that worship "begins at the heart level and if it doesn't begin at the heart level then that's not true worship." Later, he suggests that sincerity in worship is more important than any other factor, saying, "The heart response [in worship] is of the greater priority because if it's not genuine it doesn't really matter if it's even true." Furthermore, as revealed in the literature review of chapter two and the findings of chapter four, there seems to be an illegitimate connection (in the thinking of independent fundamentalists) between spontaneity and sincerity. Historically, informal or spontaneous worship was viewed by the free church tradition as a sign of sincerity in contrast to the apparent pretense of a formal, liturgical service. Greg Scheer explains:

> Evangelicals are historically anti-ritual and anti-liturgical. This is, in part, a result of a focus on heartfelt piety in worship. Repeated rituals are too austere to support that goal. Liturgical patterns are not explicitly mandated in Scripture, making them seem the "vain repetition" of human invention. In the final analysis, ritual and liturgy simply seem too "Catholic." Protestants, and especially Evangelicals, have defined themselves over and against Roman Catholics and other "cultural Christians," and their worship follows suit.[4]

To inspire sincere worship, evangelicals tolerated and encouraged emotional and physical responses. Many of these worship behaviors have become, as demonstrated through the responses to Interview Question #3, measurements of acceptable worship among independent, fundamental churches, too. Although over half of the research participants referenced Jesus' description of acceptable worship in John 4 as being "in spirit and truth," several articulated other rather subjective measurements, too—aesthetics, clapping, being God-focused, praying out loud, raising hands, saying "Amen," testifying, and even the tone of one's voice. These interview responses and descriptions of acceptable, corporate worship reveal some imbalances and dangers in the fundamental church movement.

First, the wide spectrum of responses to Interview Question #3 indicates that there is (at the very least) some confusion about what constitutes acceptable worship. To be clear, God does not accept all forms of worship—there can be little debate here. Whether it be (1) the worship of false gods, (2) the worship of the true God in a wrong way, (3) the worship of the true God in a self-styled manner, or (4) the worship of the true God in the right way but with a wrong attitude; God is not pleased when man deviates from the Scriptural pattern for worship.[5] Once again, according to John 4:23–24, God is seeking "true" worshipers; therefore, the modern church must biblically define and encourage this kind of worship. It must be a priority. Independent,

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[4] Greg Scheer, "Contemporary Praise and Worship Music," in *Hymns and Hymnody: Historical and Theological Introductions*, vol. 3*, From the English West to the Global South*, eds. Mark A. Lamport, Benjamin K. Forrest, and Vernon M. Whaley (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), 294

[5] John MacArthur, *Worship: The Ultimate Priority* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1983), 20.

fundamental pastors and church leaders need to regard the theology of worship as highly as other areas of doctrine and Christian living. A good starting point would be to include a written theology of worship in their churches' doctrinal statements—a priority that is widely practiced in Presbyterian and Reformed churches, but usually omitted in independent Baptist and Bible churches.

Second, it seems apparent that fundamentalists tend to have an unhealthy focus on external behaviors in corporate worship. Flowing out of revivalism, seemingly spontaneous expressions of emotion—crying, laughing, raising one's hands, shouting "amen," etc.—are often viewed as authentic indicators of the Spirit's filling and are equated with spirituality and maturity. In other words, these emotional responses have become the measurement of sincere, acceptable worship. For example, Participant #1 claims (without any biblical support) that "acceptable worship" is when "the people are showing their emotions." While outward behaviors do matter and may reveal a degree of sincerity, they cannot be the sole measurement of acceptable worship. Once again, there must be a balance. True worshipers will worship in "spirit" and in "truth." Both priorities are essential; therefore, mere emotionalism (whether real or contrived) cannot be the single criterion. James Boice cautions:

> We must not confuse worship with feeling, for worship does not originate with the soul any more than it originates with the body. The soul is the seat of our emotions. It may be the case, and often is, that the emotions are stirred in real worship. At times tears fill the eyes or joy floods the heart. But, unfortunately, it is possible for these things to happen and still no worship to be there. It is possible to be moved by a song or by oratory and yet not come to a genuine awareness of God and fuller praise of his ways and nature.[6]

Furthermore, outward expressions of emotion may not always be an accurate measurement of the worshiper's heart. While Scripture does explain that behavior is an overflow of the heart (Matt. 12:34), it also cautions—due to the deceitfulness of the human heart (Jer. 17:9)—against

[6] James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John, Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 1985), 296–97.

duplicitousness. Of course, the negative example of the Pharisees comes to mind. Jesus frequently and vociferously confronted their insincerity, condemning them as "whitewashed tombs" who "outwardly appear righteous to others, but within…are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Matt. 23:27–28, English Standard Version). Of significance, these condemnations are often given regarding public expressions of worship (Matt. 6:17; 23:23–24, 27–28). Additionally, the fundamentalist movement must acknowledge that sincerity is hard to measure. Factors such as personality and culture play a role in how individual worshipers communicate their emotions in a public context; therefore, sincerity can be conveyed in vastly different ways. As always, church leaders must remember that God alone sees the heart (1 Sam. 16:7) and determines who is sincere and who is not. Therefore, in light of these observations, modern-day fundamentalists need to identify and root out this pernicious form of legalism where outward behaviors—primarily spontaneous emotional expressions—are a measurement of inward spirituality. To berate congregations for not spontaneously expressing emotion is unwise and may be counterproductive because (1) it encourages outward conformity without inner reality, (2) it adds extrabiblical requirements to corporate worship, and (3) it fails to acknowledge the individuality of emotional expression.

Finally, it would seem apparent that the confusion regarding sincerity and spontaneity in corporate worship contexts is potentially driven by the blurred distinction between private and public acts of worship. As revealed by the literature review, there is a difference. Terry Johnson compellingly argues from Scripture that public worship is generally more "subdued and austere" than "physically demonstrative."[7] Using the book of Psalms, he explains that these differences are primarily due to the context of worship—public vs. private. He explains:

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[7] Terry L. Johnson, *Reformed Worship: Worship That Is According to Scripture* (Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 2000), 63.

> The Psalmist describes himself as groaning, crying, sighing, tearful, grieved, confused, lonely, afflicted, mourning, bent over and greatly bowed down, benumbed, crushed, anxious, sorrowful, despairing, sick, killed and slaughtered.… Are we to believe that because these emotions and actions are found in the Psalms that they should be expressed in public worship?[8]

The obvious answer is *no* These emotions are a description of the psalmist's private time with the Lord, not a corporate worship context. In other words, some emotions and actions are not necessarily intended to be acted out in public worship.

Furthermore, in her *Gospel Hymns and Social Religion*, Sandra Sizer observes a historical change in cultural norms, citing the Second Great Awakening as a prime influence. She describes revivalism as a "social religion, a new complex of religious practices which dissolved the earlier Puritan distinction between private and public religious exercises."[9] These observations from the literature indicate that fundamentalism's view of normative behavior in corporate worship may need an honest critique. Many of these behaviors appear to be conditioned responses that have no meaningful connection to sincerity or spontaneity. Furthermore, expectations for churchgoers to express demonstratively in public worship may be a preference based on culture rather than biblical mandate or example. It would seem self-evident that fundamentalists, who take a high view on the sufficiency and authority of Scripture and who pride themselves on accurate exegesis, would be able to identify the distinctions between private and public expressions of worship described in Scripture and implement these expressions in the appropriate contexts. Unfortunately, the movement may tend to follow the whims of culture in their expressions of worship. While fundamentalists readily identify and castigate the broader evangelical community for their "worldly" methodology in worship, they

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[8] Johnson, *Reformed*, 63.

[9] Sandra S. Sizer, *Gospel Hymns and Social Religion: The Rhetoric of Nineteenth-Century Revivalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), 50–51.

appear to be unaware of their practices which are based on historical and cultural influences. Ironically, fundamentalism needs a revival—a return to faithful hermeneutics, "rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15, ESV) regarding appropriate expressions in the context of public worship.

The Purpose of the Gathered Church

Third, this research study offers some clarification to the independent, fundamental church movement about the reason why churches gather together. As the interview phase of this study reveals, most of the interviewees believe that the primary purpose of the gathered church is edification, not evangelism. Several biblical terms were used to describe the church's purpose in corporate gatherings—edification, discipleship, equipping—and all of them suggest a reorientation away from the evangelistically motivated model popularized by historical American revivalism. Moreover, several of the research participants feel compelled to distance the independent, fundamental church from the seeker-sensitive model of worship (of the 1990s and early 2000s) as well as the modern-day attractional model of worship.[10] Significantly, all three models—revivalism, seeker-sensitive, and attractional—rely heavily on getting unbelievers to come to church to be saved. Evangelism, then, becomes the primary motivation for the corporate gathering of the church. Commendably, it seems that fundamentalism, for the most part, recognizes the shortcomings of these models of corporate worship.

Despite these positive and intentional shifts away from pragmatically designed worship services among fundamental churches, there remains a need for pastors and church leaders to affirm that the primary purpose of corporate gatherings is doxological—i.e., for the glory of God. Although several of the research participants did clarify that the church's ultimate aim is to

[10] Jared C. Wilson, *The Gospel-Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 24.

glorify God (citing key passages like 1 Corinthians 10:31 and Ephesians 3:21), their insistence on the primacy of edification in corporate settings reveals that worship services are still primarily man-centered. In other words, the church meets for the benefit of the people gathered. While the target audience has presumably changed from the unsaved to the saved, corporate worship is nonetheless viewed as a horizontal encounter (man to man) rather than a vertical encounter (man to God). The change may be well-intentioned however, it appears to be a pendulum swing that has failed to offer a biblical orientation to the corporate worship service. Instead of a return to a God-centered paradigm, many churches are merely offering another variation of man-centered worship. This is not to deny a horizontal element to corporate worship or to suggest that the worshipers will not receive some benefit from the service; however, these must be viewed as byproducts of worship, not the driving motivation of worship—as is discussed below.

The Priority of Worship

Several applications flow out of this research that will remedy the deficiencies of a man-centered approach to corporate worship. First, there must be a recognition of the priority of worship in the context of corporate gatherings. As suggested above, articulating a biblical theology of worship seems to be a low priority for independent, fundamental churches. This indicates that worship is not the church's ultimate aim; therefore, a change is required. Terry Johnson purports, "Nothing we do is as important as worship; no, nothing of a secular nature, like work, play, or even family life. Not even religious activities such as evangelism, fellowship, charity, or private spiritual disciplines are as important…. Questions about how to worship God are the most important of all."[11] Likewise, John Piper affirms the priority of worship over other well-intentioned pursuits. He writes, "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is.

[11] Johnson, *Reformed*, 15.

Missions exists because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever."[12] Unfortunately, many fundamentalist churches would disagree, as evidenced by the prominence of other pursuits in times of corporate worship (e.g., evangelism, fellowship, edification, etc.). Worship really is the most important thing that the church does, and that priority must be communicated more convincingly through the behaviors that fill the church's times of gathering.

The Regulative Principle

Second, to avoid the deficiencies of man-centered worship and facilitate a return to God-focused worship, pastors and church leaders must affirm the sufficiency and authority of Scripture in regulating the corporate worship behaviors of the church. Independent, fundamental churches rarely articulate or align themselves with the historical, Regulative Principle of worship.[13] Perhaps, this is due to its connection to reformed theology. Indeed, John Calvin was one of the first to articulate the Regulative Principle:

> We may not adopt any device [in worship] which seems fit to ourselves, but look to the injunctions of him who alone is entitled to prescribe. Therefore, if we would have him approve our worship, this rule, which he everywhere enforces with the utmost strictness, must be carefully observed…. God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by his word.[14]

Furthermore, as revealed by the literature review of chapter two, fundamentalism's connection to historical revivalism may be a factor in its reticence toward the Regulative Principle. American

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[12] John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1993), 353.

[13] For example, only two of this research study's participants referenced the Regulative Principle in their remarks about corporate worship.

[14] John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church* (Dallas: Protestant Heritage Press, 1995 reprint), 17–18.

revivalism strongly resisted any means of regulation because it favored a more spontaneous and free form of corporate worship—traits the fundamentalists (as revealed by this research study) also prefer. Regardless of these potential influences, it seems apparent that the Regulative Principle aligns well with fundamentalism's high view of Scripture and may foster a return to God-focused worship services. Succinctly stated, the Regulative Principle is merely a commitment to the sufficiency of the Bible (2 Pet. 1:3) and an affirmation of its authority to oversee and govern everything that the church does, but specifically, the way that the church worships God in its public assemblies (1 Tim. 3:15). Voicing agreement with the Regulative Principle, two of this research study's participants suggest that the church must renew a commitment to be faithful to Scripture in corporate worship. Significantly, both participants intentionally avoid the word *edification* and propose that the church simply glorify God in worship by heeding the directives of Scripture. Participant #10 emphatically states that if the church were more "Word-driven, Word-centered" it would be more "doxological" in its corporate worship. More fundamentalists need to think this way. To have truly God-focused worship, pastors and church leaders must have a greater concern for the directives of Scripture regarding corporate worship rather than other seemingly well-intentioned motives.

The Purpose & Byproducts of Worship

Finally, to avoid the futility of man-centered worship, independent and fundamental churches must clarify the difference between the *purpose* and the *byproducts* of corporate worship. As revealed by Interview Question #1, a relatively small percentage (38.4%) of the research participants communicate that "God's glory" is the primary purpose of the gathered church. In other words, they believe that worship is something other than responding appropriately to the revelation of God. This is surprising. Furthermore, like many within the

greater evangelical community, these interviewees believe that the purpose of worship includes one or more of the following: edification, evangelism, fellowship, an emotional lift, etc. While there are many good reasons and benefits to gathering as believers, these byproducts cannot be confused with the primary motive for corporate worship—it is for God, not man.

Confusion over the purpose and byproducts of worship is seen in the church's methodology of preaching. To begin, preaching is rarely considered an element of worship. Churches in the independent, fundamental tradition—as well as those in the greater evangelical community—consistently speak of worship as everything leading up to the sermon—i.e., music, prayer, giving, etc. Indeed, the impression is given that the actions before the sermon are merely preparation for the preaching, suggesting (once again) that the service is primarily for the people—they need to be prepared to get the most out of it. Chapell concurs:

> That "opening stuff" is in most people's minds the requisite assortment of hymns and prayers that we need to chug through prior to the "real thing"—the Sermon. The "stuff" that fills the time early in the service is considered only the prelude to the Sermon, the opening act to the main event, or the pleasantries we need to get past so that we can get to the "meat of the matter."[15]

Not unexpectedly, in this research study, the prominence of preaching appears as a repeated theme among the participant responses who consistently speak of preaching as the "most important" part of the church service. While this is not a surprise, it does seem to support the premise that preaching is primarily intended for some purpose other than the glory of God—namely, to evangelize or edify believers. Furthermore, this study's literature review offers additional support for this allegation. History records that American revivalism vastly influenced both the content and style of preaching. As a result of revivalism, the preacher's job was no longer primarily to interpret and explain the truth of Scripture. Instead, his role was to persuade

[15] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 21.

people to make a decision—whether for salvation or some other aspect of sanctification. These fundamental changes to the content of preaching were reflected in the style of preaching, which came to be more concerned with making an emotional connection, being spontaneous and dramatic, and having an entertaining appeal (evidenced by storytelling and humor). These changes in homiletical practice are thought-provoking; however, they also reveal a subtle yet concerning shift away from a legitimate effort toward facilitating a God-focused worship service.

While the trend in modern-day fundamentalism appears to be drifting away from an evangelistic aim in preaching (as suggested by this research study), there is still an apparent overemphasis on preaching that is characterized by being relevant and practical—in other words, preaching that is primarily man-focused. Rather than simply seeking to glorify God through the faithful exposition and proclamation of truth, the aim of today's preachers seems to be, in the words of Robbie Castleman, more "personally therapeutic" than "biblically theological."[16] For example, including five relevant applications at the end of a sermon is commonplace—whether those applications are supported by the text or not. Of course, fundamentalists are quick to maintain that Scripture has "one interpretation, but many applications." However, this overt attempt to make Scripture practical reveals a potential misunderstanding of or disbelief in the inherent power of the Word of God. In defending the superiority of expository preaching, John MacArthur explains:

> Since the expositor's first concern is to clarify the *meaning* of the text, it may be granted that expository preaching is not driven by the same kind of obsession with illustrations and applicational formulas that characterize most topical and textual preaching. The expositor depends on the power of the text itself when rightly explained, and is assured that application of the truth in a personal and individual way is ultimately the

[16] Robbie F. Castleman, *Story-Shaped Worship: Following Patterns from the Bible and History* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 20.

> responsibility of the listener, in concert with the Holy Spirit, of course [emphasis original].[17]

Scripture affirms that belief will be evident in one's lifestyle (Lk. 6:45)—in other words, people will naturally apply what they believe to be true. Moreover, *all* of Scripture is practical (2 Tim. 3:16–17); preachers do not need to make it so. This is not to suggest that preaching never applies the Word; however, a couple of important reminders are needed.

First, the primary aim of preaching—like every other element of worship—is to glorify God, not evangelize or edify. Of course, this is not to create an irreconcilable dichotomy. Biblical preaching that glorifies God *will* confront the unsaved and challenge the saved. Chapell affirms the delicate balance: "God is the most important audience member for our worship. But if God were not concerned for the good of his people, his glory would be diminished."[18] Both God's glory and man's good are necessary components; nevertheless, without the overarching aim of glorifying God, preaching easily becomes a mere horizontal endeavor as evidenced by the rather man-centered approach in many churches. Today's church-goers measure worship—including the preaching—by the feelings it produces or the benefit it provides. The common assumption: worship is primarily for the worshiper—i.e., to meet his needs, to give him an experience, and to make him feel closer to God. Kent Hughes observes:

> The telltale sign of this kind of thinking is the post-worship question, What did you think of the service today? The real questions ought to be, What did God think of it and of those who worshiped? And, What did I give to God? It is so easy to forget that in going to worship our main concern should be "to worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24)—not to receive a lift for ourselves.
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> Therefore, it is important that we understand, in distinction to the popular view that worship is for us, that *worship begins not with man as its focus, but God*. Worship must be orchestrated and conducted with the vision before us of an august, awesome, holy

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[17] John MacArthur, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, ed. by Richard L. Mayhue and Robert L. Thomas (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), 356.

[18] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 119.

> transcendent God who is to be pleased and, *above all, glorified by our worship*. *Everything* in our corporate worship should flow from this understanding [emphasis added].
>
> What about our needs then? When we worship and adore God in our singing, prayer, and listening to the Word, his *shalom* will well in our souls so that we will leave with a glad sense of personal blessing—a great lift. But this is a byproduct, not a goal, a further evidence of the generous grace of God [emphasis added].[19]

While there is a need for future studies on the aim and byproducts of preaching, it seems essential that the church reorient itself toward a doxological motive. Spiritual change in the lives of worshipers, while commendable, cannot be the primary motive of biblical preaching.[20]

A second reminder about preaching is also essential. Preachers must avoid placing homiletical techniques (alliteration, outlines, application, story-telling, extemporaneity, etc.) on the same level of authority as God's Word. While preaching must be organized and compelling (addressing the intellect, will, and emotions), relying on manmade styles and techniques for success seems to undermine the authority and sufficiency of God's Word. Chapell writes, "The chief goal of preachers should be to say what the Holy Spirit has said in the Bible. The most dependable way to do this is to explain the meaning of biblical texts…. Making sure God's people know what God has said and why he has said it is the tandem goal of expository preaching."[21] Once again, ambiguity on these matters tends to create a rather man-focused sermon and further confuses the difference between the purpose and byproducts of worship.

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[19] R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 134.

[20] Furthermore, spiritual change cannot be the measurement of successful preaching because worshipers can resist the truth and refuse change.

[21] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 234.

The Inconsistency of Altar Calls

Fourth, by way of implications in this research study, there appears to be a need for a better understanding of the appropriateness and practice of altar calls in the context of corporate worship. By *altar call*, the researcher is speaking about that element in a corporate worship service (distinct from the sermon) where the listeners are encouraged to respond physically to the preaching of God's Word whether that be raising one's hand, walking the aisle, kneeling at the front, or going to a specially designated place. While there are many variations, the common denominator seems to be some physical action that either demonstrates, or will lead to, a spiritual decision. To be sure, the proclamation of God's Word always calls for a response. There can be no debate here. Invitations to salvation abound in Scripture; however, as a distinct element of corporate worship, altar calls have often been a matter of dispute. While controversy alone does not offer a negative judgment on the practice, it does suggest that both sides have strong feelings and that the issue may not be clearly delineated in Scripture and therefore warrants careful consideration.

Several recently written books—on both sides of the debate—indicate that the discussion over altar calls is ongoing, which is good (1 Thess. 5:21). First, Jason Cherry's *The Culture of Conversionism and the History of the Altar Call* (2016) offers a critical assessment, questioning the efficacy of the practice as well as the potential drawbacks and lack of biblical support. However, on the other side, O.S. Hawkins and Matt Queen, in their recently published *The Gospel Invitation: Why Publicly Inviting People to Receive Christ Still Matters* (2023), contend that "the spirit and essence of public invitations have been practiced in many different forms since humans first sinned against God.… The Bible recounts numerous occasions in which God and His messengers publicly called people to obey Him immediately in the Old and New

Testaments alike."[22] Despite concerns over manipulation and emotionalism, Hawkins and Queen contend that altar calls are thoroughly biblical and should be frequently used in worship. Third, Erroll Hulse's *The Great Invitation: Examining the Use of the Altar Call in Evangelism* seems to provide a more centrist position than the preceding two books. While Hulse offers a somewhat straightforward and critical assessment of the revivalistic origin and the unsuitability of altar calls in corporate worship, he does so in a compelling way and contends that the church must be aggressively evangelistic. Regardless of one's stance on the issue, all three of these books are essential resources in the ongoing debate over the propriety of altar calls in corporate worship. This is a discussion in which pastors and church leaders must participate.

Methodology over Theology

As one considers this debate in the independent, fundamental church movement, some applications seem relevant. First, pastors and church leaders need to wrestle with and clarify the connections between theology, philosophy, and methodology. Broadly speaking, few within the fundamentalist realm would disagree that theology (what one believes) informs philosophy (why one believes) which, in turn, produces methodology (what one does). Indeed, fundamentalists claim to "hold to a set of beliefs which transcend all cultures and all times because those beliefs are sourced in the eternal Word of God."[23] Furthermore, they aspire to have "behavioral patterns" that match their "belief system."[24] Despite these stated intentions, there appears to be a reversal of this chronological progression—i.e., theology *first*, then methodology. At times, what churches do (their methodology) appears to dictate what they believe (theology and philosophy).

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[22] O. S. Hawkins and Matt Queen, *The Gospel Invitation: Why Publicly Inviting People to Receive Christ Still Matters* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2023), 1–2.

[23] McLachlan, *Reclaiming*, ix.

[24] McLachlan, *Reclaiming*, ix.

In other words, their fundamental beliefs are modified to accomplish a more immediate goal. For example, as the interview phase of this research study reveals, many pastors and church leaders believe that "edification, not evangelism" is the primary purpose of the gathered church, yet (at the same time) they feel compelled to culminate the corporate worship service with an evangelistic altar call. This compulsion is more keenly felt in contexts where it is perceived that "unsaved people" are present. In other words, church leaders are willing to set aside their theology (worship is for believers) in favor of a particular methodology (altar calls are essential for unbelievers). As explored in the literature review of chapter two, edification and evangelism are not mutually exclusive goals in corporate worship; however, this observed willingness to allow the methodology to trump theology is concerning. Of course, this is not to suggest that altar calls are inappropriate or should never be employed in the context of a worship service. It is simply a curious observation about the changing nature of methodology and its tendency to overwhelm belief systems. Jason Cherry observes a similar phenomenon among the modern-day church—an evident confusion over theology and methodology. He contends:

> Methodology, not theology has become the backbone of local churches. Ministry methods are viewed as more important than doctrinal statements. What a church does and how they do it are moved to the foreground. Why a church does what they do is hardly a question worth asking. Where once theology was the foundation upon which methodology was built, the conversion culture has reversed course. Now practically all methodologies, whether the altar call, children's programs, or something else, are the backbone of the local church. The idea that theology should have primacy over practice has been left behind even on the academic level, as seminaries often seem more apt to teach pastoral methodology than theology, with church growth as the goal.[25]

Once again, these observations suggest that the fundamental church movement needs to engage in this discussion, understanding the primacy of theology and how that informs methodology.

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[25] Jason Cherry, *The Culture of Conversionism and the History of the Altar Call* (Athens, AL: JEC Publishing, 2016), 116.

Defining the Gospel & Spiritual Conversion

Second, it seems evident that pastors and church leaders need to have a more thorough and biblically-nuanced definition of the gospel and spiritual conversion. Although these are basic concepts of Christianity, it seems that the root cause of this debate over the use of altar calls is a difference in understanding of these concepts. To begin, the research interviews indicate some variation in defining the word *gospel*. While a majority of the participants express a compulsion to share the gospel regularly in preaching, some narrowly define it as the good news of spiritual salvation—i.e., how to be saved. Nevertheless, two respondents suggest a deficiency in this common understanding. For example, when the researcher asks a follow-up question to Participant #12 seeking some clarification on the meaning of the gospel, he responds, "You're so not fair," communicating an awareness of and frustration over the narrow perception of the term within fundamentalist thinking. Despite his hesitance, Participant #12 goes on to define the gospel as the good news about salvation *and* "its outworkings." He says, "The gospel message is simple. Christ died and was buried, and He rose again. And, He did that for our sins. That's the message of the gospel. But how that works itself out, we have the whole New Testament, which then all of that is explaining the gospel." Participant #10 communicates a similar, more robust definition of the gospel. He says:

> I actually define the gospel as not merely the good news of personal salvation, but the good news of total redemption through Christ, which includes His coming kingdom. So, it's not merely about my personal salvation from Hell, which is an important reality, but it is the greater good news of global redemption through the coming Christ. Therefore, it's not just how to get saved, but how to live saved through the power of the gospel; and it's not merely [that] Jesus died for my sins, but He rose again and is the empowerment to live in victory today.

Both respondents seem to acknowledge that the typical understanding of the gospel among fundamentalists is deficient or somewhat limited, resulting in an emphasis on evangelism in the

context of corporate worship. As revealed in the literature review of chapter two, other church leaders have voiced a similar note of caution. John Nevin (1803–1886) observed this tendency among the revivalists who became inordinately fixated on salvation decisions. To them, Nevin claims, "Conversion is everything, sanctification nothing."[26] In more recent times, Bryan Chapell warns, "We need to be reminded that this gospel is not simply an evangelism plan; it is the message of how the good news of God's provision affects our whole lives every day. Not only is the gospel the narrative of God's past saving acts; it is the story of how those actions give us confidence for today and hope for tomorrow."[27]

Herein seems to lie the root of the issue: there appears to be a difference in the definition of the term *gospel*. As demonstrated in the research interviews, pastors feel strongly that the gospel must be proclaimed in the context of corporate worship. There can be little meaningful debate here because the New Testament abounds with directives for the church to preach the gospel (Mark 16:15; Acts 14:7; Rom. 1:15). For example, Paul ardently cries, "For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16, English Standard Version). Truly, to declare the gospel as the "power of God for salvation" should be the driving passion of every Bible-preaching minister (Rom. 1:16, ESV). However, as always, this is a matter of defining terms. One side, believing the gospel to be the message of "how to get saved," prioritizes evangelistic sermons and altar calls; while the other side, believing the gospel to be the entirety of God's transforming work in the believer's life from conversion to glorification, seeks to preach accordingly with an emphasis on discipleship and sanctification. This observed contrast may help to explain the insistence of some to perpetuate the methodology of altar calls.

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[26] John W. Nevin, *The Anxious Bench* (Chambersburg, PA: The Publication Office of the German Reformed Church, 1844), 60.

[27] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 100.

While there is room for diversity and variety in sermon topics and approaches, having an accurate definition of the gospel is a truly fundamental concern. The current debate over altar calls reveals some unnecessary disagreement here, resulting in a somewhat disunified vision. Clearly defining the gospel will offer some clarity of purpose and foster unity among fundamental church leaders.

Furthermore, in this ongoing debate over the suitability of altar calls, pastors and church leaders need to clarify the meaning of spiritual conversion. As indicated in the literature review of chapter two, both an understanding of and the language of spiritual conversion underwent some dramatic changes as a result of American revivalism—changes that appear to have been perpetuated among many fundamentalist churches. William Loyd Allen describes this "revivalist conversion motif" as "a brief conversion event with sudden onslaught and great emotional depths of fear and guilt yielding to joy in the midst of the social pressure of a highly aroused crowd lifted to ecstatic heights by communal rituals of music, movement, exhortation, and touch."[28] Additionally, Bill Leonard contends that revivalism maintains "a hyper-Arminian conversion event which placed salvation almost entirely in the hands of the sinner and his or her free will, but cut it off from the process of sanctification by making it a once and for all event."[29] With little concern for the presence of faith or repentance, this type of individualistic decisionism assures people of immediate conversion and seems to assume that little to no divine preparation or intervention is required for conversion—e.g., illumination or conviction. While the fundamentalist church movement has challenged (at times) this form of easy believism, the

[28] William Loyd Allen, "Being Born Again—and Again, and Again: Conversion, Revivalism, and Baptist Spirituality," *Baptist History and Heritage* (Summer/Fall 2010): 31.

[29] Bill J. Leonard, "Getting Saved in America: Conversion Event in a Pluralistic Culture." *Review and Expositor* 82, no. 1 (1985): 124.

emphasis by some on immediacy (assurance of salvation without fruit), environment (public over private), and an exaggerated appeal to the human will (disregarding any divine involvement) indicates that there is still a need for discussion and reorientation on this vital topic.

Perhaps it is significant that other church leaders, who still readily ascribe to the title of fundamentalist, have observed the dangers of this revivalistic view of spiritual conversion and are calling for a return to a more biblically accurate perspective. For instance, Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Plymouth, MN, articulates the following on its website:

> Another version of Fundamentalism that we repudiate is revivalistic and decisionistic. It typically rejects expository preaching in favor of manipulative exhortation. It bases spirituality upon crisis decisions rather than steady, incremental growth in grace. By design, its worship is shallow or non-existent. Its philosophy of leadership is highly authoritarian and its theology is vitriolic in its opposition to Calvinism. While this version of Fundamentalism has always been a significant aspect of the movement, we nevertheless see it as a threat to biblical Christianity.[30]

Once again, while preachers may have different nuances of belief and unique emphases in their delivery of the gospel, some details are essential and clarification on these key points is paramount. For example, the following points seem evident in this debate and demand general agreement: (1) in proclaiming the gospel, preachers must speak the "whole counsel of God;" (2) there is an inscrutable tension between God's sovereignty and human response in salvation; (3) sinners must immediately obey the command to repent; (4) emotional manipulation (coercion) is incompatible with the faithful proclamation of the gospel; (5) authentic conversion can be a personal, solitary affair regardless of place and time; and (6) there will be immediate and ongoing results in the life of the one who experiences conversion.

[30] "On Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism," About / Statements, Central Baptist Theological Seminary, accessed March 23, 2024, https://centralseminary.edu/on-fundamentalism-and-evangelicalism.

The Biblical Necessity of Liturgy

Finally, although closely related to the matter of spontaneity in corporate worship addressed earlier, the biblical concept of liturgy demands attention from the independent, fundamental church movement, too. With crystal clear clarity, most of this study's research participants expressed reticence toward worship that is planned or rigidly structured. They used the following terms to describe their conception of liturgy: "very stuffy," "ritualistic," sacramentalism," "denominationalism," "meaningless," "going through the motions," "mechanical," "staleness," "routine," and "no personal interaction." While these descriptions offer a somewhat negative connotation of liturgy, they also seem to indicate a basic misunderstanding. Admittedly, among pastors in the fundamental church movement, these perceptions are well-intentioned—a reorientation away from historical, mainline denominationalism with its authoritarian abuses and lifeless worship. However, reactionary changes often tend toward unwarranted extremes. Taken from the Greek word *leitourgia* (literally, the work of the people) and prominently used in the well-known Romans 12:1, liturgy is simply the public way a church honors God in its times of gathered praise, prayer, instruction, and commitment.[31] Robbie Castleman explains the common misconception of the term:

> The use of the word "liturgy"…focuses on how a particular group of people go about worshiping God. So a "liturgy" essentially is an order of worship…a rhythm that helps the worshiper anticipate what comes next in a congregation's service to God. Regrettably, the use of the word "liturgy" is sometimes misused as a shorthand for a particular style of worship. Liturgy is often attached only to services with an atmosphere of formality, such as services that incorporate written prayers, set refrains used as congregational responses, three hymns and a benediction. However, all orders of worship use a liturgy, all congregational worship is liturgical.[32]

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[31] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 18.

[32] Castleman, *Story-Shaped*, 34.

To communicate, therefore, that liturgy is distasteful or even unnecessary demonstrates a basic misunderstanding of the biblical term. Furthermore, despite correctly identifying elements of biblical worship, a majority of this study's participants also communicate that the order of those elements is not important. They prefer a degree of freedom in corporate worship (1) apart from a Scripturally-mandated order and (2) under the Spirit's leading and the congregation's cues. While the traditions and benefits of free worship are ingrained within fundamentalism, the assertion that order is "unimportant" seems without warrant and would suggest that some biblical clarification is needed.

A Sanctified Common Sense

In light of these participant responses, several implications for the ordering of corporate worship seem appropriate. First, common sense informs the sequence of worship in each local church. Despite arguments that Scripture offers no orders of worship, the New Testament does assume that there will be an intentional structure. For example, Paul specifies—without articulating the details—that corporate worship "should be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40, ESV). Rather than limiting Scripture to its exact words or prohibitions—i.e., there are no liturgies—church leaders must demonstrate maturity in applying the broader application of Scripture to corporate worship scenarios. In other words, they must use common sense. Terry Johnson compellingly explains:

> Right living rarely consists of simply applying the Bible's rules to circumstances. Rather, right living requires the illumination of the Holy Spirit and wisdom in applying general principles to daily choices. Pharisees limit the Bible application to the specific words—you shall not kill, commit murder, and so on, and ignore the broader application. But the broader application is where most of life is lived, and it is here that Jesus criticizes the hypocrites of His day (Matt. 5:21–48). Most of life is lived "between the lines" of explicit commands.
>
> Consequently, the Apostles regularly appeal to what is "fitting" or "suitable" or "proper," in light of Scripture's explicit commands, and yet without spelling out exatly what these

> things mean. They expect that believers will apply wisdom and discern what is appropriate.[33]

A similar appeal to pastors and church leaders is necessary: Scripture specifies that worship must be orderly; therefore, this task requires planning and forethought. Richard Webber observes:

> An examination of worship in both the Old and New Testaments demonstrates that worship is not thrown together in a haphazard way. Instead, worship is carefully designed to bring the worshiper through a well-ordered experience. In this sense the organization of worship is simply the means through which the meeting between God and human beings takes place in a vital, dynamic, and living way.[34]

Therefore, to say that the order of worship elements is unimportant seems surprising and reveals a subjectivity and pragmatism that are inconsistent with fundamentalism's high regard for Scriptural precepts and patterns. Both the elements of worship and how they are sequenced are vitally important because (1) worship reveals belief, and (2) worship forms belief.

Corporate worship *reveals* belief

Those who lead and plan corporate worship must recognize that behaviors and patterns of worship do matter because they accurately reveal what the church believes. In his book *Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition*, Christopher Ellis explains:

> The gathering for Christian worship is where Christians express what they believe in a forthright and explicit way. In worship, Christians articulate what they believe…. In this event of worship we find exposed what the Christian community is concerned about—what it values, what it takes for granted, what it regrets and where it wants to go. In this mixture of lofty thoughts and down-to-earth regrets, the Church states more clearly than anywhere else what, as a community, it stands for. Worship is embodied theology.[35]

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[33] Johnson, *Reformed*, 7–8.

[34] Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old & New: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Introduction*, revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 68.

[35] Christopher Ellis, *Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 1–2.

In other words, what people believe (their theology) will be exhibited in their behaviors. In worship, people invariably express (1) their thoughts and aspirations through prayer, (2) their heartfelt convictions by singing, and (3) their inner emotions and passions in specific actions and gestures. Through these behaviors, the worshipers are effectively demonstrating what they believe. However, not only are the *behaviors* of worship significant, but also the *order* of worship behaviors reveals what a church truly believes. Bryan Chapell contends, "Whether one intends it or not, our worship patterns always communicate something."[36] Despite an inclination toward non-liturgical worship among fundamentalists, this study's literature review and its research interviews seem to substantiate that these church leaders do have a significant concern for structure. For instance, their consistent placement of the preaching of God's Word as the pinnacle of worship demonstrates a degree of intentionality and priority. Of course, this worship sequence shows the high regard that fundamentalists have for the authority of Scripture. While some have suggested that preaching has historically been given an exaggerated place of importance, it nonetheless demonstrates the church's underlying confidence in the efficacy of Scripture to reason with listeners and compel them toward spiritual maturity.[37] In other words, even the order of the church's worship effectively reveals what it believes.

Corporate worship *forms* belief

Furthermore, worship behaviors and patterns are important because they can effectively mold the beliefs of worshipers. Several authors speak of this phenomenon. First, in his *Christ-Centered Worship* Chapell explains that worship behaviors, orders of worship, and even physical places of worship all have a powerful effect on the lives of worshipers. In other words, they

[36] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 18.

[37] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 129.

shape people. Looking at church history, Chapell contends that the elements of corporate worship were intentionally structured to reflect and teach a proper understanding of the gospel because church leaders rightly believe that "the medium is the message."[38] Likewise, Winfield Bevins suggests:

> As we come together week after week, we are slowly formed by the words, prayers, and sacred rhythms of the liturgy. The poetic words, the prayers, and the reading of Scripture leave an imprint upon our souls, and these practices shape us into men and women of God. The beauty of these rhythms is that they form us passively, almost without our knowledge. This formation is not contingent upon our mood or temperament when we enter the service. Simply by agreeing to participate and join with the existing structure and rhythms, liturgy has the power to change us.[39]

Further, Castleman claims that *all* of life is "liturgical." He writes:

> People have life patterns that greatly shape how things are done…. Human beings are creatures of habit. Good, bad, silly, meaningful or meaningless—habits routines, rituals shape our lives…. Life *is* liturgical, just like worship. It is no wonder that liturgies, the patterns of corporate worship, contribute more to the shape of one's faith than worshipers might ever realize [emphasis original].[40]

More importantly, Scripture affirms that worship is transformational. In 1 Corinthians 3:18, Paul writes, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (ESV). As believers enter God's presence through worship, having an accurate understanding of who He is and why He deserves worship, they will be spiritually formed into mature believers.

Connecting the Gospel and Worship

These thought-provoking observations seem to contradict the common sentiment that liturgy is unimportant. Because the elements of worship and the order of those elements matter,

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[38] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 17.

[39] Winfield Bevins, *Ever Ancient, Ever New: The Allure of Liturgy for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 51.

[40] Castleman, *Story-Shaped*, 77–78.

pastors and church leaders in the fundamentalist church tradition should consider the value of a more intentional, gospel-centered order to corporate worship. As quoted here and in the literature review, several authors write about the important connection between the gospel and corporate worship.[41] Robbie Castleman,[42] Bryan Chapell,[43] and Constance Cherry,[44] write compellingly about "gospel-shaped" worship. Using both historical examples and biblical patterns, these authors contend that the church's worship must be ordered around the proclamation of the gospel and that there is a logical sequence. Cherry explains the gospel-centeredness of biblical worship: "Every worship act in some way facilitates the narrative of who God is and what God has done for us in Christ."[45] Chapell goes further, relating the gospel to the actual order: "Worship that conforms to this redemptive pattern *re-presents* the gospel by moving worshipers down a path structured to parallel the progress of grace in the life of the believer [emphasis added]."[46] Having a gospel-shaped worship service entails (1) proclaiming God's acts and character, (2) confessing humanity's utter sinfulness, (3) celebrating Christ's perfect life and substitutionary death, and (4) responding in praise and renewed commitment. Historically, these priorities have guided the content and order of the church's worship. Chapell contends that a basic pattern for corporate worship emerges with remarkable consistency across the Christian liturgies: adoration,

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[41] Indeed, the researcher is speaking about a well-rounded, full-orbed definition of the gospel—not just evangelism.

[42] Castleman, *Story-Shaped*.

[43] Chapell, *Christ-Centered*.

[44] Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

[45] Cherry, *The Worship*, 25.

[46] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 118.

confession, assurance, thanksgiving, petition & intercession, instruction, communion, and benediction.[47]

To be clear, this is not to suggest a mandated, rigid ordering of corporate worship. As history records, a liturgy that is highly prescribed—through a worship or prayer book and by a hierarchal structure—tends toward ritualism and insincerity. The free church movement away from dictated songs, readings, prayers, and church year themes was a welcome change; however, this is not to affirm that order is unnecessary or unimportant. Unfortunately, the concept of "gospel-shaped" worship has been largely ignored by fundamentalism presumably in favor of its preference for spontaneity. However, as suggested above, an unwillingness to consider the formative influence of worship behaviors and patterns seems inconsistent with the movement's high regard for Scripture and tradition. There is a necessary balance, and the benefits are substantial. Corporate worship that reflects an accurate understanding of the gospel will (1) have a sanctifying effect on believers, reminding them of their salvation and motivating gratitude and genuine praise; and it will also (2) have an evangelistic effect on unbelievers, lovingly calling them to respond in repentance to the gospel. Both results will fulfill the church's ultimate mission to make disciples and ultimately glorify God (Matt. 28:19–20).

Recommendations for Future Study

As this study concludes, there are several, ongoing challenges to the independent, fundamental church movement that warrant further research, discussion, and clarification. Consideration of these challenges will enhance corporate worship, lead to greater unity and vision among pastors and church leaders, and ultimately bring glory to the Lord.

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[47] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 118.

The Connections between Theology, Philosophy, and Methodology

First, as suggested under the implications above, there is a need for future study and clarity on the all-important matters of theology, philosophy, and methodology. Defining these terms biblically and understanding how they shape one's view of ministry, especially corporate worship, seems essential. While there is wide agreement that theology (what one believes) ultimately colors methodology (what one does), there is some confusion because the inverse also appears to be true—what one does has a powerful effect on what one believes. Certainly, there's a connection between the two, but which comes first? Or, are they both equally valid in making decisions about church ministry? This confusion can be seen in the well-worn mantra: "Methods are many, and principles are few. Methods always change, but principles never do." The underlying premise is true—the precepts of God's Word are unchanging and can be applied across all times and cultures. However, are the changing methods of ministry merely neutral? Furthermore, conservative evangelicals typically have an aversion to philosophy, which they perceive to be an attempt to make sense of life apart from God. However, considering the etymology of the word and its favorable use in Scripture, philosophy is simply the love of wisdom. What role does philosophy play in ministry and corporate worship contexts and how is that related to theology and methodology? Further clarity on these topics is needed.

The Legitimacy of Revival

Although it was beyond the scope of the current research study, there is an urgent need for independent and fundamental churches to have a more robust and biblically accurate understanding of revival. As revealed in the research interview phase, many pastors and church leaders are aware of the abuses and shortcomings of American revivalism that were encouraged by evangelists like Charles Finney, but they maintain his definition of the phenomenon. Rather

than viewing revival as an unexpected and surprising work of God, they believe that the church should expect, plan, seek, and pray for revival. Some have researched and written extensively on this subject. Of course, Iain Murray's seminal *Revival and Revivalism* helps maintain a dissimilarity between true *revival* (a God-initiated renewal of purity and power) and mere *revivalism* (a man-centered, emotional manipulation to secure conversions). Also, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in his *Revival*, offers a comprehensive, yet practical, look at biblical revival. He communicates, first, the contemporary church's urgent need for revival as evidenced by an overall lack of spiritual vitality. Then, similar to Murray's work, Lloyd-Jones specifies that true revival is largely a supernatural work (instigated by God), supported through biblical preaching and humble prayer, and completely independent of emotional manipulation. Both authors offer some clarity on this issue; however, there is room for much more.

The Origin and History of the Baptists

Through the interview stage of the current study, it was brought to the attention of the researcher that some independent Baptists do not consider themselves Protestants. In other words, they believe that Baptists did not originate in the Reformation. One of the research participants claims that Baptists "were always outside of the Catholic Church." Interestingly, the famed Charles Spurgeon purported this same idea. In his written collection of sermons, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Spurgeon says:

> We believe that the Baptists are the original Christians. We did not commence our existence at the Reformation; we were reformers before Luther or Calvin were born; we never came from the Church of Rome, for we were never in it, but we have an unbroken line up to the apostles themselves. We have always existed from the very days of Christ, and our principles, sometimes veiled and forgotten, like a river which may travel underground for a little season, have always had honest and holy adherents.[48]

[48] Charles H. Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publishers, 1969), 225.

Understandably, the Baptists would want to distance themselves from doctrinal stances with which they disagree—e.g., infant baptism, sacramentalism, and works-based salvation. Furthermore, it seems reasonable that the Baptists did not want to identify with some of the less admirable traits of the leaders of the Reformation. Nevertheless, these observations deserve a more detailed study and a more compelling line of reasoning. Although the proposal seems to lean towards a type of Baptist elitism, there may be some validity to the idea that Baptists are the "original Christians." If so, what type of worship traditions were a part of these original Baptists? Do they have any continuity with historical Protestant traditions?

The Aim of Biblical Preaching

Preaching the written Word of God has always held a place of prominence in corporate worship. Indeed, this research study's participants overwhelmingly voiced their conviction that preaching is the "most important" element in worship. However, there seems to be some disagreement over the goal of preaching, especially within the independent, fundamental movement. Some strive for an evangelistic aim, maintaining a form of corporate worship popularized by historical revivalism; while others have a more didactic intention, hoping to edify and encourage believers. Biblical preaching entails both aspects; nevertheless, this dissertation contends that the preaching of God's Word should have a loftier, less pragmatic goal—the glory of God. Having evangelism or edification as the ultimate aim of preaching tends to create a man-centered, rather than God-centered, worship service. Additional research and discussion on the doxological objective of preaching are needed. How can preaching best glorify God? What hermeneutical approaches and methods of delivery will lead the worshipers to exalt God's character and person?

The Gospel Defined

Finally, as explained in this study's literature review, two writers contend that revivalism brought about a drastic change in the evangelical church's understanding of the gospel—i.e., spiritual conversion. Wm. Loyd Allen's "Being Born Again—And Again, and Again: Conversion, Revivalism, and Baptist Spirituality" and Bill Leonard's "Getting Saved in America: Conversion Event in a Pluralistic Culture" are insightful; however, a deeper investigation is warranted. Defining the gospel as more than mere evangelistic methodology is essential. Research Participant #10 compellingly insists that the gospel is not "merely the good news of personal salvation, but the good news of total redemption through Christ, which includes His coming kingdom." Although some are offering a broader, more accurate perspective of the gospel; further consideration must be made especially among the fundamentalist churches of America.

Moreover, in a closely related issue, fundamentalist scholars must also consider the centrality of the gospel in corporate worship. Considering the historical record, it seems apparent that revivalism created a form of worship solely focused on evangelistic methodology that has created a divide between the true gospel and corporate worship. Unfortunately, others (in reaction) have exacerbated this divide by focusing corporate worship on edification, and (as articulated above) they have merely perpetuated another form of man-centered worship. As considered above under implications, pastors and church leaders need to understand better the centrality of the gospel in corporate worship. What is the gospel's connection to corporate worship? How does it shape worship?

Conclusion

Worship is a priority because it is something for which the Lord is "seeking" (Jn. 4:23). Defining, defending, and exemplifying this all-important behavior should be an exciting and thoroughly satisfying endeavor—truly something for which the church should be known. Rather than perpetuating a methodology of worship that has its origin in historical revivalism, churches in the independent, fundamental movement should pursue a more robust, God-focused view of corporate worship. To be clear, a pendulum swing back into mindless ritualism is not being proposed; however, a reorientation toward biblical liturgy is rightly understood as "your reasonable [priestly] service" (Rom. 12:1, King James Version). Corporate worship that is both regulated by Scripture and informed by history will best glorify God in today's church. Terry Johnson articulates this researcher's desire to return to "simple, spiritual, reverent worship…in which we read, preach, pray, and sing the Bible.… Here we have order without suffocation, freedom without chaos, edification without entertainment, reverence without rote."[49]

[49] Johnson, *Reformed*, 68.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions/Protocol

Time of Interview: 00:00 am/pm

Date: 00/00/0000

Place:

Interviewer: Jeremy Yowell

Interviewee: [name]

Introduction

[Briefly describe the project.]

Questions:

[Probe each response when appropriate, to elicit more information or ask for an explanation of ideas—for example, "Tell me more," "I need more detail," or "Could you explain your response more?"]

#1 — What is the primary purpose of the church? How is that accomplished in corporate worship?

#2 — In your understanding, what impact did the Protestant Reformation have on corporate worship practices?

#3 — How can you determine if acceptable worship is taking place?

#4 — What elements of worship do you feel are biblically required?

#5 — Are some elements of worship more important than others? Why or why not?

#6 — Is the order of worship elements important? Why or why not?

#7 — In your understanding, how did the American revivals change corporate worship practices?

#8 — Independent Baptist and Bible churches are historically nonliturgical. Why is that?

#9 — How would you conclude the service if you didn't include a public invitation after the sermon?

#10 — In your opinion, how closely is the service's success linked to the response to the invitation?

#11 — What is the connection between corporate worship & evangelism? How should the church approach evangelism within its worship practices?

Closing the interview: “Thank you for your participation. I will be transcribing this interview and providing you with a copy for your clarification and/or further input.”

Appendix B: Research Interview Screening Questions

GOOGLE FORM: Would you be willing to participate in Jeremy Yowell's doctoral dissertation research? Jeremy is a graduate student in the School of Music at Liberty University and is conducting research as a part of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Christian Worship. Participants must be a pastor OR church leaders in an independent Baptist or Bible church. If willing and qualified, participants will be asked to take part in a single, hour–long interview (in-person *or* video call). Names and other identifying information will be requested for this study, but the information will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS:

#1 – What is your name?

#2 – Select your age range.

- ☐ *18–64*
- ☐ *65+*

#3 – What is your involvement in church ministry?

- ☐ *Church Leader*
- ☐ *Pastor*
- ☐ *Other:* _____

#4 – What is the name of your church?

#5 – What is your church's denominational affiliation?

- ☐ *Independent Baptist*
- ☐ *Independent Bible*
- ☐ *Other:* _____

#6 – Please provide an email address for me to contact you:_____

Appendix C: Recruitment Email

Dear [potential participant],

As a graduate student in the School of Music at Liberty University, I am conducting research as a part of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Christian Worship. The purpose of my research is to examine the perceptions of pastors and other church leaders from independent Baptist and Bible churches and consider what influences their beliefs about corporate worship. If you meet the participant criteria and are interested, I would like to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be a pastor or a church leader in an independent Bible or Baptist church. If willing, participants will be asked to take part in a single audio- and video-recorded, hour-long interview (in-person *or* video call). That's it. Interview questions will be provided in advance allowing you to reflect on answers ahead of time. By participating, you are offering essential information shaping the future of corporate worship. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please click here to complete the preliminary screening. If you meet my participant criteria, I will contact you to schedule an interview.

A consent document will be emailed to you if you meet the study criteria one week before the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document online *or* print and return it to me before the interview.

Participants will receive a booklet on corporate worship entitled *Intentional Worship: Some Things to Consider Including in Your Church Service* written by David de Bruyn.

I will touch base with you in a few days. Thank you for considering this opportunity.

Blessings,

Jeremy Yowell
Music Major Chair, Appalachian Bible College
Ph.D. Student, Liberty University

(███) ███-████ / ████████████@abc.edu

Appendix D: Social Media Post

ATTENTION, LINKEDIN NETWORK: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Christian Worship at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to examine the perceptions of pastors and other church leaders from independent Baptist and Bible churches and consider what influences their beliefs about corporate worship. If you meet the participant criteria and are interested, I would like to invite you to join my study. To participate, you must be a pastor or a church leader in an independent Baptist or Bible church. Participants will be asked to take part in a single audio- and video-recorded, hour-long interview (in-person *or* video call). Interview questions will be provided in advance allowing you to reflect on answers ahead of time. If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please click here to complete the preliminary screening. If you meet my participant criteria, I will contact you to schedule an interview. A consent document will be emailed to you one week before the interview, and you will need to sign and return it before the time of the interview. Participants will receive a booklet on corporate worship entitled *Intentional Worship: Some Things to Consider Including in Your Church Service* written by David de Bruyn.

TWITTER POST: Are you a pastor or church leader in an independent Baptist or Bible church? Direct message me for information about a research study on corporate worship.

Appendix E: Verbal/Phone Script

Hello, [potential participant],

As a graduate student in the School of Music at Liberty University, I am conducting research as a part of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Christian Worship. The purpose of my research is to examine the perceptions of pastors and other church leaders from independent Baptist and Bible churches and consider what influences their beliefs about corporate worship. If you meet the participant criteria and are interested, I would like to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be a pastor or a church leader in an independent Baptist or Bible church. If willing, participants will be asked to take part in a single audio- and video-recorded, hour-long interview (in-person *or* video call). That's it. Interview questions will be provided in advance allowing you to reflect on answers ahead of time. By participating, you are offering essential information shaping the future of corporate worship.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

Would you like to participate?

> [If YES]: Great, can I have your email so I can provide you a consent form and set up a time for an interview?
>
> [If NO]: I understand. Thank you for your time [Conclude the conversation].

A consent document will be given to you one week before the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me before the interview.

> Participants will receive a booklet on corporate worship entitled *Intentional Worship: Some Things to Consider Including in Your Church Service* written by David de Bruyn.

Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions?

Appendix F: Consent Form

Title of the Project: "An Inquiry into the Perceived Effects of Historical Revivalism on the Corporate Worship Behaviors of Modern-Day Independent and Fundamental Baptist and Bible Churches"

Principal Investigator: Jeremy Yowell, Graduate Student, School of Music, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a pastor or church leader in an independent Baptist or Bible church in the United States. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to examine the perceptions of pastors and other church leaders from independent Baptist and Bible churches and consider what influences their beliefs about corporate worship.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in a video-call *or* in-person, recorded (audio/video) interview that will take 45–60 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study.

Benefits to society include cultural reform and spiritual renewal. Whenever the church and its leaders consider the biblical priority of worship and renew their commitment to worship, there will be a positive impact. Being in God's presence is always life-changing, and the church has that distinct privilege in corporate worship. Second Corinthians 3:18 says that believers are "transformed" when they behold "with unveiled face" the "glory of the Lord." In other words, no one who is exposed to God's presence (through worship) will remain the same. If today's church is willing to evaluate current worship trends and heed the clear parameters of God's Word, there can be revival and blessing in our churches and country (2 Chron 7:14). That is a benefit to society.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with codes.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then deleted. The researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. After the interview participants will receive a booklet on corporate worship entitled *Intentional Worship: Some Things to Consider Including in Your Church Service*.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Jeremy Yowell. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [redacted] or

[redacted]@gmail.com. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Scott Connell, at [redacted]@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix G: IRB Exemption Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

October 26, 2023

Jeremy Yowell
Scott Connell

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-413 An Inquiry into the Perceived Effects of Historical Revivalism on the Corporate Worship Behaviors of Modern-Day, Fundamental and Independent Baptist and Bible Churches

Dear Jeremy Yowell, Scott Connell,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office