

A CORRELATION BETWEEN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEOLOGY OF THE
PROTESTANT REFORMATION AND CONSERVATIVE EVANGELICALISM

by

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(Under the Direction of Sandy D. Martin)

ABSTRACT

This thesis will address the relationship between the reforms of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th and early 17th centuries and the reforms of the contemporary conservative evangelical movement. Particular emphasis will be placed on the works of Martin Luther and John Calvin, and subsequently their similarity to the reforms of the 20th and 21st century conservative evangelicals. First, it will address the phenomena of the initial Protestant Reformation and eventual conservative evangelical movements. Secondly, there will be a discussion of the theological similarities of the two groups. Thirdly, there will be a comparison of their political positions. Finally, there will be discussion of the impacts of such a correlation.

INDEX WORDS: Protestant Reformation, Conservative Evangelicalism, Martin Luther,
John Calvin, Roman Catholicism, American Politics, Mainline
Protestantism

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To my grandfather: Erlo Robert McLaurin, Jr.

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Katherine Carolyn Sandlin deserves my grandest praise. Thank you for supporting me for nine years, but most of all these past three. If we could make it through this we can make it through anything.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to show that the emerging conservative evangelical movement is attempting to return to what it perceives to be original, essential Protestant theology. This chapter will show the development of the Protestant Mainline denominations and the emergence of conservative evangelicalism. The Christian community has been a body of continuous change and reform since its early years. Even during the time of Jesus' preaching, followers were curious as to the proper religious impact of his teachings and the correct way of following him. With this in mind, how could it be possible for the disciples of Jesus to continue for two thousand years and not continue to dispute the theological message of Christ? Theological disputes have continued to divide the Church since its inception, but few have had the impact of the Protestant Reformation that began in the sixteenth century.

Protestant Reformations

The Protestant Reformation was the answer to what were hundreds of years of perceived distortion of the Holy Church. For over a thousand years, the Church in Rome had developed the meaning of Christ's message into a form that was seen as perverted by some and perceived as inaccessible to many. Growing factions within Europe developed around the teachings of early reformers, such as Jan Hus and John Wycliffe. These two, among others, sought to correct the distortions of the Roman Church and make the Christianity of the gospels directly available to the masses, but their attempts resulted in their persecutions.

The dependent relationship of the church and state resulted in both the ineffectiveness of the pre-Luther reforms and the growing disapproval of the Protestant belief system. As the Church in Rome exerted its authority on the state, theologians began to view a distortion or outright abandonment of the message of Christ. In addition to the perceived desertion of biblical foundation, the Protestant reformers saw that the Roman Church has overstepped its ecclesial and political authority, which not only was tyranny to the people of Christ, but also heresy before Christ himself.

With the nailing of his *Ninety-Five Theses* on the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany on the 31st of October, 1517, Martin Luther set into motion what would become five hundred years of theological development.¹ From this simple act and the subsequent reception by the ruling elite and the people as a whole, the Roman Catholic Church began to split into what has become hundreds of different denominations, all of which believe that they have the correct theological disposition. Following Martin Luther's success came the rising of various Protestant factions throughout Europe. As they spread to the far reaches of the world, they too began to see reform movements build within their own ranks.

Eventually, many of the Protestant movements became mainstream denominations. They themselves developed theological standpoints, which in turn became the foundation of their own churches' teachings. Within the American population, many of these denominations became the powerhouse of religious life within the United States. Throughout its existence, the United States has been a nurturing environment for the growth of these Protestant Christian denominations, and as such they have grown substantially within the past two hundred years.

1. Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, Volume 2* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1985), 22.

Within the past several decades, we have seen the simultaneous decline of these well-established Protestant denominations² and rise of churches that call for a reform within the Protestant Christian community. These churches see their Protestant predecessors as having corrupted and abandoned the proper meaning of the gospels, and therefore have determined to protest the preceding Protestant denominations.

What is perhaps most interesting about these new Protestant movements is that they seek to institute reforms that are in many cases the exact same arguments of their sixteenth century forerunners. These twentieth and twenty-first century Protestants, collectively referred to as conservative evangelical Christians, are attempting to enact what is in effect a contemporary Protestant Reformation against the churches that developed from the teachings of the original Protestant reformers.

If we keep this in mind, we can begin to observe a pattern that emerges in Christianity. As older Christian movements become more established within the Christian community, they ultimately become more complacent in their theological stances. Whereas at their inceptions they felt it necessary to change the status quo and promote their particular theological viewpoints above those of the preceding regimes, the older that these Christians get, the more lenient they become in their viewpoints. They no longer are steadfast in all positions. Many times the newfound leniency is driven by the desire to spread their message to new people, but many times the effect is to drive out the conservative core that followed the church all along. These conservative cores often times feel it necessary to depart their former traditions in favor of a conservative alternative. If we can come to understand that Christianity, like other social movements, follows patterns such as this, then groups can understand their declining status and

2. This includes the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church USA, among others.

possibly work to counteract their loss of membership and work to satisfy the religious desires of their constituents.

Structure and Method

This thesis will develop within three primary sections. The first will address the rise and decline of the Mainline Protestant denominations, followed by the rise of the conservative evangelical population in the United States. The second will discuss the development of theological positions on the role of the Church throughout history. The third will address the position of the various Christian developments on the role of Christianity in politics and their effect on the political scene as a whole.

Throughout the entirety of the thesis paper, an emphasis will be placed on the historical development as well as the theological development of the various Christian denominations. In order to achieve this, it is important to use a combination of primary sources and historical commentary. With each issue addressed, there will be first a discussion of the development of Christian theology to the dawn of the Protestant Reformation. Secondly, there will be a survey of the positions of the Reformation, in particular to those of Martin Luther and John Calvin. These will be observed through the writings of the reformers, the implementation of such, and the discussions of religious historians. Thirdly, there will be a discussion on the theological developments of the Mainline Protestant denominations using primarily the publications of the same. Finally, there will be an examination of the positions of various conservative evangelical movements using both their own publications and the commentary of current religious scholars.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL SHIFT IN PROTESTANT THEOLOGIES

Sixty years ago, Sundays on Main Street looked the same in most American towns. Parishioners awoke early on their day off of work. The family gathered together whilst dressed in their finest clothing: men and boys in suits and ties, and ladies of all ages in dresses. Once prepared, the family would travel together to their local church where they would commune with their friends and neighbors. They came together in an almost ritualistic manner. The gathering itself was so normal that it was almost compulsory, but no one forced this occurrence. People once wanted to voluntarily surrender their time in order to perform the identical weekly custom that their parents had, and for many in the same church that their families had frequented for generations.

In recent years, there has been a shift in the normality of the previously stated occurrence. It would seem that Americans are rapidly becoming disillusioned with the traditions of their past. The well-dressed parishioners of the Mainline Protestant denominations no longer besiege Main Street U.S.A. on Sunday to the same intensity of years past. The pews of the Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, Lutheran, and Presbyterian churches, as well as others, are no longer filled with the smiling faces of the faithful every week like they once were. Those who were once happy to keep the faith of their forefathers and perform the weekly ritual of Mainline Protestant faith have found an alternative priority.

What has caused the rapid decline of these Mainline churches? Where have all of the parishioners gone? Is there a rise in the nonreligious sentiment of the American Protestant population? Perhaps there is another driving force within the Christian community that has stolen

the attention and devotion of these Mainline denominations. In a time in which attendance and membership in the Mainline Protestant denominations is declining, more conservative, evangelical denominations, however, are seeing a rise in membership.

Rise of Mainline Protestantism

The Mainline Protestant churches are the oldest denominations in the United States. While becoming closely affiliated in ecumenical endeavors of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the denominations that make up the modern Protestant Mainline are varied in their development. Once united only by their common origins, the churches that became the Protestant Mainline progressed to become the leading religious force of North America, but now are threatened by rapid decline.

The “Seven Sisters of Mainline Protestantism,” a term coined to describe an unofficial union of liberal Protestant denominations in North America,³ have long dominated the religious population of the United States. They are comprised of Old World groups and New World developments that are indicative of the cultural makeup and history of America’s settlers: Episcopalianism, Baptism, Presbyterianism, and Methodism from the British; Lutheranism from the Germans; Reform from the Germans and Dutch; as well as the various religious movements in the United States.

The first Protestant denomination⁴ to present itself to North America in any sufficient form was that of the Church of England. Being that it was the official state religion of England, and later the United Kingdom, it was the official religion of the colonies of both Jamestown and

3. William Hutcheson, *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

4. The first form of Christianity present in the New World was Roman Catholicism and prior to the Protestant Reformation.

Roanoke, the first British colonies in North America. The Church of England itself emerged from a dispute between King Henry VIII of England and Pope Clement VII. Henry had married Catherine of Aragon, a Spanish princess originally betrothed to his older brother, and after years of marriage she had failed to produce a male heir to continue the Tudor line. Henry requested an annulment that could only be granted by the Pope, but due to political pressure from Catherine's relative, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, the Pope was reluctant to do so. Henry declared England to be separate from the jurisdiction of the Church in Rome and proclaimed himself head of the Church of England.

In the beginning of the Church of England, Anglican theology was little different from that of the Roman Church. King Henry VIII, formerly declared "Defender of the Faith" by the Pope, was disinclined to vary from the beliefs of the one catholic and apostolic church of Christ. However, upon his death his successors further separated the Anglican Church from the faith of Henry. His son, Edward VI, was a young and weak ruler who was susceptible to the whims of his council. Throughout his brief reign, the reforms of Continental Protestantism pushed their way into the Anglican Church. Upon the death of Edward, his sister Mary was crowned queen. Mary, the devout Catholic daughter of Catherine of Aragon, returned the Church of England to the jurisdiction of the Pope in Rome. All reforms of the previous sovereignty were reversed and its reformers severely punished. Mary Tudor's reign also proved to be a brief one, and upon the coronation of her sister, Elizabeth, the Anglican Church once again returned to the authority of the English monarch.

With the English settlement of North America came the prominence of the Anglican Church in the New World. Some colonies (Pennsylvania, Plymouth, Rhode Island, and Maryland) were founded specifically in opposition to the Church of England, but loyalty to the

crown and the Anglican Church were concurrent. With the rise of the American Independence movement of the mid-seventeen seventies came the rise of disillusionment with the Church of England. While fighting for independence from the reign of George III, the American patriot found it counter-intuitive to his or her cause and even treasonous to say “God save the King” during worship. In response, the Episcopal Church of the United States was developed. The theology and ritual of the new denomination, especially the dependence on the *Book of Common Prayer*, followed the same model of the Anglican Church. The major difference was the rule of a council of bishops instead of that of the English monarch.

The modern Episcopal Church has kept in close contact with its roots, but also has been a model for liberal Protestantism. The Episcopal Church in the United States maintains communion with other Anglican churches, and sees itself as a continuation of the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church.⁵ In the late twentieth century, the Episcopal Church had become attractive to the disenfranchised of other denominations due to its liberal stance on social issues.

A denomination that closely followed the pattern of dissemination is that of Presbyterianism. The Scottish contributed heavily to the cultural composition of the New World. Prior to the Act of Union of 1707, the independent Kingdom of Scotland, in joint action of both the Scottish Parliament and the monarch, established ventures to colonize North America. First of many Scottish colonies was that of Nova Scotia and with it came the Church of Scotland.

The Church of Scotland was born with the emergence of the Reformation in the Kingdom of Scotland. The independent kingdom had resisted the reform of the continent, with the monarchy keeping devout ties to the Church in Rome. Historically, the kingdoms of Scotland

5. Episcopal Church, “The Anglican Communion,” http://www.episcopalchurch.org/visitors_17037_ENG_HTM.htm (accessed 8 November 2009).

and England had been bitter enemies, so when Henry VIII of England broke with the Roman Catholic Church, James V of Scotland refused to follow suit. His daughter, Mary Stuart, went as far as to lay claim to the English throne in the name of God, believing her cousin, Elizabeth Tudor, to be a heretic and unfit to rule. Mary, having long been imprisoned for this belief, became part of a plan to overthrow the Protestant Elizabeth and bring Catholicism back to the people of England with herself as queen. Elizabeth discovered the plot, declared Mary a traitor, and had her executed. Her infant son became king upon her abdication and was raised via a Protestant regent.

Protestantism had begun to flourish upon the abdication of the Catholic Mary, and the form emerging in Scotland had its roots in the Reform movement of Continental Europe. John Knox, who had been educated in Catholic, Anglican, and Calvinist theology, was at the forefront of the Scottish Reformation. Surviving persecution, Knox helped spread Calvinist theology with a Presbyterian structure, meaning a church run by a council of elders, or presbyters who meet in a general assembly. Under the reign of James VI, the Presbyterian system became the official church of the kingdom, but the king insisted upon a system of bishops. This system was later abandoned due to the discontent of the presbyters.

The mass influx of Scottish nationals, first from planned colonies and then from exiled Jacobean, led to the spread of Scottish Presbyterianism in North America. With a separation from the United Kingdom, the Presbyterians from the newly formed United States broke from the Church of Scotland and created the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America (PCUSA).

As in Scotland, Calvinist theology reached the Netherlands and Germany in the sixteenth century. It is here that the developments of Puritanism and Congregationalism⁶ began to develop. Influences from the continent pushed a rise of Calvinist power in Britain. During the reign of Charles I of Scotland and England, an overwhelming majority of Calvinist Puritans in the English Parliament orchestrated an overthrow of the king and his extravagant Anglican Church. They believed that the Church of England too closely mimicked the theology and practice of the Roman Catholic Church. After a short reign under Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell, the Puritans lost favor in Britain. Many Puritans chose to leave prior to the war to seek tolerance elsewhere. First, the Puritan expatriates attempted to make a life in Calvinist Holland, but weary of life amongst the Dutch moved on to the New World, establishing the Plymouth Colony in present-day Massachusetts. The Plymouth Colony was governed much like the function of the church itself: as a mixture of Calvinist theology with congregational structure.

After the dissolution of the Plymouth Colony, the Congregationalist (Puritan) Church began to wane in popularity. Other denominations appropriated members from the Congregational fold, even to the point that Congregational Harvard's seminary switched its allegiance to the Unitarian Church. Congregationalism survived by mergers with various like-minded denominations, eventually becoming a part of the Protestant Mainline as the United Church of Christ in 1957.

The Baptist denominations, the largest religious group in the United States, claim to have their origin in the original church of Jesus Christ. Many of its adherents believe that the Anabaptist movement that emerged in Central Europe during the Protestant Reformation was the true Church of the New Testament and had existed independently in hiding from the Roman

6. Puritanism was the English Reform movement that sought to separate from Catholic tradition and theology. Congregationalism was their preferred form of polity, focusing on the power of the individual congregation.

Catholic Church. From this group, they believe, emerged the Baptist movement that spread through Western Europe and on to North America. While it is true that Baptism emerged with Anabaptist influences, its development is much closer associated with that of Congregationalism, and therefore created in the sixteenth century. Baptism in America has its origins in the foundation of the colony of Rhode Island. Roger Williams fled Massachusetts as a result of persecution for his Baptist faith. Thereupon he established the settlement of Providence and created the first Baptist church in America. As the Baptist movement spread throughout the American colonies, the various congregations operated largely independent from one another. Their evangelical nature led them to meet in conventions of mission societies, of which became the modern denomination of the American Baptist Convention (ABCUSA) and the Southern Baptist Convention.⁷

Evangelicalism has its basis in the very beginnings of the Protestant Reformation. Grievances voiced from a monk in Germany caused the schism that spread throughout the west, creating what would become denominational Christianity. Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk and professor at the University of Wittenberg, believed that the Roman Catholic Church had abused its power and departed from its biblical basis. Although Luther had simply hoped to bring about discussion and reform in the presentation of his *95 Theses*, his actions and the following developments eventually led to the creation of the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church. Lutheranism quickly spread throughout Germany, its neighboring countries, and north into Scandinavia. Germans and Scandinavians later immigrated to the United States, bringing Lutheranism to the New World. At present, the largest apparition of the Lutheran Church in the United States is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, which was formed from a union of the American

7. Gonzales, *The Story of Christianity*, Volume 2, 306-307

Lutheran Church, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, and the Lutheran Church in America in January of 1988.⁸

The largest Mainline denomination in the United States is that of the United Methodist Church. It was developed with a background in Anglicanism and Arminianism. The denomination began as theological division within the Church of England. Brothers John and Charles Wesley led a group within their circle of friends at Oxford University committed to holy life, temperance, piety, and biblical studies. John Wesley had traveled to the British colony of Georgia under invitation of governor James Oglethorpe to pastor to the colony's native and European inhabitants, but became dismayed in his congregation's lack of devotion. The young pastor began to doubt his faith and returned to England. Upon his return, he had a moving religious experience that strengthened him in his conviction to preach.⁹ In such, he remained within the Church of England, but emphasized the beliefs and practices of his Oxford group and accentuated the need to evangelize to the impious.

Even before his death, followers of this new Wesleyan theology began to separate from Anglican communion, in direct opposition of the wishes of its founder. This new movement, referred to as Methodism in relation to the methodical nature of its structure, spread quickly in the British Isles and their colonies. Various Methodist governing bodies began to emerge in North America, but the modern United Methodist Church did not reach its present form until the union of the Evangelical United Brethren Church and The Methodist Church on April 23rd, 1968.

These denominations came to America via their adherents' desire for new lives. This life in the New World guaranteed freedom to practice their faith as they wished, and as such it flourished. The denominations that evolved in America gained popularity with the budding

8. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "History of the ELCA," <http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/History.aspx> (accessed 8 November 2009).

9. Gonzales, *The Story of Christianity*, Volume 2, 212

country, becoming the dominant form of worship. Divisions arose within the fledgling religious groups, but the Mainline maintained dominance until the late twentieth century.

The Evident Decline of the Mainline

The Protestant Mainline has dominated American religious life since European colonization, but in recent decades the number of adherents reported by these Liberal Protestant denominations has decreased dramatically. While there is speculation as to the cause of such decline, the answers that these denominations seek show a reflection of the modern American's spiritual development. These denominations are well aware of their fleeting parishioners. According to *The Episcopal Church Annual*, which chronicles the levels of Episcopal Church membership, the Church recorded its largest numbers in 1966 at nearly 3,650,000; whereas in 2002, the Church reported an attendance of just over 2,320,000.¹⁰ This story is similar to that of the United Methodist Church, which has lost over half a million adherents in the past decade, bringing its total U.S. membership to just under eight million.¹¹

A major concern of the denominations of the Protestant Mainline is the adherence to a liberal form of Protestant theology. Commitment to liberal theology means that the Mainline denominations are lenient in their interpretation of theology. At their inception, the theology created by these denominations was considered liberal in comparison to its predecessor, the Roman Catholic Church. When one considers the very meaning of the term liberal, it can be considered to mean simply a derivation from the previous normality. At the inception of

10. C. Kirk Hadaway, "Is the Episcopal Church Growing (or Declining)?," *Congregational Development*, the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, 2004, [http://www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/2004GrowthReport\(1\).pdf](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/2004GrowthReport(1).pdf) (accessed 8 November 2009).

11. Marta W. Aldrich, "United Methodist membership up, constituency down," United Methodist Church, <http://www.umc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=IwL4KnN1LtH&b=2429873&ct=5110975> (accessed 8 November 2009).

Protestantism, this took shape in an abundance of concerns: baptism, biblical studies, soteriology, eschatology, church hierarchy and construction, ethics, and evangelism, among others. While the nature of these reforms is progressive, at their foundation they were considered by their advocates to be essential to their very spiritual existence. The indispensability of these core beliefs of the denominations is what holds them together as denominations, which would seem to be contrary to their commitment to liberalism. It has been speculated that the perceived death of these denominations could be due to this unnatural foundation of being both “modernist,” meaning open to contemporary developments, and “traditional,” as in being committed to their historic theological foundations.¹² Perhaps this is one of the detracting points of today’s American Christian.

A visit to the website of the United Methodist Church explains the official stance of the Church on matters of Methodist faith. They adhere to the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed. As such they believe in one God, creator of Heaven and Earth, who is present in triune form. Methodism adheres to the belief that the Bible is, “the primary authority for our faith and practice,” and, “that Christians need to know and study the Old Testament and the New Testament (the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures).”¹³ They adhere to two sacraments. The first is baptism, which is traditionally administered at birth, but can be received at any time of life. It is given in forgiveness of sins and to welcome the believer into the one catholic Church. Second is the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, which is done to give thanks for Christ’s sacrifice and may be received by anyone who loves Christ. These theological constants are the cement that binds the United Methodist Church with the original tenets of John Wesley,

12. Robert Bacher and Kenneth Inskeep, *Chasing Down a Rumor: The Death of Mainline Denominations* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 27.

13. United Methodist Church, “Our Christian Roots,” http://www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4KnN1LtH/b.2299859/k.13B7/Our_Christian_Roots.htm (accessed 8 November 2009).

but outside of the Church's foundational theology there is little that the Church takes a strong stance upon. In fact it is their loose stance on issues of ethics that many cite as detracting. This is where the Mainline Protestant denominations are maintaining their grasp on liberalism, while they lose followers to conservatism.

Liberal denominations desire to make their message of Christ accessible to a broad range of potential parishioners. This is achieved by an interpretation of the Gospel that leaves much of the Biblical analysis up to the individual. Christ's meaning, however liberal the denomination, is generally unwavering from the individual church's foundations, but outside of this basic structure the church often has little bearing on what it means to live the Christian life. In the case of ethics, Christ's example is the main concern of Christian morality, but in issues pertinent to the twenty-first century Christian the believer is encouraged to follow his or her conscience. The liberal churches that make up the Protestant Mainline do outline their views of what it means to live a moral life, but derivation from such is considered to be human nature, and forgiveness the cornerstone of Christianity.

What is Conservative Evangelicalism?

Conservative evangelicalism is not a newcomer to Christian theology. Movements that could be considered as such have been recurring throughout Christian history; rising and falling in popularity as the desires of Christians changed. From the beginning, there has often arisen a desire to pinpoint what it means to be Christian, further narrowing the definition of Christianity. Early Church fathers fought heresies such as Gnosticism and Arianism to establish orthodox Christology. Reformers during the Protestant Reformation often preached a strict adherence to biblical study in contrast to what they viewed as the Catholic Church's derivation from the

Gospel. Modern conservative denominations are a continuation of this recurring movement, instituting reforms that they believe to be bringing believers to a truer form of Christianity.

As established Christian institutions in America moved toward liberal tendencies in either theology or morality, conservative alternatives have been established to fulfill the needs of those Christians alienated by what they believe to be corruption of Christian values. The Southern Baptist Convention discontinued its union with northern congregations in 1845 when it defended institutions that it believed to be supported biblically, most notably that of slavery. While the Southern Baptists have renounced their support of that deplorable institution, they have continued to adhere to strict biblical interpretation, which is often consulted for growing modern concerns. The Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod began as a conservative alternative to Lutheran denominations that had departed from Old World traditions and teachings. It has been devoted to the conservative Lutheran ideals of strict biblical adherence and salvation through God's grace alone, and to the opposition of liberal ideals of humanism, religious syncretism, and loose moral interpretation since its inception in 1847.¹⁴ The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) was developed in 1973, "in opposition to the long-developing [Presbyterian] theological liberalism, which denied the deity of Jesus Christ and the inerrancy and authority of Scripture."¹⁵ Other conservative movements have arisen from the Mainline denominations, but apart from the aforementioned movements, independent churches are a fast-growing constituency of the conservative community.

Along with its conservative nature, rising church movements focus on the importance of evangelicalism. The significance of what it means to be "evangelical" is fluid: the term

14. Samuel H. Nafzger, "An Introduction to The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod," Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, <http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/LCMS/introlcms.pdf> (accessed 8 November 2009).

15. Presbyterian Church in America, "A Brief History: Presbyterian Church in America," <http://www.pcnet.org/general/history.htm> (accessed 8 November 2009).

“evangelical” is essentially equal to that of “gospel” but has grown to primarily mean the manner in which the gospel is spread. Martin Luther’s theological position is referred to as “Evangelical,” being that he promoted a strict adherence to biblical study. Today, evangelicalism carries a far heavier connotation, many times being associated with conservative theology itself. These conservative movements desire to “evangelize” to the world, meaning to spread their message of the Gospel. It is believed to be necessary to spread the news of Christ to those who have not received the truth of salvation. Matthew 28:19-20 states: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”¹⁶ Adhering to scripture being conservative, and evangelism being a biblical ordinance, preaching the Gospel in attempts to convert has become part of what it means to be Christian within the conservative churches.

Conservative Christianity’s focus on evangelicalism is not usually concerned with endeavors of ecumenism. According to the Southern Baptist Convention, has historically been exclusionary in its theology, and says ecumenical organization, “would risk possible compromise of historic distinctives or the unique witness of Southern Baptists to the world.”¹⁷ This is a common thread throughout the conservative evangelical movement. Each group envisions itself as having a message that is unique to the world, often being considered the “one true way.” While these groups see that there is but one Christ and one Christianity, the conservative evangelicals promote themselves as having semi-exclusive, unmitigated access to Christ’s salvation. When considering the alternative of damnation, salvific exclusivity is a powerful tool for conversion.

16. NRSV, Matthew 28:19-20.

17. Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution On Southern Baptists And Ecumenism,” <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=459> (accessed 8 November 2009).

What message is the conservative alternative preaching that is appealing to the twenty-first century Christian? While each group has its unique presentation, there are common themes within the conservative evangelical framework that are recurring. First, Christ is the solitary cleansing factor for inherent sinful human nature. The Bible states: “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”¹⁸ If the human soul is eternal, and if it is tainted by our sinful nature, and the wages of sin are death in God, then it is necessary to be cleansed by Christ to avoid eternal damnation. This is achieved, according to the conservative evangelical movement, by a personal relationship with Christ. One must strive to walk with Christ and be Christ-like to achieve that relationship. The movement offers a theology of a God that desires to be with you, but one that cannot without a refutation of your very nature.

A denial of the sinful human nature is the foundation of the strict moral code that conservatives are urged to live by. A handful of the issues addressed by this constituency are drinking, sexuality, the role of women in the church, divorce, and abortion; to name a few. Drinking, abortion, premarital, extramarital, and homosexual sex are most often prohibited, and women are expected to maintain a traditional role in the church and consequently are excluded from ordination.¹⁹ While liberal groups expect their congregations to use their judgment in managing matters of morality, the conservatives view it as being essential to Christian life and are unwavering in its necessity. This is not to say that the conservative evangelical Christian is steadfast in all aspects of Christian morality, or that the conservative evangelical necessarily sins less than a liberal Mainline Christian, just that institutionally morality is generally considered of higher importance to the former’s faith.

18. NRSV, Romans 6:23.

19. Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution On Ordination And The Role Of Women In Ministry,” <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=1088> (accessed 8 November 2009).

One of the most controversial aspects of the rising conservative evangelical movement is a growth in charismatic representation, which constitutes a belief in gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are made manifest in the form of speaking in tongues, prophecies, or miracles. While perhaps being most prominent in Pentecostalism, the idea of charismatic occurrence has taken hold of a growing number of conservative evangelical congregations.²⁰ While many churches find these occurrences suspect, the movement spreads, perhaps due to the compatibility of the ideas of a personal relationship with God the Son and God the Holy Spirit that reaches out and moved the individual believer. This once again emphasizes the importance of the individual in the eyes of God, appealing to the individual's sense of self.

Conservative Evangelicalism Grows, While Mainline Protestantism Declines

Surveys taken within the individual denominations and by outside groups have witnessed a decline in the membership of the liberal Protestant Mainline and a rise in the membership of conservative evangelical churches. While one cannot take into account the desires of every individual Christian who leaves one church or joins another, one cannot help speculate that the corresponding rise of one dynamic and decline of another could in some way be linked. It could be true that surveys do not take into account those parishioners who die versus those who leave willingly, or that perhaps people are attending services and never joining the church, but why are more people choosing the conservative alternative?

Perhaps it is the very nature of being evangelical that brings people to the conservative churches. While many churches strive to mission to the world, the conservative evangelical churches find it indispensable to their very nature as Christians. The very message sent that

20. Douglas E. Cowan, *The Remnant Spirit: Conservative Reform in Mainline Protestantism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003) 58-63.

Christ is seeking a personal relationship with the individual is appealing, and the promise of eternal torment is alarming, so the individual who is ready for a message of any kind could be especially susceptible, assuring an influx of those new to Christianity.

Many believe Mainline Protestantism to be a victim of its own theology. While equal rights of those of different races, ethnicities, classes, nationalities, and physical abilities is not at issue for the majority of contemporary denominations, a rising concern for the Christian community is Christendom's view on homosexuality. Many Christians believe the Bible to be explicit on its stance on homosexuality: it is forbidden for a man to be with a man in the same way that he would lie with a woman.^{21,22} Various denominations have taken a wide range of stances on this issue, but the Mainline Protestant denominations have generally been accepting of the homosexual lifestyle. The Episcopal Church has met with great controversy by not only welcoming homosexuals to their churches, but also ordaining priests and bishops who are openly homosexual and allowing homosexual marriage. There are some who question how a faith based on Biblical foundations could allow such an affront to scripture, but homosexuality is not Mainline Protestantism's sole issue of ethical dilemma. These denominations are constantly being criticized for their stance on drinking, divorce, and various issues on sex, among others, none of which are a very strong opinion on the churches' behalves. For many, the issue is not that the liberal denominations exalt the behavior exhibited that is seen by conservative Christians to be scandalous that the detractors find dubious, but the fact that the loose tolerance in the churches' liberal theology allows the flourishing of such behavior by not disavowing it.

In reaction, a growing number of Christians who want more rigid structure in matters of faith are turning to conservative churches that provide such a structure. The conservative

21. NRSV, Leviticus 18:22.

22. Ibid. 20:13.

evangelical churches preach that there is one way to heaven, and they know how to get there. They can even give you a road map. No longer must anyone toil with concerns of theology or morality, because the church has an answer for every dilemma. If you are concerned with divorce, then know that the Bible (in the churches view) says that marriage is between one man and one woman for life. Stay away from drugs or alcohol, because Christ condemns it. How about Darwinian evolution? Do not worry, because the Bible teaches Creationism. All one needs to concern oneself with is the level of commitment to that personal relationship with Jesus.

Another possibility for the rise of the conservative evangelical movement is the level of independence allowed for the local church. Congregational independence is most prevalent in the nondenominational churches, but the structure of denominations like the Southern Baptist Convention allows portions of individuality. Many of these churches are unencumbered by denominational structures that limit the churches' ability to adapt to the worship desires of its constituency. If the majority of a congregation desires to dispense with traditional worship service in favor of contemporary worship, which is very often the case, then the individual church is free to do so. This also allows the individual congregation freedom from a centralized structure that previously has introduced liberalization in order to adapt to the community as a whole.

The conservative evangelical model is not exclusive to reform offshoot churches. More often, liberal Mainline Protestant churches are turning to conservatism to fight the declines in their denominations. They see the need to adapt to the changes in attitudes of today's Christian, and that often means following conservatism's example. Churches are reaching out to more people, changing their ideas on issues such as charismatics, and cutting back on what is seen by many as "moving with the whims of secular society." While it remains to be seen if or when

there could be a backswing from conservative back to liberal theology. This swing back and forth has recurred throughout history. With the growth and spread of a church, the theology liberalizes in order to be receptive to the most people. This alienates a certain few within the greater whole which desires rigor, and a return to the original conservative theology. It happened with the Roman Catholic Church in the form of the Protestant Reformation. Today it is happening in American Protestantism in the rise of the conservative evangelical alternatives to Mainline denominations. When closely examined, it is evident that the arguments that are raised in today's conservative reformation mimic, either voluntarily or involuntarily, the reforms of their Protestant Reformer ancestors.

CHAPTER 3

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

Introduction to Church Authority and Structure

Throughout the development of Christianity, the view of the role of the Church has been in a constant state of development. In the very beginning of Christianity, all one needed to do to be a Christian was to follow Jesus. When asked how he could achieve eternal life, Jesus replied to an inquisitive man, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”²³ The simplicity of this message did not continue past the death of Jesus. The apostles began to dispute each others’ teachings soon afterwards, developing in the first division of the Church.²⁴ For some, the proper institution of Jesus’ message was within the context of Judaism, and that in order to be a Christian one must first have to become a Jew. For others, the message of Jesus transcended to all people, and therefore the message was made accessible to the Gentiles. The message of the latter group lived on, and with it developed what was considered the Church.

Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire and beyond in its first three centuries, but there was no formal governance and little interaction between churches. The Church developed from a loose association of regional constituencies into a more unified body with the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE.²⁵ Constantine sought to solidify the authority of his associative religion by establishing an orthodox set of beliefs and a set scripture by which to interpret

23. NRSV, Matthew 19:21.

24. “Council of Jerusalem,” Acts 15.

25. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), 153-157.

them.²⁶ The structure that emerged was similar to that which exists in modern parliamentary systems: a council of representative authorities that convenes to discuss proper procedure. The overall governance of the Church as a whole rested in the jurisdiction of the local clergy. This bishopric dynamic continued through the following six ecumenical councils: the First (381 CE), Second (449 CE), and Third (680 CE) Councils of Constantinople; the Council of Ephesus (431 CE); the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE); and the Second Council of Nicaea (787 CE).²⁷ Throughout the development of this council format, there developed the status of the patriarchate, which elevated the importance of certain bishoprics above others. Eventually, there emerged five Patriarchs: the Bishop of Rome, the Bishop of Constantinople, the Bishop of Jerusalem, the Bishop of Alexandria, and the Bishop of Antioch were all invested with primacy above other jurisdictions.²⁸

By the second millennium, the authority of the five Patriarchs had become unequal. The Patriarch, or Pope, of the Roman Church had determined that the Bishop of Rome had authority over the other four Patriarchs.²⁹ It was believed that because Peter had been the first Bishop of Rome, that Jesus had invested his position with the authority of the entire Church.³⁰ Jesus had told Simon, who he called Peter,³¹ “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”³² This was interpreted as meaning that Peter himself was in control of access to God’s kingdom. As a result in the doctrine of Apostolic Succession, the seat

26. Ibid., 153-157.

27. Gonzales, *The Story of Christianity, Volume 1*, 112, 222-224

28. Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 185

29. Ibid., 185-188.

30. George Joyce, “The Pope,” Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12260a.htm> (accessed 31 October 2010).

31. Peter, which is *petrus* in Latin, means rock.

32. NRSV, Matthew 16:18-19.

of Peter should hold the same authority (on Earth as well as in Heaven), and therefore the Pope in Rome is that authority.³³ By asserting this primacy over the other Patriarchs, the Pope drove a wedge in between the entire Eastern and Western Churches, eventually leading to their schism in 1054 CE.³⁴

The Great Schism in 1054 CE only lent to the supreme authority of the Pope in the Western world. The papacy had exerted its authority over both the religious and secular matters of the Western half of Christianity since the discovery of the *Donation of Constantine* in the ninth century.³⁵ Within the Roman Catholic Church, there developed a dependency upon the Church for salvation. There also emerged a hierarchy within the Christian community, with the Church and its officials at the top and the lay community at the bottom. It was within this hierarchical model that theological dogma developed which would eventually become contrary to the beliefs that became the emerging Protestant movement.

Biblical Adherence

The role of the Bible within the Roman Catholic Church has always been one of a foundational document. The Bible has been considered a tool given directly to the Church in which anyone can observe God's Specific Revelation. While theologians within the Church determined that one could reach a conclusion of God's existence through God's General Revelation in Natural Theology, they also determined it would be impossible for anyone to reach a conclusion of salvation through Christ outside of the biblical precedent.³⁶ This being said, through centuries of theological development, the Roman Catholic Church has built upon its

33. Joyce, "The Pope," Catholic Encyclopedia

34. Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 571-573

35. Ibid., 341, 573.

36. Thomas Aquinas, "The Existence of God," *Summa Theologica Prima Pars*, <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1002.htm> (accessed 31 October 2010).

biblical foundation a towering monument of dogma. It is this monument that the developing reformers grew to reject.

Martin Luther despised academic theology. He once said in a sermon that, “reason is the devil’s bride.”³⁷ Reason has the ability to justify any derivation that arises in theology, and he believed that it was academic theology that had driven the teachings of the church further and further from its biblical dependence, finally to a point at which he believed the Church to have fabricated many of the practices and beliefs of his era. Within the *Ninety-Five Theses* that were proposed by Martin Luther in 1517 CE are grave concerns about alleged theological abuses within the church and its departure from biblical adherence. Referring to many of the theological developments of the papacy in the Medieval church, Luther said that they, “were sown while the bishops slept.”³⁸ The particular Bible verse that Luther alluded to here states, “while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat.”³⁹ This verse exemplifies Luther’s feeling on the theology of the era: it and its proponents are the enemies of Christianity.

One of the major issues brought up in the *Ninety-Five Theses* is the position of the Church on Purgatory and the condition of the souls therein. One of the biblical foundations for the Doctrine of Purgatory comes from the Book of 2nd Maccabees, in which Judas Maccabeus took up a collection and prayed for the dead to be delivered from their sin.⁴⁰ From this foundation the idea that it may be possible for sins to have affected the souls of the dead, and for

37. Henry Ganss, "Martin Luther," The Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09438b.htm> (accessed 27 February 2011).

38. Martin Luther and Kurt Aland, *95 Theses, with the Pertinent Documents from the History of the Reformation* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 1967), 51.

39. NRSV, Matthew 24:25.

40. “He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sin.” NRSV, 2nd Maccabees 14:43-45.

these affected souls to be relieved of their sins post mortem by the prayer and sacrifice of the living, was developed. This belief was upheld by many of the Church's most renowned theologians. Saint Thomas Aquinas argued in the *Summa Theologica*: "For if the debt of punishment is not paid in full after the stain of sin has been washed away by contrition, nor again are venial sins always removed when mortal sins are remitted, and if justice demands that sin be set in order by due punishment, it follows that one who after contrition for his fault and after being absolved, dies before making due satisfaction, is punished after this life."⁴¹ However the justification, it is the very development of theology by these philosophical means that Martin Luther rejected.

Calvin's Protestant foundations also began in opposition to the Roman Catholic Church from a biblical standpoint. He disdained any of the theological developments which he believed to not have biblical foundations. He stated in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, "when miserable men do seek after God, instead of ascending higher than themselves as they ought to do, they measure him by their own carnal stupidity, and neglecting solid inquiry, fly off to indulge their curiosity in vain speculation."⁴² By asserting their own theology without biblical precedent, he proposed that academic theologians had used themselves as the model for Godly knowledge instead using of God as the model for God. He stated later in the same work, "If true religion is to beam upon us, our principle must be, that it is necessary to begin with heavenly teaching, and that it is impossible for any man to obtain even the minutest portion of right and sound doctrine without being a disciple of Scripture."⁴³

41. Thomas Aquinas, "Purgatory," *Summa Theologica Supplementum Tertiae Partis*, <http://newadvent.org/summa/7001.htm> (accessed 31 October 2010).

42. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), sect. 1.4.1.

43. Ibid, sect. 1.6.2.

Biblical adherence is also the cornerstone of the conservative evangelical movement. Proponents of this theological faction see the Bible as the sole source for theological development, and any dogmatic which is not perceived to be founded in the Bible, or even those positions believed to be incorrect exegesis, are considered to be false Christianity or even anti-Christian. The Wesleyan Church, which is a prevalent conservative evangelical Methodist denomination, states that the scriptures, “contain all things necessary to salvation; so that whatever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man or woman that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.”⁴⁴ This echoes the foundational writings of both Calvin and Luther, and like Calvin and Luther, is used to prove or disprove doctrines that have developed within the Christian community as a whole. For example, conservative evangelical groups affirm the doctrine of the Trinity, which is not directly affirmed by Christ in the gospel, through a validation of various scriptures. Purgatory, on the other hand, is considered to be non-scriptural in origin and nonexistent, particularly since the book in which Catholic doctrine sees scripture, 2nd Maccabees, does not exist in Protestant scripture.

What we learn from this renewed biblical fundamentalism is that it permeates and dominates all aspects of theology for the neoconservative movements which recur throughout history. When we observe the emerging theological standpoints of the Protestant Reformation and compare them to the theological assertions of the conservative evangelicals of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, we see the common theme of restructuring the church to return to the church which Christ intended. The method of this restructuring is to evaluate the structure of the previous churches and rebuilding every aspect of the church using biblical blueprints.

44. The Wesleyan Church, “Our Core Beliefs,” <http://www.wesleyan.org/beliefs> (accessed 27 February 2011).

Salvation

The model of soteriology that emerged through the centuries leading up to the Protestant Reformation was one that was heavily dependent upon the Church. Over the millennium and a half of Christian life prior to the Protestant Reformation, the Church had become synonymous with Christianity. Theologically this was self-evident: the Church was the embodiment of the Holy Ghost, which is the third person of the Holy Trinity. Essentially, the Church was believed to be both part of humanity and a part of God. With this as the official dogmatic stance of ancient and medieval Christianity, whatever the Church developed theologically was considered to be of God.

In the Bible, Jesus was less than clear on the manner of salvation. Through the centuries of ecumenical councils and scriptural analysis an orthodox Christology and soteriology was developed which, while not accepted by all of Christianity, united most Christians under a common goal. The orthodox Christology emerged out of opposition to several heresies such as Gnosticism, Nestorianism, Monophysitism, and Arianism. The image of Christ that we receive is that Christ has two natures, one fully human and one fully divine which are together in hypostatic union. We also see that God the Son (who was made incarnate through Christ Jesus) is eternally begotten from God the Father. These two views have the implication that:

1. God the Son, who was made man as Jesus Christ, has always been;
2. Jesus is God; and
3. God experienced what it means to be human voluntarily in the embodiment of Jesus.

From these propositions, we are lead to assume that God had the desire to share in the human experience, and we are left questioning what this means after the fact. Was God simply on vacation, or did God wish to accomplish some deeper triumph with the Christ event?

To answer the question of Christ, one must first understand what it means to be a human. God has given humanity laws to live by via his chosen people, Israel. Within the pages of the

Torah, we learn expressly what to do and what not to do in order to live in harmony with God. We also learn that we were created in the image of God, but through the actions of our predecessors we are in a state of imperfection. As a punishment for eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the book of Genesis shows our original ancestors, Adam and Eve, being cast out of their earthly paradise (Eden) and condemned to the punishments of painful childbirth, earthly toil, and ultimately death.⁴⁵ This has been described most notably by Doctor of the Church Augustine of Hippo as the Fall of Man and the origin of Original Sin.⁴⁶ This doctrine states that humanity is inherently flawed from The Fall affair, and we are helpless to relieve ourselves from it.

No matter what we do, in the orthodox Christian view of humanity, we are sinners. We are born as such, and we continue to be sinners by thought, word, and deed. Even with the direction received from God via Moses, we are tainted by the compulsion to sin. In the Epistle to the Romans, Saint Paul stated, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."⁴⁷ Thus we discover the necessity of the Christ event. In the writings of the prophets in the Hebrew Bible there is a format constructed for the idea of a "messiah," an anointed one which will deliver the people of God from oppression, and Jesus is asserted in the New Testament to be the fulfillment of these prophecies. If Jesus is God, then the Christ event is God's salvation of humanity by his own hand, through humanity. The manner of this salvation, according to orthodox theology, was through Jesus' blood sacrifice on the cross. The theology surrounding the crucifixion mirrors the animal sacrifice required by God in the Hebrew Bible. When one desired absolution for their sins in the days of the Temple, one

45. "The Fall," Genesis 3.

46. Augustine of Hippo, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* vol. 2, Ancient Christian Writers No. 42. John Hammond Taylor, trans., (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 164-165.

47. NRSV, Romans 6:23.

sacrificed a lamb or doves. When Jesus died on the cross, it is believed that he took the sins of humanity upon him. Upon death, he descended to Hell, and then on the following Sunday he was resurrected.

How does one experience the salvific benefits of the Christ event? If Jesus took upon himself all of the world's sin during his crucifixion, then would this not imply that salvation through Christ is a universally beneficial event and we are all free from the punishment? The developed theology on the application of salvation through Christ for centuries was that one had to actively seek salvation in order to receive it. The only way to do this was to participate in the church. Effectively, Christianity became a religion focused on orthopraxis as well as orthodoxy.

The developed focus on practice and participation in the Church as a necessity for salvation was one of the main subjects raised by Martin Luther in his writings in the sixteenth century. Luther interpreted the requirements of the Church to be the purchasing of salvation through good works. What Martin Luther determined to be the only route to salvation was through the grace of God alone. He wrote, "So he [Paul in Titus 3:5-7⁴⁸] discards all boasted free will, all human virtue, righteousness, and good works. He concludes that they are all nothing and are wholly perverted, however brilliant and worthy they may appear, and teaches that we must be saved solely by the grace of God, which is effective for all believers who desire it from a correct conception of their own ruin and nothingness."⁴⁹ In as such, he rejected that salvation had nothing to do with action. His accusation was that the Church had required the believer to perform acts in order to receive God's grace. This took the form of the sacraments, penitent acts, and good deeds. Through these three required acts, Luther believed the Church created a

48. "he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life." NIV.

49. Shane Lems, "Luther on Grace Alone," *The Reformed Reader*, <http://reformedreader.wordpress.com/2011/03/15/luther-on-grace-alone-sola-gratia/> (accessed 27 February 2010).

dependence which was unnecessary to the soul's ultimate salvation, but supported the corruption of church officials. Sacraments were believed to be part of a Christian life and were kept as such in the Lutheran tradition, but the meaning behind their purpose was changed. Good deeds and penitent acts were eventually treated as symptoms of Christianity instead of the essential nature of it.

The writings of John Calvin affirm the idea of salvation through grace alone, and ultimately bring it further. While Luther wished to assert that it was acceptance of God's grace that saved the individual, Calvin and his successors took the control out of the hands of humanity completely by asserting that humanity is helpless to contribute to its own salvation. Calvin wrote that in affirming that God is omnipotent and omniscient, only God would have the power to grant salvation and God would know who would ultimately receive that salvation. Therefore, there are a set amount of people who have been ordained by God to receive salvation for all time. This is the doctrine of predestination.⁵⁰ When an individual is a member of the elect, they will be exemplars of the true Christian life that is expected of a follower of Christ.

In the seventeenth century, the Calvinist doctrine on salvation was elaborated at the Synod of Dort. Here in 1619, the orthodox Calvinist position on salvation was established as being the following five tenets: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints.⁵¹ This explains the depth of the Calvinist belief in predestination. Total depravity alludes to the status of humanity after The Fall, in which humanity became imprisoned in a state of sin and is unable to do anything about it. Unconditional election describes the idea that God chose to save some and condemn others prior to the creation of the world, and the status of being one of God's "elect" has nothing to do with

50. Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree* (Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth Press 1986), 22.

51. *Ibid.*, 155-158.

the actions of the individual. Limited atonement means that the blood sacrifice of Jesus' crucifixion is limited to those who are predestined by God to be saved. The inability of the individual to deny the will of God when God has already ordained them to be elected is referred to as irresistible grace, and the permanence of their salvation is the perseverance of the saints. The picture that is painted is one in which the free will is nonexistent, and the omniscient, omnipotent nature of God is upheld.

The conservative evangelical movement echoes the teachings of the Protestant Reformation in its adherence to the doctrine of salvation by grace alone. The majority of the conservative evangelical denominations put a heavy emphasis on the internal importance of Christian faith, thus rejecting the importance of external acts in the role of salvation. All three groups (Lutherans, Calvinists, and conservative evangelicals) cite as their justification the writing of Saint Paul, who said, "For by grace that you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God- not the result of works, so that no one may boast."⁵² The Southern Baptist Convention states, "Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour?, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord."⁵³ The personal change that is involved in this brand of theology is a blend of the personal acceptance of Christian life espoused by Martin Luther, and the purely internal and helpless nature of Christian life of the Calvinist doctrine. The Wesleyan Church affirms this in saying, "We believe that when one repents of personal sin and believes on

52. NRSV, Ephesians 2:8-9.

53. Southern Baptist Convention, "The Baptist Faith and Message," <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfm2000.asp> (accessed 27 February 2011).

the Lord Jesus Christ, that at the same moment that person is justified, regenerated, adopted into the family of God, and assured of personal salvation through the witness of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁴

As in the teachings of Luther and Calvin, good works are considered to be a sign of salvation rather than its prerequisite. Once you receive this salvation (or election) through Christ, you will be changed internally, and in turn you will be changed externally. Jesus says in the gospel of Matthew, “you will know them by their fruits.”⁵⁵ Even though this statement was made in regard to prophets, it is used as the biblical justification for this advocated position of salvation. Ultimately, the understanding of salvation’s cause and effect lies in an interpretation of the sacraments and what it means to live a Christian life.

Sacraments

As Christianity developed, the proper way of communing with God slowly developed into a number of practices called sacraments. Sacraments deal with the theological approach to everyday life. They can be divided into two categories: sacraments that are rituals pertaining to the rites of passage and rituals related to purity.

Ritual rites of passage exist in all cultures. They are society’s way of marking the transition between ages and emphasizing the importance of the stages of an individual’s life. The first rite of passage is that of birth. Rituals pertaining to birth welcome the newborn child both to the world and to the community to which they will belong. While the child will not remember the ceremony, it marks the importance of the child to those already in the community. The child represents the future of the community and the potential for the perpetuation of its values. In

54 . The Wesleyan Church, “Our Core Beliefs,” <http://www.wesleyan.org/beliefs> (accessed 27 February 2011).

55. NRSV, Matthew 7:20.

Christianity's predecessor religion, Judaism, this ceremony is the Bris; a ritual circumcision performed when a boy is eight days old. It marks him as a child of Abraham and welcomes him to the community in the manner of which God directed.⁵⁶ The Christian rite of initiation is that of Baptism. In the Gospels, Jesus was baptized as an adult by his cousin, John the Baptist. Baptism at this point was nothing new: the washing with water symbolically washes away life's infections and restores the individual to a state of purity and renewal. Over time, baptism was interpreted as being done for both the remission of sin and as an initiatory ceremony as one is welcomed into Christ's flock. As there is traditionally considered to be no salvation outside of the Church, baptism developed into a ceremony for newborns, so they too could benefit from salvation through Christ.

Then next step in human development is when one reaches adulthood. This is the point where biologically we are capable of creating our own children to care for. In society, we are expected at this point to be able to think for ourselves and therefore we are expected to be responsible for our own actions. In Judaism, a pubescent adolescent is considered an adult and given a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, at which point the child is considered an adult and expected to follow the Torah on their own. Once Christianity became the dominant religion in Europe and the Mediterranean, infant baptism became the norm. When this occurs, there is the need for a child to become responsible for their own spiritual journey and become an adult in the eyes of the Christian community. Thus we see the solidification of the sacrament of Confirmation. Prior to being confirmed, the Christian child must be initiated (baptized) and then trained in the ways of the Church. After sufficient education, the child is confirmed, at which they become full members of the Christian community, with all of the rights, privileges, and responsibilities that

56. Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2011), 279.

come with it. This ritual is typically performed at the age of puberty, but can also occur much earlier or much later, depending on the individual.

When any individual reaches the point in their life in which they can be committed in a sexual relationship and expected to reproduce, it is often expected that they should experience the ritual sacrament of marriage. Marriage is the bonding of two individuals in the eyes of the community, and in the case of Christianity in the eyes of God. In the Roman Catholic tradition, marriage is invalid unless done in the Church's purview.⁵⁷

The final ritual rites of passage are those that pertain to death. While this is not ritually performed by the individual, death is perhaps the most important rite of passage in the eyes of the community. Most often, rites pertaining to the dead involve the treatment and disposal of the body, but the performance of such is as much for the living as it is for the dead. The rite of passage in older forms of Christianity for the dead or dying is that of Extreme Unction⁵⁸ and burial. Extreme Unction is the sacrament which prepares the individual for the afterlife. Burial, while not one of the enumerated sacraments, prepares the dead for the bodily resurrection taught by the Church and gives the living the opportunity to mourn the bereaved.

The second type of sacrament in Christianity deals with purity. The disease that permeates humanity from the Christian perspective is sin, and the various forms of Christianity teach how one can be freed from the consequences of sin. In pre-Reformation Christianity, one would participate in the sacraments of Baptism, Confession and Absolution,⁵⁹ the Eucharist, and Extreme Unction in order to be released from their sin. While Baptism washes away original sin, confession of one's sins paired with the absolution of those sins relieves the individual of sins

57. Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 533

58. In the post-Vatican II Council Catholic community, the term "Extreme Unction" has been replaced by "Anointing the Sick" and is performed for those who are not necessarily dying, but infirmed.

59. Also in the post-Vatican II Council Catholic community, the words "Confession" and "Absolution" have been replaced by "Reconciliation."

performed after baptism. Receiving the Eucharist returns the Christian to a state of unity with Christ.

The enumeration and meaning of the sacraments has been a contention between Christian communities since before the Protestant Reformation. By the sixteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church held that there were seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage, Ordination (the taking of holy orders), Eucharist, Confession, and Extreme Unction.⁶⁰ Reformer Martin Luther did not argue as much against the importance of these rites, but the meaning and institution of these within the Christian life, as well as the consideration of certain rites as “sacraments.”

Martin Luther believed that the Church had put too much emphasis on the sacraments and their role in the salvation of an individual and that the Church had committed offenses against its adherents in the name of these sacraments. He also saw that the Church had approved other deeds that one could perform in order to receive the blessings of God and as a result go to Heaven. As stated before, Luther believed that salvation could not come from good works, but from the grace of God alone. Therefore, actions on Earth are a result of the relationship that one has with Christ, not the relationship itself. Luther redefined the sacraments with this, and what he saw as biblical precedent, in mind. Baptism remained the initiatory performance which freed the individual from sin, but the commitment to Christ was emphasized over the washing ritual itself.⁶¹ The second act which is referred to as a sacrament in Lutheran theology is that of Holy Eucharist. The doctrine that Luther upheld was that Christ was present in the bread and wine during the Communion, but not in a state of transubstantiation. Whereas, in the Roman Catholic doctrine the bread and wine of the Eucharist are changed into the actual body and blood of

60. Ibid., 528-533

61. Jonathan D. Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther*, *Studies in the History of Christian Thought* vol. LVI (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1994), 37-45.

Christ, in the Lutheran doctrine Christ is physically present with the community in the bread and wine of the Eucharist.⁶² In this sense, there is no salvation in eating bread and wine, but there is a communion with Christ and his community, which is a continual accepting of God's grace.

John Calvin's view on sacraments represented a complete overhaul of what it meant to live a Christian life. Like Luther, Calvin affirmed the inability of the individual to receive salvation through the performance or participation in the sacraments. Calvin taught that instead of "sacraments," Christians were to participate in the two traditions of the Church which have foundations in the teachings of the Bible: Baptism and the Lord's Supper.⁶³ This matches perfectly with the Calvinistic teaching of *Sola Scriptura*, in that there is blatant justification for these two activities in the Bible, limiting the necessity for theological development. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Gospels, in turn Jesus baptized others, and then his disciples baptized others.⁶⁴ What Calvinist theology presented was the picture of a symbolic commitment to Christ as opposed to the actual spiritual cleansing that is taught in pre-Reformation and Lutheran theology.⁶⁵

The Calvinist tradition departed completely from the idea of the preexisting theology of the Eucharist. Calvin did not believe in the physical presence that was propounded by both the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation and the Lutheran policy of consubstantiation. Instead, the Reform theological importance of the Lord's Supper was considered to be both done in remembrance of the Last Supper of the Gospels and as a communal event in which the spirit of Christ and the Holy Spirit is present.⁶⁶

62. Martin Luther, "The Marburg Colloquy," Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 279.

63. Elsie Anne McKee, *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present*, Lukas Vischer, ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 21.

64. Matthew 3:13-16, Mark 1:9, Luke 3:21, John 1:29-33, John 3:22, Acts

65. McKee, *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present*, 21

66. Ibid.

The issue of the enumeration and importance of the sacraments continues into the arguments of the conservative evangelical movement. The title of “sacrament” is seldom used, many churches prefer the term “ordinances”; however the actions of what it means for an individual to live a Christian life are often discussed in conservative evangelical theology. The same issues raised in prior theologies are considered pivotal to the conservative evangelical standpoint while not considered essential to the Christian life. For example, marriage and ordination are not necessary to the Christian life in these churches, but the theology surrounding the two is well developed within the tradition. Conservative evangelical denominations which seek to return to the teachings of the Protestant reformers mimic the theological standpoints of their predecessors explicitly. Such is the case of the Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod. In most other cases, the two rites of Christian life are those named by Calvin: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Baptism, and the manner of Baptism, is a great contention between denominations. How is Baptism properly performed? What does it really mean? Who can receive this blessing? The largest unified force in the conservative evangelical movement, the Southern Baptist Convention, states that, “Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead.”⁶⁷ There are several assertions made in this quote which exemplify the conservative evangelical teachings on Baptism. First, the method is examined, in which immersion of the baptized is required. This comes from the biblical precedent, where Jesus was

67. Southern Baptist Convention, “The Baptist Faith and Message,” <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfm2000.asp> (accessed 27 February 2011).

baptized in the River Jordan and, “was coming up out of the water.”⁶⁸ The implication being, according to interpretation, that Jesus had to be in the water to come up out of it. Therefore, the sprinkling or pouring baptisms performed by older traditions are inadequate and inauthentic when matched to the biblical precedent. The next assertion in this mission statement is that the rite is performed as an act of obedience. Obedience cannot be displayed by an infant because an infant cannot comprehend what it means to be complacent. Therefore, Baptism must be limited to those who can understand the act of submission. Finally, the importance of the rite is explained as being an outward expression of an inward belief. In this respect, Baptism is not as much of an initiatory experience as it is a commitment ceremony for those prepared to walk the Christian path. This view of Baptism is also held by the Wesleyan Church, the Churches of Christ, and in the majority of the nondenominational churches within the conservative evangelical movement.

The other consistent sacrament among the conservative evangelical community is that of communion, most often called the Lord’s Supper. The Wesleyan Church states its belief on the doctrine of the Last Supper in saying, “We believe that the Lord’s Supper is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ’s death and of our hope in His victorious return, as well as a sign of the love that Christians have for each other. To such as receive it humbly, with a proper spirit and by faith, the Lord’s Supper is made a means through which God communicates grace to the heart.”⁶⁹ Observe that this is neither a statement on the substance of the materials, nor on the exact manner of Christ’s presence in the event of the Lord’s Supper. As in the writings of the early Reform theologians, the Lord’s Supper is performed more for its historical connection and communal nature than for its salvific benefits. In the performance of the sacrament, participants are to be

68. NRSV, Mark 1:10.

69. The Wesleyan Church, “Our Core Beliefs,” <http://www.wesleyan.org/beliefs> (accessed 27 February 2011).

reminded of the Last Supper described in the Bible, and its meaning as a preparation for Christ's crucifixion and ultimately humanity's salvation therein. It serves as a reminder of the past (Christ's time here on Earth), sanctifier of the present (emphasizing the importance of Christianity's perpetuation through Church unity), and anticipation of the future of Christianity (the promise of eternity through Christ).

The focus of Christian practice in the conservative evangelical movement is an extension of the focus of Christian faith within its teachings. The twenty-first century status of conservative evangelical theology represents a victory of the internal nature of Christian faith espoused originally by the medieval Protestant reformers. As an individual who has been reborn in Christ, there are certain practices that are done to remind the individual of everything that Christ has done and will do. There is no task that a human could perform that would be sufficient to achieve salvation. It puts all of the power back in the hands of God.

Conclusion

When we examine the theological arguments of the Reformation and their contemporary counterparts, we can see that the heart of their argument is that the Church is corrupted. What they seek is to reconstruct the Church to what Christ meant it to be. This reconstruction is an easy task in the eyes of these reformers. It is right there in the Bible, all one has to do is look.

There are several problems that arise in the reconstruction of the Church. The first is interpretation. How is it that we as humans are to understand the will of God? How much of the preceding theology is to be discarded as inventions of the preceding regime? Next, we have the issue of reconstruction itself. What are you attempting to return to? When you attempt to get back to the "good old days" of Christianity, are you envisioning an actual time, or constructing

an ideal that never existed? Finally, there is the implication of the theological position that is newly asserted. When you assert that you have the “true” theological position, as Calvin, Luther, and contemporary conservative evangelical theologians have done, you also assert that other theological positions are false. What is the implication of following false beliefs about God? Did everyone go to Hell before Luther, or is there allowance for the ignorant? In the end, the theological discourse of any particular group is developed for a particular purpose. The pattern of theology adapting to society causes a liberalization of the message as a whole. As a result, the message becomes available to more people. In this spread of the message, the rigidity of the original message is watered down, and in response a conservative community speaks out. Finally, the innovative “conservative” position asserts that it is the original, and therefore correct, tradition and consequently the possessors of the exclusive truth. Exclusivity is alluring, especially when the alternative is eternal damnation, so the new conservative position grows.

CHAPTER 4

CORRELATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL THEORY IN REFORMATION AND CONSERVATIVE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY

Although sometimes overlooked in twenty-first century theology, political divisions have arisen in Christianity that have shown the deep-seeded desire for reform within various Christian denominations. Within the varying denominations of Christian history, individual movements have voiced a multitude of opinions ranging from the government's need for religious influence to the need for politics and religion to be divided completely. What is the proper role for the church and state to interact? Did Jesus intend for the church to keep its distance from governmental affairs and vice versa, or did his teachings guide Christians to operate all aspects of their lives according to the teachings of the church? Contemporary conservative evangelical reform movements assert that religion and government are essentially linked due to the faith of the governed.

Christian Politics to the Reformation

In the beginning of Christian history, Christianity not only existed outside of the political realm, but also on the fringes of society as a whole. The message propounded by Jesus himself in the gospels seems to be one of political separation and complacency. Often used to support this theory is a quotation from the Bible which parallels throughout the Synoptic Gospels, which states, "Jesus said to them, 'Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the

things that are God's.'"⁷⁰ While Jesus does not state explicitly to blindly follow the will of the government, this statement is often interpreted to mean that there is a division between an individual's obligation to his or her government and those obligations that are due to God specifically. Therefore, the Church's dealing with the government in the first few centuries of its existence was not one of political lobbying.

Adding to the division between politics and the Church were the views of Christianity within society as a whole. Within the society of its foundation, Christianity was widely viewed as a distortion of the Torah, and many Jews rejected the budding religion outright. In fact, its greatest promoter, later referred to as the Apostle Paul, began his experience with the church as one of its biggest rivals. Saul of Tarsus, better known by his Roman name Paul, was a Pharisee, and representing the religious rulers was involved in the martyrdom of some of the first Christians, particularly that of Stephen.⁷¹ This first wave of persecutions was instigated by the Jewish mainstream and continued until the Diaspora.

After the initial persecution by the Jewish mainstream community, Christianity began to be persecuted by the Roman Empire. The persecutions within the Empire as a whole began in small, localized areas throughout the Empire, and later were called to spread to the Empire as a whole. Christianity was seen as being contrary to the very ideals of the Empire. According to the beliefs of the Romans, the emperor was a living god, and upon his death he would take his place amongst the Pantheon. While here on Earth, all Roman citizens were expected to give tribute to the living god. The refusal to worship the emperor signaled out the burgeoning religion as being both nonconformist and somewhat treasonous. The implication of such an issue is that the Christian population was equally subversive to the government and hazardous to the religion of

70. NRSV, Mark 12:17; paralleled in Luke 20:25 & Matthew 22:21.

71. NRSV, Acts 6-7.

the establishment. Being contrary to both the government and religion of Rome presented a threat to the stability of the Empire. First, a growing movement with a majority of its population that refused to conform to the regulations of the government posed a perceived threat to the cohesion and continuation of the Empire. Secondly, refusal to worship, give tribute to, and even recognize the gods of the Roman Pantheon gave offence to the gods and welcomed their wrath. In addition to this, ignoring and discrediting the gods of the Empire in favor of the god of the Hebrews gave credence to the idea that Yahweh and the people who follow it were somehow more powerful than the gods of the Roman Pantheon and the empire which they represented. Thus, saying that the only true god was the God of the Hebrews and the gods of the Roman world were somehow imaginary was perceived to be declaring the Hebrews (Judea) to be greater than their Roman overlords.

This schism between Christianity and the Roman government culminated in the empire-wide persecution called by the Emperor Nero. Suspicious of the emperor, the citizens of Rome began to implicate Nero as having started the Great Fire of Rome. Nero, who was most likely nowhere near the city at the time, was accused of starting the fire in order to make room for building projects. In order to pass the blame and the hostilities of the Roman citizens, Nero implicated the fledgling Christian religion and called for their empire-wide persecution. This tactic worked well. Hostilities toward the seemingly nonconformist came easily, having been fostered previously on the local level. The ensuing hysterics removed focus from the atrocities and ineptitude of Nero and redirected them to the “outsider” sect of Christianity. What followed this proclamation was over two hundred forty years of religious persecution.

The role that government took in Christianity following the persecutions was largely two-fold. First, Christianity shifted its status of conscientious objector to that of being

antigovernment. During this time was written the *Revelation of John*, an alarming religious piece, which maps out a battle between the forces of God and the forces of evil. While most often treated as a work of eschatology, theologians have often asserted that its writer meant it to be a manifesto that pits the followers of Christ against the Roman government.⁷² With this taken into consideration, the writer, John of Patmos, warned his fellow Christians against “the Beast” (Caesar) and the power of “Babylon” (Rome). Secondly, the Roman government became a tool of salvation for many of the Christian people. While there was a developed distrust of the Roman Empire, the persecution that it perpetuated allowed Christians to die for their faith. The belief of the giving one’s life for Christ became the goal for many Christians, and martyrdom continued to be the desire of the pious until even past the rule of the Emperor Constantine.

The rule of the Emperor Constantine began in 306 CE, but his rule of the Roman Empire was not solidified until much later.⁷³ Although he did not convert to Christianity and submit to baptism until immediately preceding his death, contemporaries of Constantine wrote that he had a vision the night before the battle of the Milvian bridge, in which he saw the letters *chi* and *rho* in the sky and with them heard a voice say, “In this sign, conquer.”⁷⁴ *Chi* and *rho* are the first two letters of Christ in Greek, so when Constantine won the battle after marking the shields of his troops with the letters, he determined that he had been granted victory by the god of the Christians. In 313 CE, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, which called for the cessation of the persecutions of Christians.⁷⁵ While the persecution of Christians had been on the decline for years, this was seen as the legitimization of Christianity in the eyes of the Roman government, and brought Christianity from the status of a fringe religion to that of being somewhat favored by

72. New Oxford Annotated Bible, p. 421 New Testament.

73. Gonzales, *The Story of Christianity, Volume 1*, 107-108.

74. Ibid., 107

75. Ibid.

the Emperor. In 325 CE, Constantine convened the First Council of Nicaea, in which he sought to form Christianity from a religion consisting of hundreds of local churches with varying beliefs into a uniform body with an orthodox set of beliefs. This action brought the status of Christianity one step further: from being not only validated by the government, but to also being controlled by the embodiment of the government. By 380 CE, the Emperor Theodosius had not only supported the free worship of Christians, but also declared Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire. In just over three hundred years, Christianity had gone from a cult of a handful of Jewish reformers with no ties to the government, to a movement of the downtrodden living in contrast with the government, to the controlling religion within the most powerful government in the world. Christianity had gone from being separated from politics in the time of Jesus, to the political force itself under Theodosius.

The Church continued to be a dominant force within European politics on through the fall of the Western Roman Empire and well into the Medieval Period. In the eyes of many, after the fall of the Roman Empire, the Church was the only unifying factor that remained among the rubble of the former world superpower. Its dominance of European politics was solidified in the eighth century, when a document called the *Donation of Constantine* was discovered.⁷⁶ The *Donation of Constantine* outlines how the Emperor Constantine granted the Pope the dominion over all of his lands. While considered to be a forgery today, the *Donation of Constantine* was considered canon law for centuries.⁷⁷

The farce of the *Donation of Constantine* worked well for both ecclesial and secular powers. The pope declared Charlemagne to be the successor to the Western Roman Emperors, and in return the pope was allowed to exert his power over secular authority. Kings no longer

76. Ibid., 368.

77. Luther Hess Waring, *The Political Theories of Martin Luther* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1968), 15-16.

were compelled to simply declare themselves monarch by their own hand, but instead were able to declare that their authority to govern came directly from God. Entire countries were declared to be under the direct protection of the Holy Roman Church in exchange for the remission of the sins of the entirety of its population.⁷⁸ However, both the secular and ecclesial satisfaction in this give-and-take relationship was fleeting, and by the end of the Medieval Period the relationship between the dueling authorities had grown worn, and as such was ripe for change.

According to the Gospel of John, Christ said, “there is one fold, one shepherd.”⁷⁹ Later on, it also states that Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”⁸⁰ These are the biblical verses that laid the foundation for the pivotal Medieval Papal Bull, *Unam Sanctam*. In this bull, Pope Boniface VIII’s declaration had three main declarations: there is no salvation outside of the Church, the pope is the singular head of the only church, and that all authority was subject to the Church (and by consequence, the pope).⁸¹ The implication of this declaration is that all of humanity was subject to papal rule. All of humanity must receive salvation, and therefore must receive it through Christ. The only way to reach Christ, according to *Unam Sanctam*, is through the Church. There was only one church in the eyes of the pope, and that was the Roman Catholic Church. In order to receive the blessings of the Church and therefore receive the blessings of Heaven one must first submit to the will of the Roman Pontiff. This route of logic put the Pope in absolute control of Christian affairs: both religious and political. If at any time the government were to disobey papal decree, the political authorities would essentially be condemning themselves to Hell.

78. Ibid., 17-18.

79. NRSV, John 10:16.

80. NRSV, John 14:6.

81. Johann Peter Kirsch, “Unam Sanctam,” Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15126a.htm>. (accessed 31 October 2010).

Unam Sanctam created three options for the political authorities. First, they could obey the papal decree and submit to the political authority of the Pope. Second, they could reject the authority of the pope, but in turn risk condemnation to Hell. Thirdly, they could attempt to control the decree of the Church by controlling its authorities. The appeal of the second and third option was overwhelming. The Church and state had often disputed over the question of who was to be in charge of the two worlds, be it the political world dominating the Church or vice versa, but the quarrel between the two ignored the opinions that arose with the coming reformation.

Reformation Political Theory

The theology put forth by the Protestant reformers regarding the relationship between church and state was both in contrast and a response to that of the previous ruling bodies: both secular and religious. The debate had been throughout the Medieval Period of whether the Church should be in charge of the government or if the government had dominance over religious matters. What we can grow to understand in the writings of both Martin Luther and John Calvin was that they desired for the rule of pious individuals. If this was the case, then religion and government would be generally free from encroachment of each other, while the governed gained the benefits of the rule of both parties.

Martin Luther's pivotal work on the status of the state was *On Secular Authority*, written in 1523 CE.⁸² In it, Luther attempts to convey the merits of a government that is independent of the church's authority. He began the treatise with a letter written to Prince John, Duke of Saxony, in which he objected to the distortion of the message of the scriptures in order to solidify

82. Waring, *The Political Theories of Martin Luther*, 73

the secular authority of the Church and moreover that of the Pope.⁸³ He next stated the abuses of the German Princes against both the German people and God himself in enacting laws justified as being divinely driven.⁸⁴

While Luther did object to the idea of a government controlled by the abuses of the Church, he also believed that government is ordained by God to lead. In defense of this political foundation, he cited the scripture, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God.”⁸⁵ This citation does not attribute the divinely obtained governance to the action of the church, but instead directly to God. The implication being that those who disrupt the status quo of political rule would also be in violation of God’s direct mandate on Earth. This declaration does not grant the secular authorities complete license to do whatever they please, but it does make them answerable only to God. He also quoted, “For the Lord’s sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right.”⁸⁶ In quoting this scripture, Luther hoped to establish the belief that the government acts as the hand of God on Earth, carrying out God’s ordinances. This was proven, according to Luther, in several biblical precedents.⁸⁷ These precedents are all stemming from an earthly execution of God’s will. For example, when God gave Moses the Law, he also prescribed punishment for violation of the law to be executed by the faithful.

83. Harro Höpfl, Martin Luther, and Jean Calvin, *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1-2.

84. Ibid.

85. NRSV, Romans 13:1.

86. NRSV, 1 Peter 2:13-14.

87. Luther, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 433-434

This execution of God's will by the faithful is the perfect scenario of government according to Luther. God and humanity would need no secular governing authority if all of humanity were Christian.⁸⁸ The problem is, Luther stated, "There are few true believers, and still fewer who live a Christian life, who do not resist evil and indeed themselves do no evil."⁸⁹ This is a common argument from the religious idealist. When one considers the world to be divided into two kingdoms, one must necessitate the need for both. If humanity were perfect on its own, salvation would not be a necessity. If humanity were to follow God's laws exactly, then humanity would have no need for worldly authority.

According to the argument set forth by Luther in *On Secular Authority*, it is the duty of the ruler, who is elected by God to govern, to follow God's law and treat his subjects in a just manner. In return, the subjects of the government are to submit to the government's authority, but to what extent? The reforms of Luther and the subsequent reaction by the governments of Europe against the church had planted the seeds of rebellion throughout the Protestant world. Various rulers throughout the Holy Roman Empire had chosen to sever ties with the Roman Catholic Church, declaring their realms independent from the Church and its jurisdiction. While this move was arguably political and financial in origin⁹⁰, the action set a precedent for those unhappy with the Roman Catholic Church to enact their own reforms. But what does one do when they are a Protestant that lives under the jurisdiction of a ruler who is does not rebel against the Church in Rome? What happened in the time of Luther was that one must either have chosen to leave Catholic-controlled governance for a Protestant-controlled province or, as many in the time of Luther chose, to overthrow the government and install Protestant leadership.

88. Waring, *The Political Theories of Martin Luther*, 75

89. Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 436

90. Reasons for leaving are often considered a way to escape papal rule under canon laws such as *Unam Sanctam*, but other reasons for defecting range from desire to acquire Church property to also receiving income previously gathered by the Church and sent to Rome.

Luther believed rebellion to be a grave sin that would give rise to even worse sins.⁹¹ This in mind, he also saw cases in which the secular government could overstep its right to rule. Upon any encroachment upon the rights of the spiritual kingdom of God, secular authority has gone too far. Luther stated, “where the soul is concerned, God neither can nor will allow anyone but himself to rule.”⁹² While he did state that the authority of one who should attempt to usurp God’s holy rule is detestable, the only allowance that he gave for violating its authority was to peacefully decline to adhere to it.⁹³

Another great voice of the Protestant Reformation, John Calvin, began his political piece, *On Civil Government*, with the same argument as Martin Luther: there exist in the world two kingdoms- one secular and one divine. In the opening, he stated that in the light of the freedom from the Roman Catholic Church that comes through the Protestant Reformation, there were those who saw the ultimate freedom in Christ. That freedom was seen as being not only from the authority of the Church, but also from all authority.⁹⁴ Like Martin Luther thirteen years before him, Calvin was confronted with the idea that in a world of pious Christians, there is no need to enforce the will of God that is already followed. Calvin, like Luther, also stated that the two kingdoms were of God’s creation and control, and that none were independent from either.⁹⁵ Therefore, all people, no matter their religious status, are subject to both the laws of God and the laws of secular authority.

The position of secular authority, being that it is one invested by God, is one that should not be accepted lightly, according to Calvin. Being that they serve as God’s hand on Earth,

91. W. Thompson, D. J. Cargill, and Philip Broadhead, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble Books, 1984), 99.

92. Höpfl, Luther, and Calvin, *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*, 23

93. Ibid., 29.

94. Ibid., 49.

95. Ibid.

enacting punishment for the violation of God's Law, Calvin stated that those in authority, "ought to ponder this constantly, for it can be a spur to prick them in their duty, and can bring marvelous consolation, alleviating the difficulties and vexations inherent in their office, which are many and grave."⁹⁶ Heavy is the responsibility for those who rule, for they both have the blessings of being the tool of God, and the curse of it. Calvin believed that one in secular authority should be in constant reflection of the great duties of their office, and the higher moral standard of which they should be held to; both by God and those of which they govern.

From both Luther and Calvin we can see a model for the perfect state. Primarily, secular and ecclesial authority should be separate in governance. This abuse, in the eyes of the reformers, was one continually performed by the Roman Catholic Church by attempting to surmount the authority of secular government. Secondly, the political authorities are to be just, moral individuals. This can be determined to be one who is in constant contemplation of not only the justice that he or she is owed to the people, but also the unvarying devotion to the proper moral obligation that is owed to God and God's laws. As the governed, those who are not in political power should trust in the jurisdiction of those in control of the government, understanding that perfection only lies in God. If the government is unjust, the faithful must trust in God to make all right again, and obey only the laws of humanity which the rest in the jurisdiction of the kingdom of man.

The people of Western Europe did not heed the theological pleadings of Calvin and Luther. The political atmosphere of the Early Modern Period was not conducive to the peaceful message propounded by the theological writings of the Protestant reformers. In the years following the advent of the Protestant Reformation, revolt ravaged the states of the Holy Roman

96. Ibid., 53.

Empire as the Protestant populations demanded the freedom to worship as they please.⁹⁷ They also, in contrast with the wishes of the reformers, were rebelling against the administration that had chosen to enact religious law, and as such were usurping the rule of the Kingdom of God.

Conservative Evangelical Political Theory

During the Age of Enlightenment, political theories emerged that were innovative and contrary to the status quo of European government. Ideas regarding the rights of the people and the authority of the government emerged which largely negated many of the theological standpoints on politics of the preceding seventeen hundred years. Once again the issue was raised of what is the ultimate authority, proper structure, and foundation of the state. The political climate of the Age of Enlightenment downplayed, and largely ignored, the roll of God in the interactions of everyday human affairs. The opinion of the Enlightenment political theorists was that political rulers did not gain the authority to govern from God, but instead the authority to govern is only granted by the people governed. The governments of Europe had been autocratic monarchies, and according to this model, in light of Luther and Calvin's writings, the subjects of these governments should submit to all nonreligious laws created by the monarch. With the establishment of the democratic republic of the United States of America, Protestant Christians had the opportunity to both follow the laws of the political authority and participate in their change. For the first time, if the political authority was perceived as impious, it would be acceptable for a good Christian to overthrow the impious political authority in a peaceful manner.

The growing conservative evangelical movement in the United States has prospered well in its short existence in regard to its interaction with American politics. While their reputation is

97. Gonzales, *The Story of Christianity*, Volume 2, 36

at times associated with extremist elements, as is the case with any large societal movement, the position that they hold is not much more than an adaptation of the views expressed by the original Protestant reformers, but a variation that fits within the boundaries of contemporary American politics. The term “Religious Right” has become a part of our everyday political lexicon due to the growing political influence of this emergent religio-political movement. While sharing the designation of “Religious Right” or “Christian Right” with ultra-conservative members whose religious affiliation is considered to be outside of the conservative evangelical Protestant norm, the conservative evangelical movement is the dominant population within this political designation.

Within the past few decades, the conservative evangelical movement has been a powerful force within American politics. The political views of the conservative evangelical Religious Right have transcended party lines since its inception. Prior to the 1980’s, the Religious Right was an influential force within both the Democrat and Republican Parties. With the decline of the influence of “conservative” Democrats, such as the Dixiecrats and Blue Dog Democrats, and the perceived abandonment by the Democrat Party of the ideals held by the religious conservatives, the Religious Right unofficially aligned itself primarily with the Republican Party.⁹⁸

While choosing to be fiscally conservative in its leanings, which is arguably unrelated to the source of its primary directive, the unifying factor of the Religious Right is its focus on conservative social issues and not necessarily the economic. What they distinguish to be the correct direction of the country is a combination of their religious teachings and what is perceived to be the intensions of the political foundations of the country as a whole.

98. Steven G. Brint and Jean Reith Schroedel, *Evangelicals and Democracy in America vol. II* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009), 9-10.

Conservative evangelicals and the Religious Right hope to return the country to what they believe the country was supposed to be and once was, which is a Christian nation based on Christian ideals. When they look back in history, they see that the Founding Fathers of the United States as the ideal leaders: both wise political innovators and pious Christian ideologues. The issue arises of whether this is the true model for the historical founders of the United States, or simply a projection of the hopes and desires of the conservative evangelicals upon history in order to legitimize the underpinning of their political ideology.

No matter the facts or interpretations of what the Founding Fathers of the United States actually meant for this country, the desires of the conservative evangelical Religious Right is clear: while there is no overwhelming desire to institute a theocratic government, there is a strong aspiration to place into power individuals that are of a strong religious character. Here we see the direct correlation of twenty-first century American political theory combined with sixteenth century political theology. Martin Luther and John Calvin wrote that the ideal leader was one of constant religious reflection and unwavering, upright moral nature. When such a monarch does not exist in an area, the faithful must trust God to institute his Holy Judgment on the secular government. A government such as the United States' did not exist during the Protestant Reformation. Birthright, military strength, or both determined the authority to rule, but with the institution of democracy came the authority of the religious to institute their desired moral governance. Theologically, the pious masses no longer have to fear the sins that arise with rebellion, because politically all they have to do is to band together and remove the impious leadership.

The effects of this contemporary adaptation of Calvin and Luther's political theories have steered American politics in unique directions. All one needs to do to observe the most obvious

effect is to watch the news or any campaign advertisement for political office. While the religious affiliations of the political candidates are infrequently questioned, the political leanings of the candidate often take a back seat to the perceived moral character of the individual. The implication is, according to the standpoint of the religious populace, that if a politician has been associated with an unsavory element or perhaps has been unfaithful to his or her spouse, then they are inherently unfit for leadership. Take, for example, the accusations against Rand Paul or Christine O'Donnell in their respective 2010 United States Senatorial campaigns. Accusations were raised concerning the moral character of Rand Paul with an advertisement, based on a piece run by GQ magazine, in which it was questioned why Rand Paul was a member of a secret society, why he had mocked Christianity, and why he had allegedly worshipped a god called "Aqua Buddha."⁹⁹ Opposition to Christine O'Donnell brought to light an appearance on *Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher*, in which the then political commentator admitted that she had "dabbled in witchcraft" while in high school.¹⁰⁰ These candidates had both been supported by the Religious Right, and the accusations were posed in attempts to get the conservative evangelical movement to question the moral standpoints of their own candidates, but more often the ethical shortcomings of the political left are brought forth to guide the Religious Right to a unified voting position. Often exposed are ethical inconsistencies such as adultery, as in the cases of John Edwards or Bill Clinton.

Sometimes, the very religion of the political candidate is questioned. In this case, political opponents are not simply attempting to get the Religious Right to question the moral positions of

99. Jason Zingerle, "GQ Exclusive: Rand Paul's Kooky College Days (Hint: There's a Secret Society Involved)," (9 August 2010) <http://www.gq.com/blogs/the-q/2010/08/gq-exclusive-rand-pauls-crazy-college-days-hint-theres-a-secret-society-involved.html>.

100. Huffington Post, "O'Donnell In 1999: 'I Dabbled in Witchcraft'," http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/09/18/odonnell-witchcraft-politically-incorrect_n_722035.html (accessed 18 November 2010).

a candidate, but their ability to dwell within what is considered by the conservative evangelical community to be the “American moral position.” We see instance of this dating back for decades. When John F. Kennedy ran for president in 1960, many Americans questioned the compatibility of Kenney’s Roman Catholic background and beliefs with the Protestant Christian foundation of America and its majority of Protestant citizens. Fears ranged from the idea that he may merely interpret social issues in a different manner to the suggestion that he would take all of his political and ethical direction straight from the Pope in Rome.¹⁰¹ In the Republican Primaries for the 2008 Presidential Election, the religious beliefs of former Governor of Massachusetts Mitt Romney were brought into question and he was ridiculed for his membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.¹⁰² President Barack Obama has been interpreted as being unfit to hold his elected position for following the preaching of Reverend Jeremiah Wright and even for allegedly being a Muslim.¹⁰³ All accusations have the same main point: America is a Protestant Christian nation, and it needs to stay that way.

The conservative evangelical movement has ensured the support of its political position by having behind it well-maneuvered organizations and political candidates. The Religious Right historically has had the backing of religious political organizations such as the Christian Coalition, Empowering America, the Moral Majority, and purportedly an influential conservative evangelical Christian group in Washington that is known by the colloquial name of “The Family.” The Christian Coalition of America, founded by Pat Robertson in 1989, states as one of its purposes as to, “train leaders for effective social and political action.”¹⁰⁴ The now defunct

101. Brint and Schroedel, *Evangelicals and Democracy in America vol. I*, 333

102. Jonathan Martin “Anti-Romney, anti-Mormon calls being made in Iowa,” (15 November 2007) http://www.politico.com/blogs/jonathanmartin/1107/AntiRomney_antiMormon_calls_being_made_in_Iowa.html.

103. Brint and Schroedel, *Evangelicals and Democracy in America vol. II*, 121

104. Roberta Combs, “About Us,” Christian Coalition of America, http://www.cc.org/about_us (accessed 31 October 2010).

Moral Majority, brainchild of the deceased Jerry Falwell, was founded in 1979 with the goal of electing a moral Christian president in 1980 by conglomerating the support of the various Christian communities.¹⁰⁵ Beginning in the 1990's, groups like Empower America began to directly interact with Republican candidates and the politically active Religious Right in order to create the image for the Republican Party to appeal to the conservative evangelical community.¹⁰⁶ "The Family", also known as The Fellowship Foundation Inc., is an organization that builds a nurturing environment for political players within Washington to reach their Christian spiritual potential.¹⁰⁷ No matter the method, the goal of the organizations of the Religious Right is clear: to create the political candidacy that will best support the conservative evangelical agenda and to connect the conservative evangelical populace at large with said candidates. The conservative evangelical Religious Right is a powerful voting base, and in the past has voted uniformly, lending to a large support for conservative candidacies.¹⁰⁸

When we view the progression of the Protestant reforms, it is possible to view a pattern that resurges throughout Christian history. Repeatedly, the religious mainstream becomes larger and eventually more liberal in its theology. When this occurs, then a base within the Christian population as a whole seeks to reform the church and to return it to what they see to be the true Christian way. In this way it is conservative, and what we can observe when we review the focal points of the conservative reforms is that they are more often than not the same desired reforms as the Protestant reformers that came sometimes centuries before them. This is the case in regard to both the theological and political viewpoints of the conservative Protestant reformers. When you compare the political writings of the two most influential figures of the Protestant

105. Brint and Schroedel, *Evangelicals and Democracy in America vol. II*, 19

106. Ibid., 120.

107. Jeff Sharlet, *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008).

108. Brint and Schroedel, *Evangelicals and Democracy in America vol. II*, 146-147

Reformation, Martin Luther and John Calvin, with the actions and mission statements of twentieth and twenty-first century conservative evangelical Christians, then it is evident that the goals of the contemporary reformers is not new. Whenever society is viewed to have wandered from the “Christian” political way, it is safe to assume that the politically active Christian community will seek out moral Christian political leadership. They do not desire to have the Church as the political governor; perhaps even the conservative movements realize Christianity’s diversity. Just like any other special interest group, the conservative evangelical movement and the Protestant reformers before them seek to have their best interests represented in the government. The only way to do this is to have a morally upright Christian representative in the government. Only then can the country become what God wants and what the people of God need.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

What implications are there from identifying the recurrence of conservative theology throughout history? Does it mean that humanity forgets the actions taken in the path? Does it mean that Christianity is doomed to repeat the same theological mistakes time and time again? The answer is that practical application of Christian theology creates a recurring model that will most likely repeat itself until the Second Coming of Christ.

From the very beginning of Christianity there was a battle between conservative and liberal factions. Conservative Judaistic Christians of the first century sought to adhere to the old ways, and taught that Judaism was the only context in which Christianity could be understood. Jesus was a Jew, and the followers of Jesus should be Jewish first. The liberal faction taught a broader vision which departed from Judaism and made more converts, which eventually made it the dominant Christian theology. At the Council of Nicaea the bishops of Christianity from all corners of the ancient world came together to solidify Christianity into a single religion with uniform theology. This movement was an attempt at conservatism, because they sought to dispel the theology which they believed to have departed from the original Christian messages. At this first ecumenical council, along with the councils that followed it, they dealt with issues that conservative movements have continued to converse: Christology, scripture, sacraments, politics (both ecclesial and secular), and soteriology. Even then, the mainstream Christian community fought to drive out liberal theologies which they believed was a result of the corruption of and departure from the original message of Christ. This conservative group changed through the centuries and as a result, the Protestant Reformation grew in order to return to the conservative

Christian roots. The churches that developed from the conservative teachings of Luther, Calvin, Knox, and later Wesley, were liberalized by departing from the strict teachings of their predecessors. This has necessitated within the last century the development of a conservative alternative, which is the conservative evangelical movement.

Is this resurgence of the conservative ideology simply a social oddity, or can we learn something from the decline of one theology and subsequent rise of another. Religion is often considered to be a discipline within the humanities, but it can in many cases be considered a social science. Religious studies are a compilation of several other doctrines: history, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and linguistics, among others. In each of these fields, the educated mind is taught to identify similarities in situations and infer that there are patterns that recur within human interaction. If we consider religious studies to at the very least a combination of humanities and social sciences, then we can not only understand that religion has its own patterns, but also predict the response of society to theological developments.

The writings of the Mainline Protestant groups indicate that they seem to be confused about the decline in their membership. Some groups, like the United Methodist Church, are attempting to counteract the decline by mimicking some of the practices of various conservative evangelical churches and introducing conservative worship practices. While these superficial adaptations might reach out to a handful of new members, it ignores the underlying issues that actually cause the decline. They have liberalized their theology to make it accessible to more people, but the returns on their actions have not equaled their losses in the form of conservative detractors. Until these Mainline denominations understand that their decline is caused by their liberalized theology alienating the conservative core population, the decline will continue. In the future, the conservative evangelical churches of today will attempt to expand to new adherents. It

is in their very nature as “evangelicals” to spread the Gospel. It is in all likelihood that they will adapt to society in order to reach more people, and in response a conservative movement will grow.

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