

COMING HOME: THE JESUS PEOPLE MOVEMENT IN THE MIDWEST AND
THEIR ATTEMPTS TO ESCAPE FUNDAMENTALISM

Dissertation

Submitted to

The College of Arts and Sciences of the
UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Theology

By

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UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

Dayton, OH

May 2021



COMING HOME: THE JESUS PEOPLE MOVEMENT IN THE MIDWEST AND
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ABSTRACT

COMING HOME: THE JESUS PEOPLE MOVEMENT IN THE MIDWEST AND ATTEMPTS TO ESCAPE FUNDAMENTALISM

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This dissertation is an historical study of the Jesus People Movement (JPM) in central Ohio. At present, two of these groups exist as megachurches in Columbus, OH. Each would consider themselves as something other than fundamentalist.¹ Their story owes its importance, in part, to their strong connection to evangelical leaders previously associated with Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC). This connection extends the narrative outside of Ohio to the West Coast. These mentors had set up a network of JPM experiments including alternative seminary, experimental forms of local church polity and community, other JPM groups (including the Christian World Liberation Front in Berkeley, CA), and experiments in communal living. In other words, this dissertation provides a helpful case study for answering an historically contested question surrounding the JPM: Was it anything new, or were the changes cosmetic? To be sure, these groups believed they were leaving fundamentalism behind, but it proved more difficult to escape than imagined.

¹ I use these two terms interchangeably. As I define fundamentalism in this context as a quest for certainty through belief in an inerrant Bible. The groups examined in this dissertation would not use the terms interchangeably and understand themselves as connected to evangelicalism to some degree.

Three streams that run through evangelicalism are considered. The first stream is the belief in the authority, inerrancy, and the perspicuity of the Bible. It is accompanied by confidence in one's ability to come to a functionally objective, correct interpretation and application of the Bible, both for use in formulating propositional truth and making an application to individuals' lives. This flows into a second stream: restorationism. In this context, it attempts to restore what is assumed to be an errant Christian Church to Jesus' original intent. The groups in this dissertation began with a specific brand of restorationism found in Watchman Nee's writings. Third, the "subjective-experiential" stream flows through the Protestant principle of the "priesthood of all believers," or the idea that Christians can have a personal and direct encounter with God in which they receive guidance. These events happen in the context of the Charismatic Renewal, and each of these groups utilizes and emphasizes this stream in different ways.

Each JPM group is examined in the context of the three streams. Each group arrived at different destinations and conclusions depending on which streams they emphasized and how they were applied. In the end, I will argue that none of these groups escaped fundamentalism as long as they embraced the first stream. However, the authoritarian tendencies within evangelicalism were minimized when the third stream was implemented in a manner that respected individual experience. Further, when the expectations for certainty of interpretation and application in the first stream were tempered, the danger of unhealthy authoritarianism was also diminished. However, none of the groups in this dissertation ultimately left fundamentalism. In the end, these groups are examples of the JPM operating within doctrinal fences grounded within fundamentalism. Some of these groups travel to the edge, but none ultimately escape.

For my wife Christiann and my two children, David and Becca

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The submission of this dissertation represents the end of a long, exhilarating, and costly road. I owe a debt of gratitude to many people for timely words of encouragement, insight, and support as I carried the extra load of writing on top of a full-time faculty position at Ohio Christian University. I also owe a great debt for the sacrifices made by those closest to me as my time for them was more limited than they deserved.

The latter is the debt, which I must acknowledge first. My two children, David and Becca, sacrificed time with me as I worked many a weekend and late-night to complete this project. They were patient with their dad, and their belief in me meant the world as I faced a challenge that loomed largely. My wife, Christiann, must also be mentioned. We were married on October 18, 2020, and she sacrificed time with me from the very outset of our relationship. Somehow, while writing this dissertation, I found the love of my life and soulmate, without whose encouragement I might not have finished. My late mother, Loretta, and my father, Edward Williamson, deserve my gratitude for encouraging me and believing in me. They never doubted that I would one day complete this journey and encouraged me in moments when I struggled.

Next, I owe a great debt of gratitude to Ohio Christian University for funding my doctoral work and for granting me the time to complete it. It has been wonderful to work for an institution where I have received both patience and support as I sought to balance my responsibilities to the university and complete my degree. I also want to thank my colleagues in the Theology and Ministry Department for their encouragement and support. I need to single out my colleague and friend David Brown who was in the

program with me. Our travels back and forth from Circleville to Dayton were some of the best times of my life. Dave became my dialogue partner and best friend, and I'm so thankful that he was with me for this journey.

I also need to give a word of appreciation to the many subjects of this dissertation who offered me their time and help in collecting sources and for allowing me to interview them. Ray Nethery, Michael and Kathy Seiler, Dick Pope, Craig Heselton, Jack Hickman, Justin Perkins, Bill Counts, Barry McGuire, Dennis McCallum, Bruce McCallum, Gary DeLashmutt, Sharon Gallagher, Jim Smith, John Lloyd and many others gave of their time to meet with me and share historical artifacts and invaluable primary sources.

Finally, and certainly not least, I owe a huge debt of gratitude to the faculty in the Ph.D. program at the University of Dayton. First among these is Dr. William Trollinger, who was my faculty mentor and acted as a personal mentor and friend. In many ways, he helped save my soul when a personal crisis hit me in the middle of my writing. Dr. Trollinger encouraged me to meet with Fr. Satish Joseph, who helped me find my way to God the Father when I was at my lowest point. Additionally, Dr. Brad Kallenberg was a critical source of help and encouragement early in my journey through the program. Dr. Anthony Smith was an early believer in my work and an advocate for me to be accepted into the program in the first place. John Inglis was also a great source of encouragement in my journey and showed great enthusiasm for my topic. Finally, I want to thank Dr. Randall Balmer for his willingness to be on my committee and for his helpful feedback. It is much appreciated.

The most fitting way I could end these acknowledgments is to mention Dr. Susan Trollinger, who became a voice of God's grace in my life and introduced me to the "God of Excess" who never tires of offering his children mercy and help.

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INTRODUCTION

In his book *God's Forever Family*, Larry Eskridge writes that on January 24, 1967, a contingent of what would become known as the Jesus People Movement (JPM) was at the "Human Be-In" at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, CA. The group eschewed the LSD that was being passed around yet partook of the marijuana readily available at the event. Jim Doop, a recent convert to Christianity, recalled that,

There was a wonderful feeling of love with all these people. I had never been in such a positive atmosphere with people like this in my life. Nobody scowled at anybody. Everyone just smiled at each other and greeted one another. I had never felt love from strangers before.¹

Eskridge writes that Doop recalled, as he sat in the sunshine and listened to the music of the Grateful Dead, "I expected Christ to return at any moment. I couldn't believe that it could get any better than this...I thought I was pretty close to heaven. I just didn't know that it was available to experience anything so spiritually high.... I was so grateful to God for allowing me to be a part of this phenomenon."² Doop's response to this iconic countercultural event, as a new convert to Christianity, is illustrative of what made the JPM a fresh movement and a product of the era. It was hopeful and open to the experience of God without boundaries. It is what makes the JPM such a compelling chapter in American religious history.

The Sixties

The JPM is significant, in part, because it is the product of a very particular moment in history. Bruce Schulman writes that throughout the Sixties, the liberal consensus that had dominated the postwar period was dismantled. From the mid-1940s

¹ Larry Eskridge, *God's Forever Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 22

² Eskridge, *God's Forever Family*, 22.

until the mid-1960s, there was broad agreement that allowed the establishment of “big government.” The fundamental principles for the organization of American life were largely agreed upon by both Democrat and Republican administrations. Most Americans “accepted the activist state, with its commitments to the protection of individual rights, the promotion of economic prosperity, and the establishment of some rudimentary form of political equality and social justice for all Americans.”³ Radicals from neither party exerted much influence.

However, the word that continuously surfaces in descriptions of the “Sixties” is “upheaval.” What are we to make of Todd Gitlin’s claim that, “All times of upheaval begin as surprises and end as clichés?”⁴ His point is that we tend to artificially look at the past through arbitrary decade markers and then interpret them with “oversimplifications” and “soundbites” for mass consumption. This era is also viewed in radically different ways depending upon the ideology of the interpreter. Those on the Left will view it as a hopeful time that ended with the abandonment and defeat of the “revolution” that they sought. They were forced to settle for cultural change, but the political revolution they sought never arrived. Those on the Right view it as a time of upheaval and assault upon traditional American values, a disaster avoided, an impetus for unification, and a focus toward a restoration of order.

Alongside political upheaval was a cultural upheaval. The hippies drew inspiration from the same historical forces as the New Left and yet came to a far different conclusion. The upheaval was needed, but the system was broken beyond repair. The SDS shared this conviction but believed that the answer could be found through

³ Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies* (Cambridge, MA: DaCapo Press, 2002), 5.

⁴ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), xiii.

revolution and the establishment of a new system that would be a truly participatory democracy. The Counterculture argued that true revolution could only be found through enlightenment from within as a result of escaping the system. In his pictorial history of Sixties counterculture, Don Snyder recalls that, “Many of us believed it was the dawning of a new and better age. Some of us saw the revolution as political; others sought a more fundamental change, a spiritual and psychic transformation which would lead the alienated spirit of man back to a more wholesome reality, to the ever-unfolding, the ‘eternal now.’”⁵

Schulman writes that after the Chicago riots, both protest and conformity were increasingly seen as undesirable. There was a genuine appeal to a “real alternative to the corrupt, violent, greedy, tactless mainstream,” and it “exerted a powerful appeal.” During the Summer of Love in 1967, the best estimates of the actual number of hippies in the United States at around 100,000. By the early 1970s, they numbered in the millions. According to Schulman, by the end of 1968, the line between the young radicals of the New Left and the Counterculture had largely disappeared in the sense that even those most politically inclined had “embraced the larger cultural critique of the counterculture.”⁶

The Jesus People Movement

What came to be called “The Jesus People Movement” (JPM) had begun sometime around 1967. Ted Wise, himself a former hippie, started a Christian coffee house in the Haight Ashbury District of San Francisco. Others, like Kent Philpott, a seminary student, began doing street evangelism in the Haight as well. Wise and his

⁵Don Snyder, *Aquarian Odyssey* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 1979).

⁶ Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies* (Cambridge, MA: DaCapo Press, 2001), 14, 15.

group was present in the Golden Gate Park for the Human Be-in. Others, like Chuck Smith, the pastor of Calvary Chapel, opened their doors to countercultural youth who were seeking to know more about Christianity, creating a safe space for them to explore the faith. Smith, famously, baptized hundreds of these young people in the ocean.

National coverage of the JPM began in February of 1971 with an article in *Look Magazine* entitled “Today’s Kids: Turning to Jesus, Turning from Drugs.” The article was generally positive, but it was clear that the authors were having difficulty identifying what was representative of the JPM and what was not. There was genuine curiosity and struggle to define the JPM early on. The May 14 issue of *Life* had an article entitled “The Groovy Christians of Rye, N.Y.” that suggested the bewilderment of middle-class professionals at the sudden conversion of their children

The Christianity that obsesses these hundred or so kids in and near Rye, and many thousands elsewhere, has little to do with nativity pageants, bake sales, or other sidelights of religion familiar to their parents. Jesus, to these kids, is not the stained-glass embodiment of remote virtue, nor do they regard the Bible as a majestic collection of myths. They feel Christ as an immediate presence and see the Bible as the irrefutably accurate word of God, containing no contradictions and solving all their problems from cosmic to the trivial. ‘For them,’ as one father observes, “it’s the ultimate how-to book, like the very ambitious manual of an automobile mechanic.”⁷

This response of bewilderment was the common response of their middle-class parents at what they were witnessing.

Most significantly, *Time* ran a 12-page cover story that summer:

There is an uncommon morning freshness to this movement, a buoyant atmosphere of hope and love along with the usual rebel zeal...their love seems more than a slogan, deeper than the fast-fading sentiments of the flower children: what startles the outsider is the extraordinary sense of joy that they are able to communicate.⁸

⁷ Brian Vachon, “The Jesus Movement is Upon Us,” *Time Magazine*: (February 9, 1971): 17.

⁸ Vachon, “The Jesus Movement is Upon Us,” 16.

The constant comparison to the Counterculture was common and understandable. The young people depicted in the interviews bore the cultural signifiers in appearance and theme of countercultural youths. They were calling for revolution, and the Jesus they depicted seemed to have more in common with Haight Ashbury than conservative evangelicalism.

Survey of Research on the JPM

The JPM is contested historical territory. Part of the problem is the difficulty in identifying the boundaries of what qualifies as a manifestation of the movement. Further, there are some who argue that it was, in large part, a media creation. It was the media buzz in 1971 that led to an eventual takeover by mainstream evangelicalism. An example of this is Campus Crusade for Christ's Explo '72, where even President Richard Nixon had been in negotiations to make an appearance.⁹ Did the thousands of Christian teens attend it because they believed it to be the Christian answer to Woodstock? Likely most did. Did Bill Bright and the sponsoring organizations have any desire to produce a truly countercultural Christian expression? The answer is much more complicated. John G. Turner finds comparisons between CCC and elements of New Left groups. They shared "intense dissatisfaction with the status quo on campus, a utopian vision, grassroots organizing, and protesting, and stark internal divisions." However, even though CCC "often grew side by side" with the JPM, they "remained more straitlaced, culturally and politically conservative organization."¹⁰ Groups concerned with this dissertation did not consider Explo '72 to be a manifestation of the Jesus People Movement.

⁹ John G. Turner, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 141.

¹⁰ Turner, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ*, 138.

Historian Martin Marty recognized this absorption of the JPM by the mainstream. He wrote an article for *Theology Today* in 1972 in which he claimed that the year 1971 marked “the year of the Jesus revolution.”¹¹ It represented a significant trend in American religion. It’s potential for longevity and lasting effect was an open question at the beginning of 1972. Marty believed that the sudden attention given to the movement could lead to its demise. He questioned the wisdom behind their eagerness to embrace the press and the camera and suggested that in “almost any other period such a religious force or sectarian cluster would do what it could to find a crevasse or niche out of view somewhere. From such a place, people could carry on creative subversion, do some sorting, get things together, and then sally forth.”¹² However, he admitted that this opportunity is denied in modernity. What follows is a synopsis of some of the available literature on the movement divided into multiple groups.

Conclusions as to the true nature of the JPM vary depending upon where one draws the boundaries of the JPM and how one defines fundamentalism. Further, one’s answer to “Whither the JPM?” is greatly influenced by how one views the evangelical/fundamentalist divide. For example, if one believes that evangelicalism is a substantively different movement than fundamentalism because of their posture toward Protestant liberals and Catholics, then one is likely to find the JPM to be something, at the very least, partly new and fresh. Many members of the JPM believed that they were leaving “institutional” religion behind. Those with evangelical backgrounds usually mean two things by this statement. First, they rejected liberal Protestantism as a valid form of Christianity. Second, they desired to leave the cultural baggage of their parents’ religion

¹¹ Martin Marty, “Jesus: The Media and the Message” (*Theology Today*, January 1972), 470.

¹² Marty, “Jesus: The Media and the Message,” 471.

behind for something new and fresh that shared certain values and aesthetics with the Counterculture. They did not, and do not, wish to believe they were/are fundamentalists. However, if one is to define fundamentalism by the doctrine of an authoritative, inerrant Bible and a dogged preoccupation with the certainty of one's ability to correctly interpret and apply the Bible to all areas of life and practice in one's contemporary setting, then one will find little difference between fundamentalism and evangelicalism and by extension, the JPM.

The JPM As Something “Beyond Fundamentalism”

Hiley Ward's *The Far-Out Saints of the Jesus Communes*¹³ placed the JPM in a position “beyond fundamentalism.” In his final chapter, he addressed similarities between the doctrinal stances of Fundamentalists that were generally shared with the Jesus Movement. He concluded that the Fundamentalists focused much more on strictly defined categories, doctrinal terminology, and separation from the secular while the Jesus Movement was centered on the experience of Jesus as revealed in the Scriptures. The Scriptures carried authority, but a strictly defined doctrine of inerrancy was not viewed as necessary. “The future of the Jesus People movement was never a fundamentalist camp to begin with. The dynamics are too diverse. They could never accept the single-minded narrowness of conservatives.”¹⁴ Ward suggested the possibility that the Jesus Movement would one day become involved in politics.

Similarly, Michael McFadden's 1972 book *The Jesus Revolution*¹⁵ also understood the JPM as something beyond fundamentalism. He did not believe the

¹³ Hiley Ward, *The Far-Out Saints of the Jesus Movement* (New York: Association Press, 1972).

¹⁴ Ward, *The Far-Out Saints of the Jesus Movement*, 166.

¹⁵ Michael McFadden, *The Jesus Revolution* (New York: Harrow Books, 1972).

movement to be a fad but believed that it could eventually fade due to an inability to come to terms with society and the Church “as it is.”¹⁶ His best-case scenario was an infiltration into the established Church that would bring reformation. He did not believe that in re-entry, they would accept the values they had chosen to reject. The result would be a marked change within established denominations. The JPM had rejected the materialism of their parents and had no inclination to return.

In 1974, Jack Balswick wrote an article in the *Journal of Social Issues*, entitled “The Jesus People Movement: A Generational Interpretation,”¹⁷ that supported McFadden and Ward’s views. It was an attempt to explain how the JPM could have close doctrinal similarities to and yet be something beyond fundamentalism. He suggests the use of Manheim’s “Fresh Contact” theory. Countercultural youth came to embrace tenets of fundamentalism such as the inerrancy of Scripture, the role of the Holy Spirit, and its insistence on Jesus as the “one way”—but the context of contact with these teachings were set within the 1960s.¹⁸ As a result, they maintained traits of the Counterculture such as subjectivism, informality, spontaneity, alternative forms of worship, and “media of communication.” The Jesus People are “double dropouts”¹⁹ whose values differ both from straight society and the broader youth counterculture. Two differences between Fundamentalism and the JPM are the former’s emphasis on “*validating*” their existing religious values and strategies. The JPM appears to be more interested in the creation of

¹⁶ McFadden, *The Jesus Revolution*, 206, 207.

¹⁷ Jack Balswick, “The Jesus People Movement: A Generational Interpretation,” *Journal of Social Issues* (1974): 23-42.

¹⁸ Balswick, “The Jesus People Movement,” 28.

¹⁹ Balswick, “The Jesus People Movement,” 25.

such values and strategies. However, both draw strong lines in regard to the authority of the Bible and inerrancy.

A second approach to identifying the JPM as something new and an agent of substantive change within evangelicalism is to identify fundamentalism sociologically instead of doctrinally. Perhaps, the most influential attempt to define the movement was *The Jesus People: Old Time Religion in the Age of Aquarius* written by Ronald Enroth, Edward Ericson, and C. Breckenridge Peters do just this. Enroth and Kevin John Smith (mentioned below) both suggest that the Jesus Movement is a revitalization movement in response to social anomie. Enroth believes the Jesus Movement to be an “unorganized social movement.”²⁰ There was no centralized leadership, and the various groups were often fiercely independent, ethnocentric, and very diverse. Common threads include a simple-mindedness that fails to understand themselves in the larger context of history, an emphasis on Jesus’ imminent return, and communal living. Additionally, they focus on “inner revolution” often to the neglect of larger social issues. Ultimately, they should be understood as a “searing indictment of a desiccated, hidebound institutional church.”²¹ Until this movement arose, the established church had largely ignored the Counterculture. Enroth believes that “Theologically, the Jesus People are fundamentalists; sociologically, they are not.”²² He also identifies the JPM as generally falling within the experiential strain of American Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movements of the twentieth century.

²⁰ Ronald Enroth, Edward Ericson, and C. Breckenridge Peters, *The Jesus People: Old Time Religion in the Age of Aquarius* (Grand Rapids, MI: William C. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 232.

²¹ Enroth, *The Jesus People*, 240.

²² Enroth, *The Jesus People*, 17.

A more recent text, Kevin John Smith's 2011 book *The Origins, Nature, and Significance of the Jesus Movement*, builds off of Enroth's work. He suggests A.F.C. Wallace's Revitalization Theory as an explanation for the emergence of the Jesus Movement. Smith asserts that the Jesus Movement would not have formed apart from the cultural turmoil of the 1950s and 1960s. He finds significance in its rise occurring simultaneously with the disintegration of the Counterculture and claims that "Initially this began a mission by hippies, to hippies, for hippies." It is a revitalization movement in its own right challenging inadequacies on both sides of the cultural gestalt. For Smith, "The Jesus Movement was not only a religious alternative but also a religious variation of a general theme of disaffection, utopian dreaming, and the reshaping of social consciousness."²³

The JPM as the Catalyst to Present Day Evangelicalism and Its Engagement with Culture

Larry Eskridge published *God's Forever Family* in 2013. It is the most complete work on the movement to date. Eskridge's claim is that the JPM brought significant and lasting change to evangelicalism. It is the culmination of a trend toward evangelicals engaging culture that began fifty years prior with the birth of the Youth for Christ movement. It was "Evangelical Christianity with a hippie twist" and one of the most significant religious phenomena of the postwar period.²⁴ For Eskridge, one cannot understand resurgent evangelicalism, from the mid-sixties to the present, without taking into account the crucial role played by the JPM. Among evangelicals, the JPM ushered in

²³ Kevin John Smith, *The Origins, Nature, and Significance of the Jesus Movement* (Lexington: Emeth Press, 2011), 35, 36.

²⁴ Eskridge, *God's Forever Family*, 1.

a “strategy of accommodation” with the larger culture. They begrudgingly allowed their children the opportunity to inhabit their own and distinct cultural space. In turn, these children of evangelicals “incorporated their pop-culture sensibilities into their religious lives.” The result was a “mortal blow” to evangelical abstention from “worldly entertainments.”²⁵ Further, it changed the way that evangelicals worshipped and the music they produced. The bands that emerged out of the JPM formed the basis for what would become the Contemporary Christian Music industry. Finally, their preference for integrating Scripture-based, simple choruses and come as you are atmosphere contributed significantly to the church growth movement of the 80s and 90s that produced megachurches from Willow Creek to Calvary Chapel to the Vineyard Fellowship.

In *American Apocalypse* (2014), Matthew Avery Sutton suggests that the JPM “blended the counterculture’s criticism of mainstream American society with a call for a return to a radical, New Testament-type Christianity.” He notes their countercultural values such as opposition to consumerism, complacency in mainstream American Christianity, and their affinity for communes. Additionally, they dressed and spoke like hippies. They spoke of being high on Jesus and “rejected the trappings and demands of the modern world and looked forward to a post-Armageddon Christian utopia.”²⁶ Sutton regards the movement as a “premillennial-infused Jesus explosion” that “represented a substantial shift in American culture.” He suggests that just as evangelical leaders like Billy Graham, Harold Ockenga, and Carl Henry were attempting to consolidate authority, this new generation of Christians were rejecting institutional faith. Most interestingly,

²⁵ Eskridge, *God’s Forever Family*, 8.

²⁶ Matthey Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 342, 343.

Sutton uses this as an example of the inability of evangelical leaders to fully control the direction that their own movement would take.

Likewise, Shawn David Young's *Gray Sabbath: Jesus People USA, The Evangelical Left, and the Evolution of Christian Rock* (2015) credits the JPM for evangelical Christianity's skill at engaging culture and contextualizing their worship. The earliest manifestations of the JPM sought to quell internal angst, left in the wake of the failure of the Sixties revolution, with a turn to the historical Jesus. They hoped to begin again there carve a new path. Young classifies the Jesus movement as a "significant American revival that changed the way many youths experienced Christianity."²⁷ Simultaneously, a number of conservative denominations incorporated the vernacular of "hip" culture in an effort to evangelize 60s youths. The adoption of popular culture was an effort by evangelicals to halt what they perceived as a decline in American values. The result was a new evangelicalism that rose to become "a powerful force, making its mark on publishing, film, television, festivals, and music, continuing the historical lineage of American evangelicalism as a dominant, complex, growing expression of Christianity."²⁸

Finally, Robert Ellwood wrote *One Way: The Jesus Movement and Its Meaning*²⁹ in 1973. Ellwood believes that the Jesus Movement was part genuine, grassroots movement and part media creation. It began as a means for teens, disaffected with the costs of the drug-fueled countercultural attempts to reach an absolute inner transformation and the failures of radical politics, to achieve a true transformation of society. However, once the media spotlight was shown on them, the Jesus Movement suddenly exploded in size.

²⁷ Shawn David Young, *Gray Sabbath* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 2.

²⁸ Young, *Gray Sabbath*, 5.

²⁹ Robert S. Ellwood, *The Jesus Movement and Its Meaning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

Ultimately, the movement was in the historical lineage of evangelicalism with its ahistorical attitude, focus on ecstatic experience, apocalypticism, and anti-culture mentality (seeing itself as a part of a society that is not yet but is to come). He believed its ultimate significance would likely be most felt in the retention of the children of evangelicals who had begun to view this form of their parents' religion as a viable alternative.

The JPM and the Rise of the Religious Right

As for the Religious Right, Preston Shires' book *Hippies of the Religious Right*³⁰ argues that the JPM was the product of the symbolic end of the Counterculture in 1974. The resignation of Richard Nixon and disillusion with the failure of the Counterculture to bring the societal change they sought. The JPM was made up of the children of evangelicals who had been swept up by the Counterculture, as well as those who had no background with evangelical religion. He wrote that the activism that characterized those who emerged from the Jesus Movement was eventually leveraged for politically conservative ends. "Conservative activism was actually a faithful expression of a commitment to radical engagement that had been engendered and nurtured by sixties youth during the counterculture and then authentically and persistently lived out by them, albeit for different causes, after they converted to a biblically grounded Christianity."³¹

In *From the Bible Belt to the Sun Belt* (2011), Darren Dochuk provides helpful insight into the perspectives of the evangelical parents of adolescents and the political concerns associated with the passing of the Twenty-sixth Amendment, which allowed eighteen-year-olds to vote. Fundamentalist southerners who had transplanted their families to

³⁰ Preston Sires, *Hippies of the Religious Right* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007).

³¹ Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right*, 2.

California in the post-War period had to reconcile their faith and culture with their children's cultural adaptation into Southern Californian culture.³² The result was a form of Christianity that made them uncomfortable in its aesthetics, but that represented negligible drift from their own beliefs, both political and religious. In the end, the Jesus Movement was Fundamentalism repackaged with countercultural wrapping paper. It helped pave the way for evangelicals to get back into the cultural conversation and was a part of what made the rise of the Religious Right possible.³³

Finally, in *God's Own Party*, Daniel K. Williams mentions the JPM in his discussion of evangelical, author, and apologist Francis Schaeffer. Much like the JPM, Schaeffer incorporated imagery and illustrations from sources in the larger culture. However, like the JPM, he continued to embrace the doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible. Schaeffer, like the JPM, differed from and was initially rejected by some evangelicals because of his willingness to engage the world outside Christianity rather than separate himself from it.³⁴

The JPM As Primarily a Product of American Pentecostalism

In *The Jesus People Movement*,³⁵ Donald Bustraan argues that the JPM is best described as a family of smaller movements “polycephalous in leadership and polynucleated—birthed from a myriad of multiple geographical locations.”³⁶ The unifying factor that makes the JPM a singular movement is a shared set of hippie and charismatic characteristics. It ended with the seventies, but in its aftermath, it has led to

³² Darren Dochuk, *From the Bible Belt to the Sunbelt* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2011), 316.

³³ Dochuk, Darren, *From the Bible Belt to the Sunbelt*, 316.

³⁴ Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 138.

³⁵ Richard Bustraan, *The Jesus People Movement*, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014).

³⁶ Bustraan, *The Jesus People Movement*, loc 128.

growth, diversification and has had an influence within American Christianity that continues to the present. The JPM is best situated within the history of American Pentecostalism but was “strongly shaped” by the Counterculture of the sixties and seventies.³⁷ This gave it an identity as a subculture. It also “cross-pollinated” with American Evangelicalism but “had little, if any, connection to Fundamentalism; perhaps with the exception of a commonly shared high view of Scripture.”³⁸

In *Apostles of Reason*, Molly Worthen shares Bustraan’s opinion the JPM was an outgrowth of the Charismatic Movement. “Young evangelicals such as the Jesus People...helped lead the revival of ecstatic experience in Christian worship.”³⁹ They were responsible for creating the music of the Charismatic Movement, leading to the rise of contemporary Christian music (CCM). She writes that the JPM “represents the perfect incarnation of the Christian message in 1960s youth culture.”⁴⁰ The JPM was short-lived and was largely rejected by mainstream evangelicalism, and in turn, they rejected mainstream churches as “temples of apostasy,”⁴¹ However, it did leave a lasting mark on the evangelical expression of worship. Worthen points out that the ahistoricism and apocalypticism of the JPM led to them having given little priority and having little patience for serious theological inquiry.

Argument and Statement of Academic Question

Three “streams” that animate and are identifying markers within Protestant evangelicalism, the doctrine of biblical authority (along with inerrancy in the cases of

³⁷ Bustraan, *The Jesus People Movement*, loc 5077.

³⁸ Bustraan, *The Jesus People Movement*, loc. 212.

³⁹ Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 143.

⁴⁰ Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 145.

⁴¹ Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 143.

these particular groups), restorationism,⁴² and the personal, experiential/subjective experience of the Holy Spirit, all flowed into the JPM. My argument is that these streams seemingly all lead to the same place. The exception to this rule is when the individual is acknowledged as the primary interpreter of the subjective/experiential stream, rather than it being under the interpretive control of evangelical leaders. All three streams are present in each reiteration of fundamentalism in the twentieth century, as well as the JPM.⁴³

Fundamentalism's compulsive need for purity and certainty of belief (particularly in regard to the Bible), ahistorical approach to reproducing the first century in the present, shorn of the lessons learned in the intervening centuries, combined with the subjective/experiential stream, predisposes them to a continual cycle of generational division. Emerging generations reject the authority of the prior generation usually because of a personal "revelation from God" that leads them to split off from their forebearers. However, they continue down the same path of leveraging their own interpretation of the Bible toward authoritarianism and ahistorical restorationism, all the while believing that they are doing so with a mandate received directly from God. The generation that follows continues the cycle of rejection and recreation.

If a national, twentieth-century evangelical movement appeared to bear the potential for a fresh approach, it was the JPM because its countercultural element seemed to free it from the cultural baggage of fundamentalism. However, was the "baggage" they

⁴² By "restorationist," I am referring to the Protestant evangelical impulse to recreate the First-Century Church in the present. These efforts typically approach such projects with ahistorical assumptions along with a conviction that the Church became corrupted or even apostate at some point in the past and that they are called by God to reset the course of the Church.

⁴³ I am using the term "charismatic" loosely in this claim. What I mean is that there are experiential elements present in all fundamentalist movements in the twentieth century. This can be illustrated through their focus on a conversion "experience" with the Holy Spirit and in the emphasis on personal prayer and Bible study that can lead to discerning messages and direction directly from God.

discarded primarily superficial? They rejected fundamentalism's antagonism toward culture and embraced a countercultural aesthetic, but was there more? Was this enough for it to escape the typical destination of the three streams? The groups in this dissertation began with assumptions about the authority, inerrancy, and perspicuity of the Bible. In the end, did they become something new despite this?

The postmortem is revealing. The JPM provides an interesting look into whether or not such groups can escape this fate because they were beginning during a unique period of upheaval within the larger culture. Initially, this allowed them space to imagine and pull from various influences, both inside and outside Christianity, to begin these new attempts at restorationism. Second, they were also decentralized. Groups were only informally connected, and there was a great deal of diversity between them, possessing just enough commonalities to eventually categorize them as part of the larger movement. This meant that, at least initially, there was not an easy way for the mainstream to overtake them. Lastly, mainstream evangelicalism was in a state of flux. Neo-evangelicals had broken with Fundamentalists in the late 1950s. This led to a golden age of sorts for so-called neo-evangelical parachurch organizations in the 1960s. However, by the late 1960s, Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC), arguably the most significant parachurch organization of the era, was splintering. Many of its most significant staff members and vice presidents were coming to the conclusion that the approach of CCC's leader Bill Bright was both legalistic and wrong. Their critique echoed the critiques of the Neo-Evangelicals toward their fundamentalist predecessors a decade before. These CCC castoffs then turned their attention to continuing their work with baby boomer generation youth and particularly those who had been influenced by the Counterculture. Later, these

Baby Boomer-led groups would, in turn, break off from their former mentors, finding them too legalistic, antiquated, and/or misguided in an all too familiar refrain.

An Introduction to the Three Streams

Fundamentalism and the Authority and Inerrancy of the Bible

Fundamentalism originated as a result of the negative response to the rise of Protestant liberalism among a large number of conservative Protestant Christians. These concerns included a reaction to the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* in 1859 and the rise of higher critical approaches to the Bible.⁴⁴ While the former could be reconciled, to a degree, with a literalist reading of Genesis, the latter called into question perceived errors in the text and borrowed elements from other cultures as it examined the Bible as a contextualized, historical text. This called into question the divine origins of the Bible. Many began to understand the Bible "as an errant document that human beings, living in the stream of time, wrote."⁴⁵ A significant number of Protestants responded with alarm.

The most important theological concept to come out of this reaction was biblical inerrancy.⁴⁶ The Princeton theologians of the 19th and early 20th century developed the doctrine that the Bible was both perspicuous and free of error. They argued that the small amount of error that we do find was not present in the original autographs of Scripture and can be disregarded. The twentieth century saw an expansion to the list of "fundamentals" that qualified one to be a part of the group.

⁴⁴ Susan Trollinger and William Vance Trollinger, *Righting America at the Creation Museum*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 2.

⁴⁵ Trollinger, *Righting America*, 2.

⁴⁶ Trollinger, *Righting America*, 2.

The further hardening of the lines was an important development. James Barr warned that fundamentalism poses less an intellectual problem than an obstacle to ecumenicism since it identifies others who are not in their group as not Christian.⁴⁷ The rationale goes something like this: The Bible is God's Word to us. The authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit in a way that enabled their personalities to come through in the text but only allowed precisely what God wanted to be written. When one combines these presuppositions, to question the Bible is to question God's faithfulness. For them, it follows that someone who rejects inerrancy, rejects faith in God, and they should not be cooperated with. This potential for isolation, particularly among independent fundamentalist churches, opens the door for the possibility of abusive authoritarianism. They are not only cut off from the larger Christian conversation, but the leader typically carries great authority as the chief interpreter of the authoritative, inerrant Bible.

Restorationism

The Restorationist stream is something implicit within both fundamentalism and the Charismatic movement. It is the belief that one may "recapture" the original Gospel and vision for the Church found in the New Testament. Something was lost at some point following the death of the original apostles, and they have now rediscovered it and are thus restoring the original vision of Jesus Christ for the Church. Since fundamentalism focuses on the authority and perspicuity of an authoritative, inerrant Bible, if one follows the prescribed method of interpretation, authentic Christianity, without impurity, can be recreated.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1977), 338.

⁴⁸ D.A. Carson, *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Press, 2014), 215. B.B. Warfield responded to critics of inerrancy by claiming that the Bible was inerrant in

The groups in this dissertation were influenced by a specific brand of restorationism. Plymouth Brethrenism began in England and Ireland in 1825 but by 1848 had already split into two factions, “closed” and “open.”⁴⁹ It initially began with an idealistic “longing” for the possibility of recreating the first-century church that would be symbolized by an open communion table for all Christians, regardless of their faction, but it also carried a pessimism that led to an “exclusivist tendency.”⁵⁰ An example of this pessimism leading to exclusivism can be found in John Nelson Darby’s dispensational premillennialism.⁵¹ Darby and others in his faction of the Brethren Movement merged their optimism regarding the recreation of a pure church that could lead its adherents to a fuller experience of salvation with a pessimism regarding the ultimate destination of modern culture. Human government and systems would continue to decay and increasing numbers of the faithful would become apostate until the time of Christ’s return. Thus, they felt a growing need to keep their “pure” church from contamination from the outside.

The JPM groups in this dissertation gained inspiration from a derivation of the Brethren Movement through the writings of Watchman Nee and his “Little Flock” house

its autographs, original manuscripts, and that “We already have practically the autograph text in the New Testament in nine hundred and ninety-nine words out of every thousand.”

⁴⁹ This was in reference to the communion table. “Closed” brethren would not allow those outside of their group to partake of the Christian celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

⁵⁰ Roger Shuff, “Open to Closed: The Growth of Exclusivism Among Brethren in Britain,” (*Brethren Historical Review*, 2008) 10.

⁵¹ Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 62, 63. Dispensational premillennialism was developed by John Nelson Darby and gained popularity in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was further popularized by the notes in the Scofield Bible after the turn on the twentieth century. According to Ernest Sandeen, Darby’s system contained two main innovations to earlier forms of millenarianism. First, the second advent of Jesus Christ would be a secret rapture when only his faithful followers would be snatched away. This would be followed by a great tribulation, and second, second coming of Christ when he would set up a literal thousand-year reign on earth. Secondly, this secret second advent was immanent and could take place at any moment.

church movement in China. The emphasis was placed on creating small house churches and an ecclesiology that was based on a prescriptive reading of the Book of Acts.

The Subjective/Experiential Stream: Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movement

Alister McGrath frames the Protestant principle of the “priesthood of all believers” in the context of the authority of the individual to interpret Scripture for oneself. It contributes to the “fundamentally democratic nature” of Protestantism.⁵² However, the “priesthood of all believers” takes on a potentially more powerful democratizing effect in the Charismatic and Pentecostal branches of Protestantism. Not only can the individual interpret the Bible for themselves, but they can have a subjective experience with God that can provide guidance or even a prophetic message from God. However, this stream can also be leveraged by evangelical leaders to exert intrusive authority into the lives of their followers by making themselves the judge of whether or not the subjective experience is legitimate.

In other words, this stream holds the potential to, at least functionally, if not ideologically, free a group or individual from the darker, authoritarian side of fundamentalism. The personal experience of God can allow for empathy and a softening of the lines between Christian groups concerning questions of interpretation of the Bible. An acknowledgment of its validity can allow for mutual respect between clergy and laity, thus preventing the leveraging of authority in abusive ways.

The Charismatic Renewal or Neo-Pentecostalism was the result of a seemingly spontaneous expression of the “the baptism of the Holy Spirit”⁵³ in St. Mark’s Episcopal

⁵² Alister McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 231-234.

⁵³ Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt*, (New York: W.W. Norton Co, 2011), 281-285. This was described as a replication of the events of Acts 2. “Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind

Parish in Van Nuys, CA in 1960. This event marked the beginning of a movement that spread throughout mainline denominations (including Catholicism) across the country. It was decentralized and not associated with a particular denomination. Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ and a key figure in this dissertation, was associated with Hollywood Presbyterian Church. In 1964, the Charismatic Renewal appeared there, and 600 members of their congregation experienced glossolalia (speaking in tongues).⁵⁴ Many evangelicals were alarmed by the inclusion of experience as a source of authority in addition to the Bible. Darren Dochuk quotes J. Vernon McGee, who categorized those in the movement as “charismatic fundamentalists.” McGee finds it alarming that, “They have the Bible in one hand but experience in the other.”⁵⁵

By the early 1970s, organizations had formed to provide teaching on a broad scale. Major centers included Melodyland Christian Center in Anaheim, California, led by Ralph Wilkerson, St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Seattle led by Dennis Bennett, and the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) led by Pat Robertson. In addition to these, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal established ecumenical communities in places such as Ann Arbor, MI, and in South Bend, IN. Each of these groups exhibited both fierce independence and a belief that the movement could have a greater impact on larger Christianity if it remained an interdenominational and independent movement rather than becoming a denomination itself.⁵⁶

came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”

⁵⁴ Dochuk, *From the Bible Belt to the Sunbelt*, 282.

⁵⁵ Dochuk, *From the Bible Belt to the Sunbelt*, 283.

⁵⁶ More, *The Shepherding Movement*, 24.

However, it was this lack of accountability that gave the five leaders of the newly formed Christian Growth Ministries (CGM) in Fort Lauderdale, FL, pause in the late 1960s, and it was this group that influenced the leadership of JPM groups in this dissertation. S. David Moore suggests that the moral fall of the founder of this ministry, Elden Purvis,⁵⁷ and other notable leaders in the larger movement led them to find contemporary church structures to be “inadequate and often unbiblical.”⁵⁸ Their answer was to place emphasis on “discipleship”⁵⁹ and assign every Christian to a “shepherd” or what amounted to a “personal pastor.”⁶⁰ What became known as the “Shepherding Movement” became controversial on two counts. First, they were accused of a plot to take over the Charismatic Renewal and turn it into a denomination. Second, by 1975 there were growing reports of inappropriate control being exerted over the lives of members of these cell churches and abuses of power.

Theoretical Approach and Sources

This dissertation will examine the question of the nature and varied outcomes of these groups through the use of historical narrative. The hope is that a chronological/inductive approach to these questions has provided a clearer picture of, if not what might have been, the shared elements of each successive group that may have prevented or enabled a real emergence from evangelicalism into something truly new. How does the emphasis and utilization of each of the “three streams” influence the outcomes of these connected, yet distinct, religious experiments? Thomas Tweed’s

⁵⁷ Elden Purvis was the founder of *New Wine* magazine. It was this magazine that brought the five independent charismatic leaders (Derek Prince, Bob Mumford, Charles Simpson, Don Basham, and Ern Baxter) who became the “Fort Lauderdale Five” together.

⁵⁸ Moore, *The Shepherding Movement*, 181.

⁵⁹ An evangelical Protestant word for something akin to spiritual mentoring.

⁶⁰ Moore, *The Shepherding Movement*, 1.

definition of a historical narrative will be utilized. For Tweed, an historical narrative moves beyond chronicle, “plain narratives” representative of a chronological list of past events, to “ordered chronicles, usually with a beginning, middle, and end, that construct meaning out of the human past.”⁶¹

As Tweed explains, in the process of constructing a historical narrative, historians are bound to meet certain standards. First, there is the aesthetic standard, which concerns the level of skill applied to narrative construction. In particular, the level of vivid detail is important in any attempt to draw out the motivation of the subjects in their historical settings. Second, the moral standard guards against the use of historical narrative to “perpetuate unjust social or economic conditions by condemning some historical groups to play only minor supporting roles in the story.”⁶² Adherence to this standard should, ideally, prevent skewing of the data that overlook the importance and/or independence of individual groups for the benefit of some more influential or powerful group through the use of an overarching metanarrative that silences often overlooked grassroots movements. Third, Tweed suggests an epistemological standard. The historian does not invent the facts but seeks to assign meaning to events. This means that in their obligation to the past, historians are bound to recognize that facts stand apart from the narrative constructions that he or she utilizes to interpret the meaning of said facts.⁶³

The construction of this narrative required that I ask how individuals involved in the movement view themselves and their relationship, if any, to fundamentalism. Did they understand themselves as an entity within the Counterculture forging their own

⁶¹ Thomas Tweed, *Retelling U.S. Religious History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 7.

⁶² Tweed, *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, 8.

⁶³ Tweed, *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, 8-10

distinct version of Christianity or something within the evangelical church bringing renewal? Perhaps, we have overlooked the uniqueness of individual manifestations of this movement in favor of an approach that is either beneficial to the preferred narrative of a more powerful constituency (e.g., the Religious Right) or perhaps just for expediency in attempting to interpret an often-vexing period in history.

These particular groups are interesting precisely because they represent an early and organic meeting between elements of the Counterculture and disaffected evangelicals who sought renewal and reform. All parties involved embraced the three streams but emphasized and applied them to varying degrees. Further, these evangelicals had been personally involved in the split between fundamentalists in the late 1950s. Ten years later, they split off from their mentors to restore the Church to what they believed Jesus had originally intended in the first century. Most of these leaders had either spent significant time in California or were based there. The JPM groups they helped to establish in Ohio sent their leadership to California for training. These groups would find their mentors' vision to be inadequate in the 1970s and ultimately followed their own vision. Depending upon their use of the three streams, each of the three groups came to a different conclusion, yet none escaped fundamentalism, despite their belief that they were creating something different. In fact, they usually became more firmly entrenched. The streams limited their ability to innovate and think beyond the categories their mentors had instilled.

Primary and secondary sources were utilized in the attempt to answer these questions. Interviews with Jesus Movement participants and leaders on the campus of Ohio State University and on the West Coast served as a case study for grassroots

manifestations of the movement in the Midwest. Additionally, I had access to several issues of the underground papers from other groups they were in conversation with. I also had access to primary sources such as letters, publications, and manuscripts of interactions, teachings, and disagreements among themselves.

This particular narrative provides a helpful window into understanding the Jesus Movement on the macro scale as well. The founders of the ‘Fish House’ on the campus of OSU and some of the future leadership of Vineyard Columbus attended the JC Power and Light House, an alternative seminary, on the campus of UCLA. Two of them served as temporary editors of that seminary’s underground paper while they were students. Further, Jack Sparks, one of the founding members of the New Covenant Apostolic Order (NCAO), was also the founder of the Christian World Liberation Front (CWLF). I had access to archives of their underground paper *Right On!* This connection to the JPM on the West Coast assists in illustrating the cross-pollination of ideas and attitudes that took place at the time.

Chapters

Chapter 1: Divisions Within Fundamentalism and the Rise of the New Covenant Apostolic Order.

This chapter argues that each of the “three streams” played a part in the division that took place between fundamentalists in the late 1950s and within Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC) in the late 1960s. Founder and leader CCC, Bill Bright, had his leadership and vision questioned by several of his vice presidents who had begun to seek to recreate an authentic expression of “church” as they believed Jesus had intended it. The eventual formation of the New Covenant Apostolic Order (NCAO) would be colored by a

maximal expression of all three streams. This included their attempts at countercultural expression.

Chapter 2: The New Covenant Apostolic Order: Fundamentalism Sealed Behind Walls 2000 Years Thick.

This chapter argues that the NCAO leveraged all three streams (biblical authority and inerrancy, restorationism, and the subjective/experiential) to exert maximal authority in the lives of their followers. It argues that this is where these streams ultimately lead when taken to their logical conclusions. This chapter traces their journey from a hopeful beginning to internal discord, accusations that they were a cult, and eventual terminus into Eastern Orthodoxy.

Chapter 3: Coming Home: The Fish House/Xenos Attempts to Escape Fundamentalism but Never Really Leaves.

Two of the founders of the NCAO, Gordon Walker and Ray Nethery, had a large constituency of young followers in the Columbus, OH area. The Fish House, later Xenos Christian Fellowship, broke off from their mentors when the NCAO was formed. This chapter will examine the outcomes of a JPM group that remained fiercely independent while emphasizing the biblical authority and inerrancy stream and attempting to build their restorationist vision strictly on their reading of the New Testament. The subjective/experiential stream is not denied but is deemphasized and neglected. The result is intrusive authoritarianism. Over the years, accusations that they are a cult have plagued this church of 6000 in Columbus, OH.

Chapter 4 The Triumph of the Subjective/Experiential in a Fundamentalist Context: Vineyard Columbus

This chapter follows the JPM group in Columbus, OH, that initially joined the NCAO but later left with Ray Nethery. This group actively embraced some countercultural values

while continuing to embrace biblical authority and inerrancy. They differ from the others in that they are willing to adjust their assumptions over time. Further, they emphasize the subjective/experiential stream to a greater degree than the others. They eventually joined the Vineyard Movement in 1987 after an ecstatic experience at a Vineyard conference. Today, it is the largest Vineyard Church in the United States with over 12,000 members.

CHAPTER 1
DIVISIONS WITHIN FUNDAMENTALISM AND THE RISE OF THE NEW
COVENANT APOSTOLIC ORDER

Introduction:

If one were to sum up the mood of Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC) staff members between 1960 and 1968, it would be “triumphant.” The term “crusaders” was often applied to them without thought given to the word's historical connotation. Unlike the crusaders of the medieval era, these crusaders were not fighting with cavalry and swords. They fought with their metaphorical sword, the Bible, and sought to infiltrate public and non-evangelical,¹ private universities. They experienced tremendous growth as a result and believed there was no ideological outpost they could not conquer. However, by 1968 many of their highest ranking and most visible personnel would leave dissatisfied with CCC and their labors' results. This chapter examines why this happened in light of the “three streams.”

These former CCC directors would lead, mentor, and establish the JPM groups with which this dissertation is concerned. Not many years before, these men believed they had rejected mainstream evangelicalism to strike out independently. In reality, they never left. Like the counterculture, they thought they were ushering in a new age of

¹ For the purposes of this dissertation I use the terms “Evangelical” and “Fundamentalist” interchangeably. I will argue that, although what became known as Neo-Evangelicalism often has always sought to distinguish itself from its forebearers as more tolerant and less militant, the two movements share enough fundamental characteristics to be considered different expressions of the same American religious phenomenon.

enlightenment to the mainstream. Peter Gillquist writes in his autobiographical work *Becoming Orthodox*,

Those of us who led this particular journey met in the 1960s in Campus Crusade for Christ. Though we were products of the fifties, we must have been something of a tip-off to the turbulent sixties just ahead: dissatisfied—or better to say unsatisfied—with the status quo of what we perceived as dull, denominational American Christianity.²

These men found common ground with the Sixties counterculture. The status quo was no longer acceptable. However, this does not mean that they had left it behind. They continued to embrace the “three streams” and a typical evangelical approach to each. They not only held to biblical inerrancy, but they believed in the certainty of their interpretations.

Further, they sought an ahistorical restorationism that resembled a typical evangelical approach to a church's recreation as described in the book of Acts. Later, it would take a rather unusual direction, but their commitment and approach to the first stream prevented them from genuinely leaving evangelicalism. Finally, they embraced the subjective/experiential but craved uniformity of message to obtain a sense of certainty in their conclusions. It begs the question of whether or not anything substantive had changed. Try as they might to leave evangelicalism, they were unable to escape. Their crusade continued because the quest for certainty in their interpretation and implementation of the three streams naturally led them to view debate or dissent as a zero-sum game.

This chapter will explore the context that shaped these men's ideas and examine whether or not their attempts at creating a new movement that capitalized on the context

² Peter Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 2009), 4

of the JPM were anything genuinely new. The three streams (inerrancy, restorationism, and the subjective/experiential) prove exceedingly determinative. First, fundamentalism and its contemporary form, neo-evangelicalism, loomed in the background for all of them, and they would continue to attempt to persuade neo-evangelicals to join them. Evangelicalism was the movement through which all of them were either converted to Christianity or came of age, and they felt like they had the answer to problems they perceived within it.

Second, the writings of Watchman Nee inspired their brand of restorationism. Nee's house church movement, Little Flock, arose out of 19th century Plymouth Brethrenism, applied in a Chinese context, and from there traveled to the United States first through Nee's books translated into English. Eventually, Witness Lee, Nee's protégé, brought Nee's movement to the United States. This brand of restorationism was an attempt to recreate the Church, as described in the book of Acts, in the present, emphasizing church government and ecclesiology.

The subjective/experiential stream is also present. For these men, the experiential/subjective is best characterized by the Charismatic Movement. As stated in the introduction, the Charismatic Movement had no formal government or leadership. It was an eponymous grouping of churches and leaders from evangelical, Protestant mainline, and Roman Catholic churches and communities. It is also characterized by an openness to the gifts of the Spirit and a strong emphasis upon subjective experience and receiving personal and/or corporate messages from God. In this particular group, the leaders were the ultimate interpreters of the personal experiences with God relayed to them by their members.

Campus Crusade for Christ Chooses Billy Graham Over Bob Jones

If one is to understand the context that shaped these men, one must understand the generation that immediately preceded them. They believed the following events were of profound importance to their eventual decision to strike out independently.³ This narrative begins with a generational split between fundamentalists and those who would become known as evangelicals. Fundamentalism's pattern of leveraging of "three streams" to achieve a sense of certainty is evident.

What would become known as neo-evangelicalism began with Billy Graham's Crusades' growing popularity in the late 1940s. As Graham's popularity grew, he drew increasing attention from groups associated with the National Council of Churches (NCC). Fundamentalists viewed the NCC as the primary representative symbol of Protestant liberalism. In an attempt to form a fundamentalist alternative, Carl McIntire⁴ had formed the American Council of Christian Churches (ACCC) in 1941 to oppose it. One of NCC's goals was to promote ecumenism. Fundamentalism's emphasis on separation from groups they considered to be out of line with the "fundamentals" of the Gospel made the very idea of ecumenicism anathema.

In the 1950s, a rift began to develop, leading to a conflict between Graham and Fundamentalist leaders, many of whom were former mentors.⁵ The conflict surrounded Graham's willingness to cooperate and partner with Catholics and Protestant liberals in

³ Ray Nethery, "First Interview with Author," February 11, 2013.

⁴ McIntire was an influential fundamentalist leader in the 1950s. He was the founder of the Bible Presbyterian Church denomination and popular radio personality (Twentieth Century Reformation Hour). He also published a weekly newspaper, *The Christian Beacon*.

⁵ These included Bob Jones, John R. Rice, and Carl McIntire.

setting up his “crusades.”⁶ Graham, his Father-in-law L. Nelson Bell, Harold Ockenga⁷, and Carl F.H. Henry⁸ worked with others to found *Christianity Today*, a periodical that became a mouthpiece, of sorts, for what would soon become known as Neo-Evangelicalism and the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). The NAE had already come under suspicion, from fundamentalist leaders, for its softer, less combative approach to dialogue with Roman Catholics and Protestant liberals.

Bill Bright founded Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC) in 1951 and eventually found himself in the middle of this controversy. John G. Turner observes that Bright’s organization initially tied itself to Neo-evangelicalism through his connections to Hollywood Presbyterian Church and Fuller Seminary. However, in his stated goal to raise “100 consecrated young men,” Bright had sought the help of the arch-fundamentalist school, Bob Jones University,⁹ to staff his organization. In March 1953, he wrote to Bob Jones Jr.¹⁰ for assistance in recruitment. The goal was to increase the number of full-time workers from 13 to 100 for the following academic year. Bright wrote Jones again four years later with an additional fifty staff positions that needed to be filled. According to Turner, the school had become a reliable supporter of CCC over the years and had was a

⁶ “Crusades” refer to revivalist gatherings that have been a part of the American religious landscape since the First Great Awakening.

⁷ Harold Ockenga was an influential leader in the rise of neo-evangelicalism and eventual split with their fundamentalist forebearers. He was pastor of Park Street Church in Boston and helped found Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary and Fuller Theological Seminary.

⁸ Carl Henry was the first editor-in-chief of *Christianity Today*. This magazine was the unofficial mouthpiece for the neo-evangelical movement.

⁹ Nathaniel Carey, “Bob Jones University Regains Nonprofit Status 17 Years After It Dropped Discriminatory Policy,” *Greenville News* February 16, 2017; <https://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/news/education/2017/02/16/bju-regains-nonprofit-status-17-years-after-dropped-discriminatory-policy/98009170/>. Located in Greenville, SC, Bob Jones University is well known for its history of racist policies and views. Including not admitting African American students until 1971. In 1983, its rules against inter-racial dating led to a landmark Supreme Court decision (*Obergefell vs. Hodges*) that the IRS had the authority revoke their tax-exempt status.

¹⁰ Then president of Bob Jones University.

significant pipeline for recruits. By 1957, twenty-six staff members and the majority of CCC area directors were BJU graduates.¹¹

Turner writes that, although there was not yet a clear choice between fundamentalism and evangelicalism in the 1950s, Bill Bright had “introduced a dose of separatist fundamentalism into his young organization.”¹² However, the rift between the neo-evangelicalism of Graham had begun to grow. Turner mentions that Jones had abandoned the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in 1950 over their “moderate theological tone,”¹³ particularly concerning the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. As for Graham, Turner writes that Carl McIntire “was deeply suspicious of Graham,”¹⁴ due to his connection to the NAE. However, Bob Jones Sr. and John R. Rice had a more favorable opinion of Graham because of his crusades' results. He also points to Graham's brief time as a student at BJU and his honorary degree received in 1958.¹⁵ He had once asked Bob Jones Sr., “to think of him as ‘one of his boys.’” Graham had described himself as a fundamentalist in the 1940s but as early as 1945 told a Scottish audience that he was “neither a fundamentalist nor a liberal.”¹⁶

Bob Jones and other fundamentalist leaders practiced what was referred to as “biblical separation.” They refused to cooperate or be associated with groups they considered to be doctrinally impure. Over time, fundamentalism had developed a series of shibboleths, chief among these the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, to distinguish those who had the right belief from those who did not. Cooperation or alignment with groups

¹¹ John G. Turner, *Bill Bright & Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 75.

¹² Turner, *Bill Bright & Campus Crusade for Christ*, 75.

¹³ Turner, *Bill Bright & Campus Crusade for Christ*, 75, 76.

¹⁴ Turner, *Bill Bright & Campus Crusade for Christ*, 76.

¹⁵ Turner, *Bill Bright & Campus Crusade for Christ*, 76.

¹⁶ Turner, *Bill Bright & Campus Crusade for Christ*, 76.

who could not pass these tests of belief was a precursor to compromising one's doctrinal purity. Fundamentalists began to institute a policy of "double separation." They would not associate with those who ascribed their beliefs yet cooperated with those who did not. Graham crossed this invisible, yet very real, line in 1957 when the Protestant Council of the City of New York (PCCNY) sponsored his crusade. The PCCNY was the local chapter of the National Council of Churches, which for the fundamentalist, "symbolized ecumenicism and apostasy."¹⁷ John R. Rice and Bob Jones broke with Graham, who responded to their criticism at the 1957 NAE convention by proclaiming his intention, "to go anywhere, sponsored by anybody, to preach the Gospel of Christ."¹⁸ Graham's actions brought with them a divide that fundamentalists could no longer straddle. The level of betrayal felt by Jones, and other fundamentalists should not be understated. Turner quotes a letter written by Bob Jones Jr. to a pastor and BJU alumnus, "I do seriously think, he [Graham] may be the fore-runner—the John the Baptist of the anti-Christ, as he is the Judas of the brethren."¹⁹ The irony of this statement by Bob Jones is that neo-evangelicalism was nothing more than fundamentalism with a more refined demeanor. Graham still held to the inerrancy of the Bible and had not changed his stance on any substantive doctrinal issues. He is the "forerunner of the antichrist" because he accepted an invitation from a group associated with the National Council of Churches. Fundamentalists were worried that liberal churches would reap the benefits of the crusade Graham held in New York. They were cutting ties with Graham not because of his

¹⁷ Turner, *Bill Bright & Campus Crusade for Christ*, 77.

¹⁸ Turner, *Bill Bright & Campus Crusade for Christ*, 77.

¹⁹ Turner, *Bill Bright & Campus Crusade for Christ*, 78.

theology or doctrine but for those he chose to associate with. It was an argument over which side might benefit from his crusades.

As both sides of the conflict sought to gather endorsements and shore up loyalties in the aftermath, Bill Bright was faced with a difficult decision. CCC had enjoyed a mutually beneficial partnership with BJU. In 1957, Bright assured Gilbert Stenholm of BJU that “our message is the Gospel as revealed in the New Testament and taught at Bob Jones University.” Bob Jones Sr. wrote Bright in March of 1957, stating that “the line is being drawn now.... You are on record, and other organizations are getting on record.” Stenholm wrote to Bright in May 1958 that “Billy Graham’s campaigns are doing tremendous harm to the cause of evangelism.... We have to stick together and fight this battle.”²⁰

Turner claims that Bright had always admired Graham and had supported his earlier crusades in Los Angeles. When Graham planned a crusade at the San Francisco Cow Palace in May of 1958, this time without official ecumenical support, the CCC director at Berkeley refused to support Graham’s crusade. As a result, the Berkeley CCC committee, primarily made up of businesspeople, resigned, prompting Bright to travel to San Francisco to meet with his area director, Jerry Riffe, whose decision he had initially supported. Riffe had attended BJU at Bright's recommendation, so it was not surprising that he took a stand against Graham. However, Bright was courted by Graham, while in San Francisco, and invited him to sit on the stage. Bright reluctantly accepted (though

²⁰ Turner, *Bill Bright & Campus Crusade for Christ*, 78, 79. Upon the insistence of Bob Jones Sr, Bright had rewritten the statement of faith for CCC in early 1957 to make clear that they affirmed the “plenary inspiration of the Old and New Testaments, holding them to be the very Word of God.” Prior to this, CCC had functionally relied upon affirmation the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Vonette, his wife, declined). These events led to a schism between Bright and Bob Jones that would never heal.²¹

This created a crisis of conscience for the BJU graduates in the CCC's ranks and touched upon their understanding of the first stream: biblical inerrancy. Who was the correct interpreter of the Bible in this instance? Was it Graham and Bright or Bob Jones? Ray Nethery, who would become Bright's executive vice president and an eventual key leader in the JPM groups that concern this dissertation, attended BJU. He credits his time there with being a "valuable part of his life."²² He attended graduate school and even taught there before going to work with CCC. His move to CCC had initially opened his eyes to shortcomings in his education at BJU. He said that his experience with CCC, "Threw a monkey wrench into the whole thing. You get into these sophisticated environments that are anti-Christian or churches surrounding the campus that are liberal and have a whole lot of sorting out to do."²³ Nethery's quote gives insight into what was happening among BJU grads who joined CCC. He told Turner, "I began to realize that God's a lot bigger and a lot more diverse than I had originally conceived of in terms of my background."²⁴ He had left the echo chamber of fundamentalist discourse. Suddenly, he and others found themselves on major university campuses encountering ideas and questions they had not considered before.

In many cases, the certainty that had defined their past was beginning to be challenged for the first time. It was only two years into Nethery's tenure when Bright moved to associate himself with Billy Graham. Bob Jones Jr. now believed that Nethery

²¹ Turner, *Bill Bright & Campus Crusade for Christ*, 80, 81.

²² Ray Nethery, "First Interview with Author," February 11, 2013.

²³ Nethery, "First Interview with Author."

²⁴ Turner, *Bill Bright & Campus Crusade for Christ*, 82.

was compromised. He said it was “guilt by association” and that the debate was over the legitimacy of “cooperative evangelism” with those who were not fundamentalists. Nethery and his wife kept asking themselves, “Is Bob Jones, the Holy Spirit?” He continued, “We finally decided “no.”²⁵

For Nethery, Bob Jones was an authoritative interpreter of the Bible, until he was not. However, this begs the question: Did Nethery escape the same problems that ultimately beset his fundamentalist forebearers? He would not consider himself a fundamentalist.²⁶ However, he still held to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy and a sense of certainty in biblical interpretation. He grew up in a Plymouth Brethren context and embraced restorationism. He did so to the point that he, on more than one occasion, broke fellowship with others who disagreed with his interpretation of what the Bible taught. Did his more benign approach and willingness to enter the cultural dialogue bring a substantive change? I do not believe it did. The dispute between Graham and Bright and the fundamentalists was not doctrinal. Rice and Jones had decided that the principle of separation as a doctrinal issue. It was a fundamental.²⁷ However, Graham, Bright, and Nethery's beliefs concerning the interpretation and application of an inerrant Bible remained the same. Their willingness to dialogue and “cooperate” could only extend so far and was used for proselytization rather than a genuine exchange of ideas.

This illustrates a significant flaw in the fundamentalist, zero-sum game regarding truth. The belief that discovery and apprehension of the absolute, correct interpretation and application of the Bible are within reach. The problem is that each interpreter is

²⁵ Nethery, “First Interview with Author.”

²⁶ One of the reasons Ray Nethery agreed to meet with me was the desire to help me deal with my own fundamentalist past. I soon realized that Ray never really left fundamentalism in the first place.

²⁷ Harriet Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 41.

convinced of the veracity of their interpretation. Further, while leaders, typically, have had the most influence regarding the interpretation of the Bible, Protestants affirm the principle of a “priesthood of all believers” in addition to “Scripture alone.” The result is that every Protestant in the pew is a priest unto herself. If the Bible is perspicuous, as is claimed, then there is no way to argue conclusively as to a single interpretation's veracity.

If perspicuous, fundamentalists assume that the logical explanation for differing interpretations is that either one of the readers is intentionally rejecting what they know to be the correct interpretation of the text or that the person with the divergent interpretation is not following the proper method of interpretation. While there is room within the evangelical context for the Bible to speak to the individual, the range of interpretation must fall within a grammatical-historical hermeneutic that cannot find itself in violation of agreed-upon “fundamentals.” If one follows the proper hermeneutical method, one will agree with the “fundamentals” defined by evangelicals. Often, when disagreements of interpretation cannot be resolved, the alternative is to shun anyone who has an interpretation that disagrees with the accepted interpretation. This reality adds a tragic irony to what follows. Amid its golden age, CCC would lose close to half of its staff due to an interpretation of the Bible that found parachurch ministries to be unbiblical.

Beginnings of Dissent Within the CCC Ranks

Peter Gillquist tells the story of his conversion to Christianity at a CCC event while a student at the University of Minnesota in 1959. Ray Nethery was part of a panel, sponsored by CCC, invited to his fraternity to discuss Christianity. This event led to a series of weekly discussions about the Bible between Gillquist and Nethery. Eventually,

Gillquist converted to Christianity.²⁸ Shortly after his conversion, Nethery took Gillquist to share his testimony at the Independent Fundamental Baptist church that Ray attended. A week later, Gillquist took Nethery to visit a Lutheran Church in downtown Minneapolis that he had been attending. Peter recounts hearing a message on “living for Christ” that he felt was very good. Ray responded afterward, “Well, I’m going to have to go home and eat.” When Peter asked him what he meant, he replied, “The Bible is the sincere milk of the Word, and I’m starving to death.” He told Peter that there was no “solid content to [the sermon he had just heard], no verse-by-verse Bible teaching.” Ray continued, “We have got to have in-depth Bible teaching in order to grow in our faith.”²⁹ This exchange illustrates Nethery’s continued application of the “first stream” following the break with BJU.

The prominence of the restorationist stream was present as well. Jon Braun joined CCC in 1960. He was soon seen as a rising star and would become CCC’s premiere speaker in the 1960s. By chance, Braun met evangelist Gene Edwards in 1960 and then again in 1962 when they spoke at the same event. In the interim, Braun had discovered Watchman Nee’s³⁰ *The Normal Christian Church Life*. In this book, Nee lays out his restorationist vision for an ecclesiology that he believed was faithful to Jesus’ original vision for the Church. The meeting would prompt Edwards to eventually join Nee’s protégé, Witness Lee, in his “Local Church” movement. It was an effort to bring Nee’s movement to the United States. Braun had already become “vitaly interested” in the state

²⁸ Peter Gillquist, *Love Is Now* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 14-17.

²⁹ Peter Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 2009), 10, 11.

³⁰ Watchman Nee is discussed below.

of the church. The book had caused him to reflect on ecclesiological issues and what it meant to “be” the church.³¹

Over the next seven years, Braun would grow increasingly dissatisfied with CCC’s status as a parachurch organization. Bright was a businessman who wanted to see tangible results and receive reports. By all accounts, his managerial style was very controlling. Two years into his tenure with CCC, Braun was already dissatisfied with the organization and seeking to find his answers through his reading of the Bible,³² experiences such as hearing directly from God (subjective/experiential), and restorationism. He began to quietly set himself up as the champion of “God’s grace” contrasted with the “Law” within CCC’s ranks. He associated Bright with the “Law.” Braun was very charismatic and influential, and these themes resonated strongly with his CCC colleagues.

In December 1965, a CCC Conference was held over Christmas vacation in Washington DC. Three high-ranking and visible members of the organization, Jon Braun, Richard Ballew, and Jack Sparks, began a conversation that would continue to develop in the years to come.

We knew that the name of the game was ‘church,’ and it really came home to us that what Christ had started on this earth was a church, and [the] church was where it was. We had to find that Campus Crusade would not, in the long run, fill the bill unless Campus Crusade became a church.³³

³¹ Ron Ludekens, “The Church of Isla Vista: aka The Brothers and Sisters,” University of California Santa Barbara, 11.

³² Ludekens records that Braun said he was open to Nee’s restorationist vision because he’d been doing an extensive study of Colossians before encountering Nee’s book.

³³ Kevin John Smith. *The Origins, Nature, and Significance of the Jesus Movement* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2011), 171.

The men knew this was not something that Bill Bright would allow. Bright's organization, like most parachurch ministries, counted on funding from churches. If they became a church themselves and began baptizing converts, then the fear was that churches would then see CCC as a competitor, and funding would dry up. This meeting illustrates the centrality of their approach to the Bible in the events that followed. At the time, they felt like the very idea of "parachurch" was outside the bounds of what they read in the New Testament. "Why aren't we Church?" we would ask. 'Here in the New Testament, the only thing Jesus ever started was the Church.' We loved what we were doing, but in the Book of Acts, it was Church, not parachurch."³⁴

Finally, the third stream was utilized to verify their developing conclusions. Every summer, all CCC leaders would gather at Arrowhead Springs for a conference. Braun, Nethery, Gillquist, and others would gather in the steam room and discuss their lack of satisfaction with CCC's status as something outside and other than the church. They began to refer to their time spent together as "the Pipe" because "It seemed as we would open the Scriptures together, the Holy Spirit would speak to us as one man, constantly drawing us to the mercy of God—and back to the Church."³⁵ These references to God speaking to them "as one man" are startlingly frequent, but consensus serves to validate the subjective/experiential stream.³⁶ It offered them another source of confirmation for their dissatisfaction. The Bible had "told them so," and now God was telling them so directly.

³⁴ Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox*, 15.

³⁵ Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox*, 15.

³⁶ Hollywood Presbyterian Church was one of the centers of the Charismatic movement.

At the time, they felt like the very idea of “parachurch” was outside the bounds of what they read in the New Testament. “ ‘ Why aren’t we Church?’ we would ask. ‘Here in the New Testament, the only thing Jesus ever started was the Church.’ We loved what we were doing, but in the Book of Acts, it was Church, not parachurch.” The summer of 1966 was the turning point. They decided to meet at 6:00 am for breakfast at Sage’s Restaurant in downtown San Bernardino, CA. They met out of “zeal to discover New Testament Christianity” and spent most of their time pouring over the New Testament Epistles.³⁷

The Berkeley Blitz and Rise of the Christian World Liberation Front

The Berkeley Blitz took place on the campus of UC Berkeley in January 1967, and it is the impetus that led to the interest in Nethery, Braun, and the others to become involved with the JPM in subsequent years. The timing and location of the event are stunning in hindsight. The campus was in a constant state of student political protest leading to clashes with the police. The counterculture in San Francisco was at its euphoric and optimistic height. Turner suggests that CCC’s timing and approach were no mistake. The very week before the Blitz, the Human Be-in took place at Golden Gate Park to unify the counterculture's hippie and radical wings. Bright, Braun, and CCC believed they were making a statement just by being present on campus. It was an “invasion” or “crusade,” of sorts, by 600 CCC workers moving into the Berkeley context. They used a phone tree to contact students and invite them to events. Each of Berkeley’s 27,000 students was contacted and invited to concerts, dinners, illusionist (on staff with

³⁷ Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox*, 15.

CCC) Andre Cole's performance, and Billy Graham's address in the Greek theater that drew 8000 people.³⁸

Jack Sparks and the other's exposure to the Berkeley political protests and the counterculture left a significant impression. They had witnessed a collision between two worlds. CCC's typical playbook of going to the fraternities and sororities while utilizing sports figures as speakers were not effective in the Berkeley context. They recognized that they were attempting to answer societal problems without listening to the questions that the radicals in Berkeley had been asking. In other words, CCC had quickly jumped into the conversation at Sproul Hall, offering a solution, inner change through a conversion experience, that the Berkeley students found to be escapist if one were not willing to deal with the systemic issues plaguing the culture. This sort of Christianity had its opportunity in the 1950s, and it was precisely that sort of Christianity that the student radicals found repugnant.

Jack Sparks left CCC to launch the Christian World Liberation Front (CWLF), at Berkeley, in 1968. He was a close friend and confidant of Braun, Nethery, and the rest of the future members of the NCAO. He had begun with CCC while a graduate professor of statistical analysis at Penn State. He eventually joined Crusade as a full-time director. During this time, he became acquainted with Dick Ballew, the Eastern Regional Director for Crusade. According to Kevin John Smith, the vision for the CWLF was initially pitched to Bill Bright by Pat Matrisciano. Bright liked the idea but felt like Sparks' "wisdom and middle-of-the-road balance" would be needed to make the project a success.³⁹ The original group was made up of four couples: Jack and Esther Sparks, Pat

³⁸ Turner, *Bill Bright & Campus Crusade for Christ*, 124, 125.

³⁹ Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox*, 154.

and Kerry Matrisciano, Fred and Jan Dyson, and Weldon and Barbara Hartenberg. Sparks soon embraced the counterculture to the degree that would lead Bright to sever the support crusade had initially offered them. However, this was always the Sparks' intention, who did not want visible connections to the CCC to hinder their work.⁴⁰ Sparks and his team set out to recreate the first-century church in the Berkeley context.

While the “Berkeley Blitz” had been a massive evangelistic undertaking that had been partially funded by “archconservative businessman” Nelson Bunker Hunt, Sparks’ vision was to create something that would be indigenous to the Berkeley scene. The CWLF used the language of the counterculture and shared some social concerns with the New Left. Hunt’s involvement in the Berkeley Blitz had been motivated by the hope that this would be a way to curb the growth of leftist elements on the Berkeley campus.⁴¹ Sparks had a much different vision in mind. This collision of worlds, evangelicalism, counterculture, and the Berkeley milieu had produced a new vision in the minds of Sparks and the other six men who would, one day, form and lead the NCAO.

In February 1969, while on a visit to observe the campus, they joined a protest by the leftist Third World Liberation Front (TWLF). Holding placards promoting messages such as “Pig State No, Anarchy No, Jesus Yes!” and “It Takes Guts to Follow Jesus the Real Revolutionist,” they infiltrated the demonstration and were “cursed” and “spat upon.” When the police arrived, “they were teargassed and brutalized with the rest of the demonstrators.” Undeterred, they moved their families there in April of that year and began to infiltrate radical meetings and demonstrations to learn to “mimic the speech and

⁴⁰ Larry Eskridge, *God's Forever Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 95.

⁴¹ Gillquist. *Becoming Orthodox*, 95.

methods of the New Left.”⁴² They grew their hair out, grew beards, and began to mimic the campus radicals' style. They engaged in street evangelism and baptized converts in Ludwig's Fountain in Sproul Plaza on the Berkeley campus. The latter action expedited their formal separation from CCC because they would be perceived as a church.

Evangelical Concerns, an ecumenical consortium of pastors and churches seeking to fund JPM outreaches, began to support them that year.

What follows illustrates the continued evangelical approach to the “three streams” even as they set out to launch what would gain national attention as one of the most well-regarded JPM groups. It was meant to be something new, but under the surface, one can see evangelicalism in countercultural garb. Promisingly, the CWLF became a consistent presence on campus and soon branched out into services that would meet the Berkeley community's needs. They began a drug counseling hotline and passed out food to the homeless community. They founded a Christian youth hostel on Berkeley's Telegraph Avenue. They established houses that would provide a “transitional, family-like environment for new converts...”⁴³ However, even these efforts were primarily directed at the individual's internal change rather than a call for systemic change.

For example, there was nothing in their effort that offered a protest of gender inequality. In the February 15, 1970 issue of *Right On!*, they proudly print a copy of a leaflet they passed out at a women's liberation march the month prior. It features the following questions: “HOW WILL YOUR DEGREE HELP YOU DISCOVER WHAT A WOMAN REALLY IS?” “HOW MANY OF YOU LOVE YOUR CHILDREN ENOUGH TO CARE FOR THEM?” “HOW MANY OF YOU ARE WILLING TO LET

⁴² Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox*, 95.

⁴³ Eskridge, *God's Forever Family*, 96.

YOUR MAN SUPPORT YOU? (Or were you so ignorant of your role as a woman that you drove him away?)” “HOW MANY OF YOU REALLY WANT TO SPEND YOUR LIVES IN THE EMPLOYMENT MARKET?” “HOW MANY OF YOU DESERVE A MAN?” They followed these questions with a plea for women to allow “Jesus to free you from yourself and free you to love a man.”⁴⁴ One is at a loss to understand how such, purportedly, countercultural evangelicals could not see the offensiveness of their words, but this goes to their adherence to the first stream. Much of evangelicalism has long believed writings of the Apostle Paul, in the New Testament, can easily be interpreted as promoting such assumptions about the role of women. The issue also includes a cartoon that portrays women’s liberation as an attack on men’s rights. In the background, a man in a suit is locked out of the men’s bathroom. A beautiful young woman with a Barbie doll's figure in a tight-fitting blouse and skirt sits in the foreground. She is giving the JPM “One Way” symbol, pointing her index finger toward the sky. Beside her is a middle-aged, overweight woman, with masculine facial features, wearing ill-fitting clothes. She is wearing a hard hat and has unkempt body hair, including what appears to be pubic hair protruding from the waist of her pants. She is standing and lifting a “women’s liberation” flier above her head, revealing unshaved armpits.⁴⁵ The level of cruelty they felt justified in publishing is shocking. Still, it illustrates just how far evangelicals will go when they think their interpretation of the Bible is threatened. Further, it illustrates how evangelical the CWLF was.

During the early years that Sparks was leading the CWLF, it appears that *Right On!* was nothing more than a fusion of countercultural vernacular with evangelical

⁴⁴ Unknown, *Right On!* (Berkeley: February 15, 1970), 4.

⁴⁵ Unknown, “Comic Strip,” *Right On!* (Berkeley: February 15, 1970), 3.

theology when addressing critical societal issues. For example, their treatment of a memorial to Malcolm X in their May 1, 1970 edition. They praise Malcolm X as the “greatest black revolutionary in American history.” However, his actual story is wholly summed up in the first paragraph, with his death being characterized as the “loss of a powerful voice against oppression.” Malcolm’s identity as a Muslim is mentioned by a reference to his work with Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam, but that is followed with a mention of his travels, following his break with Muhammad, greatly expanding his “outlook.” His trip to Mecca is not referenced. Instead, “his two trips to Africa and other parts of the world” are all that are mentioned. Following his travels, he formed a “new organization.” There is no mention of his subsequent organization’s ties to Islam. Instead, we are given an examination of his views on Christianity’s failures. Right On's response was to agree with American Christianity's failure and suggest that this is not representative of them. Instead,

WE MUST GO BACK TO THE BEGINNING OF CHRISTIANITY...GO BACK TO JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF, TO FIND OUT ABOUT REAL CHRISTIANITY. America has not failed because of the system or Christianity. It has failed because the selfishness of men and women has distorted the system and Christianity itself. Therefore, the change must begin within. Ostensibly through conversion to REAL CHRISTIANITY.⁴⁶

The implication is that American Christianity has failed because it has not been faithful to the Bible. Ultimately, neither Christianity nor the system is responsible. The answer to racism is to focus on a change of the heart, ostensibly through conversion to evangelical Christianity, and an organic systemic change would follow.

The Exodus From CCC

⁴⁶ Unknown, “Memorial,” *Right On!* (May 1, 1970): 6.

Sparks' exit from CCC was only the beginning. Peter Gillquist recalled the day in 1967 when he and Braun decided that they would ultimately leave CCC. They were riding Evanston, IL, to downtown Chicago on the elevated train. Gillquist said,

'You know what we are? We're reformers. Just like Luther and Calvin, we want to get the church back to what it should be.' He nodded, yes. 'I'm not saying we're in their league,' I backtracked. 'And I don't want to sound preposterous. But what we really want to do is to reform the church.' 'You're right,' he agreed, and it was as though we had finally admitted it out loud to each other."⁴⁷

That year they began to gather other ex-CCC staff to begin "preaching and teaching the New Testament Church—at least our view of it."

In his book *Becoming Orthodox*, Gillquist does not mention Bright's meeting, after which he summarily dismissed them all. Instead, he wrote that in February 1968 he [Gillquist] "sensed a specific nudge, a still small voice saying, 'I want you to leave.'" He returned to the dorm and called Braun. He told him he was through with Crusade. After a long silence on the other end, Braun said, "So am I." Gillquist mailed his resignation in later that week. By 1968, Ray Nethery was Bright's second in command, vice-chair of the board, and head of Campus Crusade's efforts in Asia. A strain began to develop between Bright and Nethery over some of the CCC board's business decisions, and Ray thought it best to leave. A year before this, three high profile leaders of Campus Crusade for Christ had left over their disagreements with Bright and founded a seminary in a house near UCLA's campus. Linus Morris, Bill Counts, and Hal Lindsey named their school the "JC Light and Powerhouse" and began to attract students who were being converted to Christianity through the nascent JPM.

⁴⁷ Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox*, 17.

The rift between Bright and the men who left CCC is eerily similar to the split between Graham, Bright, and the BJU a decade before. In their view, Bright was not correctly interpreting the Bible. Bright had allowed his experience as a businessman to distort his understanding of how a ministry should be run and required detailed updates with numbers of converts, attendance at meetings, time spent, and numbers of new contacts made. They had begun to chafe under this model and had declared it to be legalistic. Braun had quietly set himself up as the champion of “grace,” and Bright was characterized as representative of legalism or the “law.” Just as Bright and Nethery had concluded that “Bob Jones was not the Holy Spirit,” so they had begun to interpret Bright’s approach to be counter to the spirit of the Gospel. Further, they were comfortable acting on the belief that God had been speaking to them “as one man” on these matters.⁴⁸

Following their split with CCC, the seven future founders of the NCAO scattered to various parts of the country and found varying success levels. Now they were faced with the challenge of generating support for their families. Dick Ballew sold coffee in Atlanta. Jon Braun directed a youth camp in Washington state and soon began to paint houses. Gillquist began writing and then moved the next year to work for Memphis State University. Each of them started house churches along the way with “varying success and failure.”

Gordon Walker had been teaching Bible classes in Mansfield, OH, as CCC director of campus ministries at Ohio State University. Upon leaving CCC, he decided to move there from Columbus to not interfere with the new CCC staff who replaced him. He

⁴⁸ Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox*, 10-11.

continued to drive down Columbus on Tuesdays and Thursdays to teach in-home Bible studies around the city and hold a noon class in the student union at OSU at noon. The latter quickly grew to 60 or 70 students. He had a vision for purchasing a farm that would house a work-study center for displaced youth and those seeking to learn more about Christianity. He shared this vision with Harold “Hod” Bolesky, a Christian businessman in Mansfield. Bolesky urged them to take a look at a farm he owned to see if it would suffice. Walker and his wife, Mary Sue, “fell in love” with the farm their first visit, and Bolesky offered to build them a house on the property. A year and a half later, Ray Nethery would join them there.⁴⁹ The vision for what would become Grace Haven Farm began to come into focus.

In July 1968, one month after leaving CCC, Braun assembled a meeting of fellow castoffs in La Jolla, CA. Their discussion surrounded a vision for a “non-institutional church” movement that they referred to as “Acts 29.” Braun, Nethery, Berven, Ballew, Gillquist, and Sparks managed to assemble 150 others interested in their vision. Their language mirrored the discussions they had been having for years within CCC.

The name of the game is church... That’s why most modern evangelism isn’t changing the world. It’s self-appointed, not church directed. People are not being reached in the context of the body of Christ—they’re like newborn babies being left on a doorstep somewhere to feed and care for themselves.⁵⁰

They were making their case for their developing restorationist vision. The implication was that CCC and other parachurch organizations were failing to “change the world” because they were disconnected from the larger Church and could not help these

⁴⁹ Gordon Walker, *Led By His Love* (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), loc. 542-553.

⁵⁰ Edward E. Plowman, “Whatever Happened to the Jesus Movement,” *Christianity Today*, Vol. 20, No. 2): 46.

new converts be appropriately assimilated into a community. Finding churches that would accept them proved to be a problem due to their countercultural appearance. Braun is seeking a reformation of evangelicalism. From his perspective, CCC and other parachurch organizations were experiencing success in converting people to Christianity. However, these conversions were not taking root because there was a disconnect with the church, but the “institutional church” proven to be ill-equipped to help nor willing to accept these converts. For Braun, Jesus’ original vision for the Church was waiting to be rediscovered, and the need for someone to do so was acute.

Braun’s description of Acts 29 reveals his restorationist vision: “a fellowship of Christian activists calling for a reformation of the contemporary church and advocating the emergence of a first-century-type church both within and without the organized ecclesiastical establishment.”⁵¹ When Braun and others speak of the “contemporary church” they are referencing churches that share the basic contours of their belief, specifically about the Bible. For them, mainline, so-called liberal churches were outside of the umbrella of legitimate Christianity. In this sense, they are a step backward from Billy Graham’s willingness to cooperate with liberals in the staging of his crusades.

Braun’s vision seems to be that this organization neither be a parachurch organization nor a denomination. Instead, he’s advocating a sort of meta-denomination. It would transcend denominational divides because of its first-century provenance and change said denominations from the inside out. In short, Braun and the others believed that the Church had lost its way at some point after the first century. Their goal was to attempt to circumvent all the past 1900 years' errors and return Christianity to its pure

⁵¹ Plowman, “Whatever Happened to the Jesus Movement,” 46.

expression. What sounds like hubris is a logical conclusion to the combination of the Protestant principle of Sola Scriptura merged with modern evangelicalism's focus on biblical inerrancy, combined with the belief that they heard clear messages directly from God.

Chinese Restorationism Travels West: Watchman Nee and Witness Lee

The groups associated with this dissertation drew inspiration from the Plymouth Brethren through the writings of Watchman Nee. The Brethren, as they are often called, were founded in 1825 in England and Ireland. Their name was inspired by the King James Version of the Bible's use of "brethren" as a synonym for "believer." David Woodbridge writes that "By using this name, the Brethren were demonstrating their intent to return to a period before the Church became institutionalized and divided into denominations."⁵² He writes that they sought to mold their churches based upon their reading of the New Testament that the original Church was one in which "small groups of believers [operated] according to essential patterns of worship and fellowship." These "assemblies" were autonomous, locally governed, and did not have ordained clergy.⁵³ Nee believed that there was only one true sovereign church per geographic region. Also, each local/regional church was to be self-governing. His vision had initially proven controversial among Western mission societies who feared losing control over their outposts in China. However, this proved an attractive model to Christians in China who were tired of their churches' foreign governance through denominations and missionary societies. In Braun and his friends' case, it appealed to dissatisfied evangelicals who had

⁵² David Woodbridge, "Watchman Nee, Chinese Christianity and the Global Search for the Primitive Church," *Studies in Global Christianity* 22.2, (2016): 126.

⁵³ Woodbridge, "Watchman Nee," 126

struck out on their own and repudiated denominational ties, wishing to materialize the kind of Church they believed Jesus Christ intended in the first century.⁵⁴

. Nee's movement grew rapidly in China. His combination of a model of Christianity, whose authority and identity was not derived from Western mission societies but the first century, led to explosive growth for his movement that became known as the "Little Flock." By 1949, Nee's movement is estimated to have grown to between 150,000 and 300,00 members. By 1956, it had become the largest Christian group in China.⁵⁵ After Nee was imprisoned by the Communist government in China in 1953 on "political and religious charges," his friend and protégé Witness Lee became the "Little Flock" movement leader.

Lee moved to California in 1961 to begin what would be known as the "Local Church" movement. Lee's efforts attracted attention thanks to the popularity of Watchman Nee's *The Normal Christian Life*. Angus Kinnear, a British author who had spent time with Watchman Nee on his visits to England, published this work based on compiled notes from sermons and speeches given in Europe and China. The book garnered much attention in the states, and Nee became well known outside China.⁵⁶ *Concerning Our Missions*, a second book was first printed in 1939 and reprinted in the United States under a new title in 1962 under the title *The Normal Christian Church Life*. This second book contained Nee's controversial teachings on ecclesiology. However,

⁵⁴ Woodbridge, "Watchman Nee," 134, 135.

⁵⁵ Dennis McCallum, "Watchman Nee and the House Church Movement in China," Xenos.org, accessed October 10, 2020, [https://www.xenos.org/sites/default/files/essay-pdfs/Watchman%20Nee%20and%20the%20House%20Church%20Movement%20in%20China%20\(McCallum,%20Dennis\).pdf](https://www.xenos.org/sites/default/files/essay-pdfs/Watchman%20Nee%20and%20the%20House%20Church%20Movement%20in%20China%20(McCallum,%20Dennis).pdf).

⁵⁶ David Woodbridge, "Watchman Nee," 139.

Woodbridge suggests that the name change evoked *The Normal Christian Life* and thus enjoyed a more favorable reception in the United States.

In 1965, Lee acquired a meeting place on Elden Avenue in Los Angeles, and in 1969 his ministry saw an influx of white, American young people. Liu notes that many of them had been a part of the hippie movement and implies that they were converted through Lee's ministry leading to a "revival" that coincided with the JPM. In 1970, four to five hundred church members were sent out to major US cities to start new churches connected to Lee's "Local Church" movement.⁵⁷

East Meets West: Gene Edwards, Jon Braun, and the Church of Isla Vista

Gene Edwards is a secondary, yet essential, part of this narrative as a trusted confidant to Nethery, Braun, and Walker. He was the first to experiment with Nee's ideas about restorationism. After coming into contact with Watchman Nee's writings through Jon Braun, Edwards was an evangelist who left his ministry in Texas to join Witness Lee's movement in California.⁵⁸ He soon had a falling out with Lee, following a trip to China where he had been privately critical of what he witnessed there among churches affiliated with Nee's movement. His criticisms did not stay private and were reported to Lee, so he began his work in Isla Vista, CA, just outside of Santa Barbara.

Just before leaving CCC in 1968, Braun had established a CCC chapter at UC Santa Barbara. This group later disaffiliated themselves with CCC after Braun resigned but continued the group continued to meet. Nethery connected them with Edwards, and they would become the core of his eventual experiment with his restorationist vision. In

⁵⁷ Liu Yi, "Globalization of Chinese Christianity: A Study of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee's Ministry," *Asia Journal of Theology* 30, No. 4, 2016: 103-104.

⁵⁸ Ron Ludekens, "The Local Church of Isla Vista: AKA The Brothers and Sisters" (unpublished manuscript, November 28, 1973): 11.

late 1968, several ex-crusade staffers met in Kansas City and others interested in Braun's vision of the Church. There were 25 men in attendance, and Edwards was invited. Another meeting was scheduled for a few weeks later, in January 1969, at Lake Arrowhead. This meeting of around 50 ex-crusade staff members met to try to plan a way forward. Later that same weekend, Braun and Edwards were the keynote speakers at a conference held at UCLA. They spoke to students about the problems of the current "religious system" and the possibilities surrounding establishing a new type of "Church life." Edwards' falling out with Lee and subsequent exit from the movement had provided him a new vision, a vision to begin his work inspired by Watchman Nee's approach to ecclesiology and church building.

Edwards had concluded that "organized religion" was a part of the "world system." He admired the Plymouth Brethren practice of a "simple meeting with no clergy present."⁵⁹ He sought to remove the clergy-laity distinction within the church and promote what he called "organic church life," which stood against the "religious system." Geir Lie points out that such views were in alignment with Watchman Nee and Witness Lee.⁶⁰ Edwards took Nee's concept of "Cosmos-rule" as being ruled from behind the scenes by the devil. "Cosmos" is about a fixed system and organization contrary to God's intention for humanity.⁶¹ Lie quotes Edwards: "The church was, and is the anti-world system. The church is *not* an organization. The church is anti-establishment. She does not operate by chain-of-command. The church is the one thing Lucifer doesn't head. Jesus

⁵⁹ Geir Lie, "The Ecclesiology of Gene Edwards," *Brethren Archivists and Historical Network Review*, no. 4 (2006): 38, 39.

⁶⁰ Lie, "The Ecclesiology of Gene Edwards," 38

⁶¹ Lie, "The Ecclesiology of Gene Edwards," 38-41

Christ is *direct* Head of His Church, His Body.”⁶² His vision was to establish what he believed to be the authentic church life that existed in the first 200 years of the existence of Christianity by eschewing the “religious system.” The apostolic office existed for the teaching of Christians within the church. Still, every Christian had a direct connection to God and did not have to go through a “chain-of-command” to be assured of hearing God’s voice. He identified his movement as being a third category outside of the typical Protestant/Roman Catholic divide. They were among those few throughout the history of Christianity who “have decided to be separate from ‘organized religion’ and who have existed within every century since 325 AD.”⁶³ Gene Edwards subscribed to the inerrancy of the Bible. However, he makes a subtle assertion that had significant ramifications for this narrative. Edwards is looking beyond the first century to the second through the fourth centuries. He places the moment of Christianity’s descent into “organized religion” and thus part of the “world system” at 325 CE, presumably because of the Council of Nicaea. This planted the seed for Braun and the others to start to take a fresh look at Christianity's history and create their brand of restorationism.

Braun had moved to Washington state to try to begin a ministry there. By 1970, he was in what some of his friends have described as the “fever pitch” of a “nervous breakdown.” For his part, Braun denied that he was having a breakdown, but he was in “serious emotional and physical shape.”⁶⁴ In March of 1970, driven by his dissatisfaction with the results of his efforts, he was ready to move to Isla Vista to join Gene Edwards. According to Ron Ludekens, Edwards had not anticipated someone with Braun’s name

⁶² Lie, “The Ecclesiology of Gene Edwards,” 42

⁶³ Lie, “The Ecclesiology of Gene Edwards,” 43, 49

⁶⁴ Ludekens, Ron. “The Church at Isla Vista: aka The Brothers and Sisters” University of California, Santa Barbara, 1972. 12.

recognition coming to Isla Vista. Braun described his group of friends as “shiny prospects on the evangelical scene.”⁶⁵ Braun’s contacts began funneling students to Edwards work in Isla Vista. The group quickly grew from the 30-40 that were there when Braun arrived. Through his contacts and reputation, 16 people came to Isla Vista from Altadena, over 40 from Eugene, OR, and a sizable group from Memphis, Tennessee. Ludekens wrote that these new additions were mostly ex-Campus Crusade staff, “who had the same objectives.” The group from Memphis was connected to a group Peter Gillquist had started. By the spring of 1972, the group had grown to over 225 people.⁶⁶ It appeared to Braun that their hope for a Church that reflected Jesus’ original intention was within reach.

However, things had already begun to unravel following a one-year sabbatical Edwards took between the fall of 1970 and the fall of 1971. Upon his return, he took the group “into his hands.” Before the sabbatical, the group’s authority structure had Edwards at the center with virtually unchecked authority. At this point, the conflict seems to have originated between Braun and Edwards. The conflict reached the point where it was “blown up and out of control.” Ballew and Braun went to Edwards on three separate occasions to settle their differences. Braun claimed they didn’t engage in a power struggle with Edwards. The only fight was to “retain what was there.”⁶⁷

Braun and Ballew left the church in the spring of 1972. His fallout with Edwards disillusioned Braun, “It had shattered me. I just figured, ‘what’s the use? Why try?’—because something very beautiful had been shattered.” However, Braun had already

⁶⁵ Ludekens, “The Local Church of Isla Vista,” 18.

⁶⁶ Ludekens, “The Local Church of Isla Vista,” 17-19.

⁶⁷ Ludekens, “The Local Church of Isla Vista,” 19-24.

begun researching the Bible and second-century writings to settle the “issue of authority in the Church.”⁶⁸ For his part, Edwards accused Braun and Ballew of a “grace message” that produced “swearing, cursing, drunkenness, and immorality.”⁶⁹ Regardless, Braun was exploring restorationism that moved beyond the Bible as his knowledge base. Braun, Ballew, and Sparks would turn their attention to the years following the apostles' death, and they were curious to discover what was there. It opened the door for them to embrace the second source of authority to the Bible: Church tradition. Perhaps, merely looking to the book of Acts as a blueprint was insufficient.

This episode in Braun’s ministry further illustrates the problem with the evangelical assumption that the Bible as the sole authority is a unifying factor within Christianity. It is not enough to share a standard text and expect the same interpretation and application. Further, the evangelical use of the subjective/experiential, when interpreting God’s will through the Bible, often results in very disparate interpretations. Further, interpersonal conflicts have a way of morphing into doctrinal disputes as sides try to justify their grievance or position.

The Vision for the NCAO Begins to Form

Braun and Ballew moved to Goleta, CA, near UC Santa Barbara's campus and began researching Church History in search of the authentic Church in late 1972. In 1974, Jack Sparks would move closer to UCSB to join them. Their fallout with Edwards had shaken Braun and Ballew. They had witnessed Bright’s fallout with Bob Jones and had their own falling out with Bright, only to experience another break in fellowship in their first attempt to implement their vision for the church. Their intent now began to shift

⁶⁸ Ludekins, “The Local Church of Isla Vista,” 13

⁶⁹ Lie, “The Ecclesiology of Gene Edwards” 60-61.

quietly. Braun wrote in his booklet “Finding the New Testament Church” that, during this era, they were moving against the “private, internalized individualism”⁷⁰ of the American Church and argued for the essential need of community found within the Church.

Edwards was undoubtedly pro-community, but Braun now argued for structure and hierarchy.

Gillquist described their changing view of the Christian Church's history from a “ranch” view to a “tower” view.⁷¹ Rather than a linear, sprawling development where one could face crossroads and contradictions, they began to view the story of the Church as built on a foundation of the one true Church. This Church had been faithful to (at least for a time) to Jesus Christ’s original vision for it. They believed that if they could trace the steps of the successors of the First-century Apostles, it would lead them on a linear path to the “true” Church,

We believed God was going to bring us to ‘it,’ but we weren’t sure what ‘it’ was, and until He did, we were willing to take responsibility for what we were doing. There were nights I lay awake all night over that. There were times I thought I was crazy, but we called it the phantom search for the perfect church.⁷²

Their house churches continued to model the informality and spontaneity of their previous attempts at recreating the first century Church. For example, group meetings of the NCAO groups, whether in the CWLF or their groups in Tennessee or Ohio, would begin with a “Bible study” portion of their gathering where audience participation was invited. Those in attendance might openly question what the leader was teaching. A “testimony” portion of the meeting allowed anyone who felt inclined to stand up and

⁷⁰ Jon Braun, “Finding the New Testament Church” Conciliar Press, 1987, 1, 2.

⁷¹ Peter Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 2009). 25, 26.

⁷² Kevin John Smith, *The Nature, Origin, and Significance of the Jesus Movement*, 174.

share. A singing time would usually follow where anyone could lead out in a song that others knew or that they had been writing themselves. Musicians with guitars would try to pick up the chords as they sang, and others would join in on the chorus. The Lord's Supper would be observed once every couple of months, and spontaneous baptisms often occurred.⁷³

In 1973, the seven men who would form the NCAO, Nethery, Braun, Sparks, Gillquist, Walker, Dick Ballew, and Ken Berven, began to talk about formally bringing their efforts under the same umbrella. That summer, many ex-CCC directors and others who shared their concerns about the church's state were scheduled to be at the same Christian publishers' convention in Dallas. They decided to network with as many as possible to form cooperation between their various efforts and build "New Testament house churches." About seventy men came together for the meeting. "We shared, argued, taught, and fought over new insights from Scripture, and ate our meals together for the better part of a week." They were all leery of just starting a new "deal." "But on the other hand, we were tired—extremely tired—of laboring alone." They concluded by deciding that they would "relate together" informally. According to Walker, they had "intense discussions" on such matters as how their house churches would handle leadership questions and structure, viability, worship, and connectivity level.⁷⁴ According to Kevin John Smith, what had begun as a study of the Book of Acts had become an "all-consuming focus."⁷⁵

⁷³ Donald Heinz, "Jesus in Berkeley" (Ph.D. dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, 1976), 207-218. Nethery, "First Interview with Author." Seiler and Seiler, "First Interview with Author."

⁷⁴ Gordon Walker, *Led By His Love* (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), 22.

⁷⁵ Smith, *The Origin, Nature, and Significance of the Jesus Movement*, 173.

A few months after this, Braun, Gillquist, Walker, and Ballew began meeting daily at the Sparks' home in Berkeley. They were focused upon hermeneutical questions regarding the early Church "to try to find out what these early church fathers really teach and preach and believe and how they lived?" Smith writes that as their search continued, "they became convinced that they were under a divine mandate to restore Jesus Movement converts to the 'true church.'" This became the impetus for the formation of the New Covenant Apostolic Order (NCAO). At one of these meetings, they decided that the six who were over forty should serve as "elders." Gillquist was added as a seventh later. They would meet once a quarter "to give some oversight to this small network of churches that we were bringing together." They felt a need for accountability..." some measure of visible, workable authority. As they met, they realized how little they knew about what they had begun referring to as "the New Testament Church."⁷⁶ However, Smith posits a critical question, "How could one interpret the meaning of ecclesial forms in Acts without the distortions of modern denominational loyalties?"⁷⁷ Their answer, and one that Smith seems to embrace, is that they looked to the Church Fathers for guidance. However, this merely begs the question regarding the hermeneutics of recreating the past accurately in the present.

The Birth of the NCAO

The seven men formed the NCAO in 1975. Their group included approximately 20 churches associated with Sparks, the groups associated with Grace Haven Farm in Mansfield (including those in Columbus), and groups related to Walker and Gillquist in Tennessee. Gillquist described their attitude as "do or die." They agreed that if they found

⁷⁶ Walker, *Led By His Love*, loc. 825-832.

⁷⁷ Smith, *The Origin, Nature, and Significance of the Jesus Movement*, 174.

that their practice was out of line with “all of Christendom,” they would change. “We are going to let it judge us. We are not going to judge it. Saint Augustine, Saint Athanasius, and Saint Chrysostom are they in my church?” He continues that at some point, they shifted the question to ask, “Are we in their church?”⁷⁸ One can see that the Restorationist stream is being emphasized. However, they continued to embrace biblical inerrancy combined with the belief that they were interpreting the Bible correctly and authoritatively. They had merely begun to add authoritative tradition to its interpretation.⁷⁹

On the surface, it would appear that they were leaving their evangelicalism. The NCAO had moved beyond a “Scripture alone” approach. However, Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and even Anglicans embrace tradition in continuity with the past, and there is an acceptance of the past that naturally must occur. They stand in a contextual stream. The leaders of the newly founded NCAO believed they could stand outside of this stream and judge history to see who was representative of the “true Church,” assuming that such a thing existed. Gillquist writes with a stunning lack of self-awareness:

Few men in America or even the world, I suppose, were in a position to do the sort of work we were proposing. We were beholden to no one but the Lord and each other. We were small, free to move, and free to change. Available to adjust to what we would find, we were committed to uphold nobody’s party line. We were unattached to any established church and represented a people who had already dropped out of the structures and who were also willing to change...All we wanted was Christ and His church. Instead of judging history, we were inviting history to judge us.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Smith, *The Origins, Nature, and Significance of the Jesus Movement*, 175.

⁷⁹

⁸⁰ Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox*, 26.

They assumed that, if they began with the Bible and studied the centuries that followed, it would lead them to the place where either this “true Church” existed or where it ceased to exist. They would then join it or recreate it if it no longer existed. This idea of joining rather than recreating was driven by Braun, Sparks, Gillquist, and Ballew. Ken Berven and Gordon Walker seem to follow the others. Ray Nethery would never make this leap. He assumed they were going to recreate the true Church with an assist from history and tradition. He embraced the Reformation even as the others began to question its value. However, they were finally ready to fully embark upon their great experiment to recreate the original Church. The continued splintering of evangelicalism and their break with Gene Edwards had led them to a place where they were desperate to succeed. They emerged from this moment with great hope even as the seeds for the splintering of their new movement were already present.

CHAPTER 2

THE NEW COVENANT APOSTOLIC ORDER: FUNDAMENTALISM BEHIND WALLS 2000 YEARS THICK

Introduction

This chapter centers upon three main actors among the seven “apostles” in the New Covenant Apostolic Order (NCAO). The first, Jon Braun, was the former premier speaker for Campus Crusade for Christ. He had rugged good looks, the square jaw of a comic book hero, and magnetic charisma. Jack Sparks was the innovator and trendsetter. He was the only member of the group who had a Ph.D. and was the founder of a well-known influential JPM group, the Christian World Liberation Front (CWLF). The third member, Ray Nethery, stands out in group pictures from the era as he is about four inches taller than everyone else. He was not the best looking nor the most intelligent, but he was an able administrator and was influential. Nethery had a firm sense of who he was, a Protestant and evangelical who was open to dialogue with Catholics but saw himself as a child of the Reformation.

Leaders of evangelical groups often wield significant authority over the interpretation and application of all three streams (belief in an authoritative, inerrant, perspicuous Bible, restorationism, and subjective spiritual experience). This creates opportunities for an unhealthy, even abusive, authority structure to develop over time. In these scenarios, the leader becomes the ultimate interpreter. Particularly among independent groups, the leader is generally the pastor or the person with enough charisma

to influence others. The door is often closed to genuine dialogue with those who may come to different conclusions than the leadership.

One can understand the motivation to embrace and hold tight to such a belief in the accessibility of absolute truth and the Bible's perspicuity. Each group can take comfort in the knowledge that even though they are one of the thousands of disparate Christian groups claiming to have rediscovered Christianity in its purest form, or at least the way Jesus intended it, they are the ones who got it right. For most, it is enough that they feel a personal sense, ostensibly from the Holy Spirit, that they have interpreted the Bible correctly.

In the New Covenant Apostolic Order's (NCAO) case, they hoped to be the movement that would ultimately bring unity to the fractured, visible unity of Christendom. One blushes at the scope of such a presumption. One of the first names that they proposed, according to Ray Nethery, was the New Covenant Apostolic Order *of All Things*, a truly ambitious title.¹ However, it soon became apparent that they were more intent on confirming their conclusions from all three streams than being a unifying force. Their certainty would naturally lead them to one of two conclusions: either they would recreate the one true church in the present, which would imply that other groups were in error, or they would discover an existing one true church in the present.

From Re-creation to Discovery: An inerrant tradition added to an inerrant Bible.

One can identify with the search these men were on. They had experienced division with former mentors and been frustrated by established churches being unwilling to receive their converts. For all their efforts in the 1960s with CCC, the United States

¹ Ray Nethery, "First interview by author," Mansfield, OH, February 23, 2015.

showed little evidence of a turn conservative evangelical values. They firmly believed that mass conversion to Christianity was the answer to societal ills, but perhaps they had not gotten Christianity right in the first place. There was nothing left but to start from scratch with the church they read about in the pages of the New Testament. Their application of the “three streams” will help make sense of what follows. They expanded the first stream, biblical inerrancy, to include the early centuries of the Church tradition. They maintain their evangelical sense of certainty in the interpretation and application of the text. In turn, this affects the second stream as their restorationism will begin to focus more on Christianity as experienced and practiced by Eastern Orthodox Fathers like Chrysostom than the first-century church in Jerusalem. Finally, the third stream runs in the background as they continue to believe God is personally guiding them on this quest. Along the way, their claims to apostolic authority will begin to increase.

In the beginning, their search reflected common evangelical attempts at restorationism. Their worship was spontaneous and informal, and they sought to diminish the clergy-lay distinction. They formed small house churches to replicate the New Testament church. For example, Jon Braun and Richard Ballew started a house church in 1973 in Goleta, CA, out of former UCSB students who had followed them to Gene Edwards' church and later left with them. During their time with Edwards, they had been “enamored” with the teachings of Watchman Nee. Specifically, his rejection of the clergy-lay distinction resonated with them.² However, in 1974, Ballew announced that he and Braun would now be co-pastors and founding a new organization called the NCAO. They would no longer be a "fellowship" but a "church." They were embarking on a

² Unknown, “Our History,” stathanasius.org, accessed June 15, 2020, <https://www.stathanasius.org/about/our-history/>.

search for the Church of the New Testament. They moved into the "old Logos Bookstore" and called it the "Family Center." The group was spontaneous and evolving and would multiply to two home churches in 1974 and had five by 1979.³

At a meeting in the fall of 1973 meeting Gordon Walker had said, "For the life of me, I cannot tell you the details of *where* the New Testament Church *went*." His statement was followed by Jon Braun, adding,

I'm the same way, what I want to know is, how long did the church remain true to Christ? In all honesty, I was taught that the minute the Apostle John drew his last breath, the church began to head downhill. Is that really right? And if it isn't, then where and when did the church go wrong? How could the Reformation have been avoided, anyway?⁴

The men were fatigued by the constant divisions they had witnessed among evangelicals from the 1950s until their present time in the early 1970s. They were longing to unify the church by finally interpreting and applying the book of Acts correctly. They believed the result would be a unifying renewal of Christianity. In their minds, they needed only to determine where and when the Church had become corrupted. They now included looking beyond the Bible to the early centuries of the Church.

This shift is further illustrated by an interesting exchange between Jack Sparks and presumably Nethery or one of his lieutenants. Sparks began by opining that even though everyone claims to be representative of the Church of the New Testament that "We need to find out who's right." Someone "in the back" responded like a typical evangelical might, "What do you mean, 'Who's right?' We've got the Bible, haven't we? The way you learn about the New Testament Church is by reading the New Testament." Jack Sparks objected that they were missing his point. "As Protestants, we know our way

³ Unknown, "Our History."

⁴ Peter Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox*, (Ben Lamond, CA: Conciliar Press, 2009), 23.

back to A.D. 1517 and the Reformation. As evangelicals—Bible people—we know our way up to A.D. 95 or so when the apostle John finished writing the book of Revelation. It's time we fill the gap in between."⁵ Who was the last representative of the “true” Church? If the Church became corrupted in the early centuries, was the Reformation an authentic recreation of Jesus' original intent or based on faulty presuppositions? The old-guard fundamentalists had a vision of what the “true” Church should look like, and they had rejected that vision to side with Bill Bright and CCC. Now that they had denied Bright's authority, could they get it right and stop the cycle of division?

In the early days before the official formation of the NCAO, there was a general concern for "some measure of visible, workable authority."⁶ They had titles but no official authority over the house churches that were connected to them. They learned from their study of the church's history that the earliest forms of church government had been episcopal with great authority residing in the bishop's position through the concept of "Apostolic Succession." However, their constituency was primarily made up of JPM groups and former evangelicals used to a congregational model, and many were not receptive to such a change. Two examples of unrest that characterize parts of their constituency are found in their churches' response in Tennessee and Berkeley.

In Berkeley, the shift to becoming a church was not well received from Jack Sparks' CWLF. In December 1973, he had announced that the organization would move from a conglomerate of several ministries serving in the Berkeley community to becoming a unified church attached to the emerging movement that became the NCAO. This collection of ministries included the underground paper *Right On!* a drama ministry,

⁵ Gillquist. *Becoming Orthodox*, 23.

⁶ Gillquist. *Becoming Orthodox*. 23.

a free Christian "university" named "The Crucible," and communal home. This change was met with resistance. The group's leaders, Jack Sparks, and Arnold Bernstein wrote a year and a half later that their sudden declaration was met with "the turmoil of having to deal firmly with some who by the depravity of their lives sought to overthrow the holy foundation upon which the community stands." Sparks' response to objections is telling. He had a clear delineation of who was right and who was wrong. Those who had opposed the formation of the CWLF into a church did so because of their "depravity." Their evangelical certainty is still intact based upon their response. However, it is not surprising that he faced resistance at this time. 1973 had been a year of conflict for the CWLF over gender issues and creative differences. Earlier that year, he had begun an informal Sunday afternoon meeting, loosely connected to the CWLF, that had become a flashpoint of controversy because of their all-male leadership. Tensions within the group rose further when the CWLF was unilaterally declared to be a church and became identified with this Sunday afternoon group.⁷

There was similar unrest among the house churches founded by Gordon Walker in Nashville. Walker had a gift for attracting evangelicals across denominational lines with his Bible Studies. By 1973, he had seven house churches he oversaw in the Nashville area and five-six in other Midwest locations. He wrote, "Through my study of Acts and the letters of Paul, I'd come to believe the small house church, with just a few families, was the New Testament model."⁸ However, there was now significant unrest over the authority and control proposed to the house churches in Tennessee that he and Peter

⁷ Letter, Jack Sparks and Arnold Bernstein, "Letter from the elders to the people of the church which includes CWLF" July 16, 1975, 1.

⁸ Gordon Walker, *Led By His Love*, (Chesterton IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), loc. 806.

Gillquist oversaw. They sought to impose hierarchical control. In January 1974, they held a meeting between the Tennessee house church leaders and the nascent NCAO. Their demand for these groups to fall in line with their vision and recognize their authority was met with hostility. Walker wrote, "The other men hadn't stayed together the way we had; each of them was on his journey and had his idea of what our direction should be."⁹ The seven leaders met at the end of the week in Memphis to discuss what went wrong. The seven "apostles" decided to stop holding public forums for the time being and meet with only the seven leaders for one week, four times per year.¹⁰

At this meeting that Jack Sparks suggested: "Everybody says they're the ancient church. We need to find out who's right. I think we should start at the beginning and take a fresh, close look at the New Testament. Then we've got to find out what happened to that church between the death of the last apostle and the beginning of the Reformation."¹¹ Over the next several months in quarterly meetings at Jack Sparks' home, they identified and divided up topics to study this question. The areas to be covered were "worship of the early church" (Sparks), "church history as a whole" (Braun), "church doctrine" (Ballew), "pre-Reformation church" (Berven), "post-Reformation" (Nethery), "the Bible" (Walker). True to his Baptist roots, Walker stated, "Anything that doesn't agree with the Bible is out."¹²

⁹ Walker, *Led By His Love*, loc. 824

¹⁰ There was also a meeting held in Mansfield in 1974. It was their attempt to bring the Columbus JPM groups under their control. One group joined them, and the other did not. This meeting will be discussed in chapter 3.

¹¹ Walker, *Led By His Love*, loc 830

¹² Walker, *Led By His Love*, loc 843. The Medieval Church was never considered. The group considered the Schism of 1054 to be Rome's exit from the "true" Church. See: Peter Gillquist *Becoming Orthodox* (Ben Lamond, CA: 2009) 173.

In February 1975, the group met in a cabin on San Juan Island in Puget Sound. They had each prepared a paper on their findings on the ancient church. Gillquist writes that the meeting began with Sparks' worship report. Here they found that the ancient church had always had a liturgical form of worship. These conclusions surprised the others as they had all been under the assumption that house churches based on an informal, spontaneous worship style were most in line with the earliest church described in the book of Acts. Next, he spoke about early teaching on the Eucharist as having a consensus belief in the real presence of Jesus contained within the elements. Braun followed with his paper on Church history and focused exclusively on the authority exercised by bishops. Gillquist notes that this change was more welcome to the group at this point: "After years of attempting to live under less leadership, at last, we know who is in charge."¹³ Of course, the natural conclusion was that they were in charge. Both of these findings represented the potential for significant changes to their house churches.

Kevin John Smith writes that by mid-1975, "they [the NCAO] had come to the collusion that the church is sacramental, worship is liturgical, and church government is hierarchical."¹⁴ As they began to implement these changes, some were met with strong resistance. The CWLF did not survive the transition, and Sparks formally left the group in June 1975.¹⁵ He took a third of the membership with him, the CWLF name, and their mailing list, their primary support source. However, there had been discord within the CWLF for some time.¹⁶

¹³ Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox*, 36

¹⁴ Smith, *The Origin, Nature, and Significance of the Jesus Movement*, 405.

¹⁵ Edward Plowman, "Whatever Happened to the Jesus Movement," *Christianity Today* (October 24, 1975): 54-58.

¹⁶ Charles Cotherman, *To Think Christianly: A History of L'Abri, Regent College, and the Christian Study Center Movement* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 165.

One month after the breakup of the CWLF, on July 16, 1975, Sparks distributed a letter to his church in Berkeley addressed to "the people of the church that includes the CWLF." He attempted to implement this new authoritative structure. In a letter co-authored with fellow elder Arnold Bernstein, he claimed that during the six years the CWLF had been in existence that "Jack Sparks was for the most part alone in seeking the realization of the vision of establishing a truly Christian community in Berkeley." He acknowledged that there were "at times" some who "shared a degree" of the "vision." However, "in no one, but he did the vision burn as a passion." A unified vision was opposed by some who wanted the CWLF to be a "loose coalition of creative ministries." Despite opposition, "community" had prevailed, and those who opposed his vision had left the group. "Now, because of the mercy of God, Jack is not alone. Being committed and submitted to an apostolic band, he now has peers of like mind across the nation, intent upon establishing churches similar to our own."¹⁷ Also, "God had raised up" Arnold Bernstein to share pastoral duties with Sparks.

There were continued concerns. "God [had] shown them" that if maturation was to continue, these concerns needed to be resolved. If not dealt with, "our community will not continue, that church discipline will not be maintained, that we as elders will be ineffectual and driven to quit." When Sparks had declared that the CWLF would become a church in December 1973, he had done so as the "one God had given the vision and authority needed to found the church. No one else had the authority to found the church, and that authority was not based upon a vote of CWLF people. It was given by God to

¹⁷ Letter, Jack Sparks and Arnold Bernstein, "Letter from the elders to the people of the church which includes CWLF," 2.

Jack, and he took that action in concord with the will of God."¹⁸ However, a little over a year later, there had been a push to reverse "the God-established working of authority within the church." There were members who wanted a congregational form of government and desired the ability to give input on "church policy, practice, and doctrine." They also wanted to see the leadership derive its authority from the consent of the congregation.

Sparks explained that his vision of the church is different, with an appeal to the third stream for added support to his argument. "Our government does not derive its authority from the consent of the governed, but rather from the recognition granted through laying on of hands. It functions through seeing and hearing from God and acting accordingly." He appealed to the early church and claimed that his mode of government most closely approximates it. Bishops, in the first three centuries, "held final authority in regard to biblical interpretation, authoritative teaching, and discipline in the church." Their church was in alignment with the NCAO but was under the sole authority of a single "apostle," Jack Sparks. All the leaders of the NCAO and those that they would then appoint as leaders were "appointed by the authority of the Lord."¹⁹ Any debate concerning these things must be done privately to Jack Sparks or Arnold Bernstein and never publicly. Up until this point, the leadership had held a "loose rein in many matters." This was going to change now that Bernstein had joined sparks in the local leadership. There now existed, "strength in counsel and authority is more easily and consistently applied." They did hope that God would raise other elders to serve in leadership. Congregational worship was now being taken out of a committee's hands and would be

¹⁸ Sparks and Bernstein, "Letter from the Elders," 3.

¹⁹ Sparks and Bernstein, "Letter from the Elders," 5.

under the elders' sole direction. This change was to occur immediately. Those who disagreed with the letter were encouraged to leave the church. Sparks would soon move to Goleta to work with Jon Braun and Dick Ballew in their research of the ancient church and bring many of his followers with him.²⁰ This episode illustrates the course that the NCAO was determined to take regarding the three streams. Sparks' revelation concerning the will of God was absolute; there was no argument to be made. They were going to recreate the ancient church in the present, and the early Church polity was without error. They had maximized authority over the interpretation of the inerrant Bible, had discovered the one authentic model for the church that they would now restore, and God had spoken to the seven and made them apostles over all those involved with their churches.

Perhaps it is telling that Ray Nethery's groups in Ohio did not experience a similar resistance to the seven leaders' claims of authority. Ray's approach was to give groups outside of Grace Haven Farm in Mansfield much freedom to operate. Respondents confirmed, though he had the authority of the other apostles, he never exercised it. In particular, the Columbus groups had the freedom to establish their identity and experiment with restorationist ideas. He acted as more of a mentor than a micromanager day to day decisions in the churches under his care.

On July 1, 1976, the NCAO relaunched their movement by signing a document outlining the vision that they believed God had given them and began attempting to promote the discoveries from their research into the ancient Church. The NCAO started to look like an emerging denomination and exercised a high degree of authority rather

²⁰ Plowman, "Whatever Happened to the Jesus Movement," 46-48.

than a unifying movement. That year, at one of their presentations at Grace Haven in Mansfield, OH, Jon Braun made the statement that the only question you should ask your leader when they tell you to "jump" is "how high?"²¹ Groups like the Fish House in Columbus, OH, and the small house church groups that would become Vineyard Columbus were faced with a choice. Their current and former mentors were arguing that they should have absolute authority over their ministries. Some groups joined, and others rejected their overtures. One must remember that the young JPM groups in Columbus and Berkeley felt a strong sense of loyalty and attachment to these leaders. Those that refused to join them did so with a sense of regret that they could not buy into their mentors' vision.

It is clear that though the newly formed NCAO had begun to add authoritarian tradition to their inerrant Bible. They had not forgotten the latter. They were still clearly embracing evangelicalism's first, foundational stream. "The Scripture is the only authoritative, God-breathed, infallible record given by God to humanity; it is revelation, and it is unique. Scripture, as interpreted by the agreement of the church universal, is the only authoritative source of doctrine."²²

Was the NCAO a "Third Way" or Repackaged Evangelicalism?

The NCAO is often considered a part of the JPM and is often mentioned in significant surveys of the movement as an example of the JPM's distinction from evangelicalism. Kevin John Smith classifies them as such, but he does so by conflating the CWLF and the NCAO, portraying the NCAO as the natural terminus to Jack Sparks' original vision. He argues that this led to the NCAO being a "Third Way" moving beyond

²¹ Dennis McCallum, "Interview 1 by author," Columbus, OH, September 10, 2015.

²² Unknown. "New Covenant Apostolic Order," July 1, 1976, 5.

evangelicalism to a rejection “of the sterility of enlightenment modernity, and the fragmentation of postmodernity.” This is what would eventually lead “most of the CWLF leadership back to pre-modern Eastern Orthodoxy.”²³ However, Larry Eskridge writes that the NCAO developed separately from the CWLF and was rejected by a majority (two-thirds) group. Once Sparks left, the unity between its various ministries dissolved.²⁴ Conversely, Smith argues that the true CWLF continued as a part of the NCAO. The following episode featuring Jack Sparks in a debate with liberal Protestants sheds essential light on whether the CWLF and NCAO should be categorized as something new, something beyond evangelicalism.

Smith claims that Sparks had been primarily concerned with the idea of "church" and ecclesiology as a driving force since the mid-1960s, but the early years of the CWLF do not reflect this. At a moderated dialogue between the CWLF and the Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley held at First Presbyterian Church on November 17, 1972, Jack Sparks said that when he had arrived in Berkeley in 1969, his vision was, "If churches had tried to convert the culture, CWLF wanted to bring individuals into a relationship with the living God." There were "no models" for what they were attempting to do for the CWLF. He claimed that "...they trusted God to make them free and creative."²⁵ What Sparks said next illustrates how fundamentalist leadership wields authority over the interpretation of the Bible as "God's Word." He described it as being made up of "earthy, straight words to common people, not for scholars..." He then spoke from his paraphrase of Paul's New Testament letters, *Letters to Street Christians*.²⁶ The

²³ Smith, *Origins of the Jesus Movement*, 169, 170.

²⁴ Larry Eskridge, *God's Forever Family*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) 262, 263.

²⁵ Donald Heinz, "Jesus in Berkeley" (Ph.D. dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, 1976), 261.

²⁶ Jack Sparks, *Letters to Street Christians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971).

Bible may be for the “common people” and not “scholars,” but he had his own paraphrased interpretation of the Bible that his followers were encouraged to use.

Further, at this time, Sparks was more concerned with developing a pure approach to Christian expression outside of the formal church than discovering the one true church. He continued the meeting with a description of the wedding ceremonies he had performed. They had also performed baptisms. In effect, he had set up an alternative to the formal church.²⁷ Heinz recalls that Sparks had once said that, "I never met a minister the first two years we were here. We just have parallel ministries, I guess. There was no hostility or competition. We haven't been called to what they're into."²⁸ He continued making "denominational definitions and distinctions" were of only a "slight" interest to him. Heinz noted that he and his family had no formal affiliation to a church. What could have caused him to begin to move toward making the CWLF a traditional church before eventually moving to Eastern Orthodoxy? It was the compulsive need for certainty often observed in fundamentalism.

It is essential to take a closer look at Jack Sparks' CWLF to understand how deeply fundamentalism ran in the NCAO and examine whether they ever escaped it. In his dissertation on the JPM, Kevin John Smith sees the CWLF as the source of inspiration, on an ideological level, for the formation of the NCAO. Orthodoxy was the natural conclusion to its mission in Berkeley. Evangelicals almost universally embrace the CWLF as one of the very best expressions of the JPM. Not overtly Pentecostal, emphasizing an intellectual approach that engaged the New Left²⁹ on their turf, the

²⁷ *ibid*, 262

²⁸ *ibid*, 256

²⁹ Bruce Schulman. *The Seventies*. (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001), 8-14. Schulman describes the New Left as young radicals who arose in the 1960s to oppose the liberal consensus.

CWLF is generally viewed as innovative a successful contextualization of evangelical Christianity. Their paper *Right On!* is usually lauded as the best underground paper in the JPM.³⁰ Smith believed that the CWLF was a "fusion of the best of a thoughtful evangelical tradition, with a radical counterculture perspective on the state of Western Culture. Fundamentalist enthusiasm... was balanced by a keen sense of inquiry into the meaning of the localized and global social ferment. The meaning of Jesus' life was related to the human context."³¹ It was in the interest of Gordon Walker and Peter Gillquist to retrospectively suggest that the CWLF organically transitioned into the NCAO and to suggest that Orthodoxy was the natural conclusion to their engagement with the counterculture and the New Left. Writing on the JPM, Smith, for all his praise of their journey, acknowledges the frustration of their tendency to gloss over details that were not favorable. However, Smith still attempts to paint the CWLF as naturally finding its terminus in the NCAO.

Smith argues that it was not the counterculture's failure that led to the CWLF's merging into the NCAO. "...it was theological considerations of the postmodern dilemma that steered most of the foundational leadership in the direction of ancient Orthodoxy." For Smith, postmodernity was a reaction against the certainty and materialism of modernity. He argues that the NCAO and CWLF opted for a "Third Way," which, for him, was a purported pre-modern comfortability with mystery. "As postmodernity had deconstructed history, defining it as ideologically suspect, the Bible and the history of the church had been overshadowed by an ego-centric gospel that they implicated as central to

³⁰ Kevin John Smith, *The Origins, Nature, and Significance of the Jesus Movement* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2011) 132.

³¹ Smith, *The Origins of the Jesus Movement*, 133.

the ecclesial and theological confusion of denominations and parachurch agencies."³²

However, it is difficult to see how evangelicals were allowing the Bible to be

"overshadowed." He argues that evangelicals had become influenced by postmodernity's emphasis on contextualization's difficulties in discerning objective truth even if it did exist. Smith believes that parachurch agencies and denominations allowed the Bible to be overshadowed by their lack of interest in thinking outside of their traditions to discover correct ecclesiology and theology. This argument is nonsensical. If evangelicals were becoming more fragmented in their denominational distinctives, then the evidence shows the opposite. They were *more* certain of their interpretation of the Bible than ever but were predictably coming to a myriad of conclusions in their interpretation.

The leaders of what would soon become the NCAO met at Jack Sparks' house in 1973. It is at this meeting that we see the presence of the "third stream" being leveraged authoritatively. Smith writes that they "became convinced that they were under a divine mandate to restore Jesus Movement converts to the 'true church.'" The certainty of their apprehension of a message from God through the subjective/experiential stream is more evidence of their continued evangelicalism. Sharon Gallagher, then editor of *Right On!*, points to this as a reason for the CWLF's demise, and it had nothing to do with postmodernity. Her feelings at the time were, "These guys were all former Campus Crusade area directors—a good place for rising young pastors or church leaders. But after that, what next?? They declared themselves apostles."³³ She added that it should be remembered that most of the CWLF workers did not go with the NCAO. This need for certainty overwhelmed any truly progressive turn away from fundamentalism within the

³² Smith, *The Origins of the Jesus Movement*, 159.

³³ Sharon Gallagher, "Email exchange with author," July 14, 2020.

NCAO and the CWLF as long as Sparks was in control. The future turn to Orthodoxy would not be an embrace of mystery. It would be leveraged as a reinforced fundamentalist certainty.

Smith admits that, though the tone of *Right On!* was revolutionary, its "content was weighted towards conservative, evangelical tradition, with an emphasis on personal salvation."³⁴ Despite this, he wants to paint the CWLF as something genuinely different than evangelicalism, even if it finds its origin there. His definition of fundamentalism reveals his reasoning despite the presence of evangelical elements within the CWLF. He argues that the Toronto Institute of Christian Studies' categorization of the CWLF as fundamentalist was incorrect.³⁵ He argues that fundamentalism is historically a "regressive rather than contextualized" movement. It draws "its energy not from a desire to be relevant, but rather to be resistant to changing cultural forces." Smith argues that the counterculture was demanding change and that the CWLF was evolving as it sought to reach that culture. He is correct if this is the whole of fundamentalism, but it is not. Not all fundamentalists are "regressive," nor do they all resist contextualization. However, what they do share is an embrace of inerrancy and perspicuity of the Bible as their first doctrinal "fundamental." This is accompanied by a certainty of one's interpretation and application of the text. There is what appears to be a progressive turn in the content of *Right On!* beginning in 1973-1974 with articles confronting greed and wealth disparity, racism, and corruption within the Nixon administration complicated by its past overtures to American evangelicals. This was precisely when the CWLF began to face internal

³⁴ Smith, *The Origins of the Jesus Movement*, 163.

³⁵ Smith, *The Origins of the Jesus Movement*, 168.

strife as Jack Sparks helped launch the NCAO and gradually became less and less involved with the day-to-day operations of *Right On!*

The Subjective-Experiential Stream Leveraged to Quell Unrest

The NCAO leveraged the subjective/experiential streams extensively. They did this by borrowing from the Charismatic Movement and the “Shepherding Movement” in particular. Christian Grown Ministries (CGM) was an independent, Charismatic group that published the influential *New Wine Magazine* and eventually became influential in the evangelical music industry through their “Integrity Worship” albums in the 1980s and 90s. CGM held conferences across the country, and audiotapes of their teachings were very popular. It was led by five men, Bob Mumford, Derek Prince, Charles Simpson, Don Basham, and Ern Baxter, who had previously led successful ministries and would become popularly known as the “Fort Lauderdale Five.”³⁶ After being recruited to write and edit for *New Wine Magazine*, they began to work together, a ministry initially founded by Christian businessman Elden Pervis.

Charismatic groups were marked by both fierce independence and a belief that the movement could significantly impact larger Christianity if they remained an interdenominational and independent movement rather than becoming a denomination themselves.³⁷ This also meant a lack of accountability. S. David Moore suggests that the moral fall of Elden Purvis and other notable leaders in the movement caused the five CGM leaders to find contemporary church structures to be “inadequate and often unbiblical.”³⁸ They were concerned with a “lack of character in the renewal.” It was their

³⁶ *New Wine Magazine* was published in Fort Lauderdale, FL.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 24.

³⁸ Moore, *The Shepherding Movement*, 181.

"perceived sense of God-given prophetic insight" that led them toward "themes that had specific ecclesiological implications and to experiment with practical church structures."³⁹

Their answer was to place emphasis on discipleship⁴⁰ and assign every Christian to submit to a "shepherd" or what amounted to a "personal pastor."⁴¹ The emphasis was on a "cell" church model. Home churches would be led by a "lay" pastor who would be accountable to another pastor with a chain of command leading to the senior pastor. Many of these senior pastors were in mentoring relationships with one of the five leaders in Ft. Lauderdale. Their concerns and proposals were circulated through their magazine *New Wine* and the circulation of audiotapes. The five leaders traveled extensively in the Charismatic teaching circuit and quickly gained national influence.⁴² The movement became controversial on two counts. First, they were accused of a plot to take over the Charismatic Renewal and turn it into a denomination. Second, by 1975 there were growing reports of inappropriate control being exerted over the lives of members of these cell churches and abuses of power.

A second influential group was the Word of God Community (WOGC), founded in 1967 in Ann Arbor, MI, and a part of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. They stood with CGM through the controversy over inappropriate authoritarianism. WOGC was led by Ralph Martin and Steve Clark and was also coming under similar criticism by 1972.⁴³

The complaint centered on their counseling processes, teachings on male headship, and

³⁹ Moore, *The Shepherding Movement*, 180.

⁴⁰ An evangelical Protestant word for something akin to spiritual mentoring.

⁴¹ Moore, *The Shepherding Movement*, 1.

⁴² *ibid*, 2.

⁴³ David Crumm, *Detroit Free Press Magazine*, September 20, 1992, 14.

control that leaders exerted in their followers' personal lives. These two groups had close but informal connections with the leadership of the NCAO. They took the concept of church members being accountable to a "personal shepherd" and used it to claim broad-reaching authority in the lives of their parishioners. In 1978, Bob Mumford had a meeting with leaders connected to him in Santa Rosa, CA. Michael Seiler recalled being in attendance. At the meeting, the group discussed what they had felt had become a problem surrounding the "neglect of the female role," "authoritarianism," and "minimal biblical support for the degree of headship they taught."⁴⁴ After this meeting, Nethery's churches in the Midwest scaled back their use of "shepherding" and "headship" concepts. They continued to have an informal connection with Mumford and the Word of God Community, but they moved away from excesses. This was not the case for the rest of the NCAO and soon became Evangelical Orthodox Church (EOC).

Bill Counts claims that the rest of the NCAO had merged their embrace of Eastern Orthodox theology as the one true doctrinal system with the Shepherding Movement's teachings. The other six "apostles" of the NCAO continued to seize on these teachings, declaring themselves the ultimate arbiters of how God was leading their members regarding private, personal decisions regarding changing jobs, having children, or moving out of state. When used this way, it opened an opportunity for abuse. "They combined [the Shepherding Movement] with Eastern Orthodox theology that centered everything around the church. [It was] very church-centered and mystical. In the shepherding movement, God speaks to the elders, and the elders speak to the people. The result is that the elders control your life because God is controlling your life through the

⁴⁴ Moore, *The Shepherding Movement*, 148.

elders.”⁴⁵ The subjective/experiential stream, a potential check to authoritarianism in the sense that evangelicals believe every Christian can have a direct encounter and receive guidance from God, had been compromised. The NCAO utilized this stream to quash dissent by making themselves the authoritative interpreters of the individual experience of God. This use of the Shepherding Movement teachings allowed them to build an ecclesial infrastructure of control over their members.

The Move Toward Eastern Orthodoxy

1977 was a significant year for the NCAO. They opened the Academy of Orthodox Theology, and Ken Berven launched Conciliar Press. *Again* magazine began printing as a quarterly, and it was also the year that they made their first contact with the Eastern Orthodox Church. In 1976, a former attendee of CWLF's weekly Bible studies, John Bartke, reached out to Sparks. Bartke had remained on the CWLF mailing list and was now a student at Saint Vladimir's Seminary in New York City. He began to notice that the CWLF⁴⁶ material he was receiving had started to sound very close to Orthodox teaching and made contact with Sparks. In early 1977, Sparks sent him some drafts of papers they had been working on with strict instructions to keep them confidential.⁴⁷ Bartke was so excited about what he read that he immediately took them to the seminary dean, Fr. Alexander Schmemmann. Fr. Schmemmann contacted Bishop Dmitri, who arranged for a priest, Fr. Ted Wojcik, to visit Sparks in the fall of 1977. This began a conversation that would lead to a "strong and lasting friendship."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Bill Counts, "Interview with Author" December 6, 2017.

⁴⁶ The CWLF had broken up in 1975, but Sparks was still using the name and had possession of the mailing list.

⁴⁷ Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox*, 122.

⁴⁸ Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox*, 123.

Jon Braun had been circulating papers among the members of the NCAO that reflected the move toward Orthodoxy he had begun to advocate. Nethery assumed they were studying the ancient church to produce a faithful recreation of the true Church. However, the others had shifted their vision from re-creation to discovery. They wanted to find the New Testament Church in the present and join it. Increasingly, they were concluding that the Orthodox Church was this church.

It was Nethery's two young lieutenants, Kevin Springer and Michael Seiler, who noticed the shift and alerted him. Kevin Springer told him, "If we follow Jon's arguments to their natural conclusions, we will all be wearing collars within a year."⁴⁹ Nethery responded by approaching the rest of the leadership in a fall meeting in Jackson, MS. He addressed Jon Braun and Jack Sparks specifically and said, "If we follow through with some of the presuppositions that you guys are presenting at this time, we are going to become Orthodox." Ray said that his words were "kind of startling to the others,"⁵⁰ and his concerns were denied. Ray did not believe they were telling him the truth, so the group agreed to meet in Paso Robles, CA, to present papers on issues surrounding church tradition and the sacraments before their January 1978⁵¹ conference in Sacramento, CA.

What happened in Paso Robles offers a significant example of how difficult the fundamentalist mindset is to escape. All seven leaders had been through two different exoduses from groups they had deemed either fundamentalist or flawed. Further, Braun and Ballew had been through a third split with Gene Edwards. In February 1978, they

⁴⁹ Seiler, "Interview with author 1"

⁵⁰ Ray Nethery, "Interview with author 2," Mansfield, OH, September 9, 2016.

⁵¹ There are some inconsistencies present in the accounts. Nethery, Walker, and Seiler all remember the meeting taking place in February, but I have a letter from Peter Gillquist to be publicly read in the NCAO churches dated January 16, 1978 where he announces Nethery's resignation.

would experience another division, and it was the most painful split they had experienced to this point. One must remember that Ray Nethery was more than just a colleague and peer. These men had spent their entire careers connected in some way to him, and he had been responsible for Peter Gillquist's⁵² conversion to Christianity while the latter was a student at the University of Minnesota.⁵³ Nethery had lived in community for two years with Gordon Walker. He had worked closely with the other four at CCC and in different periods in each of their ministries. Beyond Nethery, Kevin Springer and Michael Seiler were very close to Gordon Walker. Walker had been instrumental in Springer's conversion to Christianity, and he had performed his wedding ceremony.⁵⁴

Smith's narrative glosses over Ray Nethery's exit from the NCAO and offers no details. It does not fit with the narrative that the NCAO was ultimately something other or beyond fundamentalism and enamored with mystery over certainty. Gillquist and Walker mention it but fail to go into detail regarding the reasons and characterize Nethery as marching into their meeting in Paso Robles, CA and declaring that he was leaving the Order because "...you guys are too Catholic for me. I can't agree with you about communion being Christ's real body and blood."⁵⁵ His exit does not fit with the narrative that they had an epiphany from God that led them to find a "third way." A letter from Peter Gillquist concerning Nethery's resignation to be publicly read in the NCAO churches claims that Nethery had withdrawn his commitment to the Order before the Paso Robles meeting by "refusing to be in submission to the Council." Gillquist's

⁵² Listening to Seiler and Nethery you can hear the emotion in their voices as they say "even Pete" or "even Gordon" when talking about their schism with the NCAO.

⁵³ Ray Nethery, "Interview with author 1"

⁵⁴ Michael Seiler, "interview With Author 2" Zanesville, OH, August 27, 2018.

⁵⁵ Walker, *Led By His Love*, loc 983.

language is deceptive. He writes, "Ray declared this action to be, 'against everything I believe and have taught.'"⁵⁶ This is written in a way that seems to imply that Nethery was judging his actions in leaving rather than saying the NCAO's move toward Eastern Orthodoxy was counter to his beliefs. It is clear that his exit had shaken the others, and they felt the need for damage control.

Nethery claims that he walked into the room and was immediately confronted by the others.

The other six guys, to the man including Pete, said we agreed that we would never stonewall our moving ahead and that no one of us would stonewall [the others]. And Ray, we feel like you are stonewalling...And I said I don't understand, I thought we had an agreement that we would exchange papers and that we would have an open discussion of this at the next meeting. They held their ground, and after a long discussion, I just finally thought, "I think I'm out of here. I think I'm done." So, I went for a walk and came back a couple of hours later and just said, "You know, I think I need to release you guys for whatever the journey is for you. I can't go there...I'm a product of the Reformation, and that is the stand my constituency will take, and I will take. And so, they released me."⁵⁷

Michael Seiler and Kevin Springer arrived the following day and discovered what had happened. They asked for an audience with the six and appealed to them not to continue on the path toward Orthodoxy. Seiler said,

I went into the meeting, and I met with the six. Ray was not present, and I made an appeal, especially to Gordon, since he was really the closest thing I had to a spiritual mentor. And I just made an appeal that this was wrong. This was ill-advised, and ...the unity of the seven is as important as where they go...That was more important than being Orthodox and that God was working with this group...⁵⁸

The six would not listen to his appeal. Nethery, Springer, and Seiler attended the Sacramento conference just long enough to hear the meeting reports. Nethery recalled,

⁵⁶ Peter Gillquist, "Letter to the NCAO Concerning Nethery's Resignation," 2.

⁵⁷ Nethery, "Interview with author 2."

⁵⁸ Seiler, "Interview with author 2."

Well, then they met with the guys in Sacramento, and this was a big crowd. A lot of new people...By the way, these men were so charismatic. Jon Braun was awesome. Pete was awesome too...we hung around in California, just long enough to hear the reports from the meeting, and just felt so compromised and so misrepresented. One person had said we were 'wolves among the sheep' and gave a sort of a prophetic thing in this regard. Ken Jensen was his name. And I was distraught; I was just furious.⁵⁹

The "prophecy" against Ray's resignation was written down and sent out to be read in all the NCAO churches.

"I am the Lord God, who called you before you were in your mother's womb. Have I not called you as apostles? Have I not established you upon my Word? Am I not the one who strengthens you even now? Have you not believed me and followed me unto this day? Why then are you downcast? Why has your countenance fallen? Do you not believe that I am in your midst?

Rise now! Gird yourselves! All have not bowed the knee to Baal. Wipe the tears from your eyes and be strong in me. I have placed my Word in your mouth. Why have you not spoken about it? Why do you act as though you do not have the power and authority to speak?

Listen to me now, cleanse the unrighteousness from your midst. Put on your sword, and I will yet bless you this day. Is this different from Korah, Datham, and Abihu? Is this different from Miriam and Aaron? Through whom do I speak? Why do you act as though I do not speak or that I have not spoken? I am the Holy One in your midst. Know who I am. And know who you are because of me. Order the household that I have given...I am the Holy One in your midst. Know Who I am. And know who you are because of me. Order the household that I have given you lest My sheep become afraid and fainthearted—or lest you yourselves become fainthearted.

Be bold! Be strengthened! Believe the power of my Word in your midst and act! Govern my sheep. Do not sit down under a tree to weep with remorse. Do not make relationships idols. Treat them as gifts from me. They are not to be fondled but to be used. If they become unprofitable, put them away in favor of following me.

Trust me. Believe me. Honor me as God!⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Nethery, "Second Interview with Author."

⁶⁰ Gillquist, "Letter to the NCAO Concerning Nethery's Resignation," 2, 3

Here we see the experiential/subjective stream leveraged to the fullest extent. They had received a judgment from God, and Nethery was condemned as a result. There is no grace to be offered when God has, purportedly, ruled so decisively on the side of the plaintiffs. The result is painful to witness.

What if Nethery had been allowed to deliver his paper and have an open dialogue with the others? His paper was entitled "A Call to Orthodox Limits." He began by reminding the others of their vision for the church they had set forward in their 1976 covenant. He pointed out that they were obviously "not that One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church." He continued, "If anything, we are just one more division...with its distinct leadership and theology. And yet we lay claim to a desire to be wholesomely catholic—to take a stand for identity and unity universally as the body of Christ."⁶¹ In other words, Nethery continued to share the same end goal as the others. He wanted them to be identified with the rest of the larger body of Christ and also to be a unifying factor in what is a visibly fractured Christianity and is implying ambiguity regarding the diversity of Christian expression. However, they are just one of many under the Christian umbrella.

He pointed to two things that must be maintained if they are to have "God's direction and blessing." They must "maintain carefully Biblical limits in our statement and practice of orthodoxy." He continued by emphasizing that where they start would determine where they end up. His appeal was that they place these "Biblical limits" on their initial presuppositions and not go beyond them. He was still holding tight to the inerrant Bible alone and had not incorporated an "inerrant tradition" into the first stream

⁶¹ Ray Nethery, "Call to Orthodox Limits," January 10-12, 1978, 1.

with the others. This approach has its issues. However, later began to contemplate the question of who had the authority to interpret Scripture ultimately.⁶²

His next appeal was for a "spirit of catholicity with humility and grace." As someone who has had extensive conversations with Nethery, I can hear his emotion on this point. This was what he hoped for when they began the Order.

We must not assume too exaggerated a view of ourselves. History will determine our significance in the Twentieth Century. If we are not captured by the right spirit, there will be a spirit of paranoia and uptightness. We will be easily threatened by people who disagree with us.⁶³

He was calling for them to temper their desire for certainty that was a part of their fundamentalist past. He asks them to allow for a "measure of flexibility or even ambiguity in areas where we do not have exhaustive revelation from God" and that they "must not be overly precise." However, his fundamentalism was still intact. He writes that they must be accurate concerning things that the Bible offers a clear definition and accurate in communicating them.

He followed this with a historically sound posture. "We must avoid theology built upon the reactions of the Fathers' past to their battles. We must not build a theology of reaction ourselves. We must cultivate debate and the airing of different views for our tempering and balance. We must open ourselves to others outside our camp."⁶⁴ This section on the church reveals a slight departure from fundamentalism. He described the church as God's people and that it is captured through images that point to a many-sided

⁶² Nethery gave me an early draft of a paper written by Bill Counts that was critical of the NCAO/Evangelical Orthodox Church. In the margins, he had written that they still had not settled the issue of who had authority to definitively interpret the Bible.

⁶³ Nethery, "Call to Orthodox Limits," 1.

⁶⁴ Nethery, "Call to Orthodox Limits," 2.

reality lying "beyond logical definition" and pointing to "truths that lie beyond a full human comprehension." He reminded them that they are dealing with an infinite God from the finiteness of their humanity. They must be willing to accept ambiguity.⁶⁵

Next, he cautions them to allow the historic church to speak to them and proceed with great care. "We should seek the relative and less definitive posture of the Second Century church coming off of the apostolic age as our posture."⁶⁶ He points out that there was diversity in that ancient church. He claims that the hierarchy was not "highly defined and ordered; there was not undue precision demanded doctrinally but a willingness to meet the challenges. As we consider One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, let's not indulge in the precision and extensions of the later centuries."⁶⁷ This sounds as though he was (unknowingly?) critiquing fundamentalism's leveraging of the tools of modernity to define doctrine and apologetics precisely. Unfortunately, he was never allowed the opportunity to present his paper to the others.

What would cause Jon Braun (the former grace champion of CCC) and the other NCAO leaders to throw away a friendship with Ray Nethery and refuse to hear his arguments? What would make them double down by publishing a "prophecy" about him and his followers? They had accepted an inerrant tradition to add to their inerrant Bible. As Gillquist wrote, "There is no way to take the Scriptures and trash tradition. They come to us as a package. To attempt to separate the Bible from tradition is to divide the work of the Holy Spirit into approved and disapproved categories—and that sails dangerously close to the unforgivable sin."⁶⁸ They were unwilling to question it once they embraced it

⁶⁵ Nethery, "Call to Orthodox Limits," 13.

⁶⁶ Nethery, "Call to Orthodox Limits," 16.

⁶⁷ Nethery, "Call to Orthodox Limits," 17.

⁶⁸ Peter Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox*, 61.

as evangelicals do with the Bible. This created a situation within the NCAO and later Evangelical Orthodox Church (EOC). They felt the right and responsibility to micromanage and leverage punishments in details of their people's personal lives because they believed that tradition told them so. They were now apostles and stood in the line of Apostolic Succession. They thought their rulings would stand as part of that tradition they had directly tied to their inerrant Bible. In the end, neither side had escaped fundamentalism. The difference between the embrace of the inerrant Bible and the embrace of the inerrant Bible plus an inerrant tradition is negligible when one considers that it all boils down to an insatiable desire for certainty. However, the latter doubles down by creating an inerrant doctrine alongside their inerrant Bible. They were both sure enough about their interpretations that there was no other option than to part ways. They may have had “orthodoxy,” but it lacked generosity, Nethery’s plea for them all to show some humility notwithstanding.

The NCAO: A Maximal Use of the Three Streams to Establish Authority.

Following Nethery's exit, the NCAO used the Shepherding Movement's general principles and merged them with their evolving understanding of the bishop's role in the episcopal model of the ancient church. They rebranded themselves as the Evangelical Orthodox Church (EOC) on January 15, 1979. One day prior, they consecrated themselves as bishops by gathering in a circle and laying hands on each other.⁶⁹ The image of them giving one another such authority through the laying on of hands looks a lot more like evangelical Protestantism, the very evangelical Protestantism that they had found to be so flawed. They had no greater claim to authority than Bob Jones, Bill Bright,

⁶⁹ Gordon Walker, “Odyssey to Orthodoxy,” *Again* 6, no. 3: 10.

Witness Lee, or Gene Edwards did. They had power because they claimed it for themselves.

The ministries left behind in Berkeley after Sparks' exit called themselves the Christian Coalition of Berkeley.⁷⁰ One of these ministries, the Spiritual Counterfeits Project, a group focused upon identifying and warning evangelicals of “cults,” began to receive questions about the EOC with concerns about their controlling influence over their members. Because of their prior connection to Jack Sparks, they were uncomfortable commenting on the new movement.⁷¹ They called Bill Counts, formerly of the J.C. Light and Power House, to research the question and write a paper.⁷²

Counts' paper was critical of the EOC, particularly their use of Eastern Orthodox doctrine and their exercise of authority upon their members. His analysis of the former was mostly what one would expect from an evangelical talking to other evangelicals. He made clear that the EOC was aligned with the Orthodox Church in their teachings and were not simply Protestant evangelicals who had discovered a new theological insight. He began by claiming that the Eastern Orthodox Church lends itself to an overly authoritative structure because they elevate the church to Scripture's authority. He quoted Peter Gillquist,

Too long have we merely followed Christian principles or directives God spoke to his people *in years gone by*. [our italics] As, believers we should expect to hear from God. The church responds by judging the word which is spoken determining if it is true and exhorting the people to obey what the Lord has said.⁷³

⁷⁰ These were ministries that were independent but shared their origin in the CWLF. They cooperated and collaborated while retaining independence.

⁷¹ Bill Counts, “Interview with author,” December 6, 2017.

⁷² Bill Counts, “The Evangelical Orthodox Church and the New Covenant Apostolic Order,” (Berkeley: The Spiritual Counterfeits Project, 1979)

⁷³ Counts, “The Evangelical Orthodox Church,” 2.

Counts writes that the reference to messages from God in “years gone by” is referring to the Bible. This was loaded language for evangelicals when being said in the context of the Orthodox and/or Catholic churches. "Scripture alone" was an integral theme and tenant of the Protestant Reformation. He is suggesting that their embrace of Eastern Orthodoxy elevates tradition to the level of Scripture. Since the EOC leaders stand in that line of tradition, their words can be equally authoritative. Gillquist claims that the leadership both receives subjective/experiential leading from God and then has the authority to decide whether it is authoritative and then implement it with unquestioned authority.

Counts argued against the authoritative practices of the EOC on a few levels. First, he claimed that they are controlling people's lives inappropriately. He quotes Dale Autrey, one of Jon Braun’s protégés and EOC bishop in Jackson, MS who Ray Nethery described as “rabid,”⁷⁴ that the church is "accountable before God for feeding and maturing our people in *all* aspects of their lives," and that these areas included, "jobs, marriages, dating, children, finances, singles, the control of doctrine and books, and outsiders."⁷⁵ Gillquist defended this teaching by writing, "Since when does one person, all by himself, have the authority to be the final judge of God's will? From the beginning, God instructed that by the voice of two or three witnesses shall all things be established."⁷⁶ Counts responds by pointing out that Gillquist is referring to Jesus’ words in Matthew 18:16 and that this passage is referring to the confrontation of sin in the life of another believer and is not concerned with how to hear God’s will for one’s life. In any

⁷⁴ Nethery, “Second Interview with Author”

⁷⁵ Counts, “The Evangelical Orthodox Church,” 3, 4.

⁷⁶ Counts, “The Evangelical Orthodox Church,” 3.

case, the implication is that any leading an individual feels they have from God about any area of their life must receive confirmation from the leadership to be valid.

Counts included testimonies from several people who had experienced the consequences of disobeying the EOC leadership's judgment. A medical doctor recounted that he was told he might have to leave his wife if she refused to join the church with him. Another example was that of a woman whose husband decided to leave the EOC. She recounts an "elder" approaching her to say, "I was no longer under my husband's authority, and a divorce would not be my fault...My husband was going to hell, so why should I and my children follow him?" Another woman, a homemaker in the Midwest, was told that she needed to move with her husband to EOC headquarters in Goleta, CA, to deal with their marital issues. When she refused the leaders, "called me names, said I and my son, ---, would be eternally lost, and I would experience physical death as a punishment." Still, another couple with marital problems spent two weeks in the Goleta church, but they "became fearful, partly because of the abusive language of the elders, including the use of four-letter words in the presence of their small child." The couple fled town late at night in real fear that they might be pursued.⁷⁷

Second, Counts claimed that they replaced the individual's conscience with the absolute authority of the church that is, in reality, controlled by a small number of men. He quoted an undated letter from Gillquist that in January 1978, they "had called upon each member to commit himself to the order for the rest of his natural life. Each one gladly and joyfully did this with the exception of one who is no longer with the order."⁷⁸ He acknowledged that the bishops were the only ones to required sign such a pledge but

⁷⁷ Counts, "The Evangelical Orthodox Church," 4.

⁷⁸ Counts, "The Evangelical Orthodox Church," 3.

that the bishops' authority, in function, brought the same requirement upon the laity. This left no room for personal conscience should the leadership become corrupted or misguided.

How far does this authority in overriding one's conscience go? Three former EOC leaders from the Midwest claimed to have been "alarmed" at a meeting, in July 1978, when Jon Braun asked an elder to stand and asked, "If I told you to jump off a bridge, would you jump off a bridge?" The elder immediately responded, "I would."⁷⁹ Braun was using hyperbole here (one hopes), but the point is that even if the subordinate believed that what was requested by the leader would bring harm, the subordinate would have no recourse but to obey.

Third, Counts argued that these men are unwilling to keep the confidences of those who come to them for help. They are obligated to share what they learned with the other elders. Counts argues that this is a way for them to hinder defections by alerting the hierarchy to any unrest as soon as possible and bring discipline to dissenters. Even if the elder promises the person they will keep the confidence, they are still obligated to share what they heard with the other elders.

A letter was written by Jon Braun on March 24, 1978, to the elders addresses a dispute regarding confidentiality within one of their churches. A member had come to this elder in confidence, and that confidence was assured. The elder then made the issue known to the "proper authority," and the church member felt "betrayed." Braun believed that this elder had done the proper thing and that the greater sin would have been not to break the confidence. Braun then turned the attention to the aggrieved church member

⁷⁹ Counts, "The Evangelical Orthodox Church," 4.

and wrote, "Of course, as is so often the case, the betrayer felt betrayed." Then he falls back on his interpretation and application of the Bible. "Just in case someone might feel that what I am suggesting may lack integrity, let me encourage you to read John 7:2-10! One who feels confidence must never be betrayed needs a new definition of truth and integrity, one that will also fit that passage."⁸⁰ This Scripture is being taken out of context to make his argument since Jesus is talking to the disciples about going to Judea to the Feast of Tabernacles so that the public can see the works they do. Of course, this does not matter because Braun is the ultimate arbiter of what the Bible says.

Finally, Counts argued that they diverge from the Orthodox church in their application of church authority. He calls it a "Different and Disastrous Twist." He argues that while the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches' decisions are binding, they are deliberated and developed over a lengthy period of time. In the case of the EOC, there were a small number of men receiving a "word from God" sometimes on a daily and even weekly basis to speak binding decisions into the lives of their membership. He quoted Autrey's comparison of church membership to marriage. Reasons for leaving were reduced to three: death, God sending you elsewhere, and excommunication. The church's leadership determines the latter two instances...unless Jon Braun was being literal about the business with the bridge.

In the end, one is left asking whether any of them had the self-awareness to recognize that their interpretation of the Bible was one among many. They had been through splits with friends and allies before. What made their interpretation the correct one? Studying an early draft of Counts' paper that he had sent to Nethery before

⁸⁰ Berge and Mashburn, "Letter to Stephen and Sheila Finney," 1.

publication was revealing. Nethery had made a fascinating note on Counts' draft of the document concerning the interpretation of the Bible. Counts had written, "We, therefore, appeal in loving concern to the EOC leaders as Christian brothers to turn from their extreme views and practices and subject themselves to Scripture alone as the final authority."⁸¹ Ray responded with a handwritten note, "Haven't settled the question of who interprets the Scripture, individual church seminary scholars."⁸² Nethery was being forced to confront the question that fundamentalists can ignore because they assume perspicuity of Scripture. **When there is a disagreement, they believe that those who disagree are either not in tune with the Spirit, are doing their Bible study with the wrong method, or are simply not as insightful as they are.** However, this was now the third consecutive major split that had occurred in Ray Nethery's career. If only for a moment, he was wrestling with the paradox of belief in an inerrant Bible with no inerrant interpreters.

This maximal control of the three streams exerted by the EOC leadership allowed them to justify not only the exercise of intrusive authority into the lives of others but also to demand loyalty for the rest of one's natural life. In a letter entitled, "The Excommunication of Jack Howe,"⁸³ Gillquist states that in June 1977, Howe, presumably an elder, had been "placed under discipline by The New Covenant Apostolic Order for one year because of his involvement with a woman not his wife." The NCAO had responded by putting him on a one-year probation and break from ministry "to get his marriage together." Gillquist mentioned that in January 1978, the leadership of the

⁸¹ Bill Counts and Ray Nethery, "The Evangelical Orthodox Church and New Covenant Apostolic Order Draft Copy," 12.

⁸² Count and Nethery, "The Evangelical Orthodox Church Draft," 12.

⁸³ Peter Gillquist, "The Excommunication of Jack Howe," unpublished letter, May 1978.

NCAO had committed to the organization for the "rest of their natural life." Howe had been given until May 15, 1978, to make the same pledge. Gordon Walker and Dick Ballew met with Howe to inquire about his decision on May 10, and Howe informed them that his answer was "an unqualified no...he did not trust anyone on the General Council nor anyone else in the Order." The letter referred to his "character" as being a "taker," "having a hardened heart that is sugar-coated with an air of false holiness," and that he was an "ingrate."

Further, the section on his character stated that "He sees himself as a peer of the General Council and in some respects their superior." In other words, if one fails to recognize their authority or deign to consider himself the equal of the leadership, there is a character flaw in that individual. The letter stated that they had cut him off from the Eucharist unless he repents, and he must live in Goleta, CA, until they release him to leave.⁸⁴

This demand for absolute obedience extended beyond the leadership to the parishioners. A letter I was able to secure from two EOC elders, Donald Berge and Troy Mashburn Jr, copied to Bishop Dale S. Autrey, was written to a couple, Stephen and Sheila Finney, in their Memphis parish. The letter informs them that, despite the communication of their intent to leave, Steve was being placed under church discipline. They would not be granted a transfer of membership to another church. Oddly, Sheila was "dismissed from the church, but without a blessing." Their rationale is that she carried less guilt because Steve has "forced Sheila to make a choice." If either of them were to return, there would be an ostensibly public "repentance before the Lord and his

⁸⁴ Gillquist, "The Excommunication of Jack Howe," May 1978.

church. However, we stand with open arms awaiting your return." They added that they were disciplining them because of their love for them. This discipline extended to their whole family.⁸⁵ One would imagine that this meant that the denial of the eucharist extended to their children.

Conclusion: Fundamentalism Cemented Behind 2000-Year-old Walls

In 1987, the EOC was officially brought into the Antiochene Orthodox Church. One might be tempted to assume that they finally escaped fundamentalism at the end of the long path they had taken East. A situation involving the remarriage of an Orthodox priest five years after they had become a part of the Antiochene Orthodox Church provides an interesting test case.

On November 4, 1991, in a letter to his congregation, Fr. Joseph Allen addressed an issue that had caused much talk and controversy in his parish, St. Anthony Orthodox Church. Fr. Allen was a widower who wished to remarry. Canon law prohibits priests from remarrying after the death of a spouse. However, in his letter, he appealed to the reality that he could not "imagine living any other way."⁸⁶ On February 17, 1992, 17 priests who had formerly been a part of the EOC sent a letter to Metropolitan Philip Saliba (the man responsible for allowing them into the church despite resistance from others) requesting that he "not permit this violation of Scriptural and canonical tradition of the church...should reinstatement occur, we believe it would seriously hamper the fulfillment of your desire for Orthodox unity in America and the bringing in of new churches." He responded to their letter by writing, "the depth of my

⁸⁵ Donald J. Berge and Troy Mashburn Jr., "Letter to Stephen and Sheila Finney," April 25, 1979.

⁸⁶ D. Oliver Herbel, *Turning to Tradition: Converts and the Making of the American Orthodox Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 133, 134.

disappointment...exceeds the joy I experienced when I received you...you have aligned yourselves with some of the very same scribes and Pharisees who condemned me...because I had the courage and compassion to receive you."⁸⁷ The quest for certainty and purity had continued to overwhelm their capacity for compassion even five years into their tenure as a canonically Orthodox movement.

It is striking that the Church Fathers, to whom the NCAO/EOC constantly appealed, used authority in the service of protecting right doctrine. Sparks, Braun, and the others used authority to control the personal details of others' lives. It could be argued that this is fundamentalism's most destructive flaw. If one is to become convinced of one's interpretation of the Bible (and tradition in their case), then it leaves little to no space for a Christian response of compassion in contextualized circumstances. They believed that joining the Eastern Orthodox Church had finally freed them from the errors and fundamentalism they had rejected when they left Bill Bright behind. Instead, the former NCAO/EOC leaders continued to be fundamentalists. The only difference was that their certainty was now protected by walls 2000 years thick.

⁸⁷ Herbel, *Turning to Tradition*, 135.

CHAPTER 3

COMING HOME: THE FISH HOUSE/XENOS ATTEMPTS TO ESCAPE

FUNDAMENTALISM ON THEIR OWN

Introduction

In the early 1970s, the JPM band “Love Song” appeared on, Pentecostal evangelist Katherine Kuhlman’s “I Believe in Miracles” television program with the pastor of Calvary Chapel, Chuck Smith.¹ They performed their most famous song, “Welcome Back,” in front of a crowd of Christian youths. The song is a ballad, subdued with pleasant harmonies. Some of the crowd were smiling or closing their eyes in worship as evangelicals have become known to do. Others appeared ambivalent, but Kuhlman and Smith were giddy to welcome these JPM icons to her show. When the song ends, you can see her lifting her hand and pointing her index heavenward, a nod to the JPM “One Way” symbol. The scene was surreal, and yet the lyrics of the song they performed were fitting.

Welcome back to the things that you once believed in. Welcome back to what you knew was right from the start. All you had to do was to be what you always have wanted to be. Welcome back to the love that is in your heart.

I know you thought you could turn your back, and no one could see in your mind. But I can see that you know better now. You never were the untruthful kind. Yeah, and I’m so happy now to welcome you back.²

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSwp4wrDnJU>

² Chuck Girard and Love Song, “Welcome Back,” Dunamis Music, 1971.

Evangelicals who had been in fear that they were not only losing the culture war but had lost their children were overjoyed to have them back, “back to the things they once believed in...back to what they knew was right from the start.”

This chapter tells the story of three friends who sought to reproduce first-century Christianity in the present. Two brothers, Bruce and Dennis McCallum, whose mother was a Wheaton College trained evangelical leader in the north Columbus neighborhood of Worthington. Martha McCallum was a former schoolmate and friend of several of the evangelical elite; one would have imagined that her sons would one day become part of their generation's evangelical elite. However, their initial rejection of their mother's faith would lead to an attempt to forge a path independent of evangelicalism intent on reproducing the church they read about in the pages of the New Testament. Still, in the end, the journey led them back “home.”

Martha McCallum's Fundamentalist Heritage

Three Ohio State students founded the Fish House, brothers Bruce and Dennis McCallum, and their friend Gary DeLashmutt, in 1969. The latter did not come from an evangelical Christian background, but the McCallum brothers grew up in what one might call a model evangelical context. Their mother, Martha (Hoyt), McCallum, was the daughter of conservative Quaker missionaries. She attended Wheaton College with evangelical icons Billy Graham, Carl F.H. Henry,³ Howard Hendricks,⁴ Harold Lindsell,⁵ and Youth for Christ founder Torrey Johnson. Edith Torrey, daughter of R.A. Torrey,⁶

³ Henry was the first editor and chief of the Graham backed magazine *Christianity Today*. It was a mouthpiece of sorts for the neo-evangelical movement.

⁴ Hendricks would become a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary and a popular evangelical author. Hendricks would also become a prominent speaker in the Promise Keeper movement in the 1990s.

⁵ Lindsell was a founding faculty member of Fuller Theological Seminary and would write the influential *Battle for the Bible* in 1976.

⁶ Torrey (1856-1928) was a famous evangelist and writer beloved by evangelicals.

was one of her professors and left a profound impression, and she was roommates with Torrey's niece Claire. Martha's educational and spiritual formation took place among those who stood at the very center of what would become neo-evangelicalism.⁷

Martha singled out Carl Henry and Francis Schaeffer as particularly influential for her. Schaeffer left an impression with his first book, *Escape from Reason*. "...Francis Schaeffer said that the liberal theologians have escaped from reason. They contradict themselves—they lead a church but don't believe in the inerrancy of Scripture."⁸ Inerrancy of the Bible was central for Martha. Schaeffer's words seemed to have personal significance for her, and they probably should have. Her parents were almost pulled from the mission field in 1935 because the Friends Board of Missions had become "liberal" and wanted to replace her parents with "modernists."⁹ Carl Henry was a grad student at Wheaton while McCallum was there and helped her "analyze how the liberals had broken down our belief system. They start by questioning the doctrine of the infallibility of the Bible..."¹⁰ One night after speaking to Henry, she returned to her dorm room and prayed, "Lord, I want to give my whole life to you, to serve you anywhere in the world." She referred to this as her "moment of surrender."¹¹

In 1947, Martha Hoyt married John McCallum. John's father was a Baptist minister, and he, himself, was a fundamentalist.¹² After John finished his Ph.D. in physical chemistry, Martha worked as a biochemist for the Michigan Department of Health when they met. After they were married, she left her job, and John took a job with

⁷ Martha McCallum, *Spiritual Heritage* (Columbus, OH: Self-published, 2009), 53-55.

⁸ McCallum, *Spiritual Heritage*, 54

⁹ They were able to return to Kenya and worked there until her parents retired at age 67.

¹⁰ McCallum, *Spiritual Heritage*, 55

¹¹ McCallum, *Spiritual Heritage*, 55

¹² Gary DeLashmutt, "Interview with author," February 13, 2015.

Battelle Electro-Chemistry in Columbus, OH. Martha and John had four sons: Bruce, Dennis, Scot, and Keith.

The McCallum's had been visiting various churches before 1961 but finally joined a Methodist Church that year. Martha wrote that they had trouble finding a Protestant denominational church that both possessed a "biblical curriculum" for their Sunday school and a vision for the evangelization of their community. They finally settled on a conservative Methodist church, but her boys were not interested in attending.¹³ One morning her son Bruce leaned over, asked her, "What are we doing here?" In response, she decided to start a junior church¹⁴ for children in her two oldest sons' age range. It was successful, and parents approached her about teaching them about the Bible as well. This was the beginning of what would grow to become the Clintonville Women's Club, a network of home Bible studies for women meeting in homes around the Northside of Columbus.

When Gordon Walker became the Campus Crusade (CCC) director for Ohio State University in 1964, Martha, who had already been networking with CCC, quickly recognized his talent for teaching the Bible and asked him to speak at her Bible studies. The husbands of the women in Martha's Bible studies had begun to show interest because of their wives' enthusiasm for the Bible, so she started Layman's Challenge for Today, a "non-denominational study of books in the Bible."¹⁵ Walker was asked to teach a Bible study on Tuesday mornings to men and one for husbands and wives on Tuesday nights.

¹³ McCallum, *Spiritual Heritage*, 76. Also see: Dennis McCallum, *Members of One Another* (New Paradigm Publishing, 2010), x.

¹⁴ A Sunday morning teaching and worship service that meets concurrently with the main worship service in many evangelical churches.

¹⁵ McCallum. *Spiritual Heritage*, 80.

Soon, these Bible studies had groups all over Columbus.¹⁶ After Walker resigned from CCC in 1968, Layman's Challenge began taking donations to support his continued ministry.¹⁷

Martha MacCallum's Sons' Rebellion and Return

Martha's oldest son Bruce left for Wheaton College, his mother's alma mater, in 1968. Martha was a member of the John Birch Society and had taken Bruce to one of their meetings. He was turned off by what he saw there.

I went to one of those meetings in high school to write an article for our school newspaper and just to listen to them talk about "the Chinese were going to do this, and that," and "the Russians were doing this and that," in our culture. And there was this little Italian guy there...an immigrant...he had no idea what America was about but was cheering [what was being said] on because of his experience in Italy. To hear this man go on about these communists when we are supporting oppressive regimes in Vietnam...¹⁸

There was a growing protest movement at Wheaton College where a compulsory ROTC involvement for freshman and sophomore students was in place. This requirement was strongly resisted by students, with a 1965 poll revealing that 72 percent of students opposed the requirement. From 1966 on, protests and clashes between conservatives and anti-war protestors "enveloped" Wheaton's campus.¹⁹ Bruce recognized that the pro-war movement "was not based on Christianity but a search for power."²⁰ He was eventually expelled from Wheaton for attending November 15, 1969, the "Moratorium" March in Washington DC, where as many as 750,000 people marched in protest of the Vietnam

¹⁶ McCallum, *Spiritual Heritage* 80.

¹⁷ Gordon Walker, *Led By His Love*, (Chesterton, IN, Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018). Loc. 568

¹⁸ Bruce McCallum, "Phone Interview with Author," September 22, 2017.

¹⁹ Darren Dochuk, Thomas S. Kidd, and Kurt W. Patterson, *American Evangelicalism: George Marsden and the State of American Religious History* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 447.

²⁰ Bruce McCallum, "Phone Interview with Author," September 22, 2017.

War.²¹ They had technically broken the Wheaton policy by not reporting where they were going when they left campus. There were also Vietnam War protests taking place on Wheaton's campus that Bruce described as "riots." He understood the college's optics were poor, given their evangelical constituency, and that he was made to be an example.

He returned home to Columbus, and that summer attended a summer conference sponsored by Layman's Challenge at Grace Haven Farm, where Peter Gillquist, Jon Braun, and Gordon Walker were speaking. He recalled sitting outside the conference, smoking a cigarette, and looking up at the moon, saying, "I want to be something. I want to make a difference in the world. I want a life that's full of active meaningfulness." He began spending his time at his parents' house listening to Christian teachings on tape.

Martha arranged for Bruce to spend some time in Pittsburgh working with Young Life and John Pataky²² in the inner city. He came away from that experience inspired. "We were working with the black community. I was tenuous in my faith, but here I saw this community at work building bridges [to the black community]."²³ They were working with families living in federally funded housing in Northview Heights. Many of these families were separated because the housing was designated for single parents. The fathers would live outside the development so that the mothers could receive AFDC payments. The kids were bused to newly integrated school districts where mobs rocked these buses, and white kids would throw rocks at them. After spending the fall 1969 semester in Pittsburgh, he called his parents and told them he wanted to attend school at Ohio State and start a ministry there. Martha suggested he begin a Christian men's house

²¹ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), 379.

²² A former schoolmate of Martha's at Wheaton.

²³ Bruce McCallum, "Phone Interview with Author," September 22, 2017.

on campus. He returned to Columbus changed and hoped to recreate what he had found in Pittsburgh in Columbus.²⁴ He enrolled at Ohio State in the spring of 1970. Martha's oldest son was "[welcomed] back to the things that [he] once believed in. [Welcomed] back to what [he] knew was right from the start."

Bruce's younger brother Dennis was 17 when he was arrested for growing 12 marijuana plants by the Olentangy River in the summer of 1969.²⁵ Like his mother, Dennis was an avid reader, but he had gravitated to authors like Kesey, Sartre, Kerouac, Ferlinghetti, and Ginsberg.²⁶ Dennis wrote that the only "literature worthy of a functioning mind" available to him while in detention was the Bible.²⁷ He claimed that he never really embraced Christianity in his childhood and teenage years. He had a "pretty negative attitude toward church all the way through."²⁸ He had a conversion experience while in jail, recognizing that his pursuit of "kicks" through drugs led him to become the kind of person dominated by his "lower nature." He wanted to pursue a life of meaning characterized by the fruit of the Spirit the Apostle Paul describes in Galatians 5. He continued, "Since that time, I have experienced a real and vital change in my life that has startled many of the people who knew me before. Trying to describe the change is harder than trying to describe acid to a straight person."²⁹ In actuality, he only spent three days in the detention center and then was unexpectedly released and allowed to finish his

²⁴ McCallum, *Spiritual Heritage*, 86.

²⁵ McCallum, *Spiritual Heritage*, 82. Also see: Dennis McCallum, "Life is an Amusement Park," *The Fish* 1, no. 2 (August 1970): 1.

²⁶ Gary DeLashmutt, "Interview with author," February 13, 2015. See also: Dennis McCallum, "Interview with author 2," February 12, 2015.

²⁷ McCallum, "Life is an Amusement Park," 2

²⁸ McCallum, "Interview with author."

²⁹ McCallum, "Life is an Amusement Park," 2.

sentence at his parents' home.³⁰ As part of the agreement, he had to maintain passing grades at OSU and abstain from drugs and alcohol. He also had a curfew of 9:00 and had to attend church with his parents. He began taking classes at OSU in the fall of 1969. Dennis was "welcomed back" to his mother's evangelicalism as Bruce had been.

It seems important to Dennis that people see him as genuinely having been shaped by the counterculture as a youth. In my first interview, very little was said about his mother's formative influence in his life and ministry; that emerged as I dug deeper.

Dennis said that he felt alienated and let down by his experiences with traditional churches. Gordon Walker held a weekly Bible study in the student union on Tuesday evenings. Despite Walker's teaching resonating with him, Dennis did not feel like he fit in with the other Christian students. He recalls that he didn't know any of them, nor did they show a desire to get to know him. "I could tell they were frightened, probably by my countercultural, slightly hostile demeanor." He claimed he was just "prejudiced" against "church kids."³¹

Gary DeLashmutt was a childhood friend of Dennis, but the two had lost touch in middle school.³² They reconnected in high school. DeLashmutt was into the same countercultural and beatnik authors as Dennis. Gary's father was not a Christian, and his mother was an irregular attendee of a "liberal" mainline Protestant church. He reconnected with Dennis at a Methodist Youth Fellowship camp the summer before their

³⁰ Martha McCallum records this fact. Dennis McCallum gives the impression that his time in "jail" was longer.

³¹ Dennis McCallum, "My Experience in Xenos" (unpublished, 2005), 1.

³² They had been best friends in the first grade. Dennis' was very bright and skipped the second grade. They hadn't seen each other much more after that.

junior year. Gary was in the midst of an identity crisis, and finding another teen who was asking the same questions as he was “amazing” and “powerful.”³³

They began to experiment with drugs at this point in their lives to pursue truth and continued reading countercultural authors. They maintained their grades, but they did drugs together for that entire year until the other two graduated, leaving Gary alone for his senior year. Dennis was busted for growing marijuana that summer, and Gary was greeted at the door to his home by his mom. She threw the newspaper at him and said, “It looks like your friends have hit the big time.” The headline read “Two Worthington Youths Nabbed in Pot Garden: More Arrests to Follow.”³⁴ Gary ran into Dennis several times his senior year following his release from jail, and Dennis would try to convert him to Christianity. The conversations always ended in arguments.

DeLashmutt remembers being deeply skeptical of human nature. He had the attitude that “everyone is selfish; everyone uses other people. Some are just more honest about it than others.” When his girlfriend unexpectedly broke up with him two weeks before graduation, he remembers going home and lying in bed and admitting to himself, “you don’t have any idea.” As soon as he admitted this to himself, all the conversations with Dennis came “flooding back” to mind. He had the image of Jesus knocking on the door of his heart image in his mind and thought to himself that if he didn’t know what he was doing maybe, he should give Jesus a try. He ran into Dennis a few days later and told him about his conversion.³⁵ Although DeLashmutt came from outside of evangelicalism,

³³ Gary DeLashmutt, “Interview with author,” February 13, 2015.

³⁴ Gary DeLashmutt, “Interview with author.”

³⁵ Gary DeLashmutt, “Interview with author.”

he was immediately brought into the McCallum's evangelical circle. He would join Bruce and Dennis in their ministry effort in the Spring of 1971.³⁶

The Fish House: Bruce, Gary, and Dennis join the JPM

Riots broke out at OSU in 1970, and the National Guard was called to the campus. The spring semester was suspended as a result. Bruce and Dennis made a family trip to Wichita, KS to visit their ailing grandparents since the school was not in session. While they were there, they were introduced to Bob Carrol, an anchorman for the local PBS station and a lapsed Catholic who had lost his faith while working on Broadway in his youth. Bob and his nephew (a 28-year-old architect visiting from Colorado) showed Bruce and Dennis around the town and then returned to Bob's for a beer. Bruce shared some of his poetry with Bob, and he was moved. Dennis and Bruce shared their stories and their hopes for a ministry on the campus at OSU.

Bruce had come across an underground paper in Pittsburgh called *The Fish*. He liked the name and suggested that they print a paper by the same name. Dennis was skeptical because of the cost. There were only eight students involved in their ministry at that point. Martha McCallum knew a Christian man who owned a printing company on the west side of Columbus, so they approached him for help. The owner said he had an old press he wasn't using and that they were welcome to borrow. One of their group members had learned to use a printing press in a high school trade class. When the press was delivered, it happened to be the very same one, a Multilith 1250 offset press, on which their friend "Bones" had been trained. This gave them the sense that God was inspiring and blessing their vision for campus ministry.

³⁶ Gary DeLashmutt, "Interview with author."

A couple of months after their first trip to Wichita, Dennis was driving to Colorado to spend time with Bob's nephew and stopped in Wichita for a couple of days. Bob surprised him by saying that he was planning to visit Columbus and see the work they had been doing. He arrived in Columbus in August 1970. At that time, all they were involved in were Bible studies connected to the Layman's Challenge and the JPM house on Frambes St. They had just printed their second edition of *The Fish*, and it was the only independent thing they were doing. Bob was so moved by what he saw that he wanted to move to Columbus and get involved but worried that someone his age would not have much to offer. Dennis shared the vision for renting a house near the campus that could serve as a headquarters.³⁷ To their surprise, Bob left his job and sold his house within two weeks. He rented a house, using the proceeds from his home's sale, on Lane Ave, the house Gordon Walker lived in when he was CCC director. Dennis, Bruce, and others moved into the house with him and moved the printing press into the basement. Carroll would go on to serve as a sort of house "father." He wrote several articles for *The Fish* during his time there and freely shared his resources to propel the ministry forward.

Two years later, Bob Carroll would quietly leave the group. Dennis had written that it appeared that Bob had ulterior motives in joining them in Columbus, but God had used him to help them get the ministry started. Bruce clarified that Dennis was referring to the fact that Carroll was gay. Bob's sexual orientation was initially unknown initially, but Carroll and Bruce became very close friends. At some point in 1972, Carroll confessed his feelings for Bruce. Bruce said, "...The sexual dimension of our relationship from his perspective was something he wanted to pursue, so yeah, I had to draw a line

³⁷ There was already a JPM house on Frambes St, and Dennis was interested in doing the same thing.

and just say, ‘Well, that’s not going to happen.’”³⁸ Bruce said he had and continues to have a high level of respect for what Bob did for them and that his response to how the church has responded to gays has been affected by an appreciation for Carroll.

He was a wonderful human being who really sacrificed a lot to get the Fish House going and suffered...he lost more than he gained by trying to do that. And whether or not he had ulterior motives...being attracted to guys and that sort of thing...you know we all have ulterior motives and sin natures, and it’s changed my view as an adult how the church should handle that problem.³⁹

Carroll was attempting to find his way in a fundamentalist setting and contribute to something he believed in despite knowing that he would never be accepted if they knew his secret. In hindsight, an article he wrote for *The Fish* in August 1971 reveals a potential window into his attempt to find an identity within this context. He wrote a front-page article on St. Francis of Assisi that seems to be an odd fit with the group's typical articles. In the article, Carroll wrote about the frivolity of the saint’s youth and his eventual rejection of his birthright and family wealth because he fell in love with “Lady Poverty.” Bob had left the security of a good job and a nice home for the opportunity to make a difference. Like Francis, he left everything behind to care for others. When Francis came across the abandoned Chapel of San Damiano, he knew in his heart that God wanted him to rebuild the chapel when he heard the words, “Restore my house.” It is not difficult to imagine Bob drawing analogies to himself, helping to facilitate this new ministry.

The saint of Assisi was always given the protection that God gives to all who follow Him. Throughout his life, Francis lived in constant companionship with joy—an overpowering joy coupled with God’s limitless love and the overwhelming grace to which he fell heir through the agony and glory of Jesus’s death on the cross. These were his

³⁸ Bruce McCallum, “Interview with author.”

³⁹ Bruce McCallum, “Interview with author.”

insulation against the cruel judgments of man. These were the armor that battled for and earned respect from Innocent III, the Pope himself... Throughout his life, Francis was never ordained by any church. He lived as a servant of God, trained by God through the Holy Spirit. He never advocated separation from the church of the day; he showed respect to all priests and officials of that church. He wanted only to fulfill the mission assigned to him by his Lord: to find God's 'lost sheep' among his own people as Jesus told his disciples to find them among the Israelites.⁴⁰

Bob was trusting in God to protect him as he had stepped into an uncertain future. Dennis wrote that Bob spent all the money he had made from his house's sale over those two years. His devotion to God "insulated him against the cruel judgments of man."

True to their evangelical roots, their first attempt at the ministry was to launch a Thursday evening Bible study upon moving into the house. They called it the "Fish House" because it was where the paper was being printed. Bob would cook dinner for everyone, and they had a teaching on the Bible. Jim Smith was an OSU student who attended some of their early meetings. He recalled it being very informal. One night, in particular, he recalled the room was packed with 17-18 people. They sat on the steps and listened to Gary DeLashmutt share a teaching on the Bible. There was some conversation invited, but the teaching was "more didactic." For Smith, "Everything was exciting. I'm learning the Bible."⁴¹

Smith, who has kept in touch with the Fish House/Xenos over the years, also shared the way they teach is that they have a "hardcore cognitive process. They teach what the Word says, and if [you don't] match up, you're the problem." They don't want to hear anything you have to say. "Also, if it's emotional, they don't want anything to do with it. It's like if it's emotional, it's evil or something. They have nothing to do with the

⁴⁰ Bob Carroll, "Apostle to God's Children St. Francis of Assisi," *The Fish* 11, no. 10 (August 1971) 1, 3, 4.

⁴¹ Jim Smith, "Interview with author," February 9, 2015.

emotional process. They just say, ‘Well, what does the Scripture say?’ If you wanted more of the emotional, you would go to [The Frambes House].”⁴² In the first year, the group grew from 4 to 25 attending their meetings. This posture toward the subjective/experiential stream continues to the present.

Early Growth and Split with the NCAO

From 1971-1974 their ministry experienced rapid growth. In 1972, the Fish House leaders outside the inner circle of Bruce, Dennis, and Gary began leading groups in several areas around Columbus. Also, that year they were able to move to a larger house on 16th Ave. They could now host over 100 people at their meetings, and they were often at capacity.⁴³ At this point, they were facing the same problem many JPM groups faced. They were disorganized and did not have a clear sense of structure or authority. It was as if they assumed that they had the Bible, and that was enough. Growth happened, but the results were not all positive.

There were negatives during this period, as well. Twice between 70 and 74, our group faced internal division. Each time a group of formerly trusted friends stormed out of the group when they didn’t get their way. Our workforce was suspect. We never knew when one of our workers might sleep with his or her lover. Drugs and alcohol posed a regular threat. I got up to teach morning Bible studies with a hangover more than once.⁴⁴

There was also the issue of handling people who would come to stay with them who had problems with mental illness. They would take in street people from time to time as well as students. Once a person with schizophrenia attempted to murder Bruce. They responded with an increased emphasis on “commitment and discipleship.” They asked several to move out of the Fish House in 1972 due to a lack of commitment. They also

⁴² Smith, “Interview with author.”

⁴³ McCallum, “My Experience in Xenos,” 2005, 7.

⁴⁴ McCallum, “My Experience in Xenos,” 9

reimagined the house as more than a rooming house and crash pad. This was now going to be a “ministry house.” They started a home for women that they later referred to as “The Rock,” but no other houses were launched.

A split occurred in the central meeting in 1973 in the Fish House. Dennis was frustrated that the group had dropped to 65 students, and “they didn’t seem very motivated to witness.” He “didn’t feel appreciated” and had other ministry opportunities that he thought might have been more promising. He reached out to a couple of other group members, and they responded with “Wow!” but no overtures for him to stay. One night after teaching, he announced that he “would not be there next week or ever again. After a lengthy silence, someone said, ‘Does this mean we’re not meeting next week?’ I said, ‘You can meet if you want to, but I won’t be here.’ Nobody said anything else, and prayer was short and unedifying.”⁴⁵ Dennis left to do something else for two months but regretted what he had done and returned. He attempted to restart the group in June. Only ten of the group members returned, and they had to spend the next year rebuilding it. Part of the problem stemmed from the youth and inexperience among the leadership. From 1970-1975 no formal leadership structure existed. If someone in the group wanted to launch a small group under the Fish House name, they could, and they were automatically the group leader.

The second division happened in the late summer of 1974. The NCAO had been formed and made overtures for the Fish House to join them and offer them “covering.” “We felt obligated to these guys because we respected them, and they had helped us a lot. We wondered if God wanted us to have this ‘covering.’ We had always been taught that

⁴⁵ McCallum, “My Experience in Xenos,” 9.

submission to leadership was important.”⁴⁶ They attended a conference in Mansfield, and Jon Braun was the speaker tasked to share the new organization's vision. Braun, by all accounts, was a very charismatic speaker and influencer. Braun said, “If your leader says ‘jump’ your only question is, ‘how high?’” As he listened, Dennis found their thinking both “authoritarian” and “unbiblical.” DeLashmutt agreed, and internal discussions ensued. DeLashmutt said that Braun was quoting the church fathers and that, “We wanted to believe him, but he was moving beyond the Scriptures [and] the gender issues within the NCAO were of particular concern.”⁴⁷ The former reflects McCallum’s evangelical background and emphasis on biblical inerrancy and the authority of Scripture. The latter reflects Martha McCallum’s continued influence. In 1973, the NCAO had attempted to take over Layman’s Challenge and remove Martha McCallum from her teaching ministry because their interpretation of the Bible was that women should not be placed in positions of authority. Martha thwarted their assault upon her teaching ministry.

The NCAO called a meeting with them to discuss their decision. Dennis recalled that the meeting was supposed to be with himself, Bruce, Gary, and Martha, but the “more conservative one”⁴⁸ invited his dad to come at the last minute. Dennis recalled that “the whole meeting turned into a big fight between the adults, but the conclusion was that they adjured me to obey my dad.”⁴⁹ His dad ultimately advised him not to join the NCAO. The three of them, Bruce, Dennis, and Gary, had graduated from OSU that Spring and were leaving for two years to study at the JC Light and Powerhouse⁵⁰ in Los

⁴⁶ McCallum, “My Experience in Xenos,” 10.

⁴⁷ Gary DeLashmutt, “Interview with author.”

⁴⁸ Likely Ray Nethery.

⁴⁹ Dennis McCallum, “My Experience in Xenos,” 10.

⁵⁰ An unaccredited, JPM inspired seminary started by former CCC staff members located near the campus of UCLA.

Angeles. They warned the other leaders not to join the NCAO. According to DeLashmutt, the NCAO believed the Fish House was theirs. The night before they left, Mansfield leaders attempted to go around them and talk the other leaders into joining them.⁵¹

Following this split with Gordon Walker, Bruce attempted to form a board to oversee the Fish House. Laymen's Challenge had suffered due to the break with Gordon Walker, who had always been a "guiding light" for them. Like Walker, Grace Haven had always been an important source of "oversight" for the Fish House, so he selected influential Christian men from around the Columbus area and included his father. This experiment didn't last past the first meeting of the board.

We brought these men into the Fish House, and we sat down [to] have a board meeting...my father asked us to leave the room. And he said [Bruce laughs], "If there's going to be the authority here, we are going to take it, and you have to leave." We went upstairs, and Dennis, at this point, said, "Well, I'm not going to submit to this." And Louis Basso and those guys said, "I'm not going to do this. They're...taking over our house" And here, I set this whole thing up...and that was sort of the seed for how Dennis operated. He very much felt that this was his ministry...I wanted something that would be a continuity that we could walk away from and wouldn't be centered on me or on him or anyone else. But Dennis had a very proprietary view of this, and he has communication gifts. He has personal charisma, and so he was able to persuade...the rest of the guys that were in the house at the time...⁵²

This was the question with which they were faced. Dennis did not want to be told how to run their ministry. However, they all recognized that the authority question would need to be answered at some point. Bruce says that it was at this point he began to distance himself from the Fish House. Their time at the JC Light and Powerhouse would be spent searching out this question of authority and developing their brand of restorationism.

⁵¹ Gary DeLashmutt, "Interview with author"

⁵² Bruce McCallum, "Interview with author."

Dennis' first trip to the West Coast was for the Summer Bible Institute at the JC Light and Powerhouse in June of 1971. He met his future wife, Holly, on the trip. The classes were held at Hollywood Presbyterian Church and were led by Don Williams, Hal Lindsey, and Bill Counts. Bruce, Dennis, and DeLashmutt went on a second West Coast trip to the JC Light and Powerhouse in the summer of 1972. In 1974, they returned to earn a seminary degree from the school. Initially, the big draw was to study under Hal Lindsey, the author of the bestselling *Late Great Planet Earth*. DeLashmutt described him as a “master teacher and communicator of biblical doctrine at a fair depth and [in] an accessible way.” He also suggested that he could have been the successor to Billy Graham had his personal life not imploded. Dennis said that the first quarter they were there, he was habitually late to class. He would drive to the school in a Porsche with a gold chain around his neck and eventually fell into controversy for having an affair with a student.⁵³

Hal Lindsey may have disappointed, but the other faculty member they came specifically to study under did not. They spent months working on a project together with Bill Counts, who was on the faculty and a Dallas Seminary graduate who reinforced their emphasis on the perspicuity and inerrancy of the Bible. They decided to study ecclesiology and ultimately decided to establish an “eldership” in Columbus based upon that study. Dennis returned briefly in 1975 to select four elders, with Gary named the fifth elder when he returned. Over forty years later, Counts' evaluation of Bruce, Dennis, and DeLashmutt was glowing.⁵⁴ While they were there, they helped to launch an

⁵³ Gary DeLashmutt, “Interview with author.”

⁵⁴ Bill Counts, “Interview with the author.”

underground paper for their seminary. *The Supernaturalist* featured Bruce and Gary as editors, with Dennis listed as a contributing writer.

The Fish House Becomes Xenos

Gary and Dennis returned to Columbus in 1976 and found that 45-50 were meeting regularly in the Fish House's central meeting. They did not wish to distract from those currently leading the group, so they decided to set up central meetings in different parts of the city directed at specific audiences. DeLashmutt took the adult study, and Dennis created one for high school students. They also organized a dozen small groups. McCallum and DeLashmutt had significant influence and had an abundance of charisma. The small group leaders asked Dennis and Gary not to lead one or attend because they felt like even if they were just sitting in, the people would look to them to lead. Dennis wrote that "Even though our wives led in these groups, we were not welcome!"⁵⁵

In 1980, they began to experience explosive growth. The Fish House had eighteen small groups meeting in various areas around Columbus and had a waiting list of 270 people who were told that they would have to wait up to a year and a half for an opening. At this point, they came up with the idea of home churches. These would be made up of 30-35 people at the outset and grow to seventy before splitting the group and starting a new one. Between 1980 and 1983, they grew from 8 house churches to 35. In 1981, they began issuing annual reports. The first one revealed a 4% growth rate goal per month among 14 house churches with an average attendance of 37, leading to a doubling in size. Dennis wrote that this model implied that these groups would double in size every month and a half and were based on past performance.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ McCallum, "My Experience in Xenos," 11.

⁵⁶ McCallum, "My Experience in Xenos" 11.

They leased their first facility, referred to as “Building 4” or the “Warehouse,” in 1981. “Excitement reached a fever pitch” There were 1300 members in their church at that point, and they had 4000 people visit their groups for the first time that year. The purchase of a building forced them to incorporate, and they used the opportunity to rebrand the Fish House as “Xenos Christian Fellowship.” The Fish House itself no longer existed, so the name had lost its reference point. Further, they had stopped publishing *The Fish in* December 1972. In the Summer of 1981, they had begun publishing a new magazine called Xenos. It is a Greek word meaning “foreigner” or “sojourner.” Dennis wrote that adding “Christian Fellowship” was a concession toward preventing them from sounding “like a cult.”⁵⁷

Also, in 1981, Gary and Dennis attended a church growth seminar. This would lead to a “major shift in thinking” that Dennis believes would prove unhealthy. Up until this point, they thought that a focus on numbers was “carnal.” They had always secretly counted attendance, but now they were convinced that studying and analyzing their growth patterns was a healthy practice. Dennis describes a “questionable” focus on numbers and growth that began to be an unhealthy fascination and drive to become a megachurch. “I think this growing self-consciousness was unhealthy. But I don’t know how it could have been avoided. I guess we were not spiritual enough to avoid the pride that came with explosive growth.”⁵⁸ Their focus on the growth and expansion of house churches led to a competitive atmosphere among house church leaders and a lack of training and oversight. By 1984, Xenos was facing allegations that they were a “cult”

⁵⁷ McCallum, “My Experience in Xenos,” 12.

⁵⁸ McCallum, “My Experience in Xenos,” 12.

because of their unconventional model, unfamiliar name, and the time demands and discipline they expected from their members.

Xenos launched a Christian school in the fall of 1983. They bought an abandoned school building at auction from the city and came up with the \$150,000 down payment in only three weeks. Their congregation was becoming older and having children who were now school age. Dennis claimed they started the school to keep their people from fleeing to the Suburbs. The Columbus school system was “bussing students into dangerous neighborhoods.” There would be a growing social consciousness at Xenos in the eighties, but they had begun with a strongly dispensationalist mindset.

We didn't have much of a social conscience. We were probably pretty dispensational, pretty much the boat's sinking, the important thing is to get people off of it . . . I think that our vision on that probably came about in the late seventies, early eighties, a whole decade-plus later.⁵⁹

One could already see hints of a growing self-consciousness that outsiders began to view them with suspicion in January of 1981. They pushed back by showing their devotion to the Bible. Gary DeLashmutt wrote an article, “Countdown to Culture,” in Xenos magazine's inaugural issue. It gave a scenario where an OSU student joins a non-denominational church that emphasizes the Bible alone. The student's mother begins to be concerned as her daughter has doubts about the pastor's salvation, where her mom attends. The concerned mother speaks to her pastor about this, and he tells her that he believes her daughter is in a cult. He wrote, “Those who work in evangelistic organizations or who pursue a New Testament model in their churches are especially

⁵⁹ McCallum, “My Experience in Xenos,” 12.

vulnerable to this accusation. Some have already been wrongly accused, and more attacks will surely come.”⁶⁰

In 1984, Xenos experienced its first major split. Their congregation had begun to move past college-age, and their schedule of meetings was still based upon the college experience. “Home churches met every week, cell groups had been added, and central meetings were weekly (and at night). Besides these, many took classes, especially the discipleship class.”⁶¹ In addition to these, there were often meetings with disciples (mentorees) and leaders. Dennis wrote that outsiders had indeed begun to accuse them of being a cult because of the demanding schedule and “unconventional approach.” He admitted that this had always been an accusation for these reasons. It was just that the allegations became louder at this point. Both the Columbus Dispatch and Columbus Monthly printed negative stories about the church. The “Cult Awareness Network” also labeled them a “possibly dangerous group.”⁶² Dennis noted the louder and more troubling accusations came from former members. He writes that, initially, these accusations came from people who had been “confronted or disciplined” for sins like fornication. However, as the number of allegations increased, they began to include more and more people “who simply gave up under increasingly demanding leaders.” Some had come under severe criticism for “sins of omission.” They realized that “leaders were resorting more to pressure than persuasion.” They did an investigation and found that some of the accusations were accurate.⁶³

⁶⁰ Gary DeLashmutt, “Countdown to Cult-ture,” *Xenos* (Columbus, OH: January 1981), 7, 8.

⁶¹ McCallum, “My Experience in Xenos,” 13.

⁶² McCallum, “My Experience in Xenos,” 13.

⁶³ McCallum, “My Experience in Xenos,” 14.

They began to reevaluate their prior interpretations of the Bible but not their assumptions about its inerrancy and perspicuity. Further, they continued as the authoritative interpreters of the Bible. By the spring of that year, 20 of their 58 house churches were in poor health or threatening to dissolve. As growth slowed, “frustration caused immature leaders to browbeat and boss their members more than ever.”⁶⁴ They spent the next six months reevaluating the church and their methods and recognized that their training outlines “advocated a controlling or authoritarian view.”⁶⁵ Twenty home churches were dismantled over the next two years. Dennis believed they had been “suckered into a satanic ambush.” As they reworked their training material and increased the training requirements for the leadership, they “also critiqued the belief that having a sinner in your church might sink the ship like Jonah or cause defeat like Adam.”⁶⁶

Authoritarian Issues

The restorationism embraced by Xenos eschews lessons learned through Church history and tradition for an approach that attempts to focus strictly on their particular interpretation of the Bible. Bruce McCallum left after 1973 because he saw that Dennis’ influence over the others and leadership was taking them in a sectarian direction because it “was centered around Dennis and Gary’s personalities.” He intimated his concern that the Xenos model is “not reproducible.” He mentioned that his younger brother, Keith, referred to Dennis as “the pope” when he was on Xenos staff. “When you look at the [web] page, he and Gary are the ones who started this movement, so there is that personality focus in the center, and I think Dennis has matured to some degree..., but

⁶⁴ McCallum, “My Experience in Xenos,” 15.

⁶⁵ McCallum, “My Experience in Xenos,” 16.

⁶⁶ McCallum, “My Experience in Xenos,” 16.

there is this...problem.”⁶⁷ In both my interviews with Dennis, Bruce’s name hardly came up. I only learned of his integral role through reading Martha’s memoirs.

For his part, Dennis points to Xenos being “elder-led” and the importance of having multiple leaders. Like the NCAO, they require unanimous consent to make decisions. However, during another split in the early nineties, he and Gary moved to give themselves “senior-elder” status. Further, elders are not voted on by the congregation. They are nominated by the other elders (Board of Trustees) and then vetted for three months and voted on by their “Servant Team” (deacons).⁶⁸ However, these are people who have served under McCallum and DeLashmutt’s leadership for years. They cannot help but exert significant influence over them.

Compounding these issues is that small group leaders are “mature Christians” who may have only been Christian for two years and are teaching others. According to Bruce, there is a stigma surrounding the pursuit of formal theological education. I asked him if this was true, why did they allow Xenos to become a satellite campus of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School? He responded that

To have any credibility in the marketplace, you require certain certifications, and so Dennis, for example, got his degree...at Ashland...I went to Regent College, and my Hebrew professor, there was actually just a summer [adjunct]. [He] was actually a professor at Ashland, and Dennis was in one of his classes, and I got a pretty strong report from him [chuckles] about how...[Dennis] made it clear that he could teach them...Yeah, they will go and get a degree, but they...and I don’t believe they are anti-intellectual by any means...but they put people out there without requiring that preparation they don’t feel is necessary.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Bruce McCallum, “Interview with author.”

⁶⁸ Unknown, “How Does Xenos Elect Elders?” Xenos.org, accessed September 21, 2020, <https://www.xenos.org/about-xenos/how-does-xenos-elect-elders>.

⁶⁹ Bruce McCallum, “Interview With Author.”

Xenos may claim to be “anti-institutional” and certainly have unique aspects to their structure. Still, at heart, they are no different from other fundamentalist groups attempting to recreate the church they observe in the New Testament pages using an inerrant Bible as the sole authority. The Bible is perspicuous, so it does not require extensive formal training for someone to be ready to lead one of their house churches, nor is it a problem that all the training takes place within that specific church without voices from the outside beyond those approved by the senior eldership. Because they are the founders, Dennis and Gary are the ultimate arbiters of how the Bible is interpreted and applied. In distinction from the NCAO, they reject Christian tradition as an authority, but they ultimately replace it with their authority.

Analysis of the Three Streams

The NCAO was an example of the maximization of the three streams (inerrancy, restorationism, and experiential/subjective), especially in its second incarnation as the Evangelical Orthodox Church. Xenos maximized the inerrancy stream while emphasizing an approach to restorationism that emphasized authority and accountability, grounded in their reading of the Bible, without reference to the larger Christian tradition. Their minimalization of the experiential/subjective stream is noteworthy and has serious implications on the use of authority in their church.

Inerrancy

The inerrancy stream dominates the Xenos approach in all areas of life. Martha McCallum embraced inerrancy and quoted Harold Lindsell’s *Battle for the Bible* in her memoirs, “Biblical infallibility (i.e., inerrancy) is the basis for the Christian belief

system.”⁷⁰ Xenos’ statement of faith on their website affirms their belief in biblical inerrancy and includes a link to the “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy and Hermeneutics.”⁷¹ Further, both Dennis McCallum⁷² and Gary DeLashmutt⁷³ affirmed their embrace of inerrancy doctrine in separate interviews with the author.

An article in the Columbus Dispatch on April 23, 1983, revealed a growing unease among clergy in the Columbus area concerning the “fervent fundamentalism” that “pulses through the congregation. The message is unequivocal: accept Christ or live eternally in hell.” Gary DeLashmutt’s response that inerrancy is an “essential Christian doctrine and a basic tenant of Christianity.” Bridgman observed, “With essential Christian doctrines in the Bible, there is no room for debate.” However, it is the “perceived narrow acceptance— ‘believe as I believe and do as I do’ that some find objectionable.” In rebuttal to DeLashmutt, Rev. Jack Collins, pastor of the St. Thomas More Newman Center, said, “It is very dangerous. It ignores the true content of Scripture. I don’t think life is that black and white.”⁷⁴ This “black and white” nature characterizes McCallum and DeLashmutt’s approach to the Bible.

From the outset, the Xenos leadership shared the evangelical assumption that they could discover a functionally objective interpretation of the Bible that discovered the original author’s intent and correctly applied it to the present. In August 1971, Bruce McCallum wrote an article on the growth of small group Bible studies in the Columbus area. There was a pursuit of “deeper meaning” within the Scriptures. Those considered

⁷⁰ Martha Hoyt McCallum, *Spiritual Heritage* (Columbus, OH: Xenos Christian Fellowship, 2009) 32.

⁷¹ Unknown, “Statement of Faith,” xenos.org (<https://www.xenos.org/about-xenos/statement-faith>).

⁷² Dennis McCallum, “First Interview with Author.”

⁷³ Gary DeLashmutt, “Interview with Author.”

⁷⁴ Mary Bridgeman, “Ministers Question Strict Principles,” *Columbus Dispatch* (April 23, 1983) 5.

“mature” focused on the Bible’s ability to communicate a message free from bias. The goal of these groups “was to come to grips with a personal sense of the presence of Christ in their various lives.”⁷⁵

Their approach to the interpretation of the Bible is marked by a lack of acknowledgment of tradition's authority. On xenos.org, the page on their history mentions their split with the NCAO, and what stands out is their adherence to Martha McCallum’s evangelical approach to the Bible. They examine the turn from evangelicalism by their former mentor, Gordon Walker, and take the opposite position.

After struggling with whether the interpretive community of the post-apostolic fathers should be considered authoritative today, Xenos leaders settled on a view that church tradition should have no authority whatsoever in the life of the church. They concluded that all authority granted tradition is at the direct expense of biblical authority...Xenos teachers continue to see human tradition as more often the enemy of good exegesis than a help.⁷⁶

As is the case in most evangelical settings, the leadership is ultimately the authoritative interpreter. Further, there is confidence in leadership's ability to “rightly divide the Word of Truth” and definitively interpret and apply Scripture to the lives of those under their care. The potential for abuse becomes exacerbated in in-house church settings. Bruce McCallum mentioned that some of these leaders had only been Christians for a year when assigned to lead and teach others.⁷⁷

Dennis McCallum claims that they have maintained the same doctrine and approach since their beginning and that they have always understood themselves as “anti-

⁷⁵ Bruce McCallum, “Home Bible Studies Grow,” *The Fish*, 2, no. 10 (August 1971), 5.

⁷⁶ Unknown, “History” Xenos.org, accessed September 16, 2020, <https://www.xenos.org/about-xenos/history>.

⁷⁷ Bruce McCallum, “Interview with author.”

fundamentalists.”⁷⁸ However, their rejection of fundamentalism was only directed at the “anti-culture aspect.”⁷⁹

It wasn't that we thought they were necessarily wrong in their theology of the Gospel or anything like that, but the narrow, angry, separatist type thinking. We did not believe that “holy” meant to separate from the culture at all, and so we had been taught that you contextualize with your culture... Paul was ‘all things to all men.’ That was a big aspect of what the Jesus Movement was. It was contextualizing to the hippies.⁸⁰

This is backed up by their statement of faith regarding the Bible. “The Bible is the inspired word of God. The 66 books which constitute the Bible are entirely reliable and truthful, and the Bible stands as the central authority over our lives, our faith, and the direction of our church.”⁸¹ Xenos is a fundamentalist church in its approach to the Bible and has been since its days as the “Fish House.”

Their assumptions are ultimately based upon a “plain sense” reading of the Bible. Still, those who contradict their interpretation of the Bible or elevate Christian tradition too highly are not considered to be under the Christian umbrella. Early examples of this from *The Fish* include an article written in the November 1970 issue by Bob Carroll and Gordon Walker entitled, “It Could Bankrupt the World Treasury.” It recounts purported attempts to destroy what would become the Bible through Israel’s history and Christian history. It leans heavily on *Foxes Book of Martyrs* and is thus replete with tropes about Roman Catholicism.

The Word has been subject to continued attempts to destroy it—the Church itself actually persecuted and destroyed more Christians and their Scriptures than the combined officials of the Roman government. Another

⁷⁸ Dennis McCallum, “Interview with author.”

⁷⁹ Dennis McCallum, “Interview with author.”

⁸⁰ Dennis McCallum, “Interview with author.”

⁸¹ Unknown, “Statement of Faith,” Xenos.org, accessed September 15, 2020, <https://www.xenos.org/about-xenos/statement-faith>.

implacable enemy of the Lord appeared on the scene—a strange enemy, too, because it came in the form of opposition within the institutional church.⁸²

In the context of an independent fundamentalist church movement, these tropes serve to sever the Bible from history. It is almost its own divine entity surviving despite the Catholic Church's corruption and now against the institutional church. However, it is defended by Xenos and those defined by them as the faithful.

Restorationism:

The streams of inerrancy and restorationism work more closely together than any other group with which this dissertation is concerned. This is because their brand of restorationism is founded on the trust of their ability to remove bias and discover which teachings in the Bible are cultural and which ones are universal for all time. The Bible is perspicuous, and one needs merely to follow an inductive approach to the text to ascertain the plain sense meaning the author intends to convey.

Far from being something new or free from traditions of the past, when one examines Fish House/Xenos in its totality, one finds a clear fundamentalist approach to the Bible. The subtitle/tagline written on every issue of *The Fish* is “From the House Church to the People.” Their approach to restorationism is to recreate the New Testament church in the present with the Bible as their only guide. Still, they ignore the reality that they are developing this model in a particular context that includes assumptions about the Bible that exist apart from the Bible itself.

Early examples of this thought can be found in *The Fish*. In the November 1970 issue, Linda Deckard wrote an article entitled “The Gross Christian Product.” It was to be

⁸² Gordon Walker and Bob Carroll, “It Could Bankrupt the World Treasury,” *The Fish* 1, no. 4 (November 1970), 1, 4.

a recurring column that illustrates that “to some Christ has become a man-made product, packaged in ‘churches’ professing belief in his teachings; churches whose hypocrisy is glaringly obvious.” She continued, “...If you are a Christian, the Spirit will show you the facts.”⁸³ She also authored an article that is an answer to “a letter we made up.” The letter is from someone dissatisfied with her church and pastor, who is a “confessed hypocrite, preferring to use the pulpit to expound his political beliefs because he doesn’t have any Christian conviction.”⁸⁴ Deckard quoted a Harris Poll from *Redbook* in 1961 that claimed, among other things, that 99% of seminarians did not believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ. However, this article was debunked in *Christian Century* that the same year claimed that *Redbook* was preying upon the tendency toward alarmism among Protestant evangelicals. The Harris poll in question was purported to be scientific but had a tiny sample size (89 seminarians) from an unclear number of schools (4-9).⁸⁵ Deckard continues, “Believers are being forced out of their denominations into simple home fellowship and worship. We feel this is a praise-the-Lord. That’s how He started His church (which means ‘all believers’ and not a building). God is “restoring His church.” Christians should act on their “belief in God” rather than on the “basis of denominations.”⁸⁶ The assumption is that the established church has failed and that the answer can be found in small house churches led by people who would use the Bible alone as their guide.

⁸³ Linda Deckard, “Gross Christian Product,” *The Fish* 1, no. 4 (November 1970), 5.

⁸⁴ Deckard, “Gross Christian Product,” 5.

⁸⁵ Unknown, “Redbook Should Blush,” *The Christian Century*, 78, no. 43 (October 25, 1961), 1260-1261.

⁸⁶ Deckard, “Gross Christian Product,” *The Fish*. 5.

This assumption is carried forward today. In his book *Members of One Another*, Dennis McCallum writes,

We will see that New Testament churches had an ethos of their own, and some of that is embodied in explicit precepts or instructions we should follow. We can detect, by careful reading, other aspects not explicitly taught but demonstrated by example, and we should seriously consider trying to incorporate those as well.⁸⁷

The assumption is that a faithful and functioning reproduction of the first-century church can be produced by deciphering these precepts through a careful examination of the Bible. They don't bother to ask whether this assumption should be reevaluated in light of the reality that this is a shared assumption within fundamentalism and that every reproduction looks different.

McCallum continues by saying that the universal body of Christ is made up of those who have been brought into “mystical union” with Jesus Christ through conversion. Local churches are gatherings, no matter how small, of these members of the universal body. The operation of “gifts of the Spirit” and references to “one another” in the New Testament, where our giftings make us a part of the larger whole, refer to their function in the local congregation and not as part of a larger denomination. The result is that there is autonomy for individual local churches without oversight or authority from the “institutional” whole. Fidelity to the common-sense, meaning the Bible regulates each group.

Further, our union with Jesus also makes us “members of one another.”⁸⁸ It then follows that commitment to Jesus is also “commitment to his body!” These two principles of mystical union with Jesus and commitment to his body are equivocal,

⁸⁷ Dennis McCallum, *Members of One Another*, xviii.

⁸⁸ McCallum, *Members of One Another*, 16.

meaning you cannot have one without the other. This naturally gives an incredible amount of authority to the leaders of an independent local church. He interprets 1 Corinthians 12:13, “Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit,” as not referring to water baptism but “to spiritual baptism into the body of Christ.” It follows then that all Christians are “baptized” whether they have done so with water.⁸⁹ Gary DeLashmutt defines baptism as “a symbolic act through which believers publicly acknowledge their need of God’s forgiveness....Christian baptism, then, is not what causes you to become a Christian—it is something you do because you have become a Christian.”⁹⁰ These emphases have a collective, authoritative effect upon members of the group. They are linked to “one another.” Their true baptism takes place through their becoming a part of the local church.

McCallum emphasizes “one another” passages in the Bible. He writes, “This is where objective teaching meets interpretation and application to form a group ethos.” He points out that “one-another” passages appear in many different contexts throughout the New Testament and, therefore, “form a baseline for what we should expect when it comes to relationship building and *koinonia*.” Since this phrase, “one another,” is repeated “dozens” of times in the NT, “they must be universal imperatives.” For example, Galatians 5:13, “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another,” is interpreted as exclusively referring to the need to be involved in a small group outside of a large

⁸⁹ McCallum, *Members of One Another*, 18, 19.

⁹⁰ Gary DeLashmutt, “Baptism at Xenos,” Xenos.org, accessed July 21, 2020, <https://www.xenos.org/essays/baptism-xenos>.

Sunday worship service. For Colossians 3:16, “Let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another,” McCallum believes that it must be interpreted as a command to be “engaged enough with each other to counsel one another’s lives” and “admonish” them when the situation calls for it.

Further, James 5:16, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed,” clearly illustrates that the Catholic practice of confession “through a screen to priests who barely know them” is contrary to James’ intent. Instead, this is a further argument for the necessity of deep relationships within the context of a small group where, presumably, Christians will feel safe to confess their sins to one another. For McCallum, these and other Scriptures “are all moral imperatives direct from God to us and are *not optional* for serious Christians.” Further, they “apply directly to twenty-first-century America.”⁹¹ It would appear that they genuinely believe the Bible has finally been correctly applied to church life and the vision of the first century Christianity fulfilled through Xenos Christian Fellowship.

The experiential/subjective deemphasized

Xenos references the idea of a personal message of God through the Bible. Still, it never spells out how this operates for the individual apart from mentors or elders’ instruction. For example, the choice to marry is affirmed as belonging to the individual and couple. However, there are “real dangers” in the choice to be made. “If you get married, you will either enter a cauldron of pain and confusion you never imagined possible, or you will use relational and spiritual tools you gained before marriage to grow

⁹¹ McCallum, *Members of One Another*, 33-37.

out of your problems by drawing on the power of God.”⁹² This said in the context where members are to be “members of one another” and involved in small groups that become deeply involved in their lives. It reads more like a warning not to go against the collective advice of the church, or a future of “pain and confusion” await.

Further, Xenos has always been outspoken about the dangers of the “world system.” An article in the January 1981 issue of *Xenos* magazine, entitled “Idolatry Today,” said that, “an idol maybe a stone statue or some material possession, or even one’s education, degree or career.” Christians “understand that the world system extends into all aspects of life, including education.”⁹³ An article by Dennis McCallum and Scott Risley on Xenos.org entitled “Propositions on Christ, Culture, and Career” discourages parents from sending their children to prestigious universities that would prevent them from continuing to attend at Xenos because of the distance. “The number one reason the American Church lacks spirituality and power is their absorption into the world-system and its values of materialism and self-gratification.”⁹⁴ The typical church thus does not provide spiritual protection for their children who travel far for education. Further,

Since God has sovereignly placed these students in Xenos, shouldn’t the burden of proof be on why someone should go away to school? If someone had a perfectly good job and decided they would leave their church and established relationships to move to another city to take a slightly better job, wouldn’t we critique that decision? Why wouldn’t the same critique apply if we’re talking about colleges?⁹⁵

⁹² Gary DeLashmutt and Dennis McCallum, *Spiritual Relationships That Last* (Columbus, OH: Xenos Publishing, 2001), 9.

⁹³ Geoff Mitchell, “Idolatry Today,” *Xenos* 1, no. 1 (January 1981), 6, 7.

⁹⁴ Dennis McCallum and Scott Risely, “Propositions on Christ, Culture, and Career,” Xenos.org, accessed July 19, 2020, <https://www.xenos.org/essays/propositions-christ-culture-and-career>.

⁹⁵ McCallum and Risely, “Propositions on Christ, Culture, and Career.”

They are careful to claim that they do not give “authoritative directives” but instead teach, counsel, and plead with people. There is evident pressure applied to people who try to leave to follow what they feel God’s leading is for them. In an article entitled “How Can I Know God’s Will for My Life,” members are told that if they live their lives involved with others in the community, they will more clearly know God’s will for their lives.

Often, the very resources to give us feedback when we have questions about our spiritual direction are other Christians whom God has put in our lives...Our home group leaders follow God’s will as they live out exemplary lives and shepherd those in their groups, not under compulsion or for personal gain, but voluntarily (1 Peter 5:2). To not take full advantage of such leadership is unprofitable.⁹⁶

However, Dennis admitted that, in the 1980s, competition and pressure on house church leaders to maintain numbers was a problem. They may not be paid, but they have potential conflicts of interest.⁹⁷

Spiritual gifts are affirmed, but their use is “primarily *for the common good*...that is, to contribute to the health and growth of the Christian community. They are not to draw attention to the individual; they are to serve the local church. They are not primarily for my personal fulfillment...”⁹⁸ This approach to the gifts of the Spirit steers members away from the expectation of hearing directly from God outside of the context and approval of small group leaders and the eldership of the church.

⁹⁶ Unknown, “How Can I Know God’s Will for my Life?” Xenos.org, accessed July 20, 2020, <https://www.xenos.org/about-xenos/how-can-i-know-gods-will-my-life>.

⁹⁷ Dennis McCallum, *My Experience in Xenos*, ” 25.

⁹⁸ Gary DeLashmutt, “Authentic Christian Community (Part 3) Spiritual Gifts,” accessed October 9, 2020, <https://www.xenos.org/teachings/?teaching=2141>.

Conclusions

Xenos has continued to come under public scrutiny in recent years because of their authoritarian practices in their membership's lives, going so far as to change their name to “Dwell” in February 2020.⁹⁹ In 2018, the *Columbus Dispatch* published an article that examined the criticisms of former members. One former congregant, Kelly McKenna, shared her story of developing an eating disorder in her early twenties to have one aspect of her life she could control. “I was doing the same thing everybody else was....(yet) I was blamed for letting Satan into my life and not praying well enough...That wreaked havoc on my mental state and forced me to try to control things in other ways—through eating disorders and cutting.”¹⁰⁰ The article details the pressure put on members to be a part of a central meeting on Sunday, a house church meeting at some point during the week, a weekly same-sex cell group, and a meeting with a spiritual mentor.

Further, other meetings often take up additional hours. Members are strongly encouraged to read books written by the church elders and discuss them with their spiritual mentors (called “disciplers”). Advancement in the church requires more than 200 hours of leadership training. These time commitments often cut people off from family members who are not a part of the church. McKenna was once encouraged to leave the group by her sister but believed that it was a test of her commitment to God.

College-age students and single adults are encouraged to move into ministry houses they rent together and then follow the church's guidelines. Married couples meet

⁹⁹ Maeve Walsh, “Xenos Changing Name to Dwell, but Rebranding Doesn’t Quiet Church Critics,” *Columbus Dispatch*, accessed July 21, 2020, <https://www.dispatch.com/news/20200210/xenos-changing-name-to-dwell-but-rebranding-doesnrsquot-quiet-church-critics.j>.

¹⁰⁰ Danae King, “Xenos Critics Say Church is Controlling,” *The Columbus Dispatch* (November 26, 2018).

weekly in homes. In addition, optional but encouraged “accountability software” that monitors their internet usage and can “block sites that aren’t Christian or that are critical of the church.”¹⁰¹ Former members told of being “slowly isolated and became estranged from their friends and relatives who weren’t involved or didn’t support their involvement in the church.” One respondent told of being “persuaded” by Xenos members to “cut off all of the people in her life who were ‘not Christians,’” including her parents.¹⁰² The article also cites online forums that date back to 2012 criticizing Xenos. Their former friends in the church typically shun those who leave.

This is fundamentalism. It is the use of the belief in an inerrant Bible that has been interpreted by church leaders to decipher those things that are “unchanging precepts” and, in turn, apply them to everyone’s life. These boundaries between a “true Christian” and those who are not are drawn with hard lines. The practical outworking of this ends in the same place it did for fundamentalists in the 1950s. You must separate yourself from those who are corrupted. Not all evangelical churches are this controlling, but evangelical “Bible-based” restorationism with a deemphasis on the spiritual/experiential stream creates a problem. Dennis McCallum and Gary DeLashmutt believe that they are recreating God’s intention for the church as they attempt to reproduce the Christian experience that they read about in the pages of the New Testament. They are critical of the second-century church, but they are using the same metaphysical arguments that led to much of the development of the tradition, of which they are now so critical. Like that of an ancient Platonist, they assume that any change to perfection leads, by definition, to imperfection. This leads to the worship of a static and

¹⁰¹ King, “Xenos Critics.”

¹⁰² King, “Xenos Critics.”

rigid God and who does not allow for the circumstances of people living in a fallen and imperfect world. There is no place in a church like this for someone like a Bob Carroll, without whom there would not be a Xenos, because he, like McKenna, would be seen as “allowing Satan into his life.” This cannot be tolerated for fear of imperfection being allowed to corrupt the church. They believed they were leaving fundamentalism behind. In the end, they were “welcomed back.”

CHAPTER 4

THE FRAMBES STREET HIPPIES: VINEYARD COLUMBUS AND THE FREEING POWER OF THE SUBJECTIVE/EXPERIENTIAL STREAM

Introduction

The NCAO represented a maximization of the three streams. The Fish House/Xenos is representative of the maximization of the first stream, biblical inerrancy. The JPM group that would become Vineyard Columbus is representative of an emphasis on, if not maximization, of the third stream, the subjective/experiential. They continue to embrace biblical inerrancy, but they interpret it through the lens of a changing culture. God and the Bible never change, but human experience and context must inform the interpretation and application of the Bible. This includes how the second stream, restorationism, is envisioned and applied to life.

Gordon Walker Arrives in Columbus

In 1953, Gordon Walker graduated from Howard (now Samford) University. He moved to Ft. Worth, TX, to attend seminary at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. While he was there, he met a young seminarian named Gene Edwards. Walker decided that Southwestern was not for him and moved to Berkeley, enrolling at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary. By early 1963, Walker was the pastor of a small but growing Baptist church in Xenia, OH, and chairman of evangelism for the Greater Dayton Baptist Association. He invited Edwards to come to speak to pastors in the Dayton area. While there, Edwards stayed with the Walkers and suggested that Walker

would make a good campus minister. Gene told him about Bill Bright and CCC and arranged for him to meet with a CCC representative.¹

Walker was 32 years old when he joined Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC). Peter Gillquist recruited him. Gillquist had been converted to evangelical Christianity by Ray Nethery when he was a student at the University of Minnesota. After studying at Dallas Theological Seminary and Wheaton Graduate School, he had joined CCC. Walker spent time on Ohio State's campus with Gillquist and was inspired by his confidence in sharing his faith. He decided to leave his church in Xenia and accept the position of campus director for CCC at Ohio State University. He received training at CCC headquarters in Arrowhead Springs, CA, where he met Jon Braun and other future members of the NCAO.

Sometime after Walker arrived in Columbus in the fall of 1963, he became involved with the planning for the upcoming Billy Graham Crusade scheduled for July 13, 1964, and met Martha McCallum. McCallum had a network of home Bible studies for women in the wealthy Worthington neighborhood in Columbus called the Clintonville Women's Club. These home groups were not attached to a single denomination and attracted women from many different churches. Women began converting to evangelical Christianity through these Bible studies and wanted to know more about their faith. In response, McCallum founded The Layman's Challenge for Today to offer Tuesday morning classes on the Bible. As their husbands and men aware of the studies became interested in knowing more about the Bible, she asked Gordon Walker to teach a Tuesday evening study for men and women to attend.²

¹ Gordon Walker, *Led By His Love* (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), loc. 403.

² Martha McCallum, *Spiritual Heritage* (Columbus, OH: Xenos Publishing, 2009), 80.

Walker became well known in the Columbus area, and he was invited to speak at various local churches. He used the opportunity to launch a network of high school Bible studies around the city and particularly in the upper-middle-class areas of Worthington and Upper Arlington. One of these Bible studies met at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church. Orpah Andrews was a leader in the Clintonville Women's Club and had connected Walker with Upper Arlington Lutheran Church. Craig Heselton and Kathy Rowland, then in high school, were a part of a high school Bible study that Walker had started in Andrews' home. Martha McCallum encouraged others in the Clintonville Women's Club to form small groups in their homes for high school students. Kathy recalled that it was seen as "kind of cool" to attend these, and she and Heselton would hand out fliers in their homerooms to other students. Through Gordon Walker, they were given CCC materials to use to study and evangelize their high school peers.³ Kathy said, "What was happening was that they were seeding a population of kids that were probably going to attend OSU...They were throwing out seeds, and those kids bloomed in their freshman and sophomore years at OSU."⁴

In the fall of 1966, Michael Seiler came to OSU as a freshman and met Kathy Rowland at one of Walker's CCC meetings. Mike had come from a countercultural background but had rejected the version of Christianity and American materialism that they had seen in the Christianity of their parents. Kathy had not grown up in a Christian home. She described her parents as "swingers" and her dad as the personification of Don Draper's character in the AMC television show "Mad Men." She was in nursing school at that time. Michael had been impressed with her the first time he met her and began to fall

³ Michael and Kathy Seiler, "Interview with author 1," (August 8, 2016).

⁴ Seiler and Seiler, "Interview with author 1."

in love. “She was exuberant, full of energy and life, and loved by all.”⁵ They developed a deep friendship over the next year as they traveled for CCC. He finally asked her out on a date to see Peter, Paul, and Mary perform in Columbus. Michael recalled that at the end of the date, she shook his hand. The next year they were attending a youth retreat in Washington DC and held hands. Fifteen days later, they were engaged and then married in May 1969. The two embraced a form of Christianity that valued communal living. Their vision was informed by Walker but inspired by the counterculture and was uniquely theirs.

CCC’s ministry at OSU gained momentum through 1966 and experienced significant gains in the fall of 1967. In December of 1966, while at a CCC meeting in Elgin, IL with Bill Bright in attendance, Kathy said:

I had a vision of a great move of God that was going to sweep across the country. When the meeting was over, I approached Bill Bright, “I said there is something happening.” I’m...18 years old speaking to him about this and said, “this is going to sweep across the country.” And Bill Bright said to me kind of like “go away little girl” and kind of patted my head and said, “yes, yes, we have these meetings at campuses all across the United States, and they are just wonderful.” I said no, no, something much bigger is going to be happening.”⁶

Following this Christmas event, Gordon Walker started a meeting of select student leaders in January 1967. They met five nights per week to share and prayed for an hour. Kathy Seiler recalled that many did not know how to pray out loud in the early sessions, but they learned as the meetings continued. The group began praying for people by name, and many of their friends began to convert to evangelical Christianity.⁷

⁵ Michael Seiler, “Text exchange with author,” 7/31/2020.

⁶ Michael Seiler, “Text exchange with author.”

⁷ Seiler, “First interview with author.”

Mike Seiler and his friends had begun to be noticed around campus because they would eat lunch in the OSU cafeteria and say grace before their meal. The practice had attracted the notice of other students, and CCC had been rapidly expanding its visibility on campus that year. One day, they were gathered in the dorm lobby listening to tapes of Hal Lindsey teaching on apocalyptic prophecy in the Bible and accidentally left the recordings there. When they returned from dinner, they found a large group of students laughing at them. Mike recalled, “We were the laughingstock of the whole dorm.” They asked, “Do you really think this stuff is really real?” Mike and his friends responded, “This is what the Scriptures say as best we know.” Their fellow students “thought it was the most hysterical thing they had ever heard.” The next day, the Six-Day War broke out between Israel and Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, and “all of a sudden, the dorm got serious.” Mike pointed out that the timing, at the end of the school year, was important. Students were afraid of failing out of school and becoming eligible for the draft. They were not laughing at the Lindsey tapes any longer. They began to ask, “If God is in this, what do I need to be doing?” Students started coming down to the lobby to ask them questions about God. They quickly became known as the “God squad” that finals week because these conversations about God were breaking out all over their dorm, and they would be summoned to settle arguments about God. There were many conversions to Christianity that week.⁸

Gordon Walker left CCC in 1968 and moved to Mansfield, OH in 1969 to found Grace Haven Farm. Ray Nethery joined him there in 1970. They set up the farm as a work-study center inspired by Francis Schaeffer’s L’Abri in Switzerland. Nethery had

⁸ Seiler and Seiler, “Interview with Author 1.”

spent four months in Switzerland with Schaeffer before joining Walker, and they had both been heavily influenced by his writing. The word about Grace Haven spread quickly. They held conferences featuring Hal Lindsey and Bill Counts, as well as future leaders of the NCAO. They also attracted young people who were not Christian and just hitchhiking across the United States. Located right along Interstate 71, the word got out that,

If you needed a place to crash, just get off at route 13. There are these Jesus Freaks, and you can crash there for a couple of days, and they'll feed you. They have stables, and you can ride the horses. And, you know, they'll talk to you about Jesus a lot. [But] they're okay. You can kind of just hang out. So, people kept coming out, which was congruent with a vision that Ray [Nethery] and those guys from L'Abri [had].⁹

Others who were actively exploring faith came to them as well. They were invited to join them for meals and stay with them for a while at the farm. Gordon was known for his calming influence among the JPM groups.¹⁰ Many respondents spoke of his affinity for talking about God's grace in his Bible studies. Ray Nethery spoke of Walker's tendency to reach out to young people who others had rejected.

However, there were also challenges. Both Nethery and Walker came from conservative backgrounds and were not wholly prepared in the beginning to deal with the sexual permissiveness of the young travelers and seekers who showed up at their door.

They were in on the ground floor of the Jesus Movement for real. These guys had hundreds of people [that] would come from all over the state to these retreats up at this Grace Haven and you now, half to 2/3 of them were not Christians that would come to these, and they would have these public Bible lectures and break up into discussion groups. And people would come to Christ by the dozens at these things. They couldn't take it, though. They freaked out because there would be couples out in the woods sleeping in a sleeping bag together. People would go outside to get high and stuff like that, and, you know, in a movement, there's chaos; there's

⁹ Dick Pope, "Interview with Author," September 11, 2016.

¹⁰ Jack Hickman, "Interview with Author," June 16, 2017.

disorder, and they couldn't handle that. It was very upsetting to all of them...So, I mean, they were right there where they could have taken this on, and they were like "Nah."¹¹

The mention of Nethery and Walker's aversion to "chaos" and "disorder" in McCallum's criticism of their approach to these situations is revealing. Evangelicalism holds tightly to certainty, and the hippie seekers brought chaos in their wake. McCallum indicates that Nethery and Walker responded negatively and lost an opportunity as a result. Mike and Kathy Seiler also pointed out this need for certainty that plagued their mentors and kept them within fundamentalism, unable to move beyond it.¹²

Another future leader of what would become Vineyard Columbus, Danny Meyer, grew up in New York City. His family was Jewish, but his experience of his parents' religion was more cultural and social than it was about a "connection" with God. He described his home as "very secular Jewish." His neighborhood was majority Catholic, and all his friends' families were very devout Catholics. By the time he had gotten to high school, he had "written off any notion that there was a personal God...[or] any kind of formal religion. The devotion of his friends' families to religion seemed "bizarre" to him. In 1971, he left for Ashland College in Columbus, OH as a committed atheist.

That October, he met an eighteen-year-old named Meredith who lived in the community and would come to campus to share his evangelical faith with Ashland students. He had long blond hair and looked like a hippie. Most students on campus didn't take him seriously, but on the evening of October 29, 1971, Danny heard him attempting to proselytize his friend in the dorm room down the hall. Danny went over to run interference, and before long, they had an audience. "We had the campus Jesus freak

¹¹ Dennis McCallum, "First Interview with Author"

¹² Mike and Kathy Seiler, "First Interview with Author" (August 8, 2016).

and the dormitory atheist...going at it.” At some point in the conversation, Danny said, “I would love it if there was a God. It sounds very comforting and very nice, but there isn’t any. It’s just something man made up to suit himself.” Meredith challenged him to leave the dorm, so he could “introduce [Danny] to God.” Danny went with him, expecting that this would prove Meredith wrong. His attitude was, “give me the best shot you’ve got.” Once outside, Meredith led him in prayer. Danny described the experience like the movie the “Wizard of Oz.” It was as if everything inside him turned from black and white to color. On the outside, nothing appeared to have changed. He didn’t have an outburst of emotion, but the internal change was radical.¹³

Meredith was connected to Grace Haven Farm in Mansfield and invited Danny to go there with him. He was introduced to Gordon Walker and Ray Nethery, and within a month or two, dropped out of Ashland College to go live with them at Grace Haven. Walker and Meyer became close, and Walker became his mentor. He would accompany Meyer on his weekly trips to Columbus for Bible studies for Layman’s Challenge and his weekly Bible study at OSU.

The Seiler’s recalled that Walker was always more comfortable with Meyer than he was with them. “We weren’t Gordon’s favorites. Danny was because he did things in an orderly, sensible way. He approved of us, but just let us be”¹⁴ Nethery and Walker never knew quite what to do with the Seilers. Kathy said that they just “let them do [their] thing”¹⁵ They had a much more countercultural, hippie approach to life. They had a natural comfortability with the uncertainty that inviting countercultural youth to stay with

¹³ Danny Meyer, “Interview with Author.”

¹⁴ Seiler and Seiler, “Interview with Author 1.”

¹⁵ Seiler and Seiler, “Interview with Author 1..”

and learn from them brought. Mike and Kathy were married in May 1969 and moved into a house on Norwich near the OSU campus. They held student Bible studies every night, even during their “honeymoon.” In March 1970, at only 22 years old, they moved into a large house, near campus, on 166 E Frambes St., and invited students and wandering youth who came their way to live with them and learn about the Bible. They were house parents to 13 young people that first year. Mike was in grad school, and Kathy was pregnant with their first child as their first year drew to a close.

Jack Hickman, one of the early residents at the Frambes house, grew up in a blue-collar family on Columbus's east side. He began using drugs in the 10th grade. He had no real exposure to Christianity before running into a hippie Christian named Sebastian at a party. Sebastian was just passing through on his way to Los Angeles. Jack decided, in August 1970, to spend some time in LA. While on the Sunset Strip, he ran into some JPM people handing out fliers explaining the Gospel. One of them confronted Jack on the street, pressed his finger to his chest, and said, “Do you realize that at the end of your life you are going to have to give an account before the living God?” He “threw” some Bible verses at Hickman. Something about the exchange resonated with him, “I just thought to myself, you know, I’ll bet that’s true. I’ll bet that’s absolutely true.”¹⁶ They invited him to join them in their “compound” on the strip, and Jack attended a worship service with them that night. It was an expressive, Pentecostal type service. He kept asking the others,

What is this deal? How does this thing work? They said, “You need to come up, dude.” So, I said, “okay,” and I went upfront and honest to God. I had no idea what was going on, and they said get down on your knees...They started praying over me real loud in tongues, and I just felt this big peace.¹⁷

¹⁶ Jack Hickman, “Interview with author,” (June 16, 2017).

¹⁷ Hickman, “Interview with author.”

They gave him a Bible, and he started reading. Later, Jack and his friend decided to drive along the coast, and they stopped along the way to Newport Beach. Sebastian, who Jack had met in Columbus, happened to be there. He invited Jack and his friend to come over to his house that night and hear more about Jesus. The next day before Jack left, Sebastian gave him Mike and Kathy Seiler's name and address. He told him to look them up when he returned to Columbus. Jack lost their address but asked around the OSU campus when he returned and was told to go to 166 E. Frambes. Both Hickman and Kathy Seiler remember meeting for the first time. Jack had a cold, and she invited him to sit down and talk. She brought him a cup of tea and a vitamin C pill. She recalled not knowing how to help him and just doing what she could.¹⁸ When Mike got back, he talked to Jack and invited him to come to live with them. He moved in that December.

Dick Pope, another early resident, had a similar journey. He had “spiritual renewal” after graduating from high school but didn’t have any Christian friends. He looked and dressed like a hippie and did not feel welcome in traditional churches.

[I had] a real desire to follow the Lord. I was all alone. I didn’t have any Christian friends. I was just trying to follow the Lord any way I could, but I kept trying to pursue this thing as a child...” Jesus is doing something over here. I’ll go check that out, and then I’ll go check that out.” I was always the kind of guy that if something is happening, I’m going to go and try to get what I can out of this and just be a part of it.¹⁹

In the fall of 1971, Dick heard an advertisement on the local Christian radio station, and there was an ad for a “Jesus Rock” concert. He loved rock music, and it piqued his interest. The “concert” was a Pentecostal tent meeting in Delaware, OH. The evangelist

¹⁸ I interviewed Kathy before interviewing Jack. It was a moment she seemed to remember fondly as an example of how they were just attempting to help people any way they could in those days but were so young with limited resources. She didn’t give me the name of the young man she helped at the time. When Jack told me about the encounter it was clear her actions had been very meaningful to him.

¹⁹ Pope, “Interview with author.”

was LeRoy Jenkins: “he was a strange bird who wore a pink tuxedo with an evening shirt...and had this Elvis look... [He was on stage singing] “Bridge Over Troubled Waters.”²⁰ Pope liked what he saw.

“I had never been exposed to this sort of thing, but I was okay because I could sense the Lord’s Spirit, and the guy was doing things. And, I think people were really encountering the Lord.” At the end of the service, a Jesus Rock band from California sang for an hour. As he was on his way out, Dick met Jack Hickman. The two of them had a conversation that ended with Jack saying, “Hey, I live in a house with some other Christians, and we have a Bible study once a week, and we just share meals together and hang out. Why don’t you come, and you know, check this thing out?”²¹ Dick went with them to check it out that night and moved into the Frambes house a few days later.

Hickman and Pope are representative of the experiential journeys of many who populated the Frambes house over the years. They were searching for God and typically coming from backgrounds outside of evangelicalism or, as Mike and Kathy, rejecting the materialism and racism they witnessed in the mainstream church. They were in search of the Jesus they read about in the Gospels, and they wanted to experience what it felt like to be free of the constraints of mainstream culture, both Christian and secular. They embraced the Bible, believing it spoke authoritatively into their lives but were more concerned about finding ways to live it out than formulating doctrine. Kathy noted that this was a significant difference between them and the Fish House. She observed that

²⁰ Pope, “Interview with author.”

²¹ Pope, “Interview with author.”

they “parse out Greek words in the Bible to the ‘Nth’ degree” but are not strong on following through and applying what they learn to the realities of life.”²²

Mike and Kathy’s leadership style was to live their ideal of Christianity in front of those they were mentoring. Pope recalled that they were a “huge” part of his development as a Christian but that his relationship with them was in no way formal. Pope said, “I just lived with them and hung around with them, and it was just absorbed. We [had] a real organic thing. I’m sure it was more intentional on their end...[but] it was their modeling [Christianity in front of me.]”²³ Some occasional arguments or rules were broken and needed to be dealt with. Two female residents, June and Rosanna, shared a room and had an argument. Rosanna retreated to the room, so June had nowhere to go. She came down the steps carrying some sewing shears. One of the male residents who had come from Wheaton College was lying on the couch and made a snarky comment about the shears, and June startled him by throwing them down near his feet. Mike and Kathy laughed as they told the story. “Everybody had to be reconciled that night.”²⁴ They were all learning to do life together in what they imagined the Christian community should be.

On April 29, 1970, five days before the fatal shootings at Kent State, a student rally at the Ohio State University campus was held in protest of the Vietnam War. It ended with police attempting to disperse the crowd with tear gas. This group of young Christians found themselves in the center of the chaos. The National Guard was called out. Kathy remembered walking down the street to offer the guardsman Kool-Aid and flowers when they were on their block. She and Mike were struck that many of these

²² Seiler and Seiler, “Interview with Author 1.”

²³ Pope, “Interview with author.”

²⁴ Seiler and Seiler, “Interview with Author 1.”

guardsmen were the same age as they were. One night, students were on their street using a spotlight to shine at a National Guard helicopter flying overhead. They responded by flying low and hitting them with teargas. The Seilers described it as a “warzone.” The day after a national guardsman fired shots into a crowd of protestors at Kent State, killing four students, things died down on the OSU campus. Mike indicated that everyone was in shock over what had happened. He and some others took their guitars and went to a knoll behind the Student Union and began singing praise songs. Kevin Springer and Ray Nethery arrived, and Mike went to talk to them about what to do. A crowd of students began to gather around them. As the three men talked, they noticed students beginning to move closer and closer. They were able to share the Gospel that day. Mike said, “What we did that day was what the church should do, and the church looked like the church. Everyone was hopeless and didn’t know what to do. But right there, we reached...people.”²⁵

The embrace of the counterculture and rejection of their experience with the mainstream evangelical Protestant milieu enabled Mike, Kathy, and the Frambes house members to view the issues that engulfed the culture at the time through their effect upon people. They were against the Vietnam War but had former soldiers among their constituency, and they did not engage in protest. However, they filed for their organization to provide conscientious objector status. They had seen friends return from war psychologically damaged in a way that they feared was permanent. Members of their group who had served in the military would often go with members filing for conscientious objector status to vouch for and support their friends.

ⁱ Seiler and Seiler, “Interview with Author 1.”

On a surface level, the Frambes House was more “legalistic” than their Fish House²⁶ counterparts, who were known for their use of profanity and lack of rules on the issue of dating. However, their legalism was much more informed by their countercultural bent toward an anti-materialism and desire to live lives reflective of the “Sermon on the Mount.” Kathy mentioned that the Fish House group liked “stuff.” She continued, “They were from a different background than us. We were hippies, and they were suburbanites.” Kathy praised them for “doing the right thing” and keeping their small groups and house churches. Mike said that at the time,

There was a little competition between us. They moved in right behind us and started their own thing, and we were kind of like, why don’t you just join us? It seemed a little copycat. They smoked cigarettes, and they swore. As we look back, we were really the more legalistic ones, and they were the more liberal ones... Two different avenues, but at the same time, we pulled our hair out with each other. We just thought they were too sinful, and yet we all came out of Campus Crusade for Christ... we still kind of think that... we have to be kind of careful sometimes with this.²⁷

The Seiler’s recognized their deficiencies at that time, and they also maintain their criticisms of the other group while acknowledging that they both emerged from the same source and yet came to different conclusions. The feelings of the two groups toward each other are warm today. “...When we bump into each other today, we have a good laugh about those days.”²⁸

The distinction between the two groups illustrates that the determining factor in their outcomes had less to do with a strict lifestyle code and more to do with a difference in maximization/minimization of the inerrancy and experiential streams. On a surface level, one would expect that the Fish House/Xenos would have been the group more

²⁶ The future Xenos Christian Fellowship talked about in the previous chapter.

²⁷ Seiler and Seiler, “Interview with Author 1.”

²⁸ Seiler and Seiler, “Interview with Author 1.”

likely to come closest to escape fundamentalism. Frambes House/Vineyard was the more “legalistic” of the two, but as chapter 3 made clear, Xenos never escaped fundamentalism despite their claims to the contrary.

Worship was informal and spontaneous at the Frambes House. Meetings would follow a spontaneous theme based upon testimonies and Scriptures offered by the group. Some people would have developed a new chorus that week (usually based on the book of Psalms) and would lead out in song. Guitar players would pick up the chords, and they would all sing along. Mike would not have a specific message prepared but would have to be “Johnny on the spot” to teach something that matched the evening's theme. The meetings were not overly expressive in terms of the gift of tongues. However, there was a general acknowledgment of God’s immediate presence in the group and the belief that God wanted to speak directly to the group corporately and individually.

In 1972, Gordon Walker left Grace Haven Farm to begin a new work in Tennessee. Danny Meyer moved with Walker, and from there, spent two years studying at the JC Light and Powerhouse in Los Angeles. He left the year before the McCallum’s arrived and returned to Walker in Tennessee. Meyer had met his wife Penney at the Light and Powerhouse and was newly married when he returned. He wanted the opportunity to pastor a church, and Walker suggested he become the leader of a house church in Columbus that he (Walker) had started when he was in Mansfield. Meyer moved to the Worthington area of Columbus to lead that house church group in 1974. One can observe a similar theme to the journeys of Hickman and Pope. Still, Meyer spent more time in Mansfield with Walker and Nethery and had the temperament to build the necessary infrastructure for a more traditional church.

What eventually became Vineyard Columbus was made up of two different types of groups. Two groups, one a house church, Maranatha House, and the other, Believers in Christ, were more traditional church start-ups. They were located in the largely upper-middle-class, mostly white Clintonville in north-central Columbus. These groups were led by Danny Meyer (Worthington) and further north, in Upper Arlington, a group led by Rich Nathan and Craig Heselton. The latter group met in the basement of a Savings and Loan on Bethel Road. The second type of group was in the campus area and called the University Fellowship. They were the former Frambes House group that had rented out an abandoned church to meet after their meetings became too large for the group home. The campus groups described the Clintonville groups as generally more educated and “left-brained” while they were more “right-brained.” University Fellowship was made up of artists and creative visionaries but lacked the organization of the northern groups. “...Clintonville and the North end were more conservative and less radical even though we worked well together. The Northern group was infrastructure. We were the radicals and visionaries.”²⁹

Both northern groups were started as a result of Gordon Walker’s Bible studies around Clintonville. The idea for starting house churches was initiated out of necessity. Young people who did not fit the traditional church structure were converting to Christianity in these Bible studies and at the Frambes house, but they could not find a church in the area that would accept them because of how they looked and dressed.³⁰ They wanted to form churches where anyone would be welcome. These churches provided a safe space for wandering young people who found themselves in Columbus.

²⁹ Seiler and Seiler, “Interview with Author 1.”

³⁰ Seiler and Seiler, “Interview with Author 1.”

When the Columbus group was a part of the NCAO, from 1975-1978, they did not experience authoritarian issues that the NCAO groups did in other parts of the country. All respondents had a high opinion of Ray Nethery because though he technically had the authority to micromanage them, he did not exercise such control.³¹ He was content to allow them to develop their ministries while providing counsel organically. On the local level, their countercultural beginnings and lack of knowledge or interest of where the rest of the NCAO was going in their pursuit of Eastern Orthodoxy left them with a culture that focused on community over authoritarianism. Meyer recalled that Jon Braun came to speak to his house church in the early days of the NCAO and said, “When you hear Danny say ‘jump,’ you say how high on the way up.” Danny, a 21-year-old pastor at the time, felt like what Braun said was “foolish.” First, “because I didn’t know what I was doing. Most people in my church were a lot older and more mature than me and had been Christians longer than I.” Second, he continued that Braun’s leadership style was not in line with the “nature and style” of their churches.³²

In 1975, The Frambes house was closed because their landlord needed the house for his use. The Seiler’s bought a house a mile east of the OSU campus on 17th Avenue. It was a racially diverse neighborhood on the Ohio State Campus area border and the impoverished Linden District of Columbus. Still, it was also populated with many graduate students who could live cheaply and be within walking distance from the campus. Seiler recalled that housing was easy to find and affordable. He challenged their members who were soon to graduate from OSU.

The Godhead, Israel, and the Church are a portrait of community, and if we miss how important community is then, we miss what the Kingdom of

³¹ Meyer, “Interview with author.”

³² Meyer, “Interview with author.”

God is about. We said to our people, look, kids, we were all kids, statistics say that you will move within three to five years. We said here are three specific communities we'd like you to consider moving into Linden, Clintonville, and 17th Ave.³³

As the Frambes group grew, and their meetings expanded from 10-20 to over 100 attendees.

The neighborhoods that the Seilers began to challenge students who were graduating to choose offered distinct experiences. Clintonville/Worthington was more suburban, while Linden and 17th Avenue (near the OSU campus on the Linden border) were more urban and diverse. The campus group's leadership had been heavily influenced by the writings of John Perkins³⁴ and had attended conferences where he spoke. Dick Pope said the message they received from Perkins was that if they wanted to be a catalyst for racial reconciliation, they needed to move into poor, racially diverse communities.³⁵

In the Linden area, almost every fourth house was boarded up. Eventually, 7-8 families bought homes in the area, and they opened a grocery co-op because of the lack of grocery stores with fresh produce in the area. A problem that arose was that while 17th Avenue had strong leadership from Michael Seiler, the Linden group struggled to connect with the community around them genuinely. No one was there to coach them on how to connect. They lived in a community with one another but never truly could make a lasting impact on the community. Eventually, they moved out as their kids got older. The co-op failed to reach the community because there was no strong demand for the fresh

³³ Michael Seiler, "Second interview with author."

³⁴ John Perkins is a leader in the Civil Rights Movement. In 1969, he was arrested for leading a boycott of white owned stores in Mendenhall, MS and was beaten in prison. He emerged as a leading Christian voice for racial reconciliation.

³⁵ Dick Pope, "Interview with Author."

vegetables and Amish cheese they were offering. Ultimately, it was just a curious oddity to the surrounding community that had little interest in being a part of it.³⁶

However, the 17th Avenue group had success because they made connections within the community by serving as tutors to neighborhood children and serving as advocates for them in their public schools. They were well received when they moved to the neighborhood. Eventually, they had 30-40 people living on the block. Some rented, and others bought houses. There was some communal living with people sharing homes and taking in wandering young people. The focus was on building community. They had the grocery co-op in Linden, and the Seilers kept goats in their garage.

Further, they were a “common purse” community that pooled their income together. They attempted to meet the needs of the poor and those in need. Andy Whitman spent eight years in that neighborhood and met his wife while he was living there. He said Sunday morning services were held in the Seiler’s living room, but they eventually rented an old Methodist church on 16th Avenue. At their height, the combined Linden and 17th Ave group numbered between 50-60 people.³⁷

The experiment did not last. The Seiler’s moved to a farm about fifty miles west of Columbus in Muskingum County with three other families in 1979. The other families slowly moved out of the neighborhoods over the next several years. As the group became older and began having kids, they found the neighborhood challenging to raise them. Pope mentioned that they had neighbors who were always armed; it worried them for

³⁶ Dick Pope, “Phone Interview with Author” July 14, 2020.

³⁷ Andy Whitman, “Email to Author,” August 1, 2020.

their kids.³⁸ The two Clintonville churches merged in 1979, and the 17th avenue church joined with them in 1982, forming Christ Community Church.

The Seiler's continued to experiment. In 1978, they began considering a move to a rural setting. They liked the idea of the group having both an urban and rural branch of the church, and they liked the idea of practicing community on that level. However, they didn't realize how much that distance would affect their ability to do ministry with others, and they became less involved with them over time. The 77.5-acre farm was held in common with the other families. They opened a winery on the property and shared a "common purse" with the other families, but finances were a struggle. They would remain on the farm until 2010, when they moved to Zanesville, OH.

From Bulwark to Bulldozer

The Linden, 17th Ave leaders, and the two north Columbus churches³⁹ met on Tuesday nights in what they referred to as. "Presbytery." Each of these men was ordained by Grace Haven in Mansfield. The leadership of the churches was plural, and decisions had to be made with unanimous consent. An "overseer," presumably similar to a bishop, was assigned to each presbytery. Michael Seiler was appointed as overseer of the Columbus presbytery in 1979.

Rich Nathan moved to Columbus in 1977 to attend the OSU Law School. He received his Juris doctorate in 1980 and practiced law for two years before joining the OSU faculty, a business law professor in 1982. Soon after arriving in 1977, Rich began attending the Believers in Christ church and became an "elder" in the group at some point

³⁸ Pope, "Phone Interview with Author."

³⁹ Maranatha House met in Worthington and was led by Danny Meyer. Believers in Christ Church met in a bank in Upper Arlington. It was led by Rich Nathan.

after they merged with the Maranatha House in 1979 to form Christ Community Church. Although Danny Meyer was the perceived leader by the Xenos leaders and those on the outside because he was the only full-time staff person in the church and had been there since the beginning, Nathan was growing in influence. It became clear to the others, including Meyer, that Nathan had the vision and gifts to lead them where they felt they needed to go.

Following the breakup of the NCAO, the Columbus groups felt disconnected. Nethery took the churches he had overseen and formed an association with them that would later become the Alliance for Renewal Churches (ARC). It was not meant to be a denomination but a group of churches that agreed to fellowship and cooperation. The Columbus groups were always different from the others in the Nethery's association. They were less interested in settling doctrinal disputes than they were planting churches. They finally decided to leave the ARC in the early eighties when a conflict broke out over female eldership. They felt that such arguments were a distraction and that the Biblical evidence was unclear for denying female eldership in the church.

They were also closely associated with the Word of God Community (WOGC) in Ann Arbor, MI. The WOGC was a part of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. They were not a church themselves but an ecumenical renewal movement. Members of their community attended their various parishes on Sunday morning but participated in the community during the week. The WOGC was happy to welcome the Columbus groups into their association. They wished to be an ecumenical movement, and the fact that these young evangelicals wanted to be a part was evidence that their vision was working. What attracted the Columbus groups to them was that they had a strong focus on community.

The Columbus groups had always been interested in creating the sense of community they read about in the New Testament and felt they needed to be a part of something larger than themselves. They felt “orphaned”⁴⁰ after the split with the NCAO. However, the WOGC had as part of their mission, based upon a prophecy in 1968, that they wanted to be a bulwark against the surrounding secular culture.

The Columbus group had always carried an element of this. Both the University Fellowship and Clintonville groups had practiced a “high-bar Christianity.” For example, if one was to join their church, they were required to attend 12 consecutive weeks of membership class. Further, Rich Nathan’s Christian spiritual journey was one that had focused on experience early in his Christian experience as a college student, but it had become more rationalistic over time.

The bulk of my Christian life was consumed with a growing evangelical perspective of the Christian life that was mainly concerned with sound Bible teaching, seeing people converted, personal discipleship, and a classroom model of discipleship that emphasized reading and discussing but not necessarily “doing” or “experiencing” Christianity.⁴¹

This changed for him at a men’s retreat in 1987 Grace Haven Farm in Mansfield, OH, that welcomed a speaker from the Vineyard Movement.⁴² The Vineyard had begun in the late 1970s but was just emerging as John Wimber became the leader of the movement. Seven of the ARC churches sent their leaders to this conference as well. Nethery already knew that Christ Community Church was pulling away. He still hoped to maintain some sort of formal connection with them. However, that evening everything changed.

⁴⁰ Pope, “Interview with Author,” September 11, 2016.

⁴¹ Nathan, Rich and Ken Wilson, *Empowered Evangelicals* (Boise: Ampelon Publishing, 1995), 14-16.

⁴² The Vineyard Movement is an offshoot of Calvary Chapel and the JPM. It was founded by Kenn Guilliksen. In 1982, John Wimber assumed leadership of the small movement of seven churches. It quickly grew under Wimber’s leadership and is made up of over 2400 churches in 95 countries today. (vineyardusa.org, History and Legacy, <https://vineyardusa.org/about/history/>)

The speaker concluded his lecture on the Holy Spirit and said, “Okay, we are going to invite the Holy Spirit to come.” Dick Pope recalled wondering what he meant since, “God is everywhere, at all times, in the totality of his being.” He couldn’t understand what he meant by “inviting the Holy Spirit to come.” Pope was skeptical, and he had positive experiences with Pentecostals and Charismatics. He described himself as the group’s “token tongues-talkin’, prophecin’ guy.”⁴³ The speaker said, “Come Holy Spirit,” and invited them all to stand and to put their hands out if they wanted and just to be receptive. A couple of minutes passed, and then the speaker said that the Spirit was moving on the right side of the auditorium. They looked over, and there was a man who had started shaking. The speaker called him up to the front and asked the man to bless the congregation in the name of Jesus. He did, and then something happened. Pope looked over and saw Heselton’s legs start to shake like the man on stage. This was shocking for him to know because he had assumed Heselton would have been the least likely to have such an experience of “being slain in the Spirit.” Then he looked over and saw Rich Nathan. Nathan describes feeling as though a “giant had was pushing him down.” He sat down in his chair to collect himself as he was still struggling. Finally, a friend from another church asked him, “Rich, why are you resisting the Holy Spirit?” He wrote, “I broke. I began as I suddenly realized that my emotional opposition to what was going on...was, in fact, opposition to the work of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁴

The leadership team of Christ Community Church was faced with a decision. They could remain independent with their association with the WOGC, or they could join

⁴³ Pope shared this description of himself with me in the Vineyard Columbus Café. Others listening erupted in laughter as he spoke.

⁴⁴ Nathan and Wilson, *Empowered Evangelicals*, 17-19.

the Vineyard. Rich Nathan looked at the men in their next presbytery meeting and said, “I don’t want to be a bulwark. I want to be a bulldozer.” Both Dick Pope and Craig Heselton recall this as the moment where they all recognized that this was what they wanted and that Rich Nathan was to be the one to lead them. Pope recalled that the term “bulwark” had come to them through the Word of God Community and referred to the church as a defense against an increasingly sinful culture.⁴⁵ Instead, they were going to “bulldoze” such walls and make the church accessible to the “least, the last, and the lost,” and where leaders model vulnerability.”⁴⁶ The following Sunday, the elders opened the service with a similar invitation for the Holy Spirit to come into their midst. The results were identical to the Vineyard conference in Mansfield, with people visibly affected by a sense of God’s presence, and it was a turning point for the church. They grew from 200 in Sunday morning attendance in 1987 to over 1,000 by 1993.⁴⁷ Today, it is the largest Vineyard Church in the United States, with over 9000 members.

Analysis of the Three Streams

Biblical Inerrancy

To be clear, Vineyard Columbus is squarely in the stream of evangelicalism in its belief in both inerrancy and perspicuity of the Bible. Following their split with the NCAO, their connection to Ray Nethery’s “Alliance of Renewal Churches” (ARC) clearly shows that they embraced inerrancy. “The Old and New Testaments are inspired, truthful, and without error.”⁴⁸ Michael Seiler, Craig Heselton, and Dick Pope all affirmed

⁴⁵ Rich Nathan, “Phone Interview with Author.” July 14, 2020.

⁴⁶ Rich Nathan, “What It Means to be a Relevant Church,” Richnathan.com, accessed 11/13/2020.

⁴⁷ “The Story Continues,” (www.thestoryvc.org) “Our history” <https://www.thestoryvc.org/our-history>

⁴⁸ Unknown, “What Arc is About,” 1.

that they believed in the Bible's inerrancy in their interviews.⁴⁹ Rich Nathan seeks to distinguish the church's evangelicalism from fundamentalism, but he does so by appealing to Martin Marty's argument that its "oppositionalism defines fundamentalism." Nathan makes it clear that he affirms the "infallibility of the Bible."⁵⁰

However, the term inerrancy does not appear on the Vineyard Columbus' website. One is directed to the Association of Vineyard Churches website that does not use the term "inerrancy" unless you download a pdf of their entire "Core Values and Beliefs" booklet. Inside, the statement is clear, "We believe that the Holy Spirit inspired the authors of Holy Scripture so that the Bible is without error in the original manuscripts."⁵¹ A brief statement is written beside the link to the booklet that affirms that "The Bible is the final authority in all matters of faith and practice." But then it continues with a caveat concerning interpretation and application,

"However, since the Bible is a diverse collection of narrative stories, poetry, law, and letters, it is helpful to summarize its teaching in a concise form that can be comprehended by both those deeply rooted in the Church and those who have little exposure to the Bible. This is the historical function of the ancient church creeds in the first 400 years of Christ-centered faith."⁵²

This statement makes clear that the "creeds," which are ancient statements of faith about the person and work of Jesus Christ, the core of their belief, can be found here. It is in stark contrast to Xenos' devaluation of tradition as a binding authority. They also

⁴⁹Dick Pope, "First Interview with Author;" Michael and Kathy Seiler, "First Interview With Author;" Craig Heselson, "Interview With Author."

⁵⁰ Rich Nathan and Insoo Kim, *Both-And* (Downers Grove, IL, Intervarsity Press, 2013) 27.

⁵¹ Vineyardusa.org, "Core Values and Beliefs," accessed July 29, 2020, <https://vineyardusa.org/about/core-values-beliefs/>.

⁵² Vineyardusa.org, "Core Values and Beliefs."

acknowledge the inherent challenge in interpreting and applying an ancient and diverse text.

Further, they list two “major obligations” that every community of faith is bound by “faithfulness to the Word of God and sensitivity to the world in which they live.”⁵³ God and the Bible are unchanging, but culture does change. The circumstances people are living in must be considered. This does not mean they are not evangelicals. They do not believe in interpreting the Bible for the sake of “appeasing” culture. For example, on the basis of the Bible, they believe the practice of homosexuality⁵⁴ to be a sin. Danny Meyer said,

Personally, it would be a lot easier for me, as a pastor, if the Bible taught clearly that [the act of] homosexuality wasn't a sin because it flies in the face of culture. It is not easy for me to believe that or articulate that, but I don't feel like I can be faithful to the Scriptures and hold any other view. So, I guess it's what causes you to take a particular stand. If it's to appease the culture, then you are on a slippery slope. If it's saying the Scriptures are clear or aren't clear [as in the practice of ordaining women] and holding to that, then I think you're safe.⁵⁵

The posture here is interesting. They are leaning in and want to consider other perspectives, but they feel bound to side with the Bible on issues where it appears to speak clearly, whether they like it or not. Where they think the Bible is unclear, they open the door wide to a variance of opinion. In other words, they remain evangelical but seek to remove boundaries where possible.

For example, when discussing the issue of women in leadership, Rich Nathan writes against taking the “plain sense meaning” approach to biblical interpretation. He

⁵³ Vineyardusa.org, “Core Values and Beliefs.”

⁵⁴ Distinguished from being a homosexual or having same-sex attraction as an orientation. They do not believe this to be a sin.

⁵⁵ Danny Meyer. “Interview with Author.” August 1, 2016.

points out the fallacy of fundamentalists who embrace this view and use it to advocate a complementarian approach do not typically “greet one another with a holy kiss” or require women to wear head coverings. Further, he claims there are legitimate ways to explain Paul’s instructions as a cultural issue and not prescriptive. He continues, “Perhaps *refusal* to allow women to teach and the most complementarian interpretations of this text are simply the results of knee-jerk, reactionary chauvinism.” He closes the chapter with an admonition for those influenced by his arguments, not merely to announce that women can now serve in leadership. Years of being told they could not lead have likely made them less inclined to consider that the Spirit is calling them to such a role. Churches should seek out women with such giftings and encourage them to serve.⁵⁶

Restorationist Stream

The groups that would form Vineyard Columbus, along with John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard Movement, had each embraced George Eldon Ladd's writings. For them, Ladd’s theology of the Kingdom replaced Hal Lindsey’s Dispensational Premillennialism's early influence on the group. Ladd defines the “Kingdom of God” as “God’s sovereign reign...expressed throughout different stages [in] redemptive history.”⁵⁷ The Kingdom of God is both now and not yet. “But when we pray, ‘The Thy Kingdom come,’ we also ask that God’s will be done here and now, today.”⁵⁸ This is because the reign of God is accomplished in “three great acts.” The first was inaugurated with the “mission of our Lord on earth,” and thus bringing the Kingdom of God into “this present evil age.” This brought conflict between the Kingdom of God and “satanic evil”

⁵⁶ Rich Nathan, *Who is My Neighbor* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002,) 153-155.

⁵⁷ Ladd, *The Gospel and the Kingdom*, 22.

⁵⁸ Ladd, *The Gospel and the Kingdom*, 23.

that is both spiritual and played out in human beings' actions. The role of Christians and the Church is to push back against the “powers of darkness wherever we find them until the day dawns and the light of the knowledge of God shall fill the earth.” The second “great act of God” will be a literal thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth when Satan will be bound and thrown into a “bottomless pit.” However, sin and death continue during the millennium until Satan’s final defeat at the end of the millennium.⁵⁹ Finally, there will be the final judgment and the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

Thus, they saw their mission to be the work of expanding the Kingdom. This opened the door to an early emphasis on racial reconciliation and systemic injustice on a global scale. They were never absorbed into the Religious Right. Instead, They embraced the reality that there was tension in the voting booth with a choice between two parties that each had elements compatible with the Gospel and elements that were counter to the same. Further, they have typically embraced an old-earth interpretation of the book of Genesis because the scientific evidence supports such an interpretation. Therefore, it is a restorationism that harkens back to the Garden of Eden rather than one that merely sought to reproduce the first-century church. Their emphasis is on a kingdom to come. They certainly gained inspiration from the book of Acts but were not ahistorical in their approach. They wanted to embrace the themes they read in the pages of the Bible in the context of the present.

Ladd begins his book *The Gospel and the Kingdom* by stating that, “Serious students of the Bible sometimes lose sight of the fact that the study and interpretation of Scripture should never be an end in itself...When a gulf exists between the lecture-room

⁵⁹ Ladd, *The Gospel and the Kingdom*, 24.

and the pulpit, sterility in the class-room and superficiality in the pulpit often result.”⁶⁰ Ladd’s statement encapsulates what one observes when looking at the leaders of the Columbus group. They are all very bright, but none seems to aspire to be a theologian or argue more fine points of Protestant theology. This focus on the Kingdom and mission for planting churches, sharing their faith with others, and meeting practical and material community needs gave them a tendency to limit the scope of the theological issues they were willing to debate for the sake of practically meeting the needs of others. Their formal break with Nethery came when his Alliance for Renewal Churches (ARC) was embroiled in a debate over ordaining women. Nethery drew a hard line against egalitarianism, and it led to a split with their church in Salem, MA. As they were known at the time, Christ Community Church opted to stay out of the debate, but afterward, decided to no longer have a formal relationship with Nethery and ARC.⁶¹ Their general attitude toward spending time arguing and defining fine theological points and applications is a distraction from what is important.

This was a luxury they could afford, thanks to their initial oversight and training from Ray Nethery and Gordon Walker. Though fundamentalists in belief, these two men had a benign leadership style that focused on the unmerited grace of God to forgive. They learned the basics of the Christian faith through their connection to these men and experienced the NCAO primarily through Ray and secondarily through Gordon Walker. They knew the creeds and began reading the Church Fathers for themselves, but rather than trying to reproduce the ancient church in the present; they appropriated wisdom

⁶⁰ George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1959), 9.

⁶¹ Ray Nethery, “First Interview with Author.”

from the past into the present. They recognized and accepted that they stood in the stream of history, and they stood in continuity with the past moving toward a future when Christ would return. They had been exposed to Hal Lindsey's premillennial dispensationalism in their early years as Christians but rejected it very early for Ladd's theology of the Kingdom.⁶² This gave them a rationale to move into impoverished neighborhoods and set up house church ministries and a grocery co-op in the Linden District of Columbus. Not all of their efforts were successful, but they had "bulldozer" in their DNA.⁶³

The Subjective/Experiential Stream: The Nexus of Experience, the Bible, and Social/Political Issues

The three house churches that formed Christ Community and later became Vineyard Columbus interwove the experiential/subjective stream into their understanding of evangelical inerrancy and restorationism. This requires that all three streams be viewed in this unified light.

Not only were they studying Ladd, but they also added experience to their interpretive grid in understanding how to read and apply the Bible. Dick Pope said,

I would say experience [gets the credit]. So, that's an evangelical tension. You would define theology from your experience?" ...So, in Acts, you've got this dilemma. "How can these Gentiles be converted? [Well,] didn't they have the same kind of experience that we had?" They defined. They began to understand. That was the development. They didn't have theology. They had an experience, and then they said, "What are we going to make of this?" ...I think we're all aware of the tension there. But you know what? We will live with the tension, and we both know that on either extreme, there's all kinds of flakiness. [There are] all kinds of weirdness. So, I think for us, our experience and that theology kind of merged, and that didn't happen overnight. That happened over time. I think that initially, we were probably more attracted to the experience than we were the theology. Because of the experience, you know we...a lot of

⁶² Pope, "Interview with author," and Heselton, "Interview with the author."

⁶³ Pope, "Interview with author."

us had been around the block a while. We weren't a group of people that just went after any little fad, you know.⁶⁴

Pope articulates an approach to the inerrant Bible that allows for a changing cultural situation. It is not that the God of the Bible evolves, but it is an acknowledgment that its interpretation must be contextualized in the present experience. Further, it is an acknowledgment that we may be surprised by how the Spirit leads as the Kingdom is advanced in the present.

Jack Hickman was exposed to the writings of Soren Kierkegaard at Ashland Seminary. He found them to be “heroes” and did not understand Ray Nethery’s devotion to Francis Schaeffer and subsequent belief that evangelical Christians were in a fight against subjectivity.

[Schaeffer] was good, but his assessment of Kierkegaard was completely wrong. I thought Kierkegaard was a big hero, and Schaeffer was always doing this thing that this was more subjectivity...If God’s not giving you the “Aldersgate my heart was strangely warmed thing,⁶⁵ you’ve got to have that...You know, you have to have the creeds, and you have to have this foundational thing, and he probably felt like Kierkegaard didn’t have that, but I think Christianity does come down to do you believe or don’t believe?⁶⁶

Hickman touches on the difference in emphasis between Nethery and someone who came to embrace Christianity from outside of fundamentalism. Both emphasize the Bible and personal experience of God. However, Hickman embraces the creeds but focuses on faith (belief) and the subjective experience of God. He does not instinctively fear the ambiguity of the subjective. It is less bounded than Nethery’s approach and is more comfortable with mystery, ambiguity, and subjectivity. The latter seeks propositional

⁶⁴ Dick Pope, “Interview with Author”

⁶⁵ A reference to John Wesley’s conversion experience at Aldersgate in May 1738.

⁶⁶ Hickman, “Interview with author”

truth that keeps the experiential side of Christianity within strict fences (bulwarks?) that hold it (maybe even God?) under control, so we know what to expect from it.

For Rich Nathan, all subjective experience, including personal direction from the Spirit, must be judged first and foremost by the Bible. Secondly, he says that we should seek to discern the meaning and authenticity of such a revelation in the context of the body of Christ. “We should take counsel with one another when we are unsure if what we are hearing is from God.” This counsel does not have to come from the designated leadership but from “wise and trusted believers.” In contrast to the NCAO and Xenos, Vineyard Columbus clarifies that the church is not an “infallible guide” when discerning the authenticity of a subjective revelation from God.⁶⁷

In recent years, Vineyard Columbus has come under attack from far-right groups for their unwillingness to come into line with the Religious Right. In 2010, radio talk show host Glenn Beck called on people to leave churches that “preach on social or economic justice,” saying that these were “code words for Communism and Nazism.” Rich Nathan, referred to as a “local social justice leader” by the *Columbus Dispatch* in the article, declined to speak negatively against Beck directly. Instead, he simply stated that the Bible “includes many calls for social and economic justice.” For him, “God cares about the poor, cares about the immigrants, cares about the widows, cares about orphans...they are owed a measure of the earth’s bounty.”⁶⁸ In 2013, they pursued a restraining order against the far-right group, Minutemen United. The group had been protesting near the church parking lot and harassing church members. There was at least

⁶⁷ Rich Nathan and Ken Wilson, *Empowered Evangelicals*, (Boise, ID: Ampelon Publishing, 1995), 143-145.

⁶⁸ Unknown, “Glenn Beck Calls for Social-Justice Exodus,” *Columbus Dispatch* (March 12, 2010), <https://www.dispatch.com/article/20100312/BLOGS/303129679>.

one physical altercation that took place. The Minutemen were protesting the church's "passive resistance" to abortion and gay marriage. The local leader of the group, James Harrison, claimed that the Vineyard "does not speak out against homosexuality and abortion, helps women recover from abortions and accepts gay members." The church was targeted because of its size (8000 members at the time). Nathan responded that their church embraced the Bible's teachings while attempting to be as "broad and inclusive" as possible. In addition to harassing members, Minutemen had put up large signs depicting aborted fetuses along the road across the street from the church. Nathan shared that these had been traumatic for the church's children. Harrison responded to news of the injunction, saying that he would not stop because he was "called by God" to protest the church. In response, Nathan was "baffled," saying that "God would not send people to protest a church that is worshipping Christ and is reaching out to the poor."⁶⁹

Danny Meyer had a big crowd at his church the Sunday before election day in 2012 because he had announced that he would tell everyone that Sunday morning, which he thought they should vote for. His sermon suggested that they vote "for the sinner of their choice."⁷⁰ This has been the general attitude the Vineyard leadership has taken from their earliest days in the Frambes house and the groups in Worthington. There is a desire to care for the individual and an attempt to think clearly through the issues, but they view the Religious Right as ineffective at best and a corruptive force at worst.

⁶⁹ Lucas Sullivan, "Church Seeks Injunction Against Protestors," *Columbus Dispatch* (July 8, 2013), <https://www.dispatch.com/article/20130708/NEWS/307089644>.

⁷⁰ Meyer, "Interview with Author."

Mike and Kathy Seiler indicated that while the Bible is inerrant and speaks to every situation, one must consider the actual people and conditions involved. Kathy believes that the,

“Abortion [issue] has been captured by the extreme right-wing and made into an ugly thing. No one seems to care about why a woman would get an abortion, only for the most dreadful reasons. She is going to lose her job, lose her marriage, maybe she can’t afford this baby? ...the organizations that want to stop abortion aren’t thinking about how to deal with the system that has propagated this. The only way you can get by is to not get pregnant. Do you know? What is wrong with us? Some churches are talking about adoption. It took them forever! And the same churches that are fighting abortion are fighting birth control, which is the most logical way to prevent abortion. And I’ve heard all the arguments and never understood. I went to a Catholic school and heard the arguments. The early ones were that they thought maybe some of those methods caused a very early abortion, but those are unsubstantiated and really a stretch. The only reason to really oppose birth control is that you want to be sure that people who have sex always have a consequence.”⁷¹

Kathy continued that the argument that sex is only for procreation is not believed by anyone married. She turns to the Bible and notes that there is nothing in the Song of Songs about sex being for procreation. Her critique reveals a tension between thinking in terms of absolutes and considering circumstance and experience. This tension continues to be present at Vineyard Columbus.

Conclusion

From 1972-1973, Dick Pope, an underground paper called *The Yes!* at its height, printing and bundling 20,000-30,000 copies. Their very first issue reflects the spirit of their intentions toward those who they wished to reach. The paper does not have a date but has a picture on the front of an attractive young female hippie smiling with an excerpt from Psalm 117 below it inviting all nations to “Praise ye the Lord.”⁷² Inside, there is a

⁷¹ Seiler and Seiler, “First interview with author.”

⁷² Dick Pope, *The Yes: Come Quickly Lord Jesus!* 1 no. 1, 1.

small cartoon, “Barney Burned Our Sez: Don’t be a hopeless dooper be a hopeless hoper.”

On the same page is an invitation and statement of intention.

We don’t want to push anything on you. We just want you to experience what we have. We have found the key to eternal life and wish to share it with you. You may accept or reject what we have to say. The choice is yours, but please listen to us with an open mind and heart. Please don’t shut our words out. This paper is in your hands for one reason, and that reason is the same no matter who you are. This paper was given to you that you may know the truth and thereby be set free.⁷³

There is a certain humor, exuberance, and humility to the writing. Speaking with Pope and others, it is clear that these elements are still present. The exuberance has matured, and they sometimes grimace at the naivete they displayed in the early days. But one can still see and hear the spirit of those early days in their recollections of the past.

The author believes that Vineyard Columbus and the JPM groups that it grew out of are representative of what we might call “evangelicalism in tension.” They allow ambiguity. They embrace science and allow it to inform their reading of the Bible, which is why they are old-earth creationists. They allow space for experience and growth in their understanding of the Bible while holding to certain core beliefs found in the ancient creeds of the Church. They embrace inerrancy and perspicuity of Scripture while acknowledging the complexity of interpretation and allowing for a hermeneutic that considers the trajectory of what has been written. They embrace this tension. Today, Vineyard Columbus is the largest Vineyard church in the United States, and they are racially and ethnically diverse, with members from 126 different countries. They offer free legal services for the poor and after school programs for kids. A few years ago, Rich Nathan took Mike and Kathy Seiler and other former leaders from their early days in the

⁷³ Pope, *The Yes*, 2.

University Fellowship on a Cooper Road facility and Community Center tour. He showed them all programs and initiatives that the church was doing to bring tangible change to Columbus. He told them, “This was your vision.” The DNA of the JPM continues to inform the direction of the church because they have decided to live in tension rather than settle for certainty wherever possible.

CONCLUSIONS

Perhaps, this is the legacy of the JPM. It provides evidence that fundamentalism is not best defined as Kevin John Smith asserted, “regressive rather than contextualized, drawing energy, not from a desire to be relevant, but rather to be resistant to changing cultural forces.”¹ Instead, fundamentalism is best defined by a belief in the inerrancy and perspicuity of the Bible, a bent toward ahistorical restorationism, and some form of emphasis on the need for a subjective experience of God by the individual. The application of these streams in a fundamentalist context tends to allow for authoritarianism. However, authoritarian tendencies can be softened to the degree that groups eschew certainty for mystery in their approach to interpreting the Bible.

Further, rather than pursue recreation of the first century, it is beneficial to take a pragmatic approach to church structure and polity that considers the present context. Finally, they embrace the layperson as the primary interpreter of their experience with God combined with a leadership whose posture is to listen and empathize rather than instruct. This proves to be an effective protection against such tendencies. However, this approach to the three streams is predicated on allowing for ambiguity and uncertainty, but this provides more opportunity to embrace faith in a God unbounded by our shibboleths.

The first three chapters of this dissertation offered evidence of warmed-over evangelicalism. Disillusioned evangelicals and their youthful followers were taking paths that led them back to where they started because the way that evangelicals understand and leverage all three streams seemingly always takes them to the same place: the

¹ Smith, *The Jesus Movement*, 168.

certainty of the interpretation and application of an inerrant source.² More concerning, the groups' leadership in the first three chapters of this dissertation assumed the role, at least functionally, of inerrant interpreter. Kevin John Smith goes to great lengths to portray the NCAO as a “third way” and something new. Still, the evidence only reinforces the image of a movement clinging to evangelical certainty rather than acknowledging mystery and ambiguity. The result was unhealthy authoritarianism.

In the case of the NCAO, all three streams were maximally leveraged by the leadership for control. This began with the first stream (evangelical inerrancy and perspicuity of the Bible). Still, it formalized the control of the leadership over interpretation using the second stream (restorationism). Their expansion beyond the Bible to the church fathers led them to conclude that Eastern Orthodoxy was the original church in the present.³ In response, they added an inerrant tradition to their inerrant Bible and appointed themselves as “apostles” and the “bishops.” Finally, they took the third stream (subjective/experiential) and declared themselves to be the ultimate validator and interpreter of the subjective experience and direction their followers felt they had received from God. Predictably, the result was authoritarianism that crossed the line into abuse in some cases.

The Fish House/Xenos took a different approach to the three streams. They maximized the first stream with the leadership as the ultimate interpreter of an inerrant, perspicuous Bible. Perhaps, in a reaction against the NCAO, they dismissed tradition as

² Enroth, *The Jesus People*, 233. Enroth points out that the JPM was preoccupied with questions of authority. The source of authority for all JPM groups was the Bible. However, “the interpretation of Scripture and the relating of biblical teaching to everyday life are crucially dependent on available leaders and teachers.”

³ Jon Braun, *Finding the New Testament Church*, (Canada: Conciliar Press, 1987), 17.

an authority and fashioned their restorationism strictly from their interpretation of the New Testament. The result was a house church movement where leaders often exercised what many have come to consider an inappropriate authority in their members' lives. Finally, they deemphasized the subjective/experiential in favor of assuming that the Bible can give you all the guidance one needs. Any individual, subjective experience or direction from God is subject to verification and interpretation by the leadership of Xenos.

In contrast, the final chapter revealed a different outcome for Vineyard Columbus. Though they remain within evangelicalism, they approach the streams in a way that curbs authoritarian tendencies and refuses the temptation to get caught up in theological and doctrinal disputes, preferring to suspend judgment or to allow for ambiguity when possible, though they remain within evangelicalism.

The criticism of many commentators, contemporary to the JPM, was that the movement, as a whole, did not take theology seriously. They were not grounded theologically and only interested in “getting high on Jesus.”⁴ Dennis McCallum believes this led to the demise of the movement because it was shallow.⁵ Francis Schaeffer warned of the “new super spirituality”⁶ that called for an abandonment of reason and apologetics in favor of experience. However, Martin Marty believed that the JPM’s tendency to show a marked disinterest in abstract theological concepts in favor of direct experience was countering two generations of a mainline Christian tendency to downplay the role of experience and thus represented a positive trend.⁷

⁴ Dennis McCallum, “First Interview with Author.”

⁵ Dennis McCallum, “First Interview with Author.”

⁶ Francis Schaeffer, *The New Super Spirituality* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1972), 19-26.

⁷ Martin Marty, “Jesus: The Media and the Message,” *Theology Today* (January 1972): 470-476.

Evangelicals feared this trend, assuming the JPM would be left without a meaningful faith when they came down from their “high.” In some cases, this proved right, and JPM groups faded into obscurity. However, the Vineyard looks and feels different. They are evangelical but embrace ambiguity over certainty, and the experiences and circumstances of real people are held in tension with what they understand as propositional truth. They read leading evangelicals like Francis Schaeffer, but when, for example, he condemns the subjectivity of Kierkegaard, they dare to ask “why?” This group does not evidence the same authoritarian issues of the NCAO and Xenos. They have emphasized the third stream while holding the first two in the tension between the Bible and human experience while respecting the individual's interpretation.

Finally, further examination of the contrast of house church models' outcomes like those embraced by the NCAO/EOC and Xenos with the more traditional, large church model of Vineyard Columbus is worth exploring in a study of larger evangelicalism. In a post-covid-19 world, there is a revival of enthusiasm among evangelicals for the house church model.⁸ Evangelicals should ask whether or not their approach to inerrancy predisposes them to authoritarianism, in greater degrees, within smaller, more intimate settings. This was certainly the case for the groups examined in this dissertation.

⁸ For a prominent example of this revival of evangelical interest in house church movements see: Francis Chan, *Letters to the Churches* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook Publishing, 2018).

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