Dispensational Modernism

by

Brendan Pietsch

Graduate Program in Religion
Duke University

Date: _____

Approved: _____

Grant Wacker, Supervisor

Yaakov Ariel

Julie Byrne

Bruce Lawrence

Thomas Tweed

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate Program in Religion in the
Graduate School of Duke University

2011

ABSTRACT

Dispensational Modernism

by

Brendan Pietsch

Graduate Program in Religion
Duke University

Date: _____

Approved: _____

Grant Wacker, Supervisor

Yaakov Ariel

Julie Byrne

Bruce Lawrence

Thomas Tweed

An abstract of a dissertation submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in the
Graduate Program in Religion in the Graduate School
of Duke University

2011

Copyright by
Brendan Pietsch
2011

Abstract

This dissertation begins with questions about the epistemic methods that late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century American Protestants used to create confidence in new religious ideas, and particularly the role of scientific rhetoric in this confidence making. It concentrates on early Protestant fundamentalists and the emergence of dispensationalism modernism. Distinct from dispensational premillennialism—a set of theological ideas about prophecy belief and the end times—dispensational modernism was a constellation of epistemic ideas and methods used to interpret texts and time.

Historians have traditionally portrayed fundamentalists and dispensationalists as anti-modern, reactionary foes of modern scientific reasoning. Yet early dispensational thinkers created new, modernist methods for readings texts (particularly the Bible) and structuring time (through elaborate interpretations of prophecy). These ideas emerged amidst popular beliefs about the power of quantification, classification, and scientific analysis to construct firm religious knowledge. While liberal higher critics adopted practices of interpreting texts in light of the times—particularly historicism—dispensationalists took a contrary approach and interpreted the times in light of the text of the Bible. Seeing time as divinely ordered and classified with distinct divisions, dispensationalists argued that the meaning of time came from without, through supernatural ruptures in the temporal order.

Dispensationalism thrived in the interdenominational networks of mainstream and conservative Protestant clergy who sought to retain intellectual authority for biblical interpretation. As knowledge production became increasingly specialized and professionalized—the domain of elites—dispensational methods provided clergy means to navigate the tension between the need for specialized expertise and popular appeal. These ideas took canonical form

in the *Scofield Reference Bible*, first published in 1909 and still the best-selling reference Bible in American history. The reference notes in Scofield's Bible—condensed expert interpretations and taxonomic divisions—promised methodological proficiency and theological confidence to anyone who studied it.

Contents

Abstract.....	iv
List of Figures	xi
Introduction.....	1
Argument	1
Method.....	4
Terms.....	14
Significance	30
Chapter summaries and arguments	30
1. Taxonomic Minds.....	34
1.1 Newer, bigger stuff.....	34
1.2 Sunday school organization.....	38
1.3 Crises and social contexts.....	46
1.4 Engineering a new world	50
1.4.1 Numbers and measurements.....	54
1.4.2 Efficiency	59
1.4.3 Order	64
1.4.4 Taxonomic minds	70
1.5 Products of the taxonomic mind: Sunday schools	71
1.5.1 Unification and standardization.....	73
1.6 Methods and modernisms	77
Summary.....	84
2. Premillennial Backgrounds.....	86
2.1 Developments in development.....	86

2.2 Specialization and professionalization	89
2.3 Re-tuning clerical professionalization	93
2.3.1 Origins of the Bible conference movement.....	93
2.3.2 First International Bible Conference.....	97
2.3.3 Northfield	104
2.4 Accumulating accreditations	108
2.5 Two paths of clerical re-professionalization	113
2.5.1 Professional clerical networks.....	115
2.5.2 Popular Bible conferences.....	122
2.5 Summary.....	127
3. Dispensational Hermeneutics.....	129
3a Academic sciences of the Bible.....	129
3a.1 The terrain of science.....	129
3a.2 Refining old-fashioned science.....	133
3a.2.1 Princeton common sense realism	134
3a.3 Forging a new science of higher criticism	139
3a.3.1 Newman Smyth and modern doubt	140
3a.3.2 William Robertson Smith and higher criticism	144
3a.3.3 Egbert Smyth and disciplinary regimes of method.....	149
3b Popular reading and grassroots science	156
3b.1 Vengeful elephants and meaningful questions.....	156
3b.2 Spirit sightings.....	160
3b.2 Republican perspicuity.....	161
3b.3 Brethren conversational Bible reading.....	165

3b.4 Numerics and scientific typologies, from the ground up.....	175
3.c Taxonomic dispensational hermeneutics	181
3c.1 Background.....	182
3c.2 Interpretive prerequisites	185
3c.2.1 Excursus on inspiration	186
3c.3 Wholes: progressive structural unity.....	190
3c.4 Parts: distinctions between Old and New	191
3c.5 Parts: numeric distinctions	194
3c.6 Parts: literary relations	195
3c.6.1 Nonsense and the literal sense	196
3c.7 Methods and techniques	199
3.d Summary.....	200
4. Dispensational Time	204
4.1 New tenses of time	204
4.2 Millennial pasts and modern critics	208
4.2.1 Modernist response to continuous time.....	208
4.2.2 Alternating American millennial visions	211
4.3 Premillennialism and ruptured time.....	216
4.3.1 Universal and subjective times.....	220
4.3.2 Future discontinuous.....	222
4.4 Dispensations.....	224
4.4.1 Precursors: two Isaacs	225
4.4.2 Linguistic precursors and definitions.....	229
4.4.3 Dispensational definition of dispensations.....	231

4.4.4 Progressive revelation.....	234
4.5 Meanings of dispensational time.....	236
5. Engineering Time.....	241
5.1. Measurement, division, and classification	241
5.1.1 Doing things with time	243
5.1.2 Charting time	244
5.2 Dividing the past, telling history.....	247
5.2.1 Jews and Gentiles	248
5.2.2 Prophetic history	250
5.2.3 Periodization and Scofield’s dispensations	252
5.3 Present becoming: progress and pessimism	255
5.3.1 Progress and the teleology of modernity	255
5.3.2 Progress’s critics	257
5.3.3 Temporal mood: critical pessimism.....	264
5.3.3.1 Psychological pessimism	266
5.3.4 Prophetic, apocalyptic, utopian	268
5.3.5 Hope and present character	270
5.4 Predicting the future.....	273
5.4.1 Problematic predictions	274
5.4.2 Method for knowing the future	277
5.4.3 What could be known	279
5.5 Narrative time	283
6. Engineering Texts and the <i>Scofield Reference Bible</i>	286
6.1 History of marginal annotation	288

6.2 Taxonomic reading	292
6.2.1 Classification.....	294
6.2.2 Quantification.....	296
6.3 Intellectual status	298
6.4 Scofield Reference Bible history.....	300
6.5 Conclusion.....	312
References	313
Biography.....	326

List of Figures

Figure 1: John Wanamaker's Philadelphia buildings.	36
Figure 2: Moody's pupils.....	40
Figure 3: Henry Clay Trumbull	44
Figure 4: Measuring cups.	57
Figure 5: Anthropometrical measurements.....	59
Figure 6: Household efficiency	62
Figure 7: The Encyclopedistes' "Figurative System of Human Knowledge"	66
Figure 8: Sentence diagrams	67
Figure 9: Heinz's electric pickle	75
Figure 10: Dewey's Laboratory School.....	80
Figure 11: Outdoor service at the Northfield campground	108
Figure 12: Prophetic Conference at Farwell Hall	116
Figure 13: Larkin's "The Types and Anti-Types of Scripture"	180
Figure 14: A page from Brookes' Bible	184
Figure 15: Millerite chart of "God's Everlasting Kingdom"	213
Figure 16: "Mountain Peaks of Prophecy"	236
Figure 17: Larkin's "The Messages to the Seven Churches compared with Church History."	239
Figure 18: William E. Blackstone's diagram of biblical time.....	244
Figure 19: A.T. Pierson's chart of the dispensations	246
Figure 20: Pierson's "Table of Comparative Chronology"	246
Figure 21: Blackstone's chart of global religious demographics.	261
Figure 22: Larkin's "The Second Coming"	281
Figure 23: Harold Lane in prison.....	287

Figure 24: Larkin's chart of "Daniel's 70 Weeks"	297
Figure 25: <i>Scofield Reference Bible</i> title page	304
Figure 26: <i>Scofield Reference Bible</i> ad	306

Introduction

Argument

In 1991, the anthropologist Joel Robbins moved to a remote village in Papua New Guinea for two years of fieldwork. On arriving he discovered, much to his surprise, that the local Urapamin people were not only newly converted Christians, but dispensationalists—believing time was divided into divinely ordered eras, or dispensations. The seemingly isolated Urapamin waited eagerly for Jesus’ imminent return and an end-times Rapture. They peppered Robbins with questions about current world affairs, seeking signs of prophecy fulfilled, looking for the rise of a new world government and the Antichrist. The dispensationalism Robbins encountered is most often described by scholars as part of the wacky, anti-modern fringe American Protestant fundamentalism. But dispensationalism has long since slipped the bounds of fundamentalism. It now plays a major and independent role in American popular culture (witness the 65 million copies of the *Left Behind* novels sold) and throughout the modern world, influencing movements from the Nation of Islam to global Pentecostalism. In the past century, dispensationalism emerged as one of the most powerful forces in American religion, as well as one of America’s most significant religious exports.

Emerging between 1880 and 1920, dispensational thinking and practices grew out of popular fascination with applying technological methods—such as quantification and classification—to the interpretation of texts and time. Situating dispensationalism near the center of conservative Protestant religion in America, this dissertation examines the role of scientific rhetoric in these forms of religious confidence-making. Through technological methods, dispensationalists sought to imbue religious ideas with the same quality of ‘factuality’ that increasingly buttressed the cultural authority of scientists and other experts. Dispensationalists inherited their scientific aspirations from popular culture. One example will suffice here. In 1896 Fannie Farmer published the *Boston*

Cooking School Cookbook, the first cookbook in America to incorporate level measurements. Illustrating popular fascination with precision, Farmer linked cooking and quantification with scientific spirit, describing her cookbook as “condensed scientific knowledge which will lead to deeper thought and broader study of what to eat.” Popular confidence in classification and quantification became the core of what I call the *taxonomic mind*, the specific intellectual commitments that informed dispensational methods. These ideas were developed and disseminated within a new network of texts, people, institutions, and practices. By the time this network matured around 1910 its central node was the lightning-rod Bible teacher C.I. Scofield. His edited *Scofield Reference Bible*—the best-selling book in the history of Oxford University Press—became the near-canonical statement of dispensational thought and the most popular mechanism for propagation of this method of thought.

Recovering this history leads to a more robust definition of dispensationalism and locates it within the spectrum of American modernism. When viewed in a broad context, it is best understood as a new constellation of ideas about time, narrative, and epistemic method. Even as the public sphere became increasingly disenchanted—through encounters with Darwin, liberal theology, pragmatism, and other forms of modernist thought—dispensationalists labored to re-enchant the world through their own scientific methods. They developed new methods for interpreting the Bible and contemporary world events, in order to construct elaborate schemas for dividing the dispensations and ordering history. They offered alternate explanations of time—as linear, disjunctive, and divinely ordered—and of texts—whose meaning was constituted by inter-textual references. In common with their more conventionally modernist neighbors, dispensationalists insisted on the explicit use of method for constructing knowledge.

Simply said, dispensationalists believed the biblical text was a unified whole that gave meaning to fractured time, and its deeper, scientific meaning emerged in intricate literary inter-

textual referentiality. These were not conservative recapitulations of nineteenth century theology, but the mirrored images of beliefs held by more commonly recognized religious modernists: theological liberals and academic higher critics. Liberals and naturalists held that the unity of history explained the patchwork text of the Bible, and that deeper scientific meanings came from intricate reconstructions of historical contexts. Whether the unity of texts explained fractured history or the inverse, dispensationalists and higher critics both found comfort in the rhetoric of scientific and technological method. Both groups sought cultural and intellectual authority through professionalization and specialization, and both claimed at times to speak for mainstream Protestantism. By regularly juxtaposing these positions, both the modernist and counter-modernist aspects of dispensationalism become more sharply defined.

Like many of the new theological developments of the early twentieth century, dispensationalism grew in part as a response to a crisis of confidence. Or more precisely, it was a response to the particular epistemic questions that arose as conservative Protestants experienced the disjunctive character of the modern world. The increasingly fractured and fractious faces of modernity sent American believers seeking new sources of religious authority, including history, social progress, or the Holy Spirit. Not simply restating nineteenth-century certainties, dispensationalists sought secure religious knowledge through taxonomic readings of texts and time.

In his 2008 book, *On Being Certain*, neurologist Robert Burton suggested that certainty is not simply a property of ideas or reason, but is better described as a feeling associated with particular biochemical states. He argued: “Despite how certainty feels, it is neither a conscious choice nor even a thought process. Certainty and similar states of “knowing what we know” arise out of involuntary brain mechanisms that, like love or anger, function independently of reason.”¹

¹ Robert Burton, *On Being Certain* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008), xiii. For the purposes of this dissertation, I use certainty more or less synonymously with confidence in ideas. I imagine that a certain belief is one associated with the feeling of the highest degree of confidence that a particular individual is capable of mustering.

Without focusing here on the science of this claim, Burton's provocative insight prompted some of the central questions of this dissertation. Much of the literature on late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century religion assumes an epistemic dualism at the heart of theological divisions: liberals and modernists were those who were more comfortable with ambiguity, while conservatives and fundamentalists were those who sought for certainty. Yet if the quest for confidence in ideas is not a product of desire, intellect, personality type, or cultural choices, but an unconscious feature of human minds, then new questions arise. Assuming that most religious Americans were seeking the means for confident belief, this study seeks to uncover the ideas and practices that were used to create the conditions of possibility for the production of religious confidence. I argue that dispensationalists, much like other their modernist contemporaries, turned to science (or at least the rhetoric of science) and the application of technological methods to religious practices (particularly reading the Bible and interpreting sacred history) in order to create stronger systems of plausibility for their beliefs. That dispensationalists would later be characterized by their high degree of theological confidence only indicates the extent to which they were successful in adapting their interpretive practices to the conditions of modernity.

Method

Genre

Methodologically, this dissertation resembles a cultural history of ideas. Unlike much intellectual history which traces lineages of ideas among elite thinkers, this project attempts to construct a historical narrative about an intellectual tradition that emerges from, and eventually dissolves back into, popular culture. Dispensational thinkers took ideas from elites, to be sure, but the underlying structures and assumptions of dispensational thinking came not from any explicit appropriation of prior theology or philosophy, but grew out of largely implicit assumptions and

values inherited from American popular thought. Any attempt to locate origins for specific ideas in the murky vastness of popular culture is inherently pointillist, so the arguments and evidence deployed are intended to reveal correlations rather than historical causality. I do not attempt to demonstrate that C.I. Scofield read *The Boston Cooking-school Cookbook* and thus derived a particular method for quantifying biblical texts, but that the popularity of the Fanny Farmer's precise measurements helps reveal the underlying epistemic currents in American culture that helped make dispensational ideas and methods coherent and plausible. Further, this is not a chronologically told tale—not tracing a trail of causation from origins to results. When dealing with large popular intellectual impulses, change over time occurs unevenly. Sometimes evidence and examples of causal forces appear to antedate effects. Attempting to demonstrate more correlation than causation, I have often ignored chronological sequence in choosing evidence and constructing arguments.

Sources and characters

My sources are mostly published texts: theological journals, conference proceedings, newspaper accounts, religious handbooks, sermons, advertisements, and Bible notations. Extensive archival research on C.I. Scofield and other dispensational leaders helped shape my assumptions about the common forces that led to dispensational “conversions,” but very little of that material made it into this version of the project. Significant gaps exist in my own gaze as well. As a historical researcher, I find the company of “real” dead people and their particularities less interesting—or perhaps less substantial—than abstract ideas and relations of power. Social concerns that were not central to epistemic methods were bracketed, and I ignored the vast bulk of primary source literature concerning morality and behavior, politics, theology, everyday Christian living, or human suffering. The project takes very little account of race or gender, and social class is only considered indirectly. The main characters in the story are not demographically identified as semi-affluent,

male, Anglo-Protestants, but are at least partially a construction of that group; the real historical actors that I am interested in—the agents who create change over time—I refer to by names such as “technological values,” “quantification,” “historical consciousness,” or “disjunctive temporality.” Insofar as I have been able to abstract it from particular people, the drama in this story rests in the interplay of ideas and assumptions, rather than the religious or demographic details of individuals.

Methodological excursus on historical causation

This dissertation positions itself against one branch of methodological assumptions commonly found in the historiography of millennialism.² Many scholars have argued that *moods* about the present determine millennial belief, and are themselves products of social context. Such arguments assert that millenarian or apocalyptic religious groups can best be explained as a product of social or psychological deprivation or disenfranchisement. Drawing from the social sciences, these types of explanations often invoke themes such as social class, rural/urban distinctions, analyses of political power, and broad overviews of historical periods or geographical regions.

² A note on terminology: terms such as millennialism, millenarianism, apocalypticism, and eschatological appear frequently in this dissertation, most often in quotes. All bear related but slightly different meanings, yet none have clear, agreed-upon definitions. Perhaps the most general term is ‘millennialism’. Derived from Christian readings of the book of Revelation, the millennium refers to the 1000 year reign of Christ on earth before the final judgment. In recent scholarly literature, however, millennialism has come to be understood more broadly as any optimistic view of the future. Richard Landes provided one encyclopedia definition as: “Millennialism constitutes the belief that at some point in the future the social world will be transformed into a utopian world of peace, justice, prosperity and fellowship.” Richard Landes, “Millennialism.” (*Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. 28 October 2005), 563. In this sense, millennial movements are characterized as optimistic and utopian. Confusion persists, however, as the term is occasionally used to include apocalyptic and revolutionary movements that believe the path to a utopian future is neither peaceful nor progressive. Sometimes, though not reliably, scholars describe this latter type of apocalyptic view of history as ‘millenarianism’. Invoking a sense of time that is neither cyclical nor linear, but radically discontinuous, apocalyptic millenarianism is the belief that a utopian future will arrive only after a period of crisis, conflict, or supernatural intervention. Even this distinction, however, is not without contestation. Historian Hillel Schwartz used the terms synonymously in another encyclopedia to describe a complex matrix of ideas: “Millenarianism, known also as millennialism, is the belief that the end of this world is at hand and that in its wake will appear a New World, inexhaustibly fertile, harmonious, sanctified, and just. The more exclusive the concern with the End itself, the more such belief shades off toward the catastrophic; the more exclusive the concern with the New World, the nearer it approaches the utopian.” Hillel Schwartz, “Millenarianism.” *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2^d ed. (1987), 6028-6038. So, confusion persists in our most general reference works about our most basic terminology. Apart from a brief period from 1860 to 1870, the terms millennialism and millenarianism have appeared in roughly equal quantities in American literature, implying that neither term is subordinate. (See: http://ngrams.googlelabs.com/graph?content=millennialism%2Cmillenarianism&year_start=1800&year_end=2008&corpus=5&smoothing=4 (Accessed 18 August, 2011.)) Further distinctions do not escape this type of categorical perplexity. For the most part I use these terms interchangeably, without a specific technical meaning, following the usage of whatever sources I am working with. Where a specific implication of a term is relevant to the argument, I note it explicitly.

Historian Norman Cohn fathered this social sciences approach to millennialism with his influential studies of medieval millenarianism. In his 1957 opus, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, Cohn examined millenarian movements in Europe from the twelfth through the seventeenth century. He offered a definition of millenarian sects as a) collective, b) terrestrial, c) imminent, d) total, and e) miraculous.³ From this basis he argued that millenarian belief found radically different expressions, including the seemingly opposite impulses of revolutionary, egalitarian communities and individualistic, aesthetic mystics. Most important for future studies, Cohn argued that millenarianism only took hold among socially marginalized or economically deprived populations. “Revolutionary millenarianism,” he wrote, “drew its strength from a population living on the margin of society.”⁴

Others have followed Cohn’s lead in positing deprivation-based explanations for millenarian beliefs. Michael Barkun offered similar accounts of American millenarian movements in books like *Disaster and the Millennium* and *Crucible of the Millennium*. Barkun’s basic argument was that millenarian belief and practices were caused by catastrophic stress in the social or economic lives of religious believers. Disputing the importance of religious thought or rhetoric, Barkun argued that although millenarian ideology persists throughout history, ideology is insufficient to explain millennial behavior without disaster as a catalyst. He argued that millenarianism occurs primarily in rural settings that are more susceptible to natural disasters, economic and political crises, and other forms of troubling encounters with reality. In *Crucible of the Millennium*, Barkun explored the implications of this theory in the burned-over district of New York state in the 1840s. Here Barkun argued that the millenarianism of William Miller and the utopianism of Oneida perfectionist John Humphrey Noyes should both be understood as strategies

³ Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970) (1957), 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 282.

of disenfranchised groups to deal with the troubling realities of the period.⁵ Such social scientific explanations remain influential. Charles Strozier's 1994 *Apocalypse: On the Psychology of Fundamentalism in America* offered another attempt to explain fundamentalism through millenarianism, and millenarianism in terms of marginalization. Using a mixture of ethnographic, psychological, and historical approaches, Strozier sought to discover what lay behind millenarian belief. Coining the term "endism" to describe apocalyptic thinking that "seeks renewal through ultimate violence," Strozier found psychological dysfunction at the heart of endism.⁶ Strozier claimed that all fundamentalists are psychologically broken, attracted to apocalyptic belief due to past personal traumas, and obsessed with violence and collective death.

Methodological and historical problems persist in psychologized and social scientific explanations of the sort that Cohn and Barkun made popular. These studies assume that happiness, material comfort, and cultural power are essential conditions that make possible 'normal' religious experiences, while deprivation and disenfranchisement lead to ideological and religious deviance. Even more problematic, they fail to account for the evidence from the past. The dispensationalists at the heart of my story were mostly urban, relatively affluent, and possessed a vigorous sense of their own cultural power. Concerning the early controversy surrounding charges of premillennial pessimism, I argue that such charges were made by liberal critics seeking to dismiss premillennial theology as a marginal development, and bore little relationship to actual dispensationalist backgrounds or moods. For example, University of Chicago professor Herbert Willett dismissed all dispensationalist scholarship as: "nervous scanning of particular sections of the

⁵ Michael Barkun, *Crucible of the Millennium: The Burned-Over District of New York in the 1840s* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986). See also: Michael Barkun, "Millenarianism in the Modern World," *Theory and Society* 1 (1974), 117-146.

⁶ Charles B. Strozier, *Apocalypse: On the Psychology of Fundamentalism in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 153.

Bible, most of them apocalyptic,” from “untrained students of the Scriptures and of history.”⁷ Willett’s characterization of dispensational hermeneutical method as “nervous” implied that the engagements dispensationalists made with the Bible were compromised by their gloomy and despairing personalities; his attribution of “untrained students” suggested their marginal social positions. For critics (and all-too-often academic scholars as well), it was a mass-movement of personality disorders. That these charges of psychological pessimism were spurious mattered little. They established the psychologized temporal terrain for subsequent theological and academic conversations about the nature of premillennialism and dispensationalism. Despite the lack of evidence for such claims—if any such evidence about mass psychological states could be gathered—many scholars have accepted these interpretive assumptions to argue either for deprivation or psychological dysfunction as the cause of millenarian beliefs.

This is not to say social forces were irrelevant. The sense of disjunction produced by modern life made plausible certain epistemic assumptions about the nature of time. Yet social conditions alone are not sufficient to explain the development of millennial beliefs or movements, nor are the most common social explanations—disenfranchisement, alienation, economic distress, or psychological dysfunction—accurate descriptions of most millennialists in American history. I am not certain that any set of external causal forces could provide satisfactory explanations for millenarian movements generally. Instead, I seek explanations for early dispensationalism in the movement’s ability to harness the rhetoric and methods of technology to create plausible modern beliefs.

⁷ Herbert L. Willett, “Millennial Hopes and the War Mood,” *Christian Century* (March 14, 1918), 3; Herbert L. Willett, “Activities and Menace of Millennialism,” *Christian Century* (August 29, 1918), 8. Willett indulged in wholesale dismissals of the merits of any premillennial biblical scholarship: “In reality the discussions conducted under these auspices bear no relation to the study of any discipline that can be called prophecy in the light of sober and intelligent biblical scholarship.” *Ibid.*, 6.

Methodological excursus on the origins of dispensational ideas

A second methodological argument made in this dissertation concerns the origins of dispensational ideas in American Protestant thought. Much of the academic literature on dispensational premillennialism in America takes as its starting point the theological propositions of Irish cleric John Nelson Darby, particularly his beliefs about eschatology and ecclesiology. Darby's role in inventing dispensationalism is now taken for granted in encyclopedias, textbooks, and even within literature now produced by contemporary dispensationalists. Yet I resist this interpretation of Darby's significance, for historical, methodological, and historiographical reasons.

The narrative of Darbyite dispensational origins received its classic expression in Ernest Sandeen's 1970 classic *The Roots of Fundamentalism*.⁸ Sandeen described how premillennialism emerged in early-nineteenth-century Britain with a brief flourishing of eccentric, marginal millennial movements, manifested in figures like Edward Irving and Henry Drummond. These, he argued captured the imagination of Darby, who helped launch the Plymouth Brethren movement. Early American prophecy believers, such as Lutheran theologian Joseph Seiss and Presbyterian pastor James Inglis, embraced Darby's dispensational schemes between 1845 and 1878, and publicized them in their prophecy journals. These ideas spread quickly through institutional structures such as the Niagara Bible Conference, through popular journals dedicated to prophecy exposition, and through the rise of Bible schools and institutes. From the 1880s to the end of the century, the Niagara Bible Conferences, led by James Brookes, took the lead in rousing interest in prophecy and promoting Darby's peculiar views. In 1909, these views found their home in C.I. Scofield's reference Bible, which popularized Darby's particular theology throughout the twentieth-century fundamentalist movement.

⁸ Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970).

Yet the historical evidence for these connections with Darby remains weak. Few American dispensational leaders ever spoke to Darby, or of him. Indeed some seemed to have had an acrimonious relationship with Darby—unsurprisingly, as Darby viewed the American prophecy movement with suspicion. Although the Plymouth Brethren unquestionably had an enormous impact on American premillennialism, sources described it as a hermeneutic rather than a doctrinal impact: they conveyed an ethos for reading the Bible, rather than set of doctrines about time or the church or the shape of the prophetic future. The most influential early Brethren leaders in America, George Muller, Henry Moorhouse, and George Needham, were either not strongly tied to Darby or had broken with him, and were generally known as evangelists rather than prophecy teachers. Recent scholars revisiting the connection from the point of view of theological comparison also downplay Darby’s role. Historian Carl Sanders, examining the most influential of early American premillennialists, James Brookes, concluded that Brookes displayed little evidence of Darby’s influence, but drew more from Southern Baptist leader James Robinson Graves. Graves was a leader of the Landmark Baptist movement and editor of the largest Baptist paper, and his 1883 book *The Work of Christ in the Covenant of Redemption; Developed in Seven Dispensations* has been largely overlooked as a source of dispensational theology.⁹ Theologian Larry Crutchfield likewise argued that while Darby’s theology probably did have some influence on C.I. Scofield’s work, it was not determinative or overwhelming.¹⁰

Second, historiographically, accounts of a Darbyite origin of American dispensationalism dismiss the assertions of many dispensationalists, for whom associations with Darby proved problematic. Darby was both personally and doctrinally schismatic, and his record of scathing

⁹ James Robinson Graves, *The Work of Christ in the Covenant of Redemption; Developed in Seven Dispensations* (Texarkana, AR: Baptist Sunday School Committee, 1883). See: Carl E. Sanders II, *The Premillennial Faith of James Brookes: Reexamining the Roots of American Dispensationalism*, (New York: University Press of America, 2001).

¹⁰ Larry V. Crutchfield, *The Origins of Dispensationalism: The Darby Factor* (New York: University Press of America, 1992).

disputes and institutional breaks often made friends and foes alike unwilling to be too closely associated. Even more important, though, the account of Darbyite origins has been a frequent bone of contention in theological arguments about the historicity or newness of dispensationalism. Critics of dispensationalism have often claimed that its modern provenance proves it to be a heretical—or just bizarre—theological development, while adherents have protested that dispensational ideas represent the historic eschatological position of orthodox Christianity.

Norman Kraus offered the critical view in his 1958 book, *Dispensationalism in America*.¹¹ Kraus, a Mennonite theologian, hoped that providing the history of dispensationalism would help explain—and thus help debunk—its rise within his denomination. Kraus’s work focused on theologically distinctive ideas of early dispensationalist leaders, such as Blackstone, Brookes, Darby, and Scofield, but began with the assumption that premillennial ideas were false, and a “modern delusion.” Two years later a second slim volume on dispensationalism was published, Clarence Bass’s *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism*.¹² Like Kraus, Bass (an ex-dispensationalist) attempted to demonstrate that dispensationalism was created in the nineteenth century by Darby, and as such was distinct from the historical millennial beliefs of the Christian church. In doing so, Bass described his polemical objective clearly: “The theses of this book are: dispensationalism is not part of the historic faith of the church; it is not the only premillennial view ... and it is based on a faulty hermeneutical basis of interpretation.”¹³

Dispensationalists argued in response that theirs was the historic position of the Christian church, and not a novel doctrine invented in the nineteenth century. Arnold Ehlert’s 1965 study, *A Bibliographic History of Dispensationalism*, offered a good example of this argument, as Ehlert presented a long list of Christian figures, beginning with patristic sources, that purportedly taught

¹¹ C. Norman Kraus, *Dispensationalism in America: Its Rise and Development* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1958).

¹² Clarence B. Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 155.

dispensational doctrines.¹⁴ Likewise, another systematic presentation of dispensationalist history from insiders came with Charles Ryrie's 1966 *Dispensationalism Today* (revised and reprinted in 1995 as *Dispensationalism*).¹⁵ Ryrie explicitly attacked the arguments of Kraus, Bass, and others that dispensationalism is of recent provenance, and thus unorthodox (and necessarily separatist). While acknowledging that Darby had some importance in systematizing dispensationalist ideas, Ryrie traced these ideas throughout Christian history, finding early versions of dispensationalism in theological writings from Augustine to Jonathan Edwards.

More broadly, dispensationalists have suggested their beliefs come from the Bible itself, not from Darby or anyone else, and represent a traditional or orthodox view of eschatology throughout church history. Characteristically, James Brookes, when asked about the sources for his theological ideas, pointed solely to the Bible. I believe this point moves to the heart of the historiographical controversy: whether the Bible teaches dispensationalism, or whether one must be taught dispensational ideas from an external, modern, human source. My interest in this question is not theological, but out of concern with the way prior theological agendas have pushed the historiographical consensus in unhelpful directions.

Rejecting the common form of the question—whether or not the Bible teaches dispensationalism—it seems fairly clear that the Bible contains the textual resources for many independent, conscientious, and persistent readers plausibly to construct a temporal model like dispensationalism (independent of a single source of intellectual authority, such as Darby's beliefs). The conditions that made dispensational ideas about time plausible and compelling existed largely independent of the theological contexts of possible Brethren influence. Intellectual contexts (such as the failure of Common Sense realism, the challenges of Lyell's geology, and the appeal of engineering values) and social contexts (such as the dissonance caused by the Civil war and

¹⁴ Arnold D. Ehlert, *A Bibliographic History of Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965).

¹⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995).

subsequent decades of rapid change and urbanization, or the rise of American universities and social science) that proved essential for the popularization of dispensational time concepts are generally sufficient to explain the phenomenon, without demanding recourse to a theory of direct transference of theological ideas grounded in speculative historical evidence.

That is not to say American dispensationalists were not influenced in any way by Brethren theology, but that the Plymouth Brethren's influence was not in the nature of didactic communication. Which brings us finally to the methodological issues. Accounts that portray ideas traveling through culture or religious traditions in terms of neat legacies prove unsatisfying. Ideas are not transmitted in direct and irresistible sequences, but actively appropriated by agents who find them plausible and compelling in particular cultural climates. Accounts that focus on Darby's overwhelming influence in the transmission of theological ideas tend to discount the resourcefulness and creativity of early American dispensational leaders like James Brookes and C.I. Scofield, both of whom proved capable of doing their own theological work. Even more important, to focus on Darby as the well-spring of dispensationalism implies that a set of specific doctrines define the core of dispensational identity. However, it was not the specific form of premillennial theology that made dispensationalism compelling in America, but its modernist epistemic assumptions. Methodologically, the phenomenon of dispensationalism more readily responds to inquiry as a popular intellectual movement whose epistemic methods are best revealed through examination of correlative technological impulses found in mass culture.

Terms

A number of terms used in this dissertation require some preliminary explanation. Used independently, the categories of both "dispensationalism" and "modernism" have a rich literature defining both technical and popular meanings distinct from my own. Most accounts define

dispensationalism as a set of theological beliefs about prophecy and the end times, or a set of schemes for dividing sacred history. Some attempt has been made below to tease out various theological definitions of dispensationalism as they have been used in prior scholarship. However, I do not follow this usage, and the bulk of this dissertation is an extended attempt to redefine the category of dispensationalism as a constellation of epistemic conditions and hermeneutic methods used to re-interpret time and texts. The distinctive significance of dispensationalism rests not in its theological products—such as beliefs about the Rapture—but in the interpretive processes used to construct new forms of confidence in theological ideas. Thus, as I attempt to indicate in the title, the object of study in this dissertation is not dispensational premillennialism (a theological system), but dispensational modernism.

Dispensionalisms

Certainly there are many expressions of dispensationalism in American history. Historian Carl Sanders argued that scholars ought to pay more attention to the extensive diversity among dispensational schemas, and treat the subject not as a singular, unified movement, but an aggregation of “dispensionalisms,” consisting of a “group of systems that share a family resemblance.”¹⁶ This is a helpful reminder that, even as a theological category, dispensational premillennialism has been a diverse and complex set of phenomena, one that has changed dramatically over time. Attempting to create a taxonomy of theological variants of dispensationalism would be well beyond my limited patience for theological nuance. Instead, I will offer two examples, the first a description of something like ideal theological types of Anglo-Protestant millennialism, and the second a form of dispensationalism that shows the range of dispensational language and imaginations.

¹⁶ Carl Sanders, “Dispensationism or Dispensionalisms: A System or a Family?” (Paper presented at Evangelical Theology Society Meeting, 2005).

Most historians have used twentieth-century Anglo-Protestant theological categories as the baseline for defining dispensationalism. One of the clearest introductions to the theological propositions of Christian millennialism appears in Timothy Weber's *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*. Rather than attempt to summarize his already succinct prose, I offer it at length:

Broadly speaking, Christian millennialism is the belief that there will be a long period of unprecedented peace and righteousness, closely associated with the second coming of Christ. Christians can be divided into three groups, depending on whether they take the millennial reign of Christ literally and where they place Christ's return in relation to it.

Amillennialists (literally, "no-millennialists") interpret biblical references to the millennium figuratively, and contend that the millennial reign of Christ occurs in the hearts of his followers. Postmillennialists, on the other hand, believe that Christ will return *after* the church has established the millennium through its faithful and Spirit-empowered preaching of the gospel; while premillennialists expect Christ to return *before* the millennium in order to establish it by his might.

Premillennialists are further divided into two subgroups on the basis of their fundamental approach to prophetic texts. Historicist premillennialists believe that the prophetic Scriptures, especially those in Daniel and Revelation, give the entire history of the church in symbolic form. ... Futurist premillennialists argue that none of the prophecies of the "last days" have been fulfilled in the history of the church, and they expect them all to come to pass in a short period just before the return of Christ. ...

While futurist premillennialists agree on this script for the future, they disagree on the exact timing of the church's "rapture." The rapture is the "catching away" of the church to meet Christ in the air (I Thess. 4:15-17). Pretribulationists believe that the church will be raptured before the rise of Antichrist and the beginning of the tribulation. Midtribulationists, on the other hand, contend that the church will be raptured during the tribulation, after Antichrist's rise to power... Posttribulationists say the church will live through the entire period and be rescued at the end of the tribulation by the rapture at the time of the second coming.¹⁷

Thus, Weber concludes, dispensationalism is a variant of millennial belief classified as premillennial, futurist, and pretribulationist. These theological distinctions about eschatological

¹⁷ Timothy Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1983), 9-11.

hopes have defined the categories for most of the historical scholarship about millennialism in the United States.¹⁸

Yet such categories do not nearly exhaust the scope of dispensational theological ideas. In 1884, even as the conservative white clergy of this story were still constructing grounds for their dispensational ideas, African-American Episcopal bishop James Theodore Holly was using the term for dramatically different purposes. Holly argued that there were three divine dispensations: the first where the Semitic race (or Jews) was given the Holy Scriptures, the second where the Japhetic race (or whites) was charged with translating and disseminating the gospel, while the third dispensation, coming in the future, was reserved for the work of the Hamitic race, or Africans. Holly wrote: "But neither the one nor the other of those two races have entered into or carried out the spirit of those Scriptures. This crowning work of the will of God is reserved for the millennial phase of Christianity, when Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands directly unto God."¹⁹ As historian Timothy Fulop noted, Holly's views served as a critical rejection of the postmillennial beliefs of nineteenth-century America—ideas that American national virtue and western civilization would bring about the millennial Kingdom of God. The prevalence of dispensational ideas among African Americans has been neglected in scholarship on white premillennialism, in large part because the theological propositions and institutional locations were different. Yet these traditions proved

¹⁸ Particularly useful accounts of theological dispensational premillennialism include: Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, enlarged ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Virginia Lieson Brereton, *Training God's Army: The American Bible School, 1880-1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Yaakov Ariel, *On Behalf of Israel: American fundamentalist attitudes toward Jews, Judaism, and Zionism, 1865-1945* (Carlson, 1991); and Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880 - 2000* (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 2000). For examples of dispensationalist scholars writing in this field, see: Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, eds., *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), Larry V. Crutchfield, *The Origins of Dispensationalism: The Darby Factor* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992).

¹⁹ James Theodore Holly, "The Divine Plan of Human Redemption, In Its Ethnological Development," *AME Church Review* 1 (October 1884): 79-85. Quoted in: Timothy E. Fulop, "'The Future Golden Day of the Race': Millennialism and Black Americans in the Nadir, 1877-1901," in *African-American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture*, ed. by Timothy E. Fulop and Albert J. Raboteau (New York: Routledge, 1997), 240.

equally influential. For example, Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad used the language and logic of a “new dispensation” to describe his break with more historically orthodox religious traditions.²⁰ For some African-American Protestants, dispensationalism referred to a set of ethnological and theological ideas that explained racial injustices and promised a better millennial future.

I do not make use of either of these senses of “dispensationalism” in this dissertation. When speaking of eschatological beliefs, I generally use the term premillennialism to note I am referring to the theological beliefs rather than an epistemic category. And like other scholars I have bracketed the African-American ethnological dispensationalism of Holly and others, because my sense is that the cultural and intellectual impulses that made those beliefs plausible were grounded in a different set of modernist values—not the taxonomic minds I trace in American mass culture, but a different form of scientific rhetoric based on comparative anthropology.

Dispensational modernism

I use the term “dispensationalism” throughout this dissertation as a shorthand version of the category I have called dispensational modernism. My use of the modifier modernism does not indicate a desire to enter debates about the nature of modernity or modernism, as much as a need for a new category to describe the phenomena I am interested in. By and large, I am uninterested in theological beliefs about concepts such as a pretribulationist rapture or the identity of the antichrist. Insofar as dispensational premillennialism has long been used to indicate the distinctive end-times beliefs of American dispensationalists, this terrain has already been well-mapped by scholars. I am interested instead in the epistemic and methodological assumptions and practices that made such beliefs possible and plausible. “Dispensational modernism” is an attempt

²⁰ Historian Edward Curtis argued that “Muhammad combined the Christian dispensationalism of his youth with elements of Islam, a belief in “clean living,” and even a post-World War II fascination with UFOs to create a new African-American Islamic tradition.” Edward E. Curtis, IV, *Islam in Black America: identity, liberation, and difference in African-American Islamic thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

to explore these intellectual foundations of dispensationalism, particularly its methods for parsing texts and dissecting time, and to identify the cultural location and contexts that validated these methods. Additionally, this usage suggests that the category of dispensationalism should not be defined by reference to end times beliefs but through their application of methods. Put differently, I argue that the success of a dispensational product like the *Scofield Reference Bible* came not because it was dispensational but because it was modernist.

What does it mean for dispensationalism to be modernist? Any definition of “modernism” is certain to be insufficient and controversial. Beyond that, there is the problem that dispensationalists are most often described in scholarship as anti-modernist. There are two senses in which this latter label is descriptively useful. First, when used technically to refer to the theological modernism developing between 1880 and 1920; dispensationalists denied most of the theological impulses of these liberal theological ‘modernists’: arguing for the material fulfillment of prophecy, the reality of miracles and the resurrection, and the unity of the Bible. Second, in a more broadly cultural sense, historian Jackson Lears described anti-modernism as a movement that developed when: “toward the end of the nineteenth century, many beneficiaries of modern culture began to feel they were its secret victims.”²¹ Certainly many dispensationalists, along with Americans of all other stripes, felt victimized by modernity even as they embraced it.

Yet as a study in the history of ideas, it seems to me that dispensationalists were far more consistently modernist in their thinking and inclinations than otherwise. For example, when defined as a literary category, modernism relates to a crisis in the rhetoric of representation. Pericles Lewis described this as the impulse “to break away from traditional verse forms, narrative techniques, and generic conventions in order to see new methods of representation appropriate to life in an urban,

²¹ T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880 - 1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), xv.

industrial, mass-oriented age.”²² New methods of representation appropriate to technological modernity were exactly the solutions dispensationalists sought for the interpretive problems they faced. Rather than belabor the point, I merely note that I use the term “modernism” here to refer to any explicit use of methods in knowledge production, particularly in response to the epistemological challenges created by the emergence of technological modernity. Describing and defining the composite category of “dispensational modernism,” then, is the overall project of this dissertation.

Fuzzy categories

Two additional sets of terms used throughout this dissertation resist precise definition. First, I intentionally avoid offering exact definitions of either “science” or “technology.” This is not (entirely) a perverse attempt to obfuscate, but reflects the historical use of these terms. For most of the characters in this dissertation, science and technology held a number of shifting, sometimes contradictory meanings, and they invoked an even larger set of values. Most often they were used foremost as rhetorical containers, fetishistic ideals of powerful knowledge, forms of magical language, or advertising slogans. Rather than attempting to demystify and clarify the various possible meanings, I employ the terms in an approximation of the historical usage, generally to invoke a sense of desire, intellectual authority, and social power.

The second group of opaque categories I make use of are the “popular” and the “elite.” I have no sophisticated justification for my fuzzy use of these terms. Categories of elite and popular, without being theorized in some sophisticated way, merely represent my perception of the relative intellectual power and prestige of any particular set of people. That is not to say there is no logic at all to these attributions. Sociologists seeking to explore this arena often refer to political power as the measure of cultural authority or elite social positions. For example, social movement theorist

²² Pericles Lewis, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (New York: Cambridge, 2007), xviii.

Rhys Williams proposed: “Cultural power is the capacity to use cultural resources to affect political outcomes. These resources include symbols, ideologies, moral authority, and political meaning.”²³ This study shifts the metrics of measurement from political outcomes to establishing culturally authoritative intellectual conversations. Discursive tone and networks of influence, alongside social forces like specialization and professionalization, helped produce a hierarchical world of intellectual authority. As this is a story of ideas, popular and elite refer to intellectual influence—or rather, custodial control of the flow of ideas in mass culture, represented by national media—rather than political or economic power. Thus, for example, the powerful merchant John Wanamaker is considered part of popular religious culture, while the relatively unknown University of Chicago professor Herbert Willett is considered part of the elite. Dispensationalists straddled the line between popular and elite—attempts to preserve their perceived status as elite custodians of mainstream Protestantism yet losing their status as contributors to authoritative scholarly biblical interpretation. In 1880, dispensationalists held great cultural power, or at least perceived themselves to hold it. They viewed themselves as part of the mainstream of American clergy, and compared to many they represented one type of elite. Yet by 1920 dispensationalists were excluded from elite institutions like secular universities and academic societies, and their intellectual products disparaged.²⁴

This use of categories like “elite” and “popular” highlights the ways in which hierarchy is culturally constructed. Historian Lawrence Levine articulated my suspicion that, if there is any

²³ Rhys H Williams and N.J. Demerath III, “Cultural Power: How Underdog Religious and Nonreligious Movements Triumph Against Structural Odds,” in *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organization*, ed. by N.J. Demerath III, et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 367.

²⁴ These attributions of intellectual merit persist. In many conversations I have had with academics and specialists in this field, I heard dismissive assessments of dispensationalists like C.I. Scofield (“he was just a systematizer, and not all that smart”). On a similar note, while liberal theological modernism is considered an important American intellectual tradition, dispensationalism is considered an anti-intellectual social movement. I do not personally see much difference between the intellectual products of C.I. Scofield and a respected academic like Shirley Jackson Case (works from both seem equally full of unwarrantable conclusions and sophisticated methodological contortions). Yet the latter is anthologized in works on American intellectual history while the former is ignored.

lesson to be learned in this story, it is the humility of recognizing our own constructions. He wrote: “The cultural categories we live with can become vehicles of comprehension not mystification only insofar as we remember just how human and fragile, how recent and porous they have been and continue to be. To confine something as variable and dynamic as culture within rigid hierarchical divisions, which are then projected back into a past in which they did not yet exist, is to risk misunderstanding not merely our history but ourselves.”²⁵

Terms not used

Throughout this dissertation I try to avoid using the language of ‘fundamentalism’. Fundamentalism is contentious category in academic literature, having at least two distinct bodies of literature that employ the term in different senses. The first concerns a historical Protestant movement in America; the second pertains to the cross-cultural and comparative study of recent global religious movements characterized by conservative or rigid social ethics and anti-modern protests.²⁶ Neither seems appropriate to my objects of study.

To be sure, other scholars see the evidence differently. Perhaps the first academic attempt to offer a history of dispensationalism as a form of fundamentalism came in 1918, when Shirley Jackson Case published an article in *The Biblical World* titled “The Premillennial Menace.” Case, a distinguished professor of early church history at the University of Chicago and a proponent of the new scientific history, found premillennial beliefs to be “a very old and persistent delusion.”²⁷ Case’s work was one of many early theological salvos fired in the escalating battles between modernists and fundamentalists in the early-twentieth-century. A similar attack appeared in 1919 in modernist theologian Harris Franklin Rall’s three-part series on premillennialism published in *The*

²⁵ Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 242.

²⁶ Bruce Lawrence defined the term in this latter sense: “Fundamentalism is the affirmation of religious authority as holistic and absolute, admitting of neither criticism nor reduction, it is expressed through the collective demand that specific creedal and ethical dictates derived from scripture be publicly recognized and legally enforced.” Bruce Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 27.

²⁷ Shirley Jackson Case, “The Premillennial Menace,” *The Biblical World* 52 (July 1918), 23.

Biblical World, where Rall sought to thoroughly discredit and dismiss premillennial ideas.²⁸ Yet despite their overt vitriol, Case and Rall's descriptions of premillennial origins and ideas found general acceptance in scholarly circles. Over the next four decades little further academic work was done on this subject. The void was so great that Ira Brown, writing in 1952, described millenarianism as "among the most neglected of recurrent themes in the history of American thought."²⁹ Case's account of premillennial origins, in particular, became central for later academics seeking to map the terrain of premillennialism in America.

The next major work came a half century later, when Ernest Sandeen argued that the fundamentalist movement preceded the fundamentalist controversies of the 1920s, and at the heart of this movement was millenarianism, inflected by the biblical literalism of Princeton theology. For Sandeen, dispensationalism was fundamentalism. Dispensationalism was as essential component of fundamentalism in the eyes of other scholars as well. George Marsden would define fundamentalism as "militantly anti-modernist Protestant evangelicalism"—a coalition of conservatives upset about evolution, theological materialism, and a sense of cultural crisis, and drawing from nineteenth-century groups including: "evangelicalism, revivalism, pietism, the holiness movement, millenarianism, Reformed confessionism, Baptist traditionalism, and other denominational orthodoxies"³⁰ What made all of these diverse groups usefully described by a single category? Marsden argued that fundamentalism was a movement in the sense that it "developed a distinct life, identity, and eventually a subculture of its own... a loose, diverse, and changing federation of co-belligerents united by their fierce opposition to modernist attempts to bring

²⁸ Harris Franklin Rall, "Premillennialism: I. The Issue," *The Biblical World* 53:4 (Jul. 1919), 339-347.

²⁹ Ira V. Brown, "Watchers for the Second Coming: The Millenarian Tradition in America," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 39 (Dec. 1952), 441-458.

³⁰ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 4.

Christianity into line with modern thought.”³¹ The usefulness of describing dispensationalists as part of fundamentalism rests on the descriptive accuracy of portraying them as fierce opponents of modern thought. This characterization masks more than it reveals about the nature of dispensational ideas and interests.

Historians parsing the theological landscape of late-nineteenth-century Protestantism have identified three broad groups vying for position and influence.³² The first might be described as denominational conservatives, and included the staunchly conservative Presbyterians at Princeton Seminary, moderate Baptists like theologian Augustus Strong and conservative Baptists such as *Watchman-Examiner* editor Curtis Lee Laws, and nearly everyone in the American South.³³ A second group was made up of liberals and progressives that championed a New Theology. Often labeled “modernists” for their belief that theology must adapt to modern conditions, this coalition included prominent ministers such as Congregationalist Washington Gladden, as well as academics who came to dominate higher education at places like Yale, Andover, and the University of Chicago.³⁴ The third major group is best described as interdenominational evangelicalism, particularly as it developed around evangelist Dwight L. Moody and his close associates.³⁵ This

³¹ Ibid.

³² Perhaps more commonly, historians have identified two binarily opposed groups—e.g. conservatives and liberals, fundamentalists and modernists—emerging as the broad nineteenth-century evangelicalism fractured. But two articles have convincingly portrayed three separate configurations in Protestant thought and impulse: Grant Wacker, “The Holy Spirit and the Spirit of the Age in American Protestantism, 1880-1910,” *The Journal of American History* 72:1 (June 1985); and Michael Hamilton, “The Interdenominational Evangelicalism of D.L. Moody and the Problem of Fundamentalism” (Unpublished manuscript). Wacker focused on theological and cultural values and impulses, and highlighted the ability of these different coalitions to cooperate throughout the 1880s and 1890s. Hamilton paid more attention to institutions and controversies, and extending his argument through 1940, emphasized the long-term inability of these various factions to form coalitions.

³³ Wacker described this group as “mainstream conservatives,” characterized by Reformed and orthodox rationalism, and: “manifestly pious, sincere, supportive of middle-class sensibilities.” Wacker, 45. Hamilton labeled them “denominational traditionalists” whose “primary commitments lay with their denomination and its theological particulars.” Hamilton, 8.

³⁴ Wacker noted: “Persuaded that God is immanent in the processes of modern culture, individuals such as Gladden and Gilman were noted for their commitment to metaphysical idealism, biblical higher criticism, a progressive view of history, and the notion that contemporary science and philosophy are in some sense normative for Christian theology.” Wacker, 46.

³⁵ Wacker identified this third group as those committed to “higher life theology,” and “noted for their support of urban revivalism, world missions, and the theology and practice of divine healing, and most of all, for a conviction that conversion ought to be regarded, not as the goal, but as the mere beginning of a triumphant Christian life.” Wacker, 46.

movement coalesced before 1920 in the north and the west coast, and forged strong ties with like-minded Protestants in Canada and Britain. As historian Michael Hamilton noted, “The three institutional legs of the Moody network—Bible institutes, independent missionary organizations and large autonomous urban churches—were already well-established, thriving, and had a clear sense of group identity before the [fundamentalist-modernist] controversies started. By 1920 the Moody network had established at least 40 interdenominational Bible institutes. It also had organized around 40 interdenominational missionary agencies.”³⁶ Porous boundaries existed at the edges of these groups, and despite real differences, before 1900 commonalities predominated.

From the hindsight of the fractured Protestantism of the twentieth century, many historical accounts emphasize the points of conflict between liberal proponents of New Theology and conservative interdenominational evangelicals—the latter often labeled “fundamentalists.” To be sure, these groups found much to disagree with in each other’s theology. Yet such accounts oversimplify a more complex picture. As historian Grant Wacker noted, “The movements were parallel and, to some extent, patricidal protests by brothers and sisters against a common father”: denominational traditionalism, which was, “now perceived as orthodox rationalism without life or heart.”³⁷ The theological innovations of the liberal progressives seemed to make New Theology a common target, but in reality liberals and denominational conservatives both saved their greatest ire for the new interdenominationalists, who they pilloried as premillennialists and “fundamentalists.”³⁸

Hamilton believed this group was sympathetic with anti-modernism in its theological sense, but not militant, and noted: “their primary commitments lay not with any denomination, but with the interdenominational version of Christianity that the Moody network promulgated. The religious signatures of this network were revivalism, dispensational premillennialism, and Keswick holiness-style pietism.” Hamilton, 5.

³⁶ Hamilton, 33.

³⁷ Wacker, 60. New Theology represented a protest against the austerity of older conservative orthodoxies, and triggered bitter battles for the control of the denominations. Interdenominational evangelicalism offered a protest against the perceived impotence and inertia of existing denominations.

³⁸ Hamilton argued: “There was another major battle of the fundamentalist-modernist controversies, one that was resolved before the other three. This was the dispute over the meaning of the term fundamentalist. By late 1923 the modernists

As the disputes grew more contentious, each group sought to position itself as the representative of mainstream American Christianity.³⁹

Categories for these theologically based groups shift slightly when one focuses on intellectual authority, as mediated by American mass culture. The intellectual core of interdenominational evangelicalism could be found in the networks producing dispensational scholarship. By 1920, dispensationalists found their intellectual authority challenged from three sides. Traditionalists in denominations and seminaries—such as the Princeton theologians—rejected premillennialism and new forms of taxonomic hermeneutics. Liberals and progressives held control of the universities and scholarly guilds for status validation, and made historicism the indispensable method for participation—a move which excluded dispensationalists. And within their own tradition of interdenominational evangelicalism, conservative militants undermined the intellectual prestige of dispensationalism by saturating the media with anti-intellectual rhetoric. Yet in 1880, this outcome was not foreseen. Dispensational clergy and evangelists perceived themselves to represent mainstream, orthodox Christianity. In the Bible and prophecy conferences they sought to create intellectual consensus concerning methods of biblical interpretation and stimulate newly re-professionalized networks of clerical biblical scholars.

As they found their authority increasingly contested, dispensationalist strategies to preserve or re-gain prestige became more complex. Vying for influence, they created their own movement with its own forms of validation, including institutions such as interdenominational Bible schools, which sought to reestablish clerical authority over religious knowledge production, particularly

and their progressive allies had already won this fight. In the process, they developed the definition of fundamentalism that Marsden has since transformed into scholarly consensus.” Hamilton, 3.

³⁹ It is difficult to assess such claims of popular appeal, and the picture changes depending on whether one focuses on theology, epistemology, cultural values, or institutional control. The difficulty was multiplied by the subsequent categorical conflation of northern denominational traditionalists and liberal theology, who would become identified in the later twentieth century as the mainline, while the denominationalists in the south would be lumped in with the interdenominationalists and characterized as fundamentalists.

regarding biblical interpretation. By and large, they avoided direct challenges from denominational conservatives. Despite regular and trenchant critiques of premillennialism from traditionalists such as Charles Hodge and J. Gresham Machen, dispensationalists maintained uneasy truces with most conservative theological authorities. Yet they bitterly resented the prestige that liberals and progressives found in universities—perhaps even more strongly than they disagreed with New Theology. Presbyterian minister James Brookes' early biographer captured the sense of indignation that dispensationalists felt about the claims of higher critics that their methods alone possessed scientific status: "This acknowledged champion of the Plain People's English Bible knew all that they did concerning the Bible in the original, and a great deal more, in numerous instances. ... he was fully equipped to battle with the destructive Biblical critics in their own camp. He saw through the pretensions of many alleged great textual scholars, and despised their lofty and exclusive assumption of sacred learning."⁴⁰ Dispensationalists believed their interpretive methods were more scientific than the speculative hypotheses of higher critics and deserved to be taken seriously. They did sometimes "militate" to preserve their intellectual authority, but their efforts, taken as a whole, are best characterized not as defensive and reactive agitation against threatening new theological developments, but as active and constructive intellectual and social work intended to create new, alternate forms of modernist methods for producing confident belief.

In developing their *own* modernist forms of biblical interpretation, dispensationalists relied on their own taxonomic methods. Methodologically they were not reacting against either traditional Common Sense or historicist higher criticism, but working with a system of ideas that unfolded according to its own logic and its own internal intellectual momentum. Yet in their efforts to achieve respectability and gain (or retain) intellectual authority in American mass culture, dispensationalists

⁴⁰ David Riddle Williams, *James Hall Brookes, a Memoir* (St. Louis: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1897), 164.

implicitly duplicated the institutional structures of higher education, and explicitly positioned themselves in opposition to higher criticism.

Breaking apart dispensationalism from fundamentalism is a central concern of this work. The groups lumped together by historians to make up the category of fundamentalism seem to have more to do with the theological agendas of early modernist interpreters like Shirley Jackson Case—who sought to collect and dismiss all of the theological positions he disagreed with—than the realities of historical confluences. Moreover, many denominational traditionalists who were often tarred with the same brush resisted both the label “fundamentalist” and the association with dispensationalists. For example, Princeton theologians and their Common Sense philosophy are usually considered along with dispensationalists and revivalists to constitute the core of American Protestant fundamentalism. But Princeton theologians and dispensationalists had relatively little to do with each other, socially or intellectually, and the former group routinely attacked or dismissed the beliefs of the latter.⁴¹

⁴¹ A long series of historians have identified dispensational method with Common Sense reasoning and Baconian methods. Since Ernest Sandeen’s seminal book *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, most scholars have seen the conservative academic theologians at Princeton Seminary as the “intellectual” wing of the fundamentalist movement, and the dispensationalists and revivalists (who were themselves separate groups) pedestrian thinkers who, when they reflected on epistemology or method at all, simply adopted Princetonian conservative views. Sandeen wrote: “It ought to be noticed that the effect of the Princeton doctrine of the Scriptures and the millenarian literalistic method of interpreting the Scriptures was very much the same. Both Princeton and the millenarians had staked their entire conception of Christianity upon a particular view of the Bible based ultimately upon eighteenth-century standards of rationality.” Sandeen, 131. George Marsden concurred, and elaborated on this: “To whatever degree dispensationalists consciously considered themselves Baconians (it is rare to find reflections on philosophical first principles), this closely describes the assumptions of virtually all of them. They were absolutely convinced that all they were doing was taking the hard facts of Scripture, carefully arranging and classifying them, and thus discovering the clear patterns which Scripture revealed.” Marsden, 56. Indeed, some early dispensationalists, such as A.T. Pierson, claimed to use such methods, writing: “I like Biblical theology that does not start with the superficial Aristotelian method of reason, that does not begin with a hypothesis, and then warp the facts and the philosophy to fit the crook of our dogma, but a Baconian system, which first gathers the teachings of the word of God, and then seeks to deduce some general law upon which the facts can be arranged.” A.T. Pierson, quoted in Marsden, 55. Both actors and interpreters of this drama seemed to concur that dispensationalism was built, to the extent it had intellectual foundations, on Common Sense cinder blocks. Yet even still, close attention to their work demonstrates that dispensational hermeneutics rested on principles that were far from Common Sense or Baconian induction. Princetonians thought meaning began with the “facts” of the Bible, so they endlessly wrung their hands over things like the “scientific” merits of the Genesis creation accounts, or the reality of miracles. Only if the facts were firm could induction prove reliable. But dispensationalists believed biblical meaning rested not in facts, but in *relations*. While they felt it was important for the Bible to be trustworthy, and thus the Genesis accounts be considered factual, their teaching rarely focused on such issues. What was important about the Genesis accounts was not what they told us about the physical origins of the world, but how they presaged (in literary types,

Likewise, dispensational leaders played little role in the key events usually described as the beginnings of fundamentalist movement, such as the heresy trials and denominational splits in the early twentieth century, or the Scopes trial and subsequent legal battles concerning evolution. Dispensationalist leaders and thinkers existed in overlapping, but not coterminous, networks with other types of conservative Protestants at this time. Lumping them all together distorts the picture in unhelpful ways. By assuming a coherent set of interests characterized as “fundamentalism,” scholars often conflate separate networks and impulses.

Dispensationalism was not a socially or intellectually conservative movement characterized by anti-modernist agitation, but a constellation of modernist epistemic assumptions concerned with the production of confidence in the face of taxonomic modernity. To be sure, dispensationalism grew up in the same soil as more classic fundamentalists (in the interdenominational evangelical networks), and the chief concerns of both groups overlapped: personal evangelism and holiness. Yet fundamentalists, as normally defined, had distinctive beliefs about the negative aspects of modern culture. Dispensationalists, in mind if not fully in heart, were modernist. To avoid interpretive confusion, I avoid using the term ‘fundamentalism’.

numerics, imagery, and tropes) the New Testament story of re-creation and redemption. Routinely failing to see this as a distinct intellectual approach to the Bible, religious historians have repeated lumped the dispensationalists in with Princetonians, a companionship that neither group felt comfortable with. Mark Noll, in an introduction to a primary source collection, noted just how implausible it was that Princeton theologians were considered among the fundamentalists. Citing differences in style, social class and educational background, theological traditions, and academic aspirations, he noted: “Considered historically, it is more than a little strange to position the theologians of old Princeton Seminary among the fundamentalists.” Yet Noll quickly dismisses his own analysis here to claim: “Still, in spite of these manifest differences, the theologians of Princeton Seminary became full partners in the fundamentalist movement.” Mark Noll, ed. *The Princeton Defense of Plenary Verbal Inspiration* (New York: Garland, 1988), i, ii. It seems a strange reversal, the conjoining of these groups does not make enough sense to warrant ignoring all their manifest differences.

Significance

The need for a historical study of dispensationalism is great. Existing scholarship on this subject emphasizes a narrow range of theological beliefs and categories, largely ignoring the roles of popular culture and the influence of scientific methods and rhetoric. No substantive work has examined the rise of dispensationalism as a product of technological reason, or attempted to describe it as a modernist worldview. Despite the influence of C.I. Scofield and the popularity of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, no extended academic treatment of either one exists. In tracing these historical origins and networks, I hope my work will contribute to several different conversations. For the study of American Protestant fundamentalism, retelling the history of dispensationalism provokes a significant revision of the dominant definitions, categories, and conceptual metaphors. Alongside emerging scholarship on religion and regionalism, economics, sexuality, and gender, my work suggests that present descriptions of a stable and coherent American fundamentalist movement are largely a historiographic fiction. Within academic conversations about science and religion or religion and politics, this work contributes to a growing body of scholarship that seeks to replace “conflict” models of engagement with others more complex or nuanced. Moreover, I hope my work will advance conversations about the methods that twentieth-century Americans have used to create confidence in religious ideas, and particularly the role of scientific rhetoric in this confidence-making. Better understanding this tradition and its specific methods of constructing certainty can help us understand more about the nature of contemporary American and global religious groups and their multifaceted encounters with modernity.

Chapter summaries and arguments

Chapter one describes the origins of dispensational modernism in the rise of technological values in American mass culture. It narrates the development of the taxonomic mind in North

America between 1870 and 1920: a popular mania for quantification, precise measurement, classification, and ‘scientific’ explanations. Tracing these changes largely through the Sunday school movement—perhaps the largest lay-led religious movement in the United States—I examine conservative Protestant responses to social modernization, the emergence of popular numeracy, and the widespread deployment of new technologies of classification. Taxonomic thinking and became so embedded in American intellectual life that its assumptions about knowledge became unconscious. Yet to explain the emergence of dispensational modernism, and its growth and popularity, one must first examine these fundamental assumptions about the order of the world and the methodological means for confident knowing.

Chapter two narrows the focus to examine the specific social, institutional, and personal networks that nurtured and promoted the early premillennial movement—such as the Niagara Bible Conferences—amidst a framework of growing institutional and cultural specialization and professionalization. Despite being one of the earliest groups to professionalize in the United States, clergy found their intellectual authority and cultural status fading in these waves of institutional change at the end of the nineteenth century. Challenges from elite universities and the emerging discipline of biblical studies challenged the intellectual rights of clergy to interpret the Bible professionally and authoritatively. To fortify their professional position, clergy developed new networks and institutions—journals and conferences and publishing houses and educational projects—to occupy the middle ground between populist reach and specialist research. The Bible conference movement illustrated how clergy attempted to form competing professional networks and navigate the tensions between elite prestige and effective demagoguery. Not merely an embattled minority issue, premillennialism stood at the heart of the intellectual positions staked out by clergy in this movement. While the bulk of the Bible conference movement became fully populist by 1910, dispensationalists attempted to preserve and rebuild mainstream professionalized

clerical networks—with both cultural status and popular reach—that could compete with specialized academic authority.

Chapter three examines dispensational hermeneutics of texts, and is divided into three large sections. The first describes the context of competing ideas of scientific interpretations of the Bible in the nineteenth century, the second highlights some of the popular ideas about hermeneutics, and the third attempts to show the essential elements of dispensational hermeneutics. Historiography of fundamentalism describe attitudes toward the Bible as conservative re-statements of common sense inductive method, concerned with literal meanings, and formulated as a militant refutation of biblical higher criticism. Chapter three seeks to remap this territory, arguing that dispensational method was developed as a technological version of modern hermeneutics, one that rejected historicism and asserted that textual meaning emerged through inter-textual referentiality.

Chapter four examines the development of dispensational ideas about the nature of time in late-nineteenth-century America. I trace three major streams of influence: the disjunctive effects of war and social turmoil in late-nineteenth-century America, concepts of time that previous forms of millennialism bequeathed, and popular implications of both science and technology. From these various streams, dispensationalists developed corresponding understandings of time as disjunctive yet progressive, divinely ordered, and divided into dispensations. Moreover, in increasingly disputatious exchanges with modernist thinkers they defined time over and against notions of gradual, continuous, naturalistic progress, insisting instead that the meaning of time came from without, through divinely initiated ruptures in the temporal order.

Chapter five examines the temporal ramifications of dispensational ideas about time and texts. Applying a taxonomic model to understanding time, dispensationalists proposed a prophetically divided past, an ambiguously evaluated present (yet with clear implications for present

behavior), and an opaquely predictable future. Dispensationalists engineered interpretations of past, present, and future in order to construct meaningful narratives, both of individual lives and the grand sweep of history.

The final chapter serves as a summary and restates the main arguments of the dissertation. It offers an account of how dispensational ideas were codified in print, specifically in the *Scofield Reference Bible*—the best-selling reference Bible in American history—and the dispensational charts of Clarence Larkin—some of the most widespread prophetic charts in America. It suggests some reasons for the popularity and spread of these dispensational tools in the twentieth century.

1. Taxonomic Minds

1.1 Newer, bigger stuff

Philadelphia merchant John Wanamaker was big stuff. Physiognomically. During his stint as United State Postmaster General, 1889 to 1893, his “chubby face uncannily resembling that of a cherub” made him a common subject of satire and caricature in magazines like *Puck* and *Judge*.¹ Even beyond appearances, Wanamaker's influence on American culture was weighty, particularly through his innovations in retailing and advertising. The store Wanamaker opened in 1876 held the distinction of being the first modern department store. Wanamaker's new-fangled policies of fixed prices, guaranteed returns, and exemplary service transformed the way merchants and middle-class consumers imagined their interactions. Wanamaker did as much as anyone to revise American expectations of prosperity and the good life. His aggressive advertising ideas were widely copied, and his ambitious practices of buying, displaying, and marketing imported goods and clothing made him one of the most important figures for establishing middle-class fashion. Strategies for training and retaining employees proved equally innovative, and at one point he boasted that the roof of his Philadelphia store featured the world's largest outdoor gymnasium for employees' use and recreation. All of these contributions to the modern theory and practice of consumer culture suggest that Wanamaker's cherubic cheeks belong on any potential Mount Rushmore of retailers.²

¹ Roger A. Fischer, ““Holy” John Wanamaker: Color Cartoon Centerfold,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 115:4 (Oct. 1991), 454.

² Historian William Leach offered a rich description of the new cultural configuration that Wanamaker helped produce: “In the decades following the Civil War, American capitalism began to produce a distinct culture, unconnected to traditional family or community values, to religion in any conventional sense, or to political democracy. It was a secular business and market-oriented culture, with the exchange and circulation of money and goods at the foundation of its aesthetic life and of its moral sensibility. ... The cardinal features of this culture were acquisition and consumption as the means of achieving happiness; the cult of the new; the democratization of desire; and money value as the predominant measure of all value in society.” William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 3.

Yet Wanamaker's chief passion was not retailing, but religion.³ He launched his career in Christian work while still in his teens. In 1857, Philadelphia linen merchant George H. Stewart started a branch of the Young Men's Christian Association, only the fourth YMCA chapter in North America. Needing organizational help, Stewart appointed his nineteen-year-old store clerk as secretary. In his first year Wanamaker helped raise YMCA membership from 57 to more than 2,000. Ever loyal, Wanamaker remained involved in local and national YMCA work until his death in 1922, serving as president of the organization from 1870 to 1883.⁴

Whatever enthusiasm Wanamaker showed for YMCA work he doubled in his commitment to Sunday school projects. Never progressing beyond grade school, Wanamaker often said that his most important education came from his childhood Sunday school. He hoped to pass on the experience. In February 1858, Wanamaker began canvassing the poor Schuylkill River district of Philadelphia, looking for children to attend his Sunday services. His first meetings were interrupted by local hoodlums, but after securing protection from volunteer firemen, Wanamaker's Sunday school meetings quickly grew. By July of the same year space considerations forced him to move services into a giant outdoor tent; more than 300 children attended the first opening service. By October Wanamaker felt sufficiently established—or just ambitious—to begin a subscription service among the local families for a building fund. Continuing the same improbable trajectory, the Bethany Sunday School grew and prospered, becoming the largest Sunday school in America. One biographer noted: “In business and Sunday-school work alike Wanamaker possessed the talent of developing on a grandiose scale, of doing everything in a big way, of making what he created

³ Late in his life Wanamaker compared his experience in his Bethany Sunday school with his retailing work: “Those Bethany Sundays are precious pearls making up the necklace of years. ... Why people think my Bethany work is either virtue or pose I cannot imagine. I have just always liked it. And there isn’t anything else, not business certainly, that I have just always liked and have gotten always satisfaction and blessing, not worry, out of.” Quoted in Herbert Adams Gibbons, *John Wanamaker* Vol. 1 (Port Washington, KY: Kennikat Press, 1926), 51.

⁴ Marion L. Bell, *Crusade in the City: Revivalism in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1977), 180.)

attractive.”⁵ As his Bethany children grew up, the Sunday school grew into a full-fledged church that became one of the most important religious centers in Philadelphia.

Figure 1: John Wanamaker’s Philadelphia buildings.

Both the Bethany Church and the Wanamaker Department Store became Philadelphia landmarks, visible here in early commemorative postcards.

Wanamaker's success in establishing the Bethany Sunday school revealed new forces at work in the institutional development of American Protestantism. Wanamaker brought market techniques to bear on his religious projects. Sunday school marketing offered a prime example. A meticulous record keeper, Wanamaker's financial statement for Bethany Sunday school in October, 1858, included the following items: “Advertising, June 24 to October 6--\$17.81. Posters and handbills--\$6.25.”⁶ Out of a total budget of less than \$70, Wanamaker devoted more than twenty-five percent to marketing. Recognizing religious services faced competition, Wanamaker put no great store in dreary theology or morose hymns, and he pioneered the use of innovative and upbeat church music, accompanied by as many instrumentalists as he could find or train. In the first nine months of Bethany's existence he established the basic philosophy of both his religious

⁵ Gibbons, 190.

⁶ Ibid., 54.

and commercial enterprises: advertising produced the desire that attracted customers, exceptional service produced the happiness that retained them.

Argument

Wanamaker demonstrated the porousness of the boundaries between mass culture and religious culture in the late-nineteenth century.⁷ Values and methods moved fluidly from one sphere to another, leading to innovation in each. While the influx of modernist values into liberal Protestantism has been well recognized in historical literature, the process by which conservative Protestants drank at cultural wells has been less well documented. This chapter examines some of the processes by which engineering values in popular culture were adopted by American Protestants. Although such values entered religious thinking in many places, this chapter focuses on the Sunday school movement, both because this was an important location for cultural osmosis, and because it proves to be a useful place to illustrate broader movements of cultural change and religious adaptation. The story of the origins of dispensational modernism began not with grumpy Irish clerics, but with the remaking of technological values in American mass culture. Wanamaker played a small direct role in the development of dispensationalism in America, hiring several of D.L. Moody's premillennialist lieutenants as pastors for Bethany church. Yet more significantly, he illustrates the origins and trajectory of dispensational thinking. Dispensationalism was not born fully formed, but developed and grew as engineering values crawled out of the primeval swamp of popular culture and began swinging from the vines of conservative Protestantism. To understand its

⁷ Here I follow the description of the category offered by David Morgan: "By mass culture I mean a sociocultural system of producing and consuming uniformly manufactured commodities in markets that do not require the producer to know or encounter the consumer in a face-to-face manner." David Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 16. This category of mass culture is one way of talking about a phenomenon that is general in American culture without being representative. Certainly not everyone—perhaps not even most people—participated in American mass culture, and its practices and artifacts were determined for the most part by the interests of white, male, affluent citizens. Yet this concept provides a way to talk about systems that at least attempted to represent some common values and desires in American culture. I use the term popular culture more or less synonymously with mass culture.

rise and spread, one must first recognize how the DNA of dispensationalism was technological and taxonomic modernism, and the DNA of modernism was its fixation with method.

1.2 Sunday school organization

Bethany offered a novel approach to Sunday school in the mid-nineteenth century. To be sure, religious education of children had always been a part of American Protestant practice. While many earlier efforts sought to teach poor children basic literacy, by 1830 the focus had shifted primarily to moral instruction. Along with changes in focus, the movement also featured ever-increasing institutionalization. The American Sunday School Union was founded in 1824 and quickly took the lead in directing interdenominational efforts at creating and improving Sunday schools. By the 1850s, when Wanamaker began his Sunday school in Philadelphia, the American Sunday School Union was organizing a full slate of conferences, gathering national statistics, and publishing advice and instructions.

Despite an early lack of centralization and highly differentiated institutional forms, strong commonality of instructional methods existed among Sunday Schools. Before 1850, the use of recitation was so prominent that Sunday school leader (and movement historian) Edwin Wilbur Rice dubbed the first half of the nineteenth century “the Memorizing Era.” Students spent their time learning by rote creeds, hymns, and denominational catechisms. But mostly Bible verses. The Bible was at the center of mid-century Protestant life, and as the century went on, it became increasingly central for Sunday school work as well.⁸ The shared assumption was the Bible was

⁸ Rice contrasted this Bible-centered pedagogy with earlier forms of catechism, describing “the fundamental principle of the modern Sunday-school movement, namely, “basing all lessons directly upon the Bible, and sending the teachers and the scholars to that volume rather than to creeds and man-made statements of the truths of the word of God.”“ Edwin Wilbur Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement and the American Sunday-School Union* (Philadelphia: The American Sunday-School Union, 1917), 102.

digestible even for little children, and that exposure to the plain words of scripture would provide students with the insights necessary to understand and embrace Christian principles.

It is no surprise that the Bible took pride of place in nineteenth-century Sunday schools, or that Sunday schools would prove some of the fastest growing institutions of the era. The Sunday school movement was built on common impulses among American Protestants, particularly republicanism, anti-clericalism, Common Sense reasoning, and an overwhelming reverence for the Bible, plainly understood.⁹ Sunday school classes were generally taught by lay people, and most of the administrators, superintendents, and national leaders were similarly not men of the cloth, an amenable situation in a culture suspicious of elites and clerical power. Sunday schools across the country reflected these ideas of authority, as common people expressed their religious values by teaching commonly understood doctrine to common children. Newly empowered lay leadership grounded their authority in the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*—the Bible alone—but refigured through nineteenth-century common sense reasoning. In practice this resulted in an explosion of popular interpreters of the Bible, whose success popularizing their views was often attributable to charisma and an ability to apply the biblical text to whatever task lay at hand.

The keyword for most mid-nineteenth-century use of the Bible was “reasonableness.”¹⁰ Ideas warranted merit because they met the standards of popular reasonableness. Hermeneutical and pedagogical methods were largely notable by their absence; thinkers did not need to do anything fancy to translate common sense experience into knowledge, or the plain language of the

⁹ Historian Nathan Hatch described these democratic impulse that motivated this movement as part of a larger a crisis of religious authority: “This stringent populist challenge to the religious establishment included violent anticlericalism, a flaunting of conventional religious deportment, a disdain for the wrangling of theologians, an assault on tradition, and an assertion that common people were more sensitive than elites to the ways of the divine.” Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 22. A fuller discussion of Common Sense realism in American Protestantism follows in chapter 3.

¹⁰ Hatch described this impulse as this “the assertion that private judgment should be the ultimate tribunal in religious matters.” Hatch, *Democratization*, 182. Similarly, Marsden described it as a “broader philosophical assumption of the perspicuity of truth.” George Marsden, “Everyone One’s Own Interpreter? The Bible, Science, and Authority in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America,” in *The Bible in America*, ed. by Nathan Hatch and Mark Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 80.

Bible into religious teaching. By extension, most of the era's Protestants were comfortable with untrained lay persons teaching their children from widespread and "common" understandings of the Bible.

Plain reasonableness was the approach espoused by evangelists working among the urban poor and lower middle classes, particularly with children. After midcentury large Sunday schools started flourishing in many American cities. In 1858—the same year as Wanamaker began his Bethany Sunday school—a young Chicago shoe salesman named Dwight L. Moody began his own Sunday school program, recruiting students by chasing down urchins in the shabby streets of Chicago.

Figure 2: Moody's pupils.

Moody (center), seen here with sponsor John Farwell and a "bodyguard" of street urchins, was not above a bit of theater. Beyond chasing down potential pupils, he also would ride a donkey down the streets of Chicago, making a preposterous spectacle but drawing attention to his work. Photo credit: Bruce J. Evensen, *God's Man for the Gilded Age: D. L. Moody and the Rise of Modern Mass Evangelism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 127.

Similarities between Moody's evangelistic project and Wanamaker's abounded. Moody's Sunday school saw astronomical growth, reaching several hundred children within a few years.¹¹ Moody's North Market Hall School was an unruly place, quickly growing into the largest institution of its kind in Chicago and becoming a well-known tourist attraction. North Market Hall relied on lay teachers and a curriculum based solely on the Bible. As Moody's son described the early years: "It was before the day of the International Lessons... and scholars and teachers had but one text-book, the Bible, and denominational lines were not recognized."¹² Both Moody and Wanamaker's work illustrate how large, urban, interdenominational, lay led, Bible-based Sunday school programs became a major feature of religious life in the latter half of the nineteenth-century.

Yet as the nineteenth-century wore on, a proliferation of new Sunday school publications began to reveal growing uncertainty about the prospects of the Bible-only curricula. Where churches once supplied pupils of all ages with a King James Bible, now they began investing in many other sorts of Sunday school material. Producing Sunday school literature—study guides, lesson plans, review questions, maps, Bible dictionaries, and more—became a burgeoning business. The American Sunday School Union saw sales from their publication arm grow from \$10,000 in 1826 to \$235,000 in 1860.¹³ Some denominations, such as the Baptists and Methodists, launched their own Sunday school publishing empires. The growth of both denominational and trans-denominational materials among evangelical churches suggested that their faith in their untrained

¹¹ By 1862, when the YMCA took over management from Moody, the Sunday school had 450 regular attendees. By 1865 that number had risen to 750. James Findlay, *Dwight L. Moody* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 106.

¹² William Revell Moody, *The Life of Dwight L. Moody* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1900), 58.

¹³ Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 85. In addition to producing its own material, the ASSU served as a clearing-house for other publishers. Large private sources—included David C. Cook, a Moody associate who claimed to have published the first systematized Sunday school lessons—perhaps rivaled these numbers.

lay teachers' perspicuity to interpret the Bible was not as ironclad as their rhetoric of "the Bible alone" suggested.

John Wanamaker, attuned to market conditions in religious contexts as well as commercial ones, anticipated the trend. In 1871 he purchased from the American Sunday School Union a floundering publication named *The Sunday School Times*. Although founded in 1858, *The Sunday School Times* had never gained much attention. Wanamaker intended to change that. He established a new publishing business—the Times Printing House—to publish the magazine. (And to help his new venture get off the ground, he began sending the Times Printing House all the ad printing business from his John Wanamaker's department stores.) In 1875 Wanamaker hired longtime national Sunday school leader Henry Clay Trumbull as editor, along with a business manager, John D. Wattles. With sound financial footing, a keen understanding of advertising, and two well-qualified leaders, the *Sunday School Times* prospered. Not intending to make a profit from the enterprise, Wanamaker soon sold the business to Trumbull and Wattles in 1877. By 1896, circulation for the *Sunday School Times* had risen to 156,038, making it the second most popular religious periodical in the United States, narrowly behind *The Christian Herald's* 167,000 subscribers.¹⁴

With this wide audience, editor Henry Clay Trumbull became one of the most important leaders of the nineteenth-century Sunday school movement, and in American religious life. A Civil War chaplain and a longtime Sunday school worker, Trumbull seems nevertheless a strange fit for his chosen profession. His close associate Edwin Wilbur Rice described him as "fiery in temperament, imperious in manner, alert in mind, acute in judgment, and working at a high tension... proud to be counted a Puritan of Puritans."¹⁵ Trumbull's dedication to his work made a striking impression. Some years after his death, Wanamaker eulogized: "From the first day he

¹⁴ *N. W. Ayer & Son's American Newspaper Annual* (Philadelphia: N. W. Ayer & Son, 1896), 1258.

¹⁵ Rice, *Sunday-School Movement*, 183.

came to Philadelphia... H. Clay Trumbull walked among men with a face that shone with a great purpose; and when he gave his message there were those who felt that it thundered. The Sunday School Times burned into a Sanctuary. It became God's Finishing House for the Sunday-school teachers of the world."¹⁶ Trumbull intended to make it a "Finishing House" with national reach and prestige. Over the years Trumbull secured and printed statements about the value of Sunday schools from Presidents Ulysses S. Grant, Rutherford B. Hayes, William McKinley, and Theodore Roosevelt, revealing his lofty ambitions for both the magazine and the movement.

This was, perhaps, not the portrait of a man who would be drawn to the gauziness of children. And children were increasingly being understood in terms of tender vagaries. Unlike colonial era perceptions of children as little adults with economic responsibilities, Victorian sentimentalism represented childhood as a period of labor-free idyllic innocence. Childhood development arose as a necessary process that turned economically useless little dreamers into productive, responsible adults. Understanding childhood in terms of stages was itself a novel development; evidence of these new ideas include the American Medical Association's approval of pediatrics as a discipline in 1880, or the coining of the term 'adolescence' in 1904. Caught in the wake of these changing conceptions of childhood, Trumbull sought to understand, map, and order the process by which children moved through the various stages of development.

¹⁶ John Wanamaker, "A Burning Lamp Lit Fifty Years Ago," *The Sunday School Times* 51:1 (Jan. 2, 1909), 5. Wanamaker's prose in this article was certainly not sedated. He described how Trumbull "called to his side the ripest scholars and best known leaders of the age from both sides of the sea. ... He relighted the lamp of hope and courage in every State Sunday-school organization throughout the United States, and revived and aided in reconstructing the International interdenominational Sunday-school work up on its broad and practical basis. A sacred spell was on his life that was felt in every circle in which he moved." Ibid.

Figure 3: Henry Clay Trumbull

Trumbull's face presumably shone with purpose behind the fully developed beard.

Even with Trumbull's thundering success, Wanamaker was not content to stay out of the religious publications market. In 1876 he started a second Sunday school publication called *The Scholar's Quarterly*. As his biographer described, "This marked a new era in scholar's helps... which affected all Protestant Sunday schools between 1876 and 1880. *The Scholar's Quarterly* contained Wanamaker's idea of what he wanted his Bethany children to have—a book with the lessons for thirteen weeks, review exercises, order of service, a map, and a Bible dictionary of places and glossary of unusual words."¹⁷ Wanamaker's involvement reached beyond the bankroll; for the first two years of its life Wanamaker prepared most of the material for *The Scholar's Quarterly* himself.¹⁸

¹⁷ Gibbons, 193.

¹⁸ Wanamaker's publications were still a drop in the ocean of ink. Around this time the International Sunday School Union began publishing its "Uniform Lesson Series," which became the most widely adopted Sunday school lesson series and eventually supplanted most smaller schemes.

This proliferation of Sunday school material told volumes. In the 1850s the Bible was the only necessary text for leading a Sunday school, yet by the 1870s many more helps were needed. This perceived need for helps grated against the strong continued rhetoric of the Bible alone. Even for professionals it was unclear whether to view Sunday schools as a great democratic movement for Bible education, or as a scientific process of helping regulate the stages of childhood religious development, or both simultaneously. An untrained expositor, like a mere U.S. president, could not always figure out the balance. To coincide with the national centennial celebrations in Philadelphia, Trumbull solicited a note from President Ulysses S. Grant to lead off the front page of the June 17, 1876 edition of *The Sunday School Times*. “My advice to Sunday-schools,” Grant opined, “no matter what their denomination, is: Hold fast to the Bible as the sheet-anchor of your liberties... To the influence of this book are we indebted for all the progress made in true civilization, and to this we must look as our guide in the future.”¹⁹ Yet two pages later, an article by John S. Hart—founder and editor of the magazine from 1859 to 1871—suggested that Sunday schools’ methods must go beyond mere Biblicism and: “should be governed by the same general principles as those employed in other schools.”²⁰ Hart argued that Sunday schools should put behind them amateurism and embrace scientific educational theories. He suggested:

There should be intelligent classification of the scholars, not according to years or size, but according to intellectual capacity and development; classification of the school ... object-teaching for the very young, memorizer exercises, blackboard exercises, not acrostic gymnastics, but explanations addressed to the eye as the most certain method of reaching the understanding and the memory.²¹

By 1876 Hart, along with most national Sunday school leaders, believed that specialized methods and exercises were needed for pupils to approach the Bible effectively in Sunday school classes.

¹⁹ Ulysses S. Grant, *The Sunday School Times* (Jun 17, 1876), 385. Flush with his success, Trumbull remarked a few pages later: “No utterance of any President of the United States was ever worthier of eternal remembrance. Nor was ever surer of being remembered.” *Ibid.*, 392.

²⁰ John S. Hart, *The Sunday School Times* (Jun 17, 1876), 387.

²¹ *Ibid.*

President Grant's simple faith in the Bible was enmeshed in a thick web of theories, methods, exercises, teaching practices, and study helps.

Further demonstrating the professional commitment to an unstated—even perhaps unstatable—policy of “the Bible plus help” was the mass of supplementary materials on sale in every edition of *The Sunday School Times*. Alongside the advertisements for corsets and elastic belt buckles and burglar safes—examples of Wanamaker's enterprising solicitation of secular advertisements—were no fewer than 25 advertisements for companies or religious agencies selling review exercises, Sunday-school libraries, tracts, lesson leaves, hymnbooks and singing books (including one bearing the inspired title “Songs for the Wee Ones”), illustrated Bibles and other sundry resources for Sunday school educators. Just as significant were appeals to expertise. One such appeared in a short editorial in *The Sunday School Times* titled “Common-sense in Bible Study.” It began with a punchy refutation of the topic: “It is a violation of common-sense to attach undue importance to common-sense views.”²² The author continued: “we do not weight the common-sense views of an ignorant man concerning electrical phenomena against the knowledge of an expert electrician. “Common-sense” and special knowledge are of the same relative importance in Bible study as elsewhere.”²³ Reasonableness seemed less and less a product of *common* sense and more and more related to the faith put in the products of education and expertise.

1.3 Crises and social contexts

The surge of Sunday school publications made manifest underlying social dynamics. Standardization efforts came partially in response to the well-documented massive social changes that took place after the Civil War, and the anxieties produced by those changes. It started with the

²² “Common-sense in Bible Study,” *Sunday School Times* 38:48 (Nov. 28, 1896), 765.

²³ Ibid.

city. Huge Sunday schools like Wanamaker's only became possible with the growth of cities, and they responded to the disorientation that urban life created. The end of the nineteenth century saw the decline of the power, autonomy, and cultural power of what historian Robert Wiebe called the "island community."²⁴ While urbanization had been a fear of small communities for the better part of a century, in the stormy aftermath of the Civil War, hitherto powerful rural configurations of republican patriarchy, small-scale capitalism, and Victorian moralism began to crumble at an accelerated rate.²⁵ In its place came a new order of industrial capitalism, sweeping new immigration, messy urban politics, consumer culture, racial, ethnic, and class struggles, and the birth of huge technological systems such as electric and telephone grids.

These revolutions shocked comfortable Anglo-Protestant communities, and consequences led to both fragmentation and unification in American culture. Looking at demographic measures such as ethnicity, wealth, class, and politics, American culture became more diverse and contentious.²⁶ Yet by other measures—such as the rise of a middle class consumer culture and large-scale technological systems—a more unified national landscape emerged.²⁷ Historian James Turner described the dynamics of this change with respect to national consumption: "Especially with the advent of national chain stores, smaller towns grew more closely linked with the great metropolises. The huge mail-order houses brought home even to rural folk the new city-oriented civilization. The ideal of a single national pattern of life and set of values... came much closer to realization."²⁸

²⁴ Wiebe described: "The great casualty of America's turmoil late in the [nineteenth] century was the island community. Although a majority of Americans would still reside in relatively small, personal centers for several decades more, the society that had been premised upon the community's effective sovereignty, upon its capacity to manage affairs within its boundaries, no longer functioned. The precipitant of the crisis was a widespread loss of confidence in the powers of the community." Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967), 44.

²⁵ For an account of earlier cultural anxieties about the city, see Karen Haltunnen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

²⁶ See: Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon, The United States, 1877-1919* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987).

²⁷ A useful version of this interpretation is: William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993).

²⁸ James Turner, "Understanding the Populists," *Journal of American History* 67 (September 1980), 370.

Promoters of a national mass culture—men like John Wanamaker—had confidence that a unified set of values and technological solutions could cure the increasing fragmentation of society.²⁹ This new national culture abstracted values from white, Protestant, middle-class communities and marketed them as essential American ideals: the Good Life. National culture promised that ‘good’ Americans could improve their lives through more efficient production, consumption of material goods and services, and reliance on technology and technological systems. In turn, these technological and consumer solutions were themselves born from cultural experiences of overabundance, of wealth, time, knowledge and labor.³⁰

Yet despite the comforts of consumption and the rise of a more-unified national culture, a sense of crisis reached across the spectrum of American culture. From high to low, Americans lamented and fretted about the changes brought about by urbanization and industrialization. In his 1905 autobiography, *The Education of Henry Adams*, the scion of the ruling elite worried about how “man had translated himself into a new universe which had no common scale of measurement with the old.”³¹ The mechanical metaphor, “no common scale of measurement,” spoke both to

²⁹ One historical account that attempts to tackle the tensions between this increasing fragmentation and unification is Lawrence Levine’s *Highbrow/Lowbrow*. Levine argued that mass culture was just as interested in the production of systems of cultural unification as elite culture: “In an industrializing, urbanizing nation absorbing millions of immigrants from alien cultures and experiencing an almost incomprehensible degree of cultural change and spatial mobility, with anonymous institutions become ever larger ... the sense of anarchic change, of looming chaos, of fragmentation, which seemed to imperil the very basis of traditional order, was not confined to a handful of aristocrats. Indeed, the elites had more allies than they were ever comfortable with, for too many of the new industrialists as well as many members of the new middle classes, following the lead of the arbiters of culture promised both relief from impending disorder and an avenue to cultural legitimacy.” Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988). 176.

³⁰ Ronald Schleifer described the problem of abundance: “The crisis of the secular humanism of our Enlightenment inheritance - is a function, to a large degree, of its success in creating enormous abundances of wealth and knowledge, in dominating both nature and non-Western societies, in promoting as well as denying canons of equality and abstract conceptions of humanity, and in desacralizing quotidian and social experience.” Ronald Schleifer, *Modernism and Time* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), xi.

³¹ Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1918), 381. Although writing several decades later than many of the developments in this chapter, Henry Adams has become the gold standard for describing elite anxieties in the era. For example, Roger Lundin described: “For Adams the post-Darwinian discrediting of natural theology struck deep, and he was in the end unable to take solace, as James did, in experience. In *The Education of Henry Adams*, he mocked his own lifelong efforts to discern a pattern in history or experience. He believed the same technological forces that had shattered nature’s design had now laid ruin to history’s order.” Roger Lundin, *From Nature to Experience* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 86. Lawrence Levine similarly used

Adams' sense of the problem and its potential solution. Rural fears of the crises provoked by abundance were no less real, even as they became a source of amusement for those who more easily embraced change. The satirical magazine *Puck* harpooned rural anxieties about the city in an 1884 disquisition titled "Advice to Boys – From Various Standpoints":

Stick to the farm, and after working fifteen hours planting potatoes, and turning the grindstone an hour after supper, you can enjoy the ecstatic bliss of going home and, by the dim, uncertain light of a tallow-candle, or the fitful glare of a smoky oil-lamp, reading in your country paper that farmer Snales has put a new roof on his pig-pen, and Jonas Boggs has given his barn a new coat of paint. After absorbing a column or two of this sort of thrilling intelligence, you can turn to the advertisements and be made happy by discovering the announcements of four new patent-medicines. How much more elevating and instructive is it to spend an evening thus than to follow in the footsteps of the boy in a large city, who, perchance, witnesses a comic opera which knocks a nail or two out of his coffin, or attends a scientific lecture and learns a lot of nonsense about the sun being so far away that a railroad wouldn't reach it in a thousand years, or visits a free library and stocks his mind with the best thoughts of our leading writers!³²

The country boy who went to the city and found his values changed was a common stereotype of the era, attacked and romanticized in equal measures. Fear of social change was only outpaced by desire for the technological systems and methods that promised solutions to the crises of urbanization.

Technological systems—such as railroads, electricity, the telegraph, and large factories—had daedal consequences in this period. They produced crisis: large factories were Petri dishes for economic inequality, labor unrest, and ethnic tensions. They also popularized new forms of mass culture. At the same time, they offered solutions to the problems of the age, including the problems they created and problems no one previously knew existed. National advertisements for patent

Adams to illustrate social anxieties: "Everywhere in the society of the second half of the nineteenth century American culture was undergoing a process of fragmentation, which prompted Henry Adams and Henry James to issue their complaints about multiplicity. This multiplication, or fragmentation, was manifest in the rise of professionalization, which left the nation with a bewildering multiplicity of distinctive professional organizations that gave testimony to the increased specialization, complexity, and atomization of life." Levine, 207.

³² "Advice to Boys – From Various Standpoints," *Puck*, XVI:408 (Dec. 31, 1884), 276.

medicine, for example, used the rhetoric of science to convince people of the fragility of their own health and the possibility of their cure.³³ Technological systems also facilitated and perpetuated older forms of mass culture. Historian Ruth Schwartz Cowan captured this process of change, noting that: “The social ties that bound individuals and communities together... were being carried over, communicated through, and to some extent controlled by technological networks that were owned by large, monopolistically inclined corporations. ... And at the very same time, because of the very same processes people were becoming more dependent on each other.”³⁴ Whatever their impact, few escaped the reach of technological systems. As they became increasingly integrated in modern life, they were accompanied by an unwitting adoption of technology’s underlying values. For both rural and urban denizens, high and low culture, the end of the nineteenth century brought about a social, cultural, and intellectual crisis. Technology and its values were both the sickness and its cure together.

1.4 Engineering a new world

Out of this crisis, the end of the nineteenth century gave birth to a world of engineers. It was a world built by engineers—trains and tractors and electric streetlights and skyscrapers—but also a world built for engineers, as ever more instruments for measurement came into popular use— such as stopwatches and railroad schedules and measuring cups. Engineering impulses were venerated in

³³ One classic advertisement read: “science: Science is “knowing how.” The only secret about Scott’s Emulsion is years of science. ... This is why Scott’s Emulsion of cod-liver oil never separates, keeps sweet for years, and why every spoonful is equal to every other spoonful. An even product throughout.” “Advertisement,” *The Sunday School Times* 38:1 (Jan. 4, 1896), 2. Medicine was not the only commercial product peddled with science. Basic foods were served up with a healthy dollop of technological rhetoric as well, such as an ad that ran: “Scientific Food: That Relieves Patients Quickly. “My experience with food has been considerable. For twenty years I suffered with chronic indigestion and bowel complaint, which brought on general debility,” says a gentleman of Danville, Ill. ... “At last I went to the hospital, and while there began using Grape-Nuts, the physician giving me permission, and from that day I commenced to gain.... I can now eat anything in reason; I sleep well, and I have gained 22 pounds in flesh. Grape-Nuts food saved my life. It adds to the health and comfortable living, makes the mind clear, and prolongs life.” “Advertisement,” *The Sunday School Times* 44:45 (Nov. 8, 1902), 601.

³⁴ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *A Social History of American Technology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 171.

inventors like Thomas Edison and industrial systematizers like Frederick Winslow Taylor, and they became increasingly important among professional scientists as the intellectual descendants of Darwin began remapping understandings of the natural world. The growth in engineering was easily measurable. Census data showed the number of professional engineers rose from about 7,000 in 1880 to 136,000 in 1920.³⁵ There was a corresponding surge in the number of related training institutes, schools, and engineering programs. Historian of science Thomas Hughes suggested that this not only produced a new world based on technology, but changed everyday values in the process: “By 1900 [Americans] had reached the promised technological world, the world as artifact. In doing so they had acquired traits that have become characteristically American. A nation of machine makers and system builders, they became imbued with a drive for order, system, and control.”³⁶ The boom in professional engineering revealed not only changing industrial needs, but also the technological desires of the culture at large.

Beyond the reaches of professionals, the engineering mindset took hold in the everyday life of American people, and in their efforts to remap the human worlds of culture. In 1896, Fannie Farmer published her now-famous edition of the *Boston Cooking School Cookbook*, the first cookbook in America to use level measurements. Prior to this, following a recipe required prior mastery of the art of cooking, presumably learned in traditional households. By the turn of the twentieth century, though, this conception was giving way before a growing engineering spirit. Farmer’s cookbook relied on a different concept of the recipe: a set of precise textual rules that, read literally, promised cooks consistent and reproducible results. Farmer linked cooking and quantification with the popular desire for measurement, describing her cookbook as “condensed scientific knowledge which will lead to deeper thought and broader study of what to eat.”³⁷ Farmer

³⁵ Cowan, 140.

³⁶ Thomas Hughes, *American Genesis* (New York: Penguin, 1989), 1.

³⁷ Fannie Merritt Farmer, *The Boston Cooking School Cook Book* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1896), 1.

thought scientific explanations and technological processes should not be reserved for experts, but were an imperative part of new mass consumption. She wrote: “With the progress of knowledge the needs of the human body have not been forgotten. During the last decade much time has been given by scientists to the study of foods and their dietetic value, and ... the time is not far distant when a knowledge of the principles of diet will be an essential part of one’s education.”³⁸ Farmer was not alone in this belief, and her cookbook—and its scientific explanations—was widely adopted by hundreds of thousands of American households.³⁹ As cooks devoured Farmer’s instructions for making measurements, precise measurement itself became a product for popular consumption.

Fervor for engineering was initially cooked up in urban kettles, but served to all. Robert Wiebe saw even in rural venues that popular values tasted of “the regulative, hierarchical needs of urban-industrial life. Through rules with impersonal sanctions, it sought continuity and predictability in a world of endless change.”⁴⁰ Predictability and order—the promise of a recipe for new social configurations based on precise measurements—moved quickly from city to countryside, carried in part by new patterns of consumption. One of Wanamaker’s retailing innovations was to help make the commercial goods and services of urban life available to the rural population. Mail order retail, led by big names like Sears and Roebuck, Montgomery Ward, and Wanamaker’s, saturated the countryside. In a brief stint in politics, Wanamaker served as postmaster general of the United States from 1889 to 1893, and his chief initiative was to provide universal rural free delivery. Small shop owners in towns resisted this policy, as it meant that rural residents would not be forced to travel to towns to collect their mail (and presumably buy goods at the same time). But towns could no longer compete with the political clout of the cities. Consumption in urban and

³⁸ Farmer, 3.

³⁹ Farmer’s cookbook has been in print continuously since 1896, albeit regularly revised. By the time of the publication of the 1914 edition, the last revision that Farmer supervised, the book had sold more than 360,000 copies. By 1990, more than 4 million copies had sold. See: http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/cookbooks/html/books/book_48.cfm.

⁴⁰ Wiebe, xiv.

rural circles became more uniform, and became a marker of new mass culture and the technological systems that produced and enabled it.

Not only did patterns of consumption change, but also the means by which commercial transactions took place. John Wanamaker did as much as anyone to create this new commercial environment, cultivating a new relationship with customers built around numbers, newness, and the new technologies of advertising. Seemingly everywhere, Wanamaker was hip-deep in promoting and exploiting technological systems and processes. His 24 story department store could only be run with the help of hundreds of clerks, buyers, and bookkeepers with newly trained skills in quantitative sciences. His customer relations demanded an economic system that grew increasingly to trust in the power of numbers. The effectiveness of his advertising drew on the popularity of psychology as a means to describe and predict human motivations, and the belief that individual behavior was—in aggregate—predictable had widespread consequences. The hierarchical organization of the store into departments where buying and selling was based on particular forms of expertise was new. The very idea of a department store, where goods of different classes could be effectively purchased and sold relied on an increasingly sophisticated mechanism of classification. Wanamaker's innovations relied on his basic belief that retailing was not an organic, natural, or static process, but an enterprise that required the application of method, order, and technology to generate success.

All these particular practices were predicated on the widespread cultural adoption of engineering values, particularly: the social power of numbers and quantification, the ideal of efficiency, the centrality of measurement, and the popular embrace and transformation ideas about taxonomy—including order, hierarchy, and systematic distinction. Where many mid-nineteenth-century Americans thought scientific method to be more or less synonymous with egalitarian common sense, by the end of the century popular imagination held that scientific method

necessarily involved the application of engineering values or technological solutions. This increased complexity, counter-intuitively, generated even more popular faith in science as a method of knowing and doing things, as the masses demanded goods and services that only educated and trained elites could provide. Engineering values became the prime epistemic currency as Americans searched for new methods that could buttress their confidence in their knowledge.

Wanamaker brought many of his commercial practices with him into his Sunday school work. Protestant life in America was transformed by the emergence and adoption of technological systems and values. Historian William Leach offered a sweeping assessment of the changes brought about by commercial practices: “American religious institutions, and the spiritual climate transmitted by them, were transformed by the new mass economy and culture and aided in their creation. ... By 1900 mainstream Protestant denominations were beginning to bend and redefine their institutional missions in compliance with the new cultural perspective.”⁴¹ Always busy producing new forms of religious culture, in the late nineteenth century, many American Protestants structured their newest practices and institutions around the challenges and solutions that technology and engineering values offered.

1.4.1 Numbers and measurements

The most fundamental engineering value was quantification, grounded in basic numeracy. Numeracy grew steadily in usefulness and prestige over the course of the nineteenth century. Historian Patricia Cline Cohen narrated this advance of numeracy: “By the mid-nineteenth century the prestige of quantification was in the ascendant. Counting was presumed to advance knowledge, because knowledge was composed of facts and counting led to the most reliable and objective form

⁴¹ Leach, 10. For Leach, the key elements of the new commercial perspective were the commodification of desire and the “cult of the new.”

of fact there was, the hard number. ... Counting was an end in itself; it needed no further justification.”⁴² Like most intellectual developments, time elapsed between numeracy’s growth as a technical capability and its emergence as a cultural value. The growth of popular mathematical capacities in the early nineteenth century, along with the corresponding increases in public education, enabled the subsequent development of a new cultural faith in numbers.

Numbers were explicitly praised for their technical powers and practical applications. Implicitly, the power of numbers came from their ability to produce confidence in knowledge and in social relations. Trust in numbers became a vital form of social communication.⁴³ Historian Theodore Porter described the process by which quantification obviated the need for personal relationships in commercial interactions, by substituting more elaborate constructions that depersonalized social trust, instead grounding transactions in numerical processes, such as double-entry bookkeeping. In the earlier commercial relationships of a rural nation, customers may have trusted their local shopkeeper because of personal or indirect knowledge of their character. Yet cities made character-based commerce impossible, as urban residents were increasingly compelled to place their trust in generic corporations or unknown merchants. Yet as Porter noted, “Mechanical objectivity serves as an alternative to personal trust.”⁴⁴ In the absence of personal trust, numbers, quantification, and machines produced confidence in the honesty and fair dealings of merchants.⁴⁵ Consumers found safety in numbers.

⁴² Patricia Cline Cohen, *A Calculating People* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 205.

⁴³ Historian Theodore Porter helpfully suggested we “regard numbers, graphs, and formulas first of all as strategies of communication. They are intimately bound up with forms of community, and hence also with the social identity of the researchers.” Theodore Porter, *Trust in Numbers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), vii.

⁴⁴ Porter, 90.

⁴⁵ Porter offered this assessment: “reliance on numbers and quantitative manipulation minimizes the need for intimate knowledge and personal trust. Quantification is well suited for communication that goes beyond the boundaries of locality and community. A highly disciplined discourse helps to produce knowledge independent of the particular people who make it.” Porter, ix. Historian Mary Poovey argued a similar point: “In emphasizing system over observed particulars, both double-entry bookkeeping and mercantile accommodation elaborated what one might call the theoretical dimension of the modern fact. In implying that the internally coherent systems of writing and exchange constituted signs of honesty and virtue, these two mercantile instruments demonstrated that the idea of system could carry moral connotations whose

Wanamaker's career spanned these changes in American culture. Early on, Wanamaker's reputation as a devout Christian layman and the director of a well-known Sunday school helped attract customers whose confidence rested in the belief that such a man would not cheat his customers. However, as both the city and the business grew, personal reputation could not sustain the weight of public trust. Wanamaker instituted novel policies for generating customer trust, such as fixed prices and one of the first 'guaranteed return' policies in American business. Fixed prices eliminated the need for customers to trust that a particular salesperson would not swindle or out-bargain them, instead making the numerical price the absolute ground for every transaction. Guaranteed returns offered customers the confidence that Wanamaker's products and prices stood up against his competition. Recognizing that one of the chief impediments to building an enormous commercial institution was finding ways to give customers sufficient grounds for trust, Wanamaker invoked the power of numbers to produce social trust.⁴⁶

Once established, numbers produced confidence not just in retail transactions, but in the formation of basic knowledge. Tables of figures sprouted everywhere, and seemingly every argument relied on quantifiable facts. Measurement became the key source for new numbers. Americans could hardly swing a stick through late-nineteenth century popular culture without encountering extensive evidence of quantification. Even stick swinging became an object of

effects exceeded the referential function of mercantile writing, because one of those effects was the establishment of creditworthiness itself." Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), xvi.

⁴⁶ Additionally, Wanamaker found this cultural power of numbers essential as he began to expand his reach through mail-order catalogs. Customers in distant places had no reason to trust that Wanamaker would ship them goods in satisfactory condition, or fulfill their purchase at all, and unlike dealing with local merchants, they had little means for recourse if things went awry. Distance offered a second challenge, and as Porter suggested: "quantification is technology of distance ... It exacts a severe discipline from its users, a discipline that is very nearly uniform over most of the globe." Porter, ix. This discipline was most taxing on its most ardent promoters. In return for customers' new forms of trust grounded in quantitative realities, companies were forced into the strict disciplines demanded by the modern applications of numbers, particularly bookkeeping. Demands grew for a new class of educated employees. Public schools, colleges, and training institutes were all pressed into service providing a new labor force for the new demands of an economy that placed trust in the power of numbers, and many businesses, including Wanamaker's, began in-house training programs to satisfy their voracious appetite for skilled calculators.

quantification at the turn of the twentieth century, as the American national pastime of baseball found itself increasingly described through numbers: box scores, earned run averages, batting averages, and other statistical means for quantifying entertainment all blossomed at the end of the nineteenth century.

Alongside a steady diet of numbers, precise measurement sated the thirsts of a generation drunk on engineering values. In her cookbook, Fannie Farmer emphasized that the most important operation of cooking method was measurement. Precise use of heat and moisture, proportions, and ingredients were vital to predicable cooking success. In a section titled “How to Measure,” Farmer wrote: “Correct measurements are absolutely necessary to insure the best results. Good judgment, with experience, has taught some to measure by sight; but the majority need definite guides.”⁴⁷

1. Measuring-cup divided in thirds, with tablespoon, illustrating the measuring of dry ingredients.
2. Measuring-cup divided in quarters, with teaspoon one-half full of dry ingredients.

Figure 4: Measuring cups.

An essential tool for any home cook, Fannie Farmer offered illustrations and instructions on how to incorporate precise measurement into the age-old process of cooking. Farmer, 28.

⁴⁷ Farmer, 25

Some Americans seemed inclined to think that anything that could be measured was worthy of the name science. One of the most revealing developments of the period was the brief fashionable reign of anthropometry. An 1888 article in *Science* magazine described anthropometry as: “The systematic measurement of the several parts of the human body, together with the testing of their functions.”⁴⁸ The direct payoff from all of this measuring was not always clear, but it still promised great things: “The results of such measurements, when widely taken and ably compared, will be to practical biology and hygiene what statistics, in the present use of the term, are to economical science, – the experimental basis of their practical application.”⁴⁹ An anthropometry laboratory was first proposed by Francis Galton, a British intellectual jack-of-all-trades and a half-cousin of Charles Darwin. Galton made scientific contributions in biology, statistics, and meteorology, as well as inventing and popularizing the term ‘eugenics’ and much of the scientific field surrounding it. Galton hoped that extensive anthropometric data would help police correctly identify criminals, but he also sought pure data as an exercise in human classification. Precise measurements, even without clear useful purpose, proved seductive to many of the scientific minds of the generation, and in mass culture, every mind was a scientific mind.

⁴⁸ “The Growth of Children,” *Science* Vol. 11, No. 259 (Jan. 20, 1888), 28.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Figure 5: Anthropometrical measurements.

Galton became one of the pioneers of anthropometry, although the field was first proposed by Alphonse Bertillon in 1883. Above is part of a diagram from Bertillon showing the science of anthropometry. Alphonse Bertillon, “Releve du Signalement Anthropometrique.”

1.4.2 Efficiency

In the field of industrial engineering, devotion to precise measurement reached new heights. But as industrial engineering illustrates, measurement was valued not only for its own sake, but because it supported an even greater good. Efficiency became the mantra of a generation of engineering-minded reformers who sought to apply the principles of scientific management to improve productivity in the factory, in the home, and in the Sunday school.

Industrial engineering was the product of a new generation of school-trained (instead of shop-trained) managers, who embraced a Progressive Era ideology of efficiency. While shop-trained managers valued tradesmen mentors and an older system of craftsmanship, new engineering managers assumed relevant skills could best be learned in classrooms, from instructors and blueprints. In 1883, a young mechanical engineer named Frederick Winslow Taylor graduated from the Stevens Institute of Technology, and the following year became the chief engineer of the

Midvale Steel Works. In his relatively brief career Taylor caused a giant ruckus among American industry. Taylor believed that the chief problem for American business was inefficiency, and he wrote: “the remedy for this inefficiency lies in systematic management... The best management is a true science, resting upon clearly defined laws, rules, and principles, as a foundation.”⁵⁰ Eventually Taylor’s new science of efficiency promised to transform all of economic and social life.

Although often credited as the father of scientific management, Taylor’s ideas are best understood as the crystallization of deeply rooted cultural inclinations. Historian David Montgomery noted Taylor’s absorption of, and influence on, American culture, illustrated in the way his: “admonitions to employers on ways to make their workshops more “efficient” drew heavily on the reform rhetoric of the Progressive Era and also contributed important themes to that rhetoric.”⁵¹ Because of these synergies, principles of scientific management outperformed competing management styles in the first decades of the twentieth century, inaugurating a new era in American business theory. Scientific management demonstrated that old-fashioned business practices—such as oversight by traditionally trained master craftsmen—were less efficient and profitable than business processes designed by new professionally trained engineers.

Taylor mass-produced imitators and disciples. Two of the most important were Lillian and Frank Gilbreth, whose work on time studies popularized scientific management theories in settings beyond just industry. Frank Gilbreth described the animating spirit of their work: “It is the aim of Scientific Management to induce men to act as nearly like machines as possible, so far as doing the work in the one best way that has been discovered is concerned.”⁵² The two primary tools of the

⁵⁰ Frederick Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1911), 7.

⁵¹ David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 179. Carroll Pursell made a similar argument, noting that for Taylor’s scientific management, the “wide appeal during and after his lifetime was due in large measure to its reinforcement of a national inclination to try and solve social problems through technical means.” Carroll Pursell, *The Machine in America: A Social History of Technology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 210.

⁵² Frank B. Gilbreth, *Primer of Scientific Management* (New York: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1914), 103.

Gilbreths were the stopwatch—used for quantifying time precisely—and the scientific diagram—used to disseminate the technical knowledge gleaned through observation, measurement, and analysis. Time studies measured the motions of a master craftsman to record and break them down into the smallest possible elements. These were then diagramed, analyzed, and published so that other workers could imitate the “one best way” of doing a task and thus maximize their efficiency. In industrial contexts, the elevation of efficiency above all other goals was accompanied by the elevation of the engineer and engineering practices over the traditional authorities of trade guilds and masters.

Interest in scientific management did not end at the factory door. Drawing deeply on the rhetoric of efficiency and promising engineered solutions to the problems of time management, they found welcome in many areas of mass culture. In the early twentieth century, some homemakers adopted the tools of precise measurement and careful charting to improve the efficiency and quality of their labor. Lillian Gilbreth helped pioneer the migration of time studies from the shop floor to the kitchen counter. The title of one of her many books read *Management in the Home: Happier Living through Saving Time and Energy*, thus indicating the close connections being forged between values such as efficiency and the idealized Good Life. By measuring and dividing time and tasks into increasingly precise units, Gilbreth could determine the one best way to accomplish everyday household chores, such as boiling an egg or preparing meatloaf. Gilbreth encouraged homemakers to take up technical charting on their own, just like professional engineers: “In the process of the chart the engineer gives a description of every step used in doing the job. ... You can do this too. Make process charts of some of your household tasks and see what a clear picture you get of what you are doing and how you might improve.”⁵³ Writing in popular magazines such as the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, Gilbreth’s household management

⁵³ Lillian M Gilbreth, Orpha Mae Thomas, and Eleanor Clymer, *Management in the Home: Happier Living Through Saving Time and Energy* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1954).

theories launched a cottage industry of household management.⁵⁴ Even as stopwatch-bearing household engineers charted every corner of the home, the values of efficiency were kneaded throughout mass culture.

Figure 6: Household efficiency

Some of the tools offered to homemakers to help quantify and optimize their labors included flow process charts and traffic analyses. The Gilbreths wrote: “In the science of management, as in all other sciences, progress that is to be definite and lasting depends upon the accuracy of the measurements that are made.” Lillian and Frank Gilbreth, *The Writings of the Gilbreths*, Ed. By William R. Spriegel and Clark E. Myers (Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, 1953), 226.

⁵⁴ Here, as elsewhere, technology created both problems and solutions. One popular leader of the household management movement was Mary Pattison, who in “Scientific Management in Home-Making” offered a stirring call to action: “The recent development of what is known as scientific management in a variety of man’s occupations, has roused the American woman to question whether this be not a system equally adaptable to her domain—the building and maintenance of the home. The purpose of this paper is to show that not only are these same principles definitely translatable to her world of activity, but that in the present status of the home the only sure progress toward the solution of the so-called “servant problem,” as well as the high cost of living, lies in the ability to apply just this system of scientific management from the survey, the budget, the index and card-catalogue to the required time, motion, cost and temperature in boiling potatoes, making bread or washing a garment.” Mrs. Frank A. Pattison, “Scientific Management in Home-Making,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 13 (June 1913), 96. See also: Laurel D. Graham, “Domesticating Efficiency: Lillian Gilbreth’s Scientific Management of Homemakers, 1924-1930,” *Signs*, Vol. 24, N. 3 (Spring 1999), 633-675.

Everyday efficiency and Sunday efficiency were only short steps away. Applying scientific management principles to religion quickly caught the imagination of Henry Frederick Cope, general secretary of the Religious Education Association, who in 1912 published *Efficiency in the Sunday School*.⁵⁵ Cope giddily described ‘efficiency’ as “a word to conjure with.” Just as important, Cope thought, it might be a moral imperative. “No church,” he wrote, “has a moral right to cumber the ground and to draw support from men unless it is developing efficiency to do its work.”⁵⁶ Repeatedly comparing the church to a factory, Cope found much to admire and emulate in the measuring and ordering of a scientifically managed factory floor. In chapters bearing names such as “Applying Some Efficiency Tests,” “Order and Discipline. The Organization Test,” and “Making Your Experts at Home,” Cope offered stringent, if not succinct, advice on how to run a Sunday school like an efficient industrial factory.

Cope was not alone in this goal. In 1916 the journal *The Biblical World* published an article by Warren Grant titled “Scientific Management and Sunday School Superintendence.” Grant presumably had specific targets in mind when he argued: “There is no reason why a church should be ineffective simply because it is composed of good people.”⁵⁷ An efficient system, as he proposed, involved an elaborate multi-tiered arrangement of superintendence and oversight based on “specialization of endeavor” that he called “functional foremanship.” Even more ambitiously, that same year Eugene M. Camp wrote a book titled *Christ’s Economy: Scientific Management of Men and Things in Relation to God and His Cause*. President of the symptomatically named

⁵⁵ Henry Frederick Cope, *Efficiency in the Sunday School* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912). Cope offered: “An efficient Sunday school is one in which the working forces understand its purpose or aim, its conditions and materials of operation, and its methods of procedure; one in which duties are so assigned and responsibilities so clearly divided that its operations proceed with economy of effort and without waste or friction; one in which there is the application of all possible working forces and the enlistment of every aid available to secure desired results; one in which those who believe they work with God will so work that all His work can proceed without hindrance and with certainty of results.” Cope, 3. Thankfully he found a briefer—or perhaps, more efficient—statement of the end goal: “An efficient Sunday school develops efficient Christians.” Ibid.

⁵⁶ Cope, 4.

⁵⁷ Warren P. Grant, “Scientific Management and Sunday-School Superintendence,” *The Biblical World* Vol. 47, No. 3 (March 1916), 161-167.

American Board of Applied Christianity, Camp sought to show that Jesus was the original scientific manager. Exercising a gift for metaphor, Camp argued, “The men of a parish are like locomotives in a railway yard. Evangelists and firemen may kindle fires in fireboxes, but there are no dividends until there are definite plans and work—tracks and engineers.”⁵⁸ Mixing the newest theories of scientific management with a dollop of nineteenth-century Protestant primitivism, Camp argued that the “plans and work” for efficient Christian work had been available since the teachings of Jesus. He announced: “Christ taught scientific management of men and things in relation to God and His cause, and that that management which solves the problems of the church, solves also the pressing human problems of industry, of commerce, of government.”⁵⁹ A magisterial and ambitious work of anachronism, Camp plumbed the depths of the Progressive Era desire to have the church function like an efficient machine.

1.4.3 Order

All of this quantifying, measuring, and striving for efficiency had to add up to something eventually. For synthesis, Americans attempted to classify reality into orderly systems.⁶⁰ For Americans, the history of the classificatory systems that order modern reality began in the late nineteenth century. Classification took place across the spectrum. Since the publication of Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* in 1859, American naturalists had been thinking about, and struggling with, schemes for classifying the natural world. Nearer the end of the century, Sigmund Freud’s followers, William James, and a host of other elites were making intensive efforts to map

⁵⁸ Eugene M. Camp, *Christ’s Economy: Scientific Management of Men and Things in Relation to God and His Cause* (New York: The Seabury Society, 1916), 3.

⁵⁹ Camp, 8.

⁶⁰ Lawrence Levine saw the search for order as perhaps the most basic of the new cultural values. He wrote: “The quest for order ... was an urge common to so wide a range of cultural leaders that it helped to shape the very manner in which people conceived of culture at the turn of the century.” Levine, 206.

and systematize the human psyche.⁶¹ Scientific managers and merchandising giants were attempting to bring a new order to the commercial world. All these forms of classification began with an attempt to determine comparative properties, and to group things along the lines of similarity while underscoring difference.⁶² The resultant distinctions and categories were not natural, however instinctive they became, but enmeshed in systems of cultural control. Choosing grounds to evaluate similarity and difference was both a scientific and a political act, and power was necessarily involved in making the axes of classification stick. Classifiers often asserted that their constructions were based in the structure of the natural world itself, but no matter how invisible to the times, such structures were always constructions.

The most seductive form of classification was taxonomy. This offered new tools—visual and conceptual—for efficiently and scientifically ordering the world. Linnaeus’s biological classifications in the eighteenth century presented one popular model for nineteenth-century engineers to emulate. Another even more ambitious project came from the eighteenth-century French Encyclopediasts, led by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert, who invested vast energies in the taxonomic classification of all human knowledge. The Encyclopediasts began with the structure of knowledge proposed by Francis Bacon in *The Advancement of Learning*, but so radically altered and illustrated it that it became something new altogether.⁶³ Like Linnaeus, the Encyclopedists

⁶¹ On the similarities of these projects of classification, historian Thomas Hughes offers: “Charles Darwin helped explain the influences of Nature, Sigmund Freud tried to comprehend the psychological forces crackling like electrical charges within and all around us; but as yet we reflect too little about the influences and patterns of a world organized into great technological systems.” Hughes, 184. Others note similar interests: “James was preoccupied with classification and with comparative issues of similarity and difference as fundamental to thought throughout *The Principles of Psychology*.” Jonathan Z. Smith, “A Matter of Class: Taxonomies of Religion,” *The Harvard Theological Review* Vol. 89, No. 4 (Oct. 1996), 390.

⁶² Poetically put by Kenneth Bailey: “In its simplest form, classification is merely defined as the ordering of entities into groups or classes on the basis of their similarity. Statistically speaking, we generally seek to minimize within-group variance, while maximizing between-group variance.” Kenneth Bailey, “Typologies and Taxonomies,” *Sage University Paper Series on Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences* 07-102 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 1.

⁶³ See: Robert Darnton, “Epistemological angst: From encyclopedism to advertising,” in *The Structure of Knowledge: Classifications of Science and Learning Since the Renaissance*, ed. Tore Frangsmyr (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

placed immense faith in their method of ordering reality. The classifiers trusted inherently in the scientific merits of taxonomy. Their faith in their “taxonomic approach to knowledge,” as historian Robert Darnton noted, was such that they imagined “the epistemological problems would disappear in a Linnaen-like process of naming and classifying.”⁶⁴

Figure 7: The Encyclopedistes’ “Figurative System of Human Knowledge”

Yet efforts at classification were not limited to scholars. By the late nineteenth century everyone was joining the act. Even children were expected to wax taxonomical. Grammar school readers demonstrated these new expectations. Lindley Murray’s *English Grammar*—one of the most popular American school readers in the early nineteenth century—followed long-standing

⁶⁴ Darnton, 74.

pedagogical practice by emphasizing memorization and practical illustrations. Changing trends, however, surfaced with the 1896 publication of Alonzo Reed and Brainerd Kellogg's edition of *Higher Lessons in English*. Suggesting that students must "know the sentence as a skillful engineer knows his engine," Reed and Kellogg argued that dissecting the relations between language elements taught students "the laws of discourse in general."⁶⁵ The crux of Reed and Kellogg's appeal lay in their introduction of a taxonomic way of ordering language relations: the sentence diagram. The sentence diagram connected children with the tools of the engineer. "In written analysis," Reed and Kellogg wrote, "the simple map, or diagram ... will enable the pupil to present directly and vividly to the eye the exact function of every clause in the sentence."⁶⁶

Figure 8: Sentence diagrams

In introducing the sentence diagram in language education Reed and Kellogg suggested that recognizing the taxonomy of grammar—verbs grouped with verbs, conjunctions with conjunctions—was an essential part of any scientific understanding of language. "English Grammar," they wrote, "is the science which teaches the forms, uses, and relations of the words of the English language." Reed and Kellogg, 2.

What made taxonomy so appealing?⁹ For many, it was a pleasurable intellectual exercise. Jonathan Z. Smith suggested: "Classification, by bringing disparate phenomena together in the space of a scholar's intellect, often produces surprise, the condition which calls forth efforts of

⁶⁵ Alonzo Reed and Brainerd Kellogg, *Higher Lessons in English*, 2nd ed. (New York: Maynard, Merrill, & Co., 1896).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

explanation.”⁶⁷ Pleasure was not the only attraction, though. Taxonomy was a means for building confidence in the structures of the world. Visually, taxonomy often produced dramatic and compelling results. Taxonomies, generally heuristic, hierarchical, and multidimensional, were capable of producing elaborate, scientific-looking diagrams—creating an aesthetic of expertise. Language and time were two of the most important structures of knowledge to be subject to rampant taxonomy in the late nineteenth century, indicating both as objects of particular anxiety for which classification offered balm.

More often than not, taxonomies eliminated the messiness of historical development by focusing on synchronic distinctions between classes. Taxonomy was usually a static form of classification. In this respect it was full of ironies. It promised to communicate truths about the evolutionary structure of the world popularized by Darwin, but to tame and order that world through the methods of engineers. One could classify species according to their biological origins (as naturalists did), or classify nations according to their historical consciousness (as Marxists did), or classify knowledge in historical categories (as the Encyclopedists did). Yet each of these attempts to categorize the processes of development inevitably resulted in a system of knowledge that ignored the ongoing process of change. Taxonomic ordering of species, while based on Darwin’s conceptions of descent, elided the process of change between species and ignored the possibility of and such changes in the future. Species were grouped into static taxons—classes with little capacity to represent difference, inter-species variation, or evolution over time. History itself became lost in the process of naming and ordering. In this respect, taxonomy was an attempt to the Romanticist idea of historical development under the aegis of engineering methods. Yet in the attempt, change was elided. Taxonomy was able to subdue and order the products of historical change, but not the process.

⁶⁷ Smith, “A Matter of Class,” 402.

Yet even though taxonomy could never fully model change over time, it was remarkably effective in ordering time itself. Often the taxonomization of time involved the construction of complex and large-scale systems of division. The introduction of time zones was perhaps the greatest example of this work. Through the collusion of the largest railroad companies, who sought to increase measurability and predictability of train schedules, the United States was functionally divided into four time zones in 1883. The railroads were powerful, but the project was compelling to Americans in its own right, and they quickly adopted the divisions.⁶⁸ Dividing time into distinct zones seemed to be a reflection of the natural world—reflecting the rotation of the sun around the earth—and over time it began to take on the aura of natural inevitability. By the time Congress passed a law confirming the use of time zones in 1918, many had forgotten that time zones were a cultural product of division and distinction, and that these particular boundaries and measurements were not the only way time could be ordered.

Corporations became increasingly dependent on classifications of time as well. Historian T. J. Jackson Lears argued that: “The corporate drive for efficiency underwrote quantified time as a uniform standard of measurement and reinforced the spreading requirement that people regulate their lives by the clock.”⁶⁹ Both the stopwatch of the industrial scientific manager and the punch-clock of the factory floor represented new possibilities for businesses to order time. For many, days became instinctively divided into work hours and leisure hours, work hours further divided into tasks and goals and processes. Public schools were just as hasty to embrace this model of time. Post-Civil War schools in northern cities were some of the first public institutions to be run by the clock. Not merely for the sake of efficiency, this clock-structured day helped train students for work

⁶⁸ Historian Ruth Cowan noted: “Virtually everyone in the country accepted the new time that had been established by the railroads, although Congress did not actually confirm the arrangement by legislation for another thirty-five years. Such was the pervasive impact of the integrated rail network.” Cowan, 156.

⁶⁹ T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880 - 1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 10.

in an increasingly commercial world.⁷⁰ Collectively, the engineering principles of precise measurement, division and distinction, and applied meaning became the tools by which many Americans forged an understanding of time as both economic and taxonomic. Economic metaphors took root in language: time spent and saved and squandered. And taxonomic structures undergird these metaphors in the realm of practice, and helped Americans of the Progressive Era assign larger meaning and order to the march of time in their lives.

1.4.4 Taxonomic minds

The result of all of these changes was the emergence of a way of thinking best described as the taxonomic mind. Phrenologists of American culture might well be amazed at the vast transmogrification that took place in the minds of common Americans over the second half of the nineteenth century. At mid-century, the smooth, ocular faiths and plain truths of the world, understood through common sense, rendered the world readily intelligible. Yet the taxonomic mind of the late nineteenth century was all bumps and crevices, grounding its knowledge in specialized lobes of order, measurement, quantification, and efficiency. These privileged nodes of thinking came to adopt engineering methods and technological processes, or at least adopt the accompanying rhetoric of engineering. This new taxonomic mind guided Americans, religious and otherwise, through the cultural and intellectual changes of the end of the century, offering explanations of crisis and promises of solution. The ideas and practices forged by the taxonomic mind defined American religion in the twentieth century, and it made possible the development of dispensational thinking among conservative Protestants.

⁷⁰ Historian Glenn Miller proposed such: “The high schools, thus, carved out a position for themselves at the heart of industrial America. Their graduates held the more bureaucratic or routine positions needed to organize and manage the newer businesses. Every large store, whether a Wanamaker’s in Philadelphia or a more modest shop in a smaller town, needed a number of clerks to make the sales and a number of skilled bookkeepers to measure the profit and loss.” Glenn T. Miller, *Piety and Profession: American Protestant Theological Education* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2007), 118.

1.5 Products of the taxonomic mind: Sunday schools

Ideational shifts, visible and invisible, resulted in significant transformation of the Protestant world between 1880 and 1920. Perhaps no institution demonstrated the ubiquity of new engineering impulses as clearly as the Protestant Sunday school. This enterprise marshaled vast resources and imagination, cut across denominational and ideological lines, and was everywhere grounded in the popular religious culture of its time. Its developing practices of unification, standardization, and greater institutionalization reveal the functions of the taxonomic mind in American popular religious culture.

Despite growing theological divisions, education of children remained one of the unifying factors in American Protestantism well into the twentieth century. Factional divisions between conservatives and liberals (and other belligerents) in the 1880s and 1890s have been overemphasized by historians.⁷¹ But even long after other alliances broke down, general agreement remained about the need to educate children and the institutions necessary for doing so, particularly Sunday schools, YMCAs, YWCAs, and children's literature. A good deal of consensus persisted about the appropriate methods and content of educational efforts. *The Sunday School Times* remained a benchmark of this unity, as its pages included writing from many points on the theological spectrum. This is not to say differences did not exist. Conservatives saw Sunday school as a place to form moral character; Progressive reformers wanted to educate children in process to produce a more just society. Yet everyone seemed to agree that children needed instruction in basic biblical literacy and morals.

Indeed, fights over Sunday schools would have scandalized institution builders like John Wanamaker. To be sure, by Wanamaker's death in 1922, liberal modernists and conservative

⁷¹ One notable exception appeared in: Grant Wacker, "The Holy Spirit and the Spirit of the Age in American Protestantism, 1880-1910," *The Journal of American History* 72:1 (Jun. 1985), 45-62.

fundamentalists were fighting bitterly for control of the minds and institutions of American Protestantism. Yet Wanamaker was a product (and promoter) of the older evangelical alliances of the mid-nineteenth century. In 1858 when he first established Bethany, American Protestant evangelicals were divided by denomination, but largely united in grand matters of cultural practices. Wanamaker's friend and contemporary Dwight L. Moody helped define the evangelical boundaries widely and inclusively. Toward the end of their lives, both Moody and Wanamaker's allegiances slid towards theological conservatives, and most important, higher life preachers and dispensationalists. Likewise, Wanamaker put key premillennialist leaders Arthur Tappan Pierson and J. Wilbur Chapman in charge of Bethany church. Yet both Moody and Wanamaker continued to hold open doors for liberals, and Moody continued to share pulpits and lecterns with liberal biblical scholars throughout his career. Wanamaker dabbled in liberal ideas and rarely felt threatened by new ideas or charisms of modernity.⁷² It is fitting, then, that the modern, urban Sunday school movement that Moody and Wanamaker helped produce was one of the last bastions of Protestant unity into the twentieth century.

Moreover, education proved to be one of the more vertically integrated industries of era. College professors took an active interest in early schooling, and curricular and pedagogical changes taking place in one sphere of education often quickly made their way to others. In the late nineteenth century, illustrious college professors taught Sunday school classes not as a hobby but as a serious act of pedagogical research and practice. Both endeavors required similar forms of educational theory and method (particularly the psychology of learning), and each was directed at

⁷² Boldly, Wanamaker even peddled social evolution in a speech before the International Sunday School Convention in 1896. Wanamaker read a long passage from the book *Social Evolution* by Benjamin Kidd, ending with the passage: "Natural selection seems, in short, to be steadily evolving religious character in the first instance, and intellectual character only as a secondary product in association with it." Wanamaker described Kidd's work as "the best contribution of later years to the literature of humanity." John Wanamaker, "The International Sunday-School Work," *Eighth International Sunday School Convention* (Chicago: W.B. Jacobs, 1896), 93.

progress.⁷³ Thus, tracking changes in the Sunday school movement reveals developments in the main channels of American Protestantism.

Sunday schools illustrate the changing dynamics of religion in the period not because they were exceptional, but because they were so typical. Sunday schools formed one of the largest lay-led movements in United States history—including, by 1906, 192,722 schools, 1,746,074 officers and teachers, and 15,337,811 students.⁷⁴ Without a central organization—the American Sunday School Union exercised no official authority over local Sunday schools—or a trained staff, American Protestant Sunday schools were structured by common understandings of the world and dominant themes in popular culture.⁷⁵ In this context, the application of engineering values to Sunday schools was not inevitable, but productive and revealing. Engineering values became manifest in Sunday schools in a variety of ways, including moves toward greater unification and standardization of curricula and methods, and increasing specialization and professionalization. The taxonomic mind that would prove essential to the development of dispensationalism became rooted and spread in the broad expanse of mainstream American religious education.

1.5.1 Unification and standardization

In 1908 John Wanamaker was succeeded as President of the Pennsylvania Sabbath School Association by Henry J. Heinz, president of the Pittsburgh-based H. J. Heinz food company.⁷⁶

Born in 1844 in Pittsburgh, Heinz's devout Lutheran parents hoped he would become a minister.

⁷³ John Dewey's famous Laboratory school was one example. Child psychologist G. Stanley Hall, himself a former Sunday school pupil and teacher, drew heavily from Sunday school teachers for his observations of child development. University of Chicago president William Rainey Harper's Sunday school experiments provided another example.

⁷⁴ United States Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1906: Summary and General Tables* (Washington: Government Print Office, 1910) 89.

⁷⁵ This claim is very probably misleading. As early as the 1820s, denominations were forming their own Sunday school committees and publishing houses. Some of these, like the Methodists and Presbyterians, had authoritarian Sunday school committees that attempted to dictate local practices.

⁷⁶ They traded offices more than once. When John Wanamaker was elected Chairman of the Executive Committee of the World Sunday School Association, he succeeded Henry J. Heinz, who had died earlier that year.

But Heinz got a taste of pickle peddling as a boy and devoted his life to producing and selling produce. In 1876 he founded the eponymous H.J. Heinz Company, and by his death in 1919 he had 25 branches, 6,523 employees, and 85 pickle-salting stations to his name. By 1907, he was producing more than twelve million bottles of ketchup per year (nearly one for every Sunday school student in the country). Many of Heinz's commercial innovations had to do with standardizing his product, processes, and image. Heinz insisted his factory employees were always clean-scrubbed and wearing spotless uniforms to impress the many tourists that came to visit his factories.⁷⁷ He likewise standardized the packaging of his products; in 1890 he created the patented and now-customary ketchup bottle: octagonal, screw cap, keystone label, neck-band.⁷⁸ This quest for uniformity extended beyond merely appearance. Heinz was one of the few produce vendors who fought for the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, and was a strong proponent of greater sanitation and health standards, in food and elsewhere.⁷⁹ Standardization and order were more than simple business strategies, though, they were a way of life for Heinz. An avid watch collector, he served as an honorary curator of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, to which he eventually donated many of his timepieces.

Like Wanamaker, Heinz was widely recognized as an advertising genius, most famously responsible for the ubiquitous "57 varieties" slogan.⁸⁰ The condiment mogul was also responsible for such innovations as the first electric sign, in 1900, a six-story monstrosity featuring 1200 light bulbs and a giant electric pickle. At the 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago, the

⁷⁷ In an era of labor unrest, Heinz was known for his model factories, and he boasted that his company never had a labor strike. Indeed, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers called Heinz's works "a utopia for working men." John N. Ingham, *Biographical Dictionary of American Business Leaders* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1983), 566-567.

⁷⁸ Andrew F. Smith, *Pure Ketchup: A History of America's National Condiment, with Recipes* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 43.

⁷⁹ See: Bob Batchelor, *The 1900s* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), 71.

⁸⁰ Although the company produced more than 57 varieties of food in 1896 when the slogan was unveiled, Heinz thought it sounded like a magic number. The fact that simple enumeration could serve on its own as an advertising slogan was itself remarkable.

ketchup tycoon hired pretty girls to hand out samples and more than a million little green pickle-shaped buttons labeled “Heinz.”⁸¹ He was rabid about offering customers exceptional service—a close kin to marketing itself—and began having his salesmen forgo selling on Saturdays to devote their time to helping middleman grocers learn how to store and display produce. Marketing and standardization went hand in hand. Heinz’s advertisements for standardized products and uniform quality appealed widely because Americans increasingly believed in the virtues of standardization and order. (And if they did not, Heinz’s advertising helped convince them.)

Figure 9: Heinz’s electric pickle

Yet condiments, commerce, and clocks were not his only legacy. At his death, *The Herald of Gospel Liberty* announced, “Thirty-five million in the world’s Sunday-school membership will be saddened by the news of the going of their friend and leader.”⁸² Heinz was a patron of the Sunday school movement, like Wanamaker, and helped shape the movement according to these new values. Sunday schools reflected these broader cultural trends of unification and standardization, showing again how religious popular culture partook of the same values as commercial American spheres. Working alongside those industrialist Sunday school barons were a number of national religious leaders who shared many of their values, particularly full-time Sunday

⁸¹ Batchelor, 70.

⁸² “Henry John Heinz—World Sunday-School Leader,” *The Herald of Gospel Liberty* (June 12, 1919) 579.

school workers like John H. Vincent, Henry Clay Trumbull, and Edwin Wilbur Rice. Collectively, they transformed the Sunday school movement, and the greater culture of American Protestantism.

In 1872, the American Sunday School Union made one of the first strong moves toward standardization and unification when they adopted a plan to create and distribute a common set of weekly lessons. Developed by Vincent, Trumbull, and Rice, the uniform lesson plans were an ambitious project that promised to introduce all children, regardless of denomination, to the same Bible passage each week.⁸³ These leaders saw the project not as a top-down imposition of structure, but a fulfillment of populist wishes for greater standardization. Trumbull offered a disquisition on the popular demand:

The wish was again and again expressed by individuals, periodicals, and local associations, that the same portion of Scripture should be studied week by week in all the land. The movement for uniformity was popular rather than personal ... It was the common people of the United States—the great mass of Bible students through the length and breadth of the land—who pressed for it, creating a public sentiment in its behalf not easily remedied.⁸⁴

Whether or not such popular outcry existed, the uniform lesson plans were widely adopted.

Uniform lessons offered engineered solutions to the perceived problems of Sunday school education, with their neat weekly division of the Bible into thematic passages, tidy classifications of theological lessons, and promise of an orderly progress through the weedy years of childhood development. Perhaps not surprising, given the close ties between industrialists and the Sunday school movement, the goals of the Uniform Lessons mirrored the goals of industrial capitalism and commercial marketing: efficiency, standardization, control, and order.

⁸³ Perhaps in order to allay denominational anxieties, they encouraged tailoring of the presentation of this uniform material: "Each society or publishing house adopting the new Uniform Lessons was free to prepare its own explanations, analyses, questions, and other helps on the lessons for its constituency. The aim of the committee representing the publishers was to secure uniformity in the Scripture subjects only, and not a uniformity of the treatment of them, or of methods of instruction." Rice, 301.

⁸⁴ Trumbull, *Report, National Sunday School Convention*, 1872, 20. Quoted in Rice, *Sunday School Movement*, 298.

1.6 Methods and modernisms

Sunday schools were hardly alone in this obsession with method. In 1896, the philosopher John Dewey established the University Elementary School of the University of Chicago. Known as the Dewey School, and eventually the Laboratory School, the elementary school represented Dewey's efforts (and those of his collaborators) to work out a scientific theory of education. Dewey's chief assumption was that knowledge was unified with action, or that proper learning involved practice. He could think of no better way to test this theory than by teaching cooking. Like his contemporary Fannie Farmer, Dewey thought cooking was a set of practical skills constitutionally wed to science. Historian Louis Menand listed the goals the Laboratory school pursued in pedagogical cookery:

Dewey incorporated into the practical business of making lunch: arithmetic (weighing and measuring ingredients, with instruments the children made themselves), chemistry and physics (observing the processes of combustion), biology (diet and digestion), geography (exploring the natural environments of the plants and animals), and so on. Cooking became the basis for most of the science taught in the school. It turned out to have so much curricular potential that making cereal became a three-year continuous course of study for all children between the ages of six and eight.⁸⁵

In 1895, the year before his school opened, Dewey published a partial account of his educational philosophy. Co-written with educator James A. McLellan, *The Psychology of Number; and its Application to Methods of Teaching Arithmetic* promised to teach teachers how to teach mathematics based on scientific and psychological principles. The first task, Dewey assumed, was to convince teachers that psychological methods were necessary for effective education. Dismissing the idea that it was possible to teach without some method, Dewey saw a battle in educational theory between: “devices picked up no one knows how, methods inherited from a crude past, or else invented, ad hoc, by educational quackery--and methods which can be rationally justified.”⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2001), 323.

⁸⁶ John Dewey and James A. McLellan, *The Psychology of Number; and its Application to Methods of Teaching Arithmetic* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1895), 10.

Locating himself, unsurprisingly, against educational quackery, Dewey argued that acknowledging the necessity of method and determining an appropriate method were the first steps toward effective mathematics education.⁸⁷ Furthermore, Dewey believed that the application of scientific method to teaching was not just the most efficient way to teach mathematics, but an ethical imperative. “Even upon its merely formal side,” he wrote, “a study which requires exactitude, continuity, patience, which automatically rejects all falsification of data, all slovenly manipulation, which sets up a controlling standard of balance at every point, can hardly be condemned as lacking in the ethical element.”⁸⁸

Having established its significance, the bulk of Dewey’s book enumerated the appropriate psychological methods for teaching mathematics. First, Dewey insisted that ‘number’ was a mental construct, and not a property of things in themselves.⁸⁹ More precisely, number was a concept constructed to deal with practical problems, through the auspices of measurement. The key idea, Dewey obunubilated, was: “the idea that number is to be traced to measurement, and measurement back to adjustment of activity”⁹⁰ The origins of number were in measurement, which had two separate functions. The first was generally described as unity, abstraction, generalization, the assembling of parts into a whole, or synthesis. The second was described through terms such as discrimination, relation, analysis, keeping apart, correlative differentiation and identification. Dewey found these two functions—lumping and splitting—as the basis for all psychological understandings of mathematics, describing: “the various operations performed, which are all reducible to (a)

⁸⁷ Dewey also wrote: “Only knowledge of the principles upon which all methods are based can free the teacher from dependence upon the educational nostrums which are recommended like patent medicines, as panaceas for all educational ills. ... All new suggestions, new methods, he will submit to the infallible test of science; and those which will further his work he can adopt and rationally apply, seeing clearly their place and bearings, and the conditions under which they can be most effectively employed.” *Ibid.*, 10. And: “The difference between being overpowered and used by machinery and being able to use the machinery is precisely the difference between methods externally inculcated and methods freely adopted, because of insight into the psychological principles from which they spring.” *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, xiii.

⁸⁹ He wrote: “Number is not (psychologically) got from things, it is put into them.” *Ibid.*, 61.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

synthesis-addition, multiplication, involution; and (b) analysis-subtraction, division, evolution.”⁹¹ In this, Dewey’s use of number resembled the function of taxonomy. Within the context of these operations, then, mathematics took concrete form through a process of mental construction. “Number,” Dewey opined, “represents a certain interest, a certain psychical demand; it is not a bare property of facts, but is a certain way of interpreting and arranging them—a certain method of constructing them”⁹² For Dewey, this sense of constructedness went all the way down. Dewey’s school attempted to work out these methodological principles out in everyday experience. The school provided a typical late-nineteenth-century institutional framework: taught by professional teachers connected through networks, rather than hierarchically, and relying on standard texts. The school built its practice from the epistemological ground up, following Dewey’s principles: 1) understanding proper method is the first, ethically imperative step; 2) number is constructed from the necessity of measurement; 3) number involves two operations, synthesis and analysis, to enable the process of classification; 4) the entire structure is interpretive. Dewey believed those principles worked just as accurately with cooking as with numbers. Number, the operations of number (synthesis and analysis), the science of mathematics, and the psychology of teaching mathematics were all necessary interpretive epistemic acts, and all designed to enable the functioning of life.

⁹¹ Dewey, 62. He elaborated: “The idea of number is not impressed upon the mind by objects even when these are presented under the most favorable circumstances. Number is a product of the way in which the mind deals with objects in the operation of making a vague whole definite. This operation involves (a) discrimination or the recognition of the objects as distinct individuals (unit); (b) generalization, this latter activity involving two subprocesses; (1) abstraction, the neglecting of all characteristic qualities save just enough to limit each object as one; and (2) grouping, the gathering together the like objects (units) into a whole or class, the sum.” Dewey, 32.

⁹² Dewey, 21.

Figure 10: Dewey's Laboratory School

Students in the elementary geography classroom in Dewey's experimental school made use of a central sandbox to model erosion and land forms. Teaching took place alongside analytical reflection on the necessary methodological processes needed to guide student development. (Image: University of Chicago Archives.)

Even while professional pedagogues were squabbling and haranguing each other concerning Dewey's theories and their competitors, popular culture had largely already made up its mind on these issues. In kitchens all over America, household cooks recognized in new, explicit ways that cooking—perhaps the most basic social function—required method. Fannie Farmer, like Dewey, argued that good methods produced good results. Doing things in the traditional way did not mean methods were not being used, but that inefficient methods were being used. Like Dewey, Farmer couched her advice in the rhetoric of science, even beginning her cookbook with a description of the chemical composition of the human body.⁹³ These practices, widespread in

⁹³ Farmer's science of cookery had more operations than the two Dewey identified in his science of mathematics. However, for Farmer as well, combination (synthesis) and separation (analysis) were two of the principal tasks of cooking.

popular culture, reworked all kinds of knowledge using the values of the engineer and the rhetoric of scientific methodology. Usually when the question was put to American popular culture, culture chose to drape itself with the (rhetorical, at least) robes of science and engineering. From the swamps of John Dewey's byzantine prose to the broad plateau of Fannie Farmer's popular cookbooks, Americans of all stripes were finding confidence in engineering values. They embraced a new dialect of knowledge, accented heavily with science, method, quantification, measurement, efficiency, and classification.

On the surface, Dewey's educational project was the inverse of trends in popular culture. On the other end of the educational spectrum, John Wanamaker established "Store-Schools" to offer employees both a general education and the specialized quantitative skills necessary for modern department stores to function. For Wanamaker, abstract knowledge was useful because it allowed people to accomplish practical goals. For Dewey's cookery students, however, the process required an extra step: practical experimentation was useful because it helped produce abstract knowledge, and abstract knowledge was useful because it enabled practical achievements. Both agreed that neither the practical goals nor the abstract knowledge could be obtained without an explicit and effective application of epistemic method.

In the subset of the Anglo-Protestant religious world, this impulse to transform all learning into a scientific enterprise was exhibited in the dramatic growth in the quantity of Sunday school literature. Not only did publication of Sunday school lesson material boom, but more tellingly, publication of theoretical materials about proper methods for teaching Sunday schools also multiplied. Longtime Sunday school teachers, administrators, and professional educators all

Lastly, Farmer's cookbook was the epitome of taxonomic virtuoso. Recipes were grouped in hierarchical taxons with chapter titles such as "Veal, Sweetbreads, Potatoes, and Pies." Within each recipe a taxonomic arrangement of ingredients and instructions provided the logic for the visual explanation of cooking science.

contributed, as everyone attempted to ground new teaching methods on scientific understandings of the nature of the child. One typical example appeared in the *Sunday School Times* by Frederica Beard, identified as a “specialist in Sunday-school work,” who, in arguing for the importance of a separate beginner’s class for young children, found it necessary to invoke new theories:

Scientific observation of child nature has brought to light two facts,—first that spiritual development runs along parallel lines with physical and mental growth; second, that there are definite stages of growth, determined by nascent periods, that stand out distinctly, and must be reckoned with in any attempt to supply the needed nourishment and training at any one stage. There are marked changes in brain development significant usually at the age of seven, and a child naturally enters a larger world at this time.⁹⁴

Skeptical readers might have wondered what kind of scientific observation of child nature could properly measure spiritual development, but those small quibbles hardly mattered. As methods multiplied, prescriptive teaching materials proliferated.⁹⁵

Like Dewey, many scientifically minded spirits sought to marry theory with practice. One of these was Dewey’s boss, William Rainey Harper. President of the University of Chicago, Harper agreed to take over as superintendent of the Sunday school program at Hyde Park Baptist Church on the condition that he would have a free hand in structuring the teaching. He immediately

⁹⁴ Frederica Beard, “Why Every Sunday-School Should Have a Beginners’ Department,” *The Sunday School Times* 44:32 (Aug. 9, 1902), 421.

⁹⁵ For example, a short list of magazines that carried articles about how to set up, administer, or teach Sunday school includes: *The Sunday School Times*, *The National Sunday School Teacher*, *The Sunday School Workman*, *The Sunday School World*, *The Sunday School Journal*, *The Independent*, *The New York Observer*, *The Congregationalist*, *The Advance*, *The Pilgrim Teacher*, *The Baptist Teacher*, *The Westminster Teacher*, *The Sunday School Journal*, *The Sunday School Executive*, *The Sunday School Magazine*, *The Standard*, and *The Interior*. Books were even more popular, and a similarly abbreviated list includes: H. T. Musselman, *The Sunday-School Pupil* (Teacher-Training Department, Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1908); George Herbert Betts, *How to Teach Religion: Principles and Methods* (Abingdon, 1910); Edward Leigh Pell, *Secrets of Sunday-School Teaching* (Fleming H. Revell, 1912); Marshal A. Hudson, *How To reach Men, To hold Men, To teach Men, It has been done*. (Baraca, 1907); George Herbert Betts, *The Curriculum of Religious Education* (Abingdon, 1924); Wade Crawford Barclay, *The Pupil, The Teacher, and the School* (Smith and Lamar, 1912); George Herbert Betts, *Method in Teaching Religion* (Abingdon, 1925); Ernest De Witt Burton and Shailer Mathews, *Principles and Ideals for the Sunday School: An Essay in Religious Pedagogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1903); Alford A. Butler *The Churchman’s Manual of Methods: A Practical Sunday School Handbook for Clerical and Lay Workers*. (Milwaukee: The Young Churchman Co., 1915); George Albert Coe *A Social Theory of Religious Education* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1927); G. Stanley Hall, *Aspects of Child Life and Education* (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1907); Samuel B. Haslett, *The Pedagogical Bible School: A Scientific Study of the Sunday School with Chief Reference to the Curriculum* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1903); Henry Frederick Cope, *Ten Years Progress in Religious Education* (Chicago: The Religious Education Association, 1913); and Henry Clay Trumbull, *Teaching and Teachers, or The Sunday-School Teacher’s Teaching Work and The Other Work of the Sunday-School Teacher* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1905).

disbanded all the classes and disposed of the existing curriculum, and began to re-constitute the program on more scientifically amenable grounds. He modeled the Sunday school after public schools, with graded classes, and provided his own series of class material, which became known as the Constructive Studies in Religion Series. Harper's liberal and modernist collaborators were equally serious about the Sunday school experience. Ernest DeWitt Burton and Shailer Mathews, both professors at the University of Chicago's Divinity School, each worked at the Hyde Park Baptist Sunday School as teachers and administrators. Together, Burton and Mathews published in 1903 a summary statement of their ideas about Sunday school. Titled *Principles and Ideals for the Sunday School: An Essay in Religious Pedagogy*, this book added to the burgeoning literature designed to teach teachers about teaching and running an efficient Sunday school.

Some suggested that if study of method was scientific, then studies of studies of method must be doubly so. Thus, materials about materials proliferated as well. In *A History of the American Sunday School Curriculum*, Frank Glenn Lankard, a Professor of Biblical Literature at Northwestern University, began to catalog this massive literature on Sunday school teaching.⁹⁶ The science of Sunday school reached its recursive limit with Leonidas Wakefield Crawford. In a 1922 Northwestern University dissertation, Crawford attempted to analyze the contents of the various Sunday school materials currently in use. Titled *The status and evaluation of extra-biblical material in curriculum of religious education in the United States*, Crawford's work represented the apex of scientific synthesis.⁹⁷ For example, evaluating Harper's materials, Crawford calculated that in the Constructive Studies in Religion Series "32.7 per cent of the lesson material is biblical, 52 per cent

⁹⁶ Lankard described his object of study: "The closing years of the nineteenth century mark changes and advances in the study of the Bible and in religion. The scientific method which was gaining such headway in education and psychology began to make itself felt in the field of religion. This spirit was first reflected in a number of books which appeared around 1900 dealing with investigations of a scientific nature in the field of religion." Lankard, 276.

⁹⁷ Leonidas W. Crawford, *The status and evaluation of extra-biblical material in the curriculum of religious education in the United States* (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1922).

is quasi-biblical, and 15.3 per cent is extra-biblical.”⁹⁸ Crawford was an extreme example of meta-methodological mania. But by the time John Dewey established his Laboratory School, his assumptions about method were common: it was necessary for knowing. As arguments about method spawned ever-more methodological edifices, scientific method—associated with the engineering values of quantification, measurement, comparison, and classification—became the holy grail of educational crusades. The Sunday school movement and similar educational endeavors showed the churning infatuation with method was shared across a broad spectrum of theological interests and intellectual domains. Popular and elite, conservative and liberal, Americans began to believe in modernist epistemic propositions: that their processes of knowing required methods, and that knowledge must be engineered.

Summary

Between 1880 and 1920, the mass culture of America changed from rural communities to a more industrial, urban, demographically fractious, and technologically structured society. The challenges these social changes precipitated in culture and religion were consistently met with more technology, and with new methods based on engineering values. America became a technological society, as not only its elites (academics, inventors, and pickle-men) but most (white Protestants, at least) found epistemic confidence and cultural power in technological methods and engineering values.

One final illustration may highlight these changes. In 1917, the longtime American Sunday School Union leader Edwin Wilbur Rice wrote one of the first and most comprehensive histories

⁹⁸ Lankard, 298.

of the Sunday school movement.⁹⁹ Rice concluded his work with an assessment of the changes he felt necessary to continue to grow the Sunday school movement. “The average Sunday-school must be far better organized,” he argued, and to achieve modernization they required even more prescriptive teaching materials: “the best manuals of methods, the simplest but best handbooks, dictionaries, and reference libraries of biblical exposition and interpretation, the most approved and standard treatises on child nurture and development, the latest and sanest suggestions on social service, recreation, play and work.”¹⁰⁰ This litany exposed Rice’s values: better organization, better reference material, better psychological understandings of children, better methods. But even more revealing of his values were the values he—the consummate educator—instilled in his own children. No surprise, then, that in 1917 Edwin Wilbur Rice, Jr. was elected president of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers. The younger Rice was a lifelong scientist and engineer. Studying under the well-known inventor Elihu Thomson, Rice Jr., managed multiple laboratories, became technical director of General Electric at its formation, and eventually served as president of General Electric from 1913 to 1922. For the Rice family, as for American Protestantism at large, engineering impulses ran in the blood.

The story of dispensationalism in America rightly begins in these contexts, with cookbooks and grocery barons and Sunday school literature, not in obscure eighteenth century theological sectarians. Social changes that produced technological modernity and the adoption of engineering values are not mere background to the story, but a glimpse at the deepest layer of dispensational modernism. The epistemic foundations of dispensationalism rest on the taxonomic minds of late-nineteenth-century Americans, and the broad, mainstream cultural and religious values and beliefs about the power of engineering methods to produce confident beliefs.

⁹⁹ Edwin Wilbur Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement and the American Sunday-School Union* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Association, 1917).

¹⁰⁰ Rice, 433.

2. Premillennial Backgrounds

2.1 *Developments in development*

In 1909, the 53-year-old Sigmund Freud made his only visit to the United States. He came at the invitation of psychologist G. Stanley Hall, president of Clark University and founding president of the American Psychological Association. To help commemorate Clark's twentieth anniversary, Hall invited Freud and Carl Jung to visit and offer lectures in German, thus formally introducing psychoanalysis to the United States. Freud offered an overview of his new field and concluded with a diagnosis: "*Our hysterical patients suffer from reminiscences.* Their symptoms are the remnants and the memory symbols of certain (traumatic) experiences."¹ Unlike popular theories that imagined human nature a product of character or behavior, Freud believed the origins of the self could be best understood in terms of development and memory. Although his American lectures were perhaps more symbolic than directly influential, his ideas gradually slipped into the American subconscious.

Yet for disinterested observers, Clark University was as much of an innovation in American cultural life as Freud's ideas. Funded by businessman Jonas Gilman Clark—and perhaps competitively inspired by Clark's friend, railroad tycoon Leland Stanford—Clark University was founded as America's first all-graduate university. Hall, a former student of William James, served as its first president. Clark and Hall envisioned a grand European-style university, similar to the newly founded Cornell or Johns Hopkins, with a paramount commitment to research. Beyond this, however, their visions diverged. Clark hoped to establish an undergraduate college to accompany

¹ Sigmund Freud, "The Origins and Development of Psychoanalysis," in *Lectures Delivered Before the Department of Psychology, September 1909* (Worcester, Mass: Clark University, 1910), 7. Freud would go on in these lectures to present psychoanalysis as a humane response to the traumas created by modernity: "The claims of our civilization make life too hard for the greater part of humanity, and so further the aversion to reality and the origin of neuroses, without producing an excess of cultural gain by this excess of sexual repression. We ought not to go so far as to fully neglect the original animal part of our nature, we ought not to forget that the happiness of individuals cannot be dispensed with as one of the aims of our culture." Ibid., 38.

the graduate division. But Hall continually resisted undergraduate education, believing that the graduate-only model allowed Clark's faculty and scientists to conduct advanced research and seminar-style instruction that would be compromised by the tedium of teaching undergraduates.

Hall's resistance to an undergraduate college grew out of his understanding of Darwinian evolution, applied to psychology and the process of human development. As with species, Hall believed, so too do processes of evolution occur within individuals, within societies, and within educational institutions. Each recapitulated the progress of the others, moving from the barbarian savagery of infancy to the enlightened reasoning of modern adulthood.² Semi-savage undergraduates still needed indoctrination, and this kind of education was frankly a waste of time for the specialists and elites that Clark University employed. It was not that Hall dismissed the importance of such early education; he spent much of his career studying and writing about it, including making influential interventions in the Sunday school movement.³ Yet for continued advancement at Clark, professionalization demanded isolation from the primitive masses of undergraduates.

While differing on many particulars, Freud and Hall shared a commitment to the study of psychological origins and development. By 1909, they represented an elite academic consensus:

² Perhaps more directly than Darwin, Hall's ideas of individual psychological development drew on Ernst Haeckel's recapitulation theory, succinctly rhymed as "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny," the idea that the development of an individual of a species from embryo to maturation mirrors the development of the species evolutionarily in the past. Hall described early periods of child development in such terms: "The child, uncivilized and to some extent even savage, is precociously thrust into an environment saturated with adult influences... and for older children fetishisms galore, gangs corresponding to the primitive tribes, propensity for hunting, killing, striking with clubs, pounding, stealing, etc., the sense of the powers of the point, edge, string, and many forms of plays and toys, the nascent sense of death, and other items far too numerous to even catalogue here--all show that the child is vastly more ancient than the man; and that adulthood is comparatively a novel structure built on very antique foundations. The child is not so much the father of the man as his very venerable and, in his early stages, half-anthropoid ancestor." G. Stanley Hall, "Evolution and Psychology," in *Fifty Years of Darwinism: Modern Aspects of Evolution* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1909), 260,262.

³ Among his contributions to the field of childhood development, Hall argued for the necessity of new developmental perspectives on Sunday school education, writing: "psychology presents a new standpoint in looking, as I have said, primarily at the nature, needs, and power of the growing soul of childhood during its successive stages." And he made recommendations for dramatically new curricular goals, such as imagining that: "A complete religious education on the recapitulation theory would be to give each child a touch of the best in every religion through which the race has passed from the lowest to the highest." G. Stanley Hall, *Educational Problems*, Vol. I (New York: D Appleton and Company, 1911), 155-6, 136.

that humanistic scientific research was comprehensively associated with the search for origins and explanations of development. Professionalized research, broadly construed, was the process of uncovering origins (of whatever the object of study) through specialized methods and reasoning. In 1905 Freud published his influential *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, in which he argued that psychoses in adults could be explained by locating their origins in childhood traumas. Freud wrote: “the very impressions which we have forgotten have nevertheless left the deepest traces in our psychic life, and acted as determinants for our whole future development.”⁴ Childhood experiences explained personality, and researchers in the new sciences of the self were tasked to discover such subconscious origins. Recognizing psychological origins was not a matter of mere common sense perception, but required specialized exploration of the unconscious.

Similarly influenced by recapitulation theory, Freud shared Hall’s conviction that social development mirrored psychological. Just as adults stood above children, so too could societies be ordered according to their level of development. Freud, like many of his fellow moderns, equated an evolutionary view of culture with development, and equated development with nationalistic hierarchy. At the top of the developmental pyramid stood Europe, best represented by German culture. Freud’s dim view of America showed in his reflection on his trip to Clark University:

We found, to our great astonishment, that the unprejudiced men of that small but respected pedagogic-philosophical university knew all the psychoanalytic writings and had honored them in their lectures to their students. Thus, even in prudish America one could, at least in academic circles, discuss freely and treat scientifically all those things that are regarded as offensive in life.⁵

Freud’s astonishment at signs of intellectual life in “prudish America” was itself not surprising. For much of the nineteenth century, even most Americans engaged in scholarly activities shared his developmentally graduated, nationalistic cartography of cultural hierarchy. German ideas held more

⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Three Contributions to the Sexual Theory*, trans. by A.A. Brill. (New York: The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Company, 1910), 36.

⁵ Sigmund Freud, *The History of the Psychoanalytic Movement*, trans. by A.A. Brill. (New York: The Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Company, 1917), 22-23.

cultural currency, German educations weighed more on the scales of public opinion, and citations from German authorities were, all other things being equal, definitive. In part, this reflected the fact that the intellectual life of America was largely unorganized throughout the nineteenth century. As sociologist Edward Shils noted, even at the end of the Civil War, “most of the serious and productive intellectual life of the country was still carried on outside the universities.”⁶ For Freud, the disorganized, popularly distributed intellectual authority of nineteenth-century America was evidence of the nation’s underdevelopment.

The establishment of Clark University (along with others such as Johns Hopkins in 1876 and the University of Chicago in 1892) signaled change. All three universities exhibited explicit ambitions to compete with German educations. They did this by privileging specialized research, enforcing more rigorous professional boundaries, and extensively marketing the products of their knowledge-production processes.

2.2 Specialization and professionalization

Specialization was the most straightforward of these processes of change taking place in the university. Specialization was, notably, hostile to the Baconian and common sense populism of much of American culture. As historian John Higham noted: “The leading American scientists were never altogether comfortable with the belief that Everyman can trust his senses, that science is

⁶ Edward Shils, “The Order of Learning in the United States: The Ascendancy of the University,” in *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860-1920*, ed. by Alexandra Oleson and John Voss (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 20. More influential than universities were the existing “professions,” particularly clergy, who had long been establishing professional identities and building scholarly credibility around the mastery of ancient languages, continental ideas, and pragmatic public appeal. One can see further evidence of this lack of intellectual organization in Harvard President C.W. Eliot’s remarks in 1869: “Very few Americans of eminent ability are attracted to this profession [of University teaching]. The pay has been too low, and there has been no gradual rise out of drudgery, such as may reasonably be expected in other learned callings.” Charles William Eliot, *Addresses at the Inauguration of Charles William Eliot, President of Harvard College*, (Cambridge: Sever and Francis, 1869), 53.

everybody's business.”⁷ Instead, they insisted on the division of intellectual labor, conducted by elites technically trained in university methods and bearing a Ph.D. Desires for methodological and topical specialization went hand in hand with hierarchical views of knowledge and cultural status.⁸ Although academics allowed for democratic leveling of disciplines within the context of semi-egalitarian universities—with no discipline having formal authority over any other—in the culture at large they argued that the proper order of intellectual authority should place university-based specialists at the top.⁹

In turn, this extensive specialization made possible avenues for advanced professionalization within the university. Common features included: the formation of professional societies to vet qualifications, developing standards of acceptable methodologies, new training and accrediting facilities to produce qualified members and marginalize unaccredited contributions, and networks of personal and institutional association that colluded to guard the boundaries of the profession.¹⁰ In most respects, this process successfully consolidated intellectual authority in America in the hands of an elite cohort of academically situated professors.¹¹

⁷ John Higham, “The Matrix of Specialization,” in *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860-1920*, ed. by Alexandra Oleson and John Voss (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 18. Against specialization, Higham contrasted the problematic application of Baconianism and common sense methods for specialized research, which: “Both taught that science is nothing more than a classification of the evidence of the senses. Anyone, therefore, could participate in the scientific enterprise.” Ibid.

⁸ On the general elitism and snobbishness of the enterprise, consider Higham’s evaluation: “The matrix of specialization was built by people who were deeply dissatisfied with the status of science and scholarship in America and who set out deliberately to remodel their own situation along European lines. Their object was partly to elevate men of science and letters to the dignity of an European elite. At the same time they sought to purify science and scholarship (as well as art and literature) by making those enterprises more rigorous and sophisticated and thus removing them from common understanding and participation. Intellectual specialization inevitably challenged egalitarian values by conferring new authority on technical elites.” Ibid., 9.

⁹ This was not a uniform or consistently overt agenda, particularly before WWII. American academics were forced to balance elitist impulses with populist rhetoric, in a process that Higham described: “As the experience of the late nineteenth century demonstrated, the best strategy for American specialists was to play down vertical relationships, expand horizontally, and thereby erect a great decentralized democracy of specialists.” Ibid., 21.

¹⁰ Historians, of course, disagree on the meaning and features of professionalization as it took place in America. For a more thorough discussion of this idea and some of its problematic aspects, see: Laurence Veysey, “The Plural Organized Worlds of the Humanities,” in *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860-1920*, ed. by Alexandra Oleson and John Voss (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

¹¹ I use the phrases “cultural status,” and “intellectual authority” more or less interchangeably in this chapter, to describe the kind of nebulous power that succeeded in changing public understandings of the Bible and its appropriate methods of

To be sure, professionalization was not a new development in American culture, and much intellectual authority was already in the hands of elites. The traditional “professions” like law, medicine, and theology had established themselves centuries earlier. Lawyers and ministers already resided in exclusive social locations, suffered increasingly bureaucratic institutional requirements, and presumed esoteric knowledge—particularly the knowledge of classical languages. Drawing largely from white males from the Northeast, these non-academic professions represented less than four percent of the American adult population in 1890.¹² Thus, professionalizing pressures among intellectuals in the late nineteenth century were not directed at popular sources of intellectual or cultural authority, but focused instead on consolidating and re-organizing existing hierarchies of elites. Historian Laurence Veysey described this change: “The social effect of intellectual specialization was to transfer cultural authority, most crucially over the printed word and over what was taught in college, to sons and daughters of the elite—away from the cultivated professions considered as an entirety and toward a far smaller, specially trained segment within them, those who now earned Ph.D. degrees.”¹³ Consolidating intellectual authority in the academic professions replaced one collection of elites with another.

New professions saw threats in different places. The older professions organized to compete with popular sources of ideas—mountebanks and hedge preachers and amateur lawyers.

interpretation. Although public understanding of the Bible is less easy to measure than political ends, I have found helpful to use an adapted version of the description of cultural power offered by social movement theorist Rhys Williams: “Cultural power is the capacity to use cultural resources to affect political outcomes. These resources include symbols, ideologies, moral authority, and political meaning. They can be used to legitimate or delegitimize political arguments or actors, to keep some issues public and others out of the public eye altogether, and to frame the discussion of those issues that become public.” Rhys H Williams and N.J. Demerath III, “Cultural Power: How Underdog Religious and Nonreligious Movements Triumph Against Structural Odds,” in *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organization*, ed. by N.J. Demerath III, et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 367. Even more helpfully, Williams expands the theory to note: “Four factors are especially important in translating cultural resources into [cultural power]: (a) the structural location of the actors using the cultural resources; (b) the salience of cultural resources in the local political culture; (c) the openness of the cultural field to legitimate challenges; and, (d) the legitimacy of the beneficiary population.” Ibid., 369.

¹² Veysey, 52.

¹³ Ibid., 63.

Yet professionalizing academics sought foremost to compete with other academics, particularly Europeans, and only secondarily vied with popular sources of knowledge or even the older professions. To compete in this space—and to gain credibility from the European scholars they sought to emulate and ultimately replace—aspiring elites like G. Stanley Hall and his faculty members at Clark University tried to distance themselves from the noisy public and older authorities. Methodologically, they pursued uniformity by recognizing only those research approaches that offered explanation through a search for origins. Institutionally, they achieved status through a slate of new universities (such as Chicago, Johns Hopkins, and Clark) where they could find a measure of isolation from clamoring undergraduates and the rest of the benighted public.

For generating prestige among the American public, this approach worked magnificently. Like with besotted youths drunk on unrequited love, nothing inspired ardor and respect quite as powerfully as being ignored and disdained. Yet academics also gained authority by appealing to the one universal cultural value: science. By the first few decades of the twentieth century nearly all university professors draped their work in the sexy garb of scientific rhetoric. This allowed them to exercise what Veysey called the “equivalent of magicianship,” insofar as they could convincingly claim exemption from popular critiques or interference by appealing to their status as professional experts.¹⁴ The ambiguity of elitism, methodological exclusivity, and institutional consolidation all helped transfer intellectual authority in American culture into the hands of university professors.

¹⁴ Laurence R. Veysey, *The emergence of the American university* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1965), 355. He summarized this effect: “Professionalism was more of a slogan than a definition of specific academic role ... Yet the ambiguity of the concept of professionalism was partly in its favor, since it implied a power which was both vaguely scientific and at the same time somewhat mysterious.” Ibid.

2.3 Re-tuning clerical professionalization

Freud's successful visit in 1909 showed the results of the preceding decades of (unevenly) changing modes of professionalization among the knowledge production communities in the United States. Yet this change was not universally embraced. One of the key sites of resistance was the mainstream Protestant clergy. Since clerical professionalization came largely through denominations—and denominations, whatever their moral heft, had little intellectual authority to bestow—clergy seeking to preserve intellectual authority needed to look elsewhere for resources.

One of the most important locations for clerical re-professionalization was the Bible conference movement. Beginning in the 1870s, Bible conferences flourished among American Protestant clergy and serious laypersons. Blending elements from old camp meetings, urban revivals, yearly denominational conferences, scholarly meetings, and summer vacations, they served as a pseudo-institutional homes and sources of social and professional networking. Bible and prophecy conferences became transitional institutions in American religion, where many of the key issues of biblical interpretation that emerged in the nineteenth century were debated, reworked, and disseminated. Conferences facilitated shifting denomination and institutional affiliations, and showed impulses towards both popular and professional goals. Bible conferences attempted to provide a new social location for the production of traditional clerical expertise and authority. Despite their relatively small scale and institutional instability, they nevertheless were an influential promoter of alternative modes of clerical professionalization, specialization, the validation of intellectual authorities, and the marketing of ideas.

2.3.1 Origins of the Bible conference movement

The chief catalyst for the American Bible and prophecy conferences was George Carter Needham. Born in Ireland in 1846, by his early twenties Needham was working as a minister

among the Plymouth Brethren.¹⁵ In 1868 he arrived in America with letters of introduction from famed British preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon, and with a familiarity with Bible conferences.¹⁶ He quickly befriended D.L. Moody and worked extensively with the American evangelist. Over the next half century he promoted, organized, and participated in dozens (perhaps hundreds) of national and local Bible and prophecy gatherings. A regular participant at the Niagara Bible Conferences, he also helped coordinate the International Prophecy Conferences, held in New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia, the Interdenominational Bible Conferences, held annually in Ocean Grove, New Jersey, the International Seaside Bible Conferences, held in Asbury Park, New Jersey, the Northfield Summer Bible Conferences, held in Moody's hometown of Northfield,

¹⁵ A researcher into Needham's early life might well get excited by discovering his *New York Times* obituary. It read: "At ten years of age he was sent to sea on board an English ship bound for South America. The little fellow was cruelly tortured by the brutal Captain and crew. They beat him, tied him to the mast, and finally tattooed his arms and body. At the completion of the voyage to South America he was taken ashore in a desolate section of the Patagonia, where he was left to face starvation. He was found by a band of cannibal Indians, who considered him a delicate morsel, and was prepared to make a feast of him, but he was saved at the last moment by the superstition of the Indians, who discovered the strange tattoo marks on his body. "Rev. George C. Needham Dead." *New York Times*, February 17, 1902. Sadly, this was a mix-up by the *Times*, and the pirates and cannibals were encountered by another Needham, perhaps his brother, Thomas, who also became an evangelist and settled in Philadelphia.

¹⁶ Perhaps. Conventional interpretations suggest that Needham's Plymouth Brethren background played a key role, although the evidence does not seem to be particularly strong on this point. Historians of American prophecy belief have often pointed to Needham's background with the Plymouth Brethren to demonstrate provenance and influence for later dispensational theological ideas. One of the most frequently cited models for American Bible conferences was the Powerscourt meetings of the Plymouth Brethren in Ireland in the 1830s. In 1831, aristocratic evangelical Lady Theodosia Powerscourt began hosting annual autumn conferences of clergy and laymen at her home in county Wicklow, near Dublin, Ireland. The conferences were marked by millenarian interest, eventually dominated by the Plymouth Brethren leader John Nelson Darby. Seen as an essential force in the development of the Plymouth Brethren movement, the Powerscourt conferences offered one possible inspiration for later American prophecy conferences. Needham's involvement in both the Irish Brethren and the American prophecy conference movements is certainly the strongest link for this connection. See also: Donald H. Akenson, *An Irish history of civilization* v. 2, 360; Ernst Sandeen, 33-34, 133. Yet although the institutional resemblances seem strong, it is quite a leap to assume theological lineages existed as well, particularly since there is no evidence Needham participated in these early conferences, and Needham's own work did not heavily feature Darbyite dispensationalism. Also, at some point, Needham left the Brethren to join the Baptists. Other historians have pointed to the Keswick movement in England as the inspiration for the American prophecy conference movement. Organized in 1873 by holiness and higher life teachers Robert Pearsall Smith, Hannah Whitall Smith, and William Boardman, they settled into yearly conferences at Keswick, England, in 1875. George Marsden, noting the influence that Keswick emphasis on the Holy Spirit had on the followers of D.L. Moody—particularly Rueben Torrey, A.C. Dixon, and C.I. Scofield—saw the Keswick meetings as a major influence on the American Bible conference movement, noting: "The Northfield conferences especially resembled the Keswick gatherings." Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 78. Both Powerscourt and Keswick were certainly well-known in American Bible conference circles, and individual leaders like George C. Needham may have drawn on the example of one or the other as inspiration for their work in organizing Bible conferences. And yet, to point to these earlier meetings as causal precedents seems to obscure the impulses in American culture—such as clerical re-professionalization—that made this new form of religious gatherings popular and influential.

Massachusetts, and The National Bible Conference for the South, held in Old Point Comfort, Virginia, among others. In organizing these ventures, Needham drew on his vast connections with evangelical leaders to offer a steady and reputable supply of speakers. As co-editor with A.J. Gordon of the journal *The Watchword*, he often found a means to publish the proceedings from conferences.¹⁷

In 1868, soon after arriving in the United States, Needham worked with James Inglis to organize a small meeting of premillennialists in New York City. Inglis, editor of the millenarian periodical *Waymarks in the Wilderness*, was interested in promoting both premillennial interpretations of the Bible and the devotional use of the Bible in clerical life. This meeting, subsequently called the Believer's Meeting for Bible Study, became a regular summer fixture.¹⁸ In a few years the meeting had grown from small private gatherings to a larger, semi-public conference.¹⁹ After a short break following the death of Inglis, St. Louis Presbyterian minister James Hall Brookes presided as president of the conference from 1875 until his own death in 1897. The conference moved venues yearly until it eventually settled at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, from 1883 to 1897, becoming popularly known as the Niagara Bible Conference. Alongside Needham

¹⁷ Needham was also a prolific writer. One of his stories, "Father Waffle" (described as "a touching gospel temperance story") sold more than half a million copies. Another of his books, *Street Arabs and Gutter Snipes*, offered an account of "The Pathetic and Humorous Side of Young Vagabond Life in the Great Cities, with Records of Work for their Reclamation." George C. Needham, *Street Arabs and Gutter Snipes* (Boston: D.L. Guernsey, 1884).

¹⁸ Other descriptions make the origins of this conference sound more haphazard: less religious agitation than summer entertainment. James Brookes' biographer described it as more like a collective vacation: "The gathering began in a small informal meeting of evangelists who had planned to spend their summer outing in a small place." David Riddle Williams, *James H. Brookes: a memoir* (St. Louis: J. W. Allen, 1897), 166. I have not found evidence that spouses or children attended these outings, although Williams implied that hotel companies in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, helped sponsor the yearly Bible conferences.

¹⁹ Of these early meetings, and of Needham's precise involvement, many questions remain, including the general number of participants. One early account of uncertain provenance appeared years afterward in the *Los Angeles Times*, describing how: "The father of the present movement, Rev. George C. Needham, came to this country from England in 1868. In that year, in conjunction with Rev. James Inglis, he established what were known as Bible conferences, at which the prophecies were discussed. Years before he had established similar conferences in London. The first national conference in the United States was held in Philadelphia in 1869, and the second in St. Louis, in Rev. Dr. Brooke's church, where a large number of clergymen attended the sessions. Then there sprang up a series of conferences, similar to those of Mr. Moody at Northfield, and these have been maintained annually, until now four are being held regularly every year, the largest being in New York." "Chariots in the Sky: An Anticipated Pre-millennarian Movement," *Los Angeles Times* (Jan. 4, 1891), 9.

and Brookes, prominent organizing members included gyrovague William J. Erdman, who served as pastor of Moody's church in Chicago before moving to other Congregational and Presbyterian pulpits, and Leander W. Munhall, a Methodist itinerant evangelist who would also later serve as a major conference organizer.

Needham, like the later Moody, spent much of his energy working for ministers.²⁰ The Bible conferences, while they had an outward evangelistic rhetoric, were largely aimed at professional clergy. Conferences offered ministers an opportunity to network, to encounter and debate new (or old) ideas, and not least, to relax in popular New England and Canadian vacation spots during the summer months. Demanding money and time to travel and stay at posh locations, conferences drew from the middle and upper crusts of American clergy—attracting bishops, well-known ministers, and lay millionaires rather than seedy agitators or hardscrabble hedge preachers. Clergy with ambition and a message found connections with publishing resources, including Inglis' Waymarks, Arno Gaebelein's Our Hope Publishing, and most important, Fleming H. Revell's (Moody's son-in-law) eponymous publishing company. Evangelistic speakers auditioned for invitations to visit distant pulpits and hold evangelistic campaigns. For many, conference affiliations began to replace denominational structures as the primary institutional and ideological homes for ministers.²¹ The networks and ideas that emerged from the Niagara Bible conferences led some

²⁰ Needham's obituary described his work outside of the Bible conferences as mixed evangelism and clerical support: "The greater part of his life was passed in constant movement from one part of the country to another. He spent the Summer months for several years in a cottage at Manchester-by-the-Sea near Boston, preaching in the neighborhood three to four times a week, besides holding drawing room meetings in towns near by. His home was a rendezvous for tired evangelists, broken-down preachers, and returned missionaries." "REV. GEORGE C. NEEDHAM DEAD.; Noted Evangelist, Friend of Dwight L. Moody, and Prolific Writer – His Varied Career." *New York Times*, (February 17, 1902).

²¹ This shifting allegiance might also help explain why so few Niagara participants were involved in the fierce denominational battles to come, as they no longer need the denominations to provide essential professional and collegial support.

historians to describe it as the cradle of fundamentalism.²² Yet conference goers saw themselves not as a fringe militant movement, but concerned custodians of mainstream Protestant ideas.

2.3.2 First International Bible Conference

By 1878, the meetings at Niagara generated enough enthusiasm that the participants sought a more public forum. In 1878, James Brookes, A.J. Gordon, and others organized a larger public meeting for premillennial Bible lectures in New York. Alternately dubbed “The First International Prophecy Conference” or “The First American Bible and Prophetic Conference,” it was overseen by Stephen Tyng, Jr., rector of the Church of the Holy Trinity in New York City where the sessions were held.²³ The program and participants included many prominent American Protestant clergy, particularly from the Midwest and Northeast. Alongside the eight members of the organizing committee, the call for the conference included the names of 122 men who endorsed the program of the conference, including national Sunday school leader B.F. Jacobs, Philadelphia department store mogul John Wanamaker, premillennial pioneers Robert Cameron, Nathaniel West, and W.E. Blackstone, and conference cornerstone George C. Needham. It was an interdenominational group. Although Presbyterians and Episcopalians dominated, Methodists, Baptists, Dutch Reformed, and Congregationalists were on the program, apparently with little tension about denominational distinctives.

²² Walter Unger argued: “the early Bible conference men were at the vanguard of the Fundamentalist movement and that the Bible and prophecy conference meetings and the vast body of literature emanating from them became the vehicle where Fundamentalist strategies and doctrinal emphases were formulated and carried out.” Walter Unger, “Earnestly Contending for the Faith”; *The Role of the Niagara Bible Conference in the Emergence of American Fundamentalism, 1875-1900*, (Ph.D. Diss, Simon Fraser University, 1981), 6.

²³ The presence of Tyng, who was not otherwise associated with the Niagara movement, reveals the conference’s aims for theological inclusiveness. Despite strong disputes between the various sub-camps, premillennialists of all stripes gathered in 1878 on a common platform. As Unger noted, at the 1878 dispensational theology was “present but not pronounced.” Unger, 137.

The call for the conference proposed an agenda that was equal parts theological exposition and social networking: “Those who hold to the personal pre-Millennial advent of Jesus Christ, and who are “looking for that blessed hope,” should meet together in conference... to set forth in clear terms the grounds of their hope, to give mutual encouragement in the maintenance of what they believe to be a most vital truth for the present times.”²⁴ In this, as in future conferences, “mutual encouragement” was a capacious category, alluding both to developing friendships and soliciting professional help and resources.

Unlike previous Bible conferences, which received very little press attention, the 1878 conference was media savvy. Extensive coverage, including full transcripts of many of the speeches, appeared in newspapers in New York and Chicago. Newspapers were initially unsure how to characterize the event. *The New York Times*, seeking to put the conference in historical perspective, found only one precedent apart from the meetings of Millerites half a century before.²⁵ Wary of any such precedents, participants included “First” in the title of the conference to avoid any previous comparisons. Recognizing the potential danger of being associated with the earlier enthusiasm of the Millerites, speakers among the New York premillennialists made their differences and disagreements explicit. Nathaniel West explained: “‘Millerism’ has no more to do with ‘Millenarianism’ than the Talmud has to do with the Bible, or the Rhemish Annotators with the New Testament. A Pre-millennial advent is one thing; a pre-advent millennium is another. Millerism was the public denial of the Pre-millenarian doctrine. ... It was the child of an old and repudiated system of interpretation.”²⁶ West stressed that, unlike the Millerites, premillennialists were not in the business of predicting exact dates for Christ’s return. It was a fine line between

²⁴ Nathaniel West, ed., *Second Coming of Christ: Premillennial Essays of the Prophetic Conference* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1879), 11-12.

²⁵ The author noted: “It is the second conference of the kind ever held, the first having taken place in London last February. There have been many smaller denominational conferences of the Second Adventists, but none before the London conference, which included believers in Christ’s second coming from all evangelical denominations.” “The Premillennialists” *New York Times* (Oct. 31, 1878), 2.

²⁶ “The Pre-Millennarians: Closing Exercises of the Prophetic Conference.” *New York Times* (Nov. 2), 1878, 2.

being something new and something old. Premillennialism, presenters stressed, was the historically orthodox position of the church. Only the conferences were new.

In style as well as theology the conference blended adaptation with tradition. Although some of the speeches were sermonic and hymns were sung at the conference, for the most part the professional ministers delivering speeches resisted their oratorical training and read carefully prepared papers. The goal was not pastoral application of spiritual lessons, but scholarly defense of premillennial doctrines—and associated Bible reading strategies—to an audience professionally interested in the subject. Talks frequently included elaborate exegesis of Greek terms and regular citations from European biblical scholars. In this respect, the 1878 premillennial conference took itself seriously as cutting edge, intellectually authoritative biblical teaching. The published conference papers, compiled by Nathaniel West, included a forty-two page critical appendix with extended excerpts from well-known works of European biblical scholars.

West believed the stakes were high—he noted that “the truth of a doctrine depends... upon its exegetical foundations”—so he emphasized the prestige of the foundational biblical scholarship that premillennialists relied on.²⁷ “The authorities cited need no introduction,” he asserted in the volume’s introduction. “Their fame is universal. If any intelligent scholarship, more competent ... resides anywhere in Christendom, I am unconscious of its locality.”²⁸ West’s attributions of scholarly fame spoke volumes about his intended audience, for none of them were household names. There were no Sigmund Freuds nor even Ferdinand von Zeppelins among these European biblical scholars. West himself translated many of the excerpts, for lack of any other available English translations. Names like Berleberg, Richter, Theurer, Stockmayer, Pfeiderer, and Schenkel were hardly so famous that they needed no introduction, except perhaps for audiences of seminary-

²⁷ West, 479.

²⁸ Ibid.

trained professionals.²⁹ This canon of authorities known only within an elite guild indicated the extent to which the ministerial profession was already professionalized at the end of the nineteenth century.³⁰

Only two of the conference speakers were full-time academics. Henry Lummis taught classics at Lawrence College in Appleton, Wisconsin, while John Thomas Duffield was an ordained Presbyterian minister who taught at Princeton College, but in the mathematics department. Indeed, academic institutional affiliation was unnecessary at this moment, before universities succeeded in pressing their exclusive claims as guardians of knowledge. In 1878, a nationally prominent minister held as much—or more—intellectual authority as an Ivy League theologian. The question, then, was not why the 1878 conference organizers did not feel the need to involve academic biblical scholars, but why more sympathetic academics did not participate? The absence of foremost conservative Princeton theologian Charles Hodge, who was no friend of premillennialism *and* had died four months earlier, was perhaps no surprise. But the lack of other representatives—not just from Princeton or Andover or Yale, but from any seminary or college—suggests that for most of the nineteenth century ambitious religious leaders seeking a national soapbox chose the pulpit rather than the lectern.

²⁹ West's appendix attributed excerpts to: *The Berleberg Bibel*; Richter's *Erkiane Haus Bibel*; Starke's *Synopsis*; Neue's *Testament*; Theurer's *Dae Reich Gottes*; Stockmayer, *Das Oelblatt*; Pfeiderer's *Der Paulinismus*; Ebrard's *Christliche Dogmatik*; Schenkel's *Christliche Dogmatik*; Van Oosterzee's *Christian Dogmatics*; Christlieb's *Modern Doubt and Christian Belief*; Dorner's *Person of Christ*; Luthardt's *Lehre von der Letzen Diagen*; Lange's *Bremen Lecture*; Auberlen's *Der Prophet Daniel*; Kliefoth's *Offinubarnuz Johannie*; Rothe's *Dogmatik Eoos' Interpretation of Daniel*; Schmid's *Biblical Theology*; Koch's *Das Tansend Uhrige Reich*; Steffann's *Das Ende*; Moses Smart on the Apocalypse; Alford on the Apocalypse; Winthrop's *Premium Essay*; Jamison's, Fausett's and Brown's *Critical Commentary*; *The Parousia*; Neander, Lechler, Gloag, Olshansen, Meyer, Bauinpirteu, Hackett, Da Costa, on Acts 3:19-21; Rev. George Duffield, *D.D., Dissertations on the Prophecies*; Rev. R. J. Breckenridge, D.D. *Knowledge of God Subjectively Considered*; and Dostcidieck's *Of Teubarang Jobaunis*. Like Zeppelins, this collection of scholars appears to have passed quietly yet left a long shadow.

³⁰ Ernst Sandeen found this extensive premillennial appeal to European scholarship an anomaly. He wrote: "Quite in contrast to their previous practice, millenarian speakers at the 1878 conference frequently referred to European scholars for support of their positions—a practice that persisted for the next two decades and then disappeared." Sandeen, 150. His puzzlement reflects his interpretive assumption that premillennialism was always a fringe movement seeking to justify minority positions, rather than seeing these nineteenth century conferences as representative of broadly mainstream, culturally authoritative professional ministers.

Notably, the modernist biblical scholarship emerging in the United States at the time was neither highly regarded nor highly feared. Conference speakers made no mention of higher criticism or “New Theology.” Some denounced modern spiritualizing exegesis, but for the most part their barbs were directed not at liberal biblical critics as such, but at postmillennialists who espoused a faith in the power of religious work to perfect the world. Generally speaking, it seemed most conference attendees imagined themselves in friendly relations with academic biblical scholarship, which they understood as mainly an export from Germany, and of specialist rather than general import. And conference attendees were likely not deluded in imagining their relative cultural status. For the viewing public, new critical developments in American biblical scholarship came from sources no more reputable or famous than the prophecy conference presenters. In the 1870s, leaders of New Theology included popular preacher Henry Ward Beecher and Washington Gladden, but most others were unknown figures like Congregational minister Newman Smyth or Episcopalian R. Herbert Newton. Only Charles Augustus Briggs at New York's Union Theological Seminary held an important academic position. Their education was likewise unexceptional; historian William Hutchison wrote of these early modernists: “Unlike the liberals who came to prominence after 1890, most of these men had not pursued graduate studies beyond theological seminary; and only Briggs and the Smyth had studied abroad.”³¹ Thus the scholarly ambitions of the 1878 premillennialists were by no means unreasonable. They were as qualified as any group to produce a vibrant and culturally authoritative intellectual tradition of American biblical study. Those present in 1878 would have been surprised to hear academic claims that prestigious biblical scholarship should take place in universities, and should focus on origins and development.

Confident in their scholarly prerogatives, 1878 premillennialists could focus their energies on shaping public opinion rather than rebutting intellectual attacks. Summarizing at the end of the

³¹ William Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Harvard University Press, 1976), 78.

conference, they turned to draw out the practical implications of premillennial belief. The chief ramification was an urgent call to evangelism: “The doctrine of our Lord's Premillennial advent,” read a concluding statement, “is one of the mightiest incentives to earnestness in preaching the Gospel to every creature 'Till He come.’”³² Indeed, the 1878 conference was more successful in popularizing the objectives and community of American premillennialism than it was in generating any consensus over the theological particulars. (This trade-off, and the inclusive line-up of the program, elicited fierce criticism. Irish Plymouth Brethren leader John Nelson Darby accused the 1878 conference of having “all sorts of heretics there, and persons deliberately hindering the truth in seeking to connect it with the world and the camp.”³³) The 1878 prophecy conference showed the traditional ministerial profession at its highest ebb. Seminary degrees offered sufficient proof of specialization for interested ministers to engage in intellectual debates with European academics. For the 1878 Bible conference attendees, pulpits and popular appeal were the keys to cultural and intellectual authority.³⁴

Their mainstream credentials and cultural authority seemed so assured that premillennialists expressed surprise when their positions were attacked as a minority view. Yet attacks soon followed, and continued unabated for the next half century. Although never mentioned in the proceedings of the 1878 conference, Union Seminary's Charles A. Briggs viewed the prophecy conference as a personal threat, and responded vigorously. He wrote a series of

³² “The Pre-Millennarians: Closing Exercises of the Prophetic Conference,” *New York Times* (Nov. 2, 1878), 2.

³³ Quoted in Sandeen, 156. Sandeen noted at this time that no one formally affiliated with the Plymouth Brethren participated in the conference, perhaps indicating some of the cause for Darby's unhappiness. Yet Sandeen still concluded that the big theological tent of the 1878 conference did not represent a popular mainstream premillennial movement, but a fringe sect in which “Darby's views were being more widely represented than he realized.” Ibid.

³⁴ By and large, early premillennialists held both seminary degrees and pulpits. Nathaniel West held a B.A. and M.A. from the University of Michigan and a D.D. from Allegheny Seminary, and the pastorate of Central Church of Cincinnati, Ohio. A.J. Gordon earned degrees from Brown University and Newton Theological Institute and spent more than a quarter century as pastor of Boston's Clarendon Street Church. William Rufus Nicholson graduated from La Grange College, Alabama and received a D.D. from Kenyon College, Ohio, while serving as a bishop of the Reformed Episcopal Church. Rufus W. Clark matriculated at Yale College and New Haven Theological Seminary, before serving at the First Reformed Church of Albany, New York. In this climate, premillennialists without formal theological education or prominent pulpits were the exception rather than the rule.

articles spanning four months in the *New York Evangelist*, in which he proclaimed premillenarianism was heresy and “the basis of a most pernicious series of doctrines, ever rejected by the Church as fanatical, visionary, and dangerous.”³⁵ Briggs demanded that premillennialists “abandon their organizations, disband their committee, stop their Bible and Prophetic conferences,” otherwise he felt these troublemakers “will have only themselves to blame if the storm should become a whirlwind that will constrain them to depart from the orthodox churches, and form another heretical sect.”³⁶ Briggs, using a time-honored casuistic strategy of peremptorily accusing his opponents of the rhetorical infelicities he was in the process of committing, blamed the prophetic conference for its constant theological sniping at orthodox churches, bemoaned the personal attacks directed at his character, and fiercely denigrated the credentials of all who disagreed with him.

Premillennialists recoiled. They saw Brigg’s combative jobations as heavy-handed, particularly his words: “threatening persecution, as against heretics, if Millenarians do not keep those views to themselves,” and demonstrating his “assumption of superiority and ecclesiastical authority.”³⁷ A decades-long battle emerged, in the pages of the *New York Evangelist* and countless other books, papers, journals, and pulpits, to debate whether or not premillennialism or its alternatives represented the views of the historical church, the church fathers, the important creeds (particularly the Westminster Confession of Faith), or the views of the majority of American Christians. Both groups attempted to marginalize the other by claiming that opposing positions represented only a minority view or constituted a recently developed heresy. Over time, the actual arguments, historical and theological, proved far less important than the institutional locations of the

³⁵ Charles A. Briggs, *New York Evangelist* (Sept. 12, 1878), quoted in George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, vol. 1 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), 551. Briggs signed his articles as “Westminster” thus claiming continuity with the positions of the Westminster confession.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, vol. 1 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), 481.

various parties. In 1878, the ministerial presenters at the prophetic conference possessed enough cultural status that they only needed acknowledge the views of a handful of British and German scholars. Meanwhile, Charles Briggs, distinguished professor at Union Theological Seminary, felt the need to engage with premillennialist ideas in order to defend his positions. Within a few decades, however, the relative status of those positions would be dramatically exchanged.

2.3.3 Northfield

Unable to predict their own future, premillennialists in 1878 were not aware that their ministerial prestige would rapidly lose ground to university scholars. So they continued attempts to bridge the gap between profession and popular, continued to value Bible school educations and public knowledge, and continued to organize and publicize through Bible conferences. Such was the atmosphere in 1880 when evangelist Dwight L. Moody established a series of summer conferences near his home in Northfield, Massachusetts. Moody's popularity and clout at this point in his career ensured that his speaking invitations would entice the leading lights of English-speaking Protestantism. Yet the core of the speaking line-up at the Northfield conferences included his closest lieutenants and prominent ministers who had supported his work. George Needham was unremarkably present. Premillennialists were common, as there was a sizeable overlap between Moody's associates and the networks that had developed around James Inglis and James Brookes. Names such as A.J. Gordon, Nathaniel West, William J. Erdman, Henry Parsons, and J. Wilbur Chapman drew crowds in both Niagara and Northfield. Moody's conference grew yearly in both attendance and significance. J. Wilbur Chapman estimated that, for the aging Moody, this proved a satisfying culmination to his career: "I question if there is any work that Mr. Moody was engaged in

throughout the world that he was more interested in than the Northfield Conference. ... Mr. Moody's educational ideas ... were epitomized in the work of the summer conferences."³⁸

The Northfield conferences worked in the mediating tradition of the 1878 prophecy conference, aspiring to garner intellectual authority from both popular appeal and specialized expertise. Unlike purely populist revival meetings, the Northfield conferences were intended for audiences of ministers and full-time Christian workers. Unlike university courses, the conferences did not recognize distinctions between learning and piety. The conference sought to help professionalize clerical audiences by theological training and developing social networks. However, ministers directed process of professionalization, rather than professors. Northfield signaled an even more dramatic shift in Protestant clerical organization. Since the eighteenth century, evangelical practices revolved around lay activity.³⁹ Although popular Protestantism began to take on the character of emerging consumer cultures in the eighteenth century, even in this model clergy were largely associated with production of religious goods. Ministers were expected to function as fully operational factories for intellectual, moral, and spiritual guidance. By contrast, the Northfield conferences (and the Bible conference movement generally) offered audiences made up of clergy an opportunity to *consume* the religious knowledge, affective experiences, and theological confidence they were otherwise asked to produce.

Since Moody felt that ministerial formation ought to involve spirituality as much as it did intellectual coherence, conferences were designed to be devotional as much as doctrinal. Moody himself was never much concerned with establishing theological consensus, by committee

³⁸ J. Wilbur Chapman, *The Life and Work of Dwight Lyman Moody* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1900), 218, 220.

³⁹ Citing an "ideology of Enlightenment individualism that underlay the popular practices of an involved evangelical laity," Historian Bruce Hindmarsh noted the importance of such practices: "Laypeople were typically active not only in public religious observances but also in hearing and speaking of personal religious experience, hymn-singing, exhorting or even preaching, extemporaneous prayer, and also in private religious practices such as devotional reading, prayer, meditation, fasting dairy-keeping." Bruce Hindmarsh, "Reshaping Individualism: The private Christian, eighteenth-century religion and the Enlightenment," in Deryck Lovegrove, ed. *The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 68.

deliberation or otherwise. Northfield speakers ranged ecumenically and theologically, and sometimes, such as with Moody's invitation to Keswick speakers, this inclusiveness incited controversy among the various presenters. Yet Moody's power and stubbornness quelled too much dissent, and eventually forged a general respect for the broad evangelical alliance Moody desired.⁴⁰

Conferences like Northfield revealed the unpreparedness of denominations for dealing with demographic growth. Clergy were now a large enough population (and in the Northeast and Midwest, concentrated enough), that neither personal relationships nor denominational structures were sufficient to organize them into learned collectives. Denominations, while serving the vital purpose of educating (in seminaries) and accrediting ministers, were too loosely structured and too partisan to meet the professional needs of most ministers who had ambitions for cultural influence. Denominations offered few opportunities for original research or for exchanges of new ideas, like that represented by the 1878 prophecy conference. Moreover, many ministers found continued competition among denominations aggravating. The Niagara Bible conference participants recognized this frustration in a creed published in 1878: "We believe that the Church is all composed of all who are united by the Holy Spirit... rising above all sectarian prejudices and denominational bigotry."⁴¹ Unlike denominations, Moody imagined his interdenominational meetings to be a new means for educating and organizing clergy, something like academic conferences, as places where professionals in a common field could be exposed to new and advanced thinking about their subject matter, and where they could make meaningful connections with other like-minded professionals.

⁴⁰ Chapman noted: "Mr. Moody had one characteristic which impressed itself on all his associates. He would not exalt one truth at the expense of another, and so Northfield has not been known as the place where any particular line of truth was promulgated." Chapman, 215. The result of this effort was an effective formation of new religious communities. Describing premillennialism as a "protodenominational fellowship movement," Ernest Sandeen wrote: "Millenarianism ... became something more after 1875. At its center, among the true initiates, it became a spiritual home, a community." Sandeen, 132.

⁴¹ James Brookes, "The 1878 Niagara Creed," *The Truth* 4 (1878), 456.

Northfield did not prove to be the most influential or lasting of the Bible conferences. It lost much of its momentum after Moody's death in 1899. However, it was unmatched in popularizing the Bible conference model. The Northfield conferences helped validate the desire of American Protestant clergy to establish lasting professional extra-denominational affiliations. Chapman assessed the greater debt of Bible conferences to Moody: "In many parts of the country there are annual summer gatherings of Christian people for the study of God's Word. The number is rapidly increasing, and the growth of some of these conferences is really remarkable. In a sense, at least, the Northfield Conference ... is responsible for them all."⁴² As usual, the stout Moody cast a wide shadow wherever he passed. Thus in 1900, Chapman could confidently assert: "Northfield is pre-eminently, in the judgment of many people, the most important gathering of Bible students in this country, if not in the world."⁴³ In the Bible conference movement it seemed, at least for a brief time, that a means had been found to help preserve ministerial authority over biblical interpretation.

⁴² Chapman, 215. Using an enigmatic sense of chronological causation, Chapman identified some of the conferences that owed their beginnings to Moody, including the dispensational gatherings at Niagara-on-the-Lake—began in 1868, a dozen years before the first Northfield conference—and the Midwestern gatherings at Winona Lake, Indiana, which began in 1875.

⁴³ Chapman, 217.

Figure 11: Outdoor service at the Northfield campground

Moody stands facing the audience. Although the majority of Northfield lectures took place indoors at the buildings of the Northfield schools, this picture shows something of the mixed intentions of city residents attending summer conferences in the country. While the rustic setting invoked the revivalist camp meetings of mid-century, the impeccably dressed audience and the prevalence of books show the atmosphere was less one of ecstatic enthusiasm and more one of somber intellectual engagement. (Image: Chapman, 228.)

2.4 Accumulating accreditations

Despite their innovations, the Moody network and Northfield conferences lagged behind universities in the rate and scope of professionalization. Clark University represented the new standard, with its laboratories full of specialists and walls covered with framed doctorates. Increasingly into the twentieth century, degrees and guilds formed the basis for ongoing formation of experts. Historian Lawrence Veysey described the period from 1870 to 1920 as “the first great

flowering of an organized network of structures involving the humanities in their every phase.”⁴⁴ To be sure, some professional organizations existed before 1870. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences was founded in 1780, and the American Antiquarian Society seemed presciently ahead of the times when they threw open shutters in 1812. Both offered some institutional resources for budding academic disciplines. But the real explosion of professional organizations—founded and run mainly by university men, instead of dedicated amateurs or political bodies—came after 1870. The Society of Biblical Literature was founded in 1880. The American Historical Association and the Modern Language Association followed closely, ramping up operations in 1884. The American Philosophical Association and the American Anthropological Association joined the incorporation frenzy in 1900 and 1902, respectively. Outside the humanities this pattern of organization held true as well, as, for example, the American Institute of Electrical Engineers emerged in 1884 while the Geological Society of America crystalized in 1888.⁴⁵ Through professionalization, disciplines sought autonomy without institutional independence.

Most scholarly organizations were cut to familiar patterns. All valued specialization, university affiliations, and advanced research. Most formed journals to publish members’ current work. All made at least cursory attempts to be nationally representative of the field, although in practice New Englanders dominated most societies. All launched annual conferences where scholars gathered to present research and network.⁴⁶ Within the university, pressures to create

⁴⁴ Veysey, 65.

⁴⁵ Non-university-based white-collar professions organized en masse during this period as well. The American Dental Association was formed in 1859, slightly ahead of the curve. The American Bar Association wrote its bylaws in 1878. In both cases, alongside professional development and networking, issues of accreditation took prominence. Veysey suggested the bulk of these developments looked to European precedents. He wrote: “especially in the 1880s and 1890s, humanists of both sorts revealed their underlying appetite for exclusiveness by turning with ever greater enthusiasm to the continental European model of centralized cultural institutions. ... The model suggested a need for creating organizations with national scope, leading to unity and system rather than fragmentation.” *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁶ Even at the time, academics knew this format of conference lectures was not particularly effective or appealing, and early society members regularly complained about boring papers and lack of audience responses. See: *Ibid.*, 77.

increasingly standardized, bureaucratized, and intellectually segmented fields led to widespread approbation for membership in nationally prestigious, elite societies.

For a time, some societies sought to create scholarly consensus through these meetings. Veysey found such lofty intellectual goals in the nascent American Philosophical Association meetings as late as 1917. “The elusive promise of the annual APA meetings,” he quipped, “was that they might actually bring about agreement on the nature of ultimate truth through deliberation by committee.”⁴⁷ Yet scholarly societies quickly recognized that the greater benefit of these meetings came through developing social networks and aggregating cultural capital, instead of through the transmission of particular ideas or the construction of consensus. Veysey described this change in conference proceedings as: “a growing slackness of tone, an open awareness that personal relationships and social amenities counted for more than did attempts at intellectual problem-solving.”⁴⁸ Networks of scholars grew up around common disciplines as professional societies instead of shared employers became the gatekeepers of academic identity. Many academics found their vocational identity not in some generic image of the university, nor by participating in local communities and associations, but as elite members of dispersed, highly trained and highly specialized guilds.⁴⁹

Biblical studies (and the often related study of church history) experienced many of these same professionalizing tendencies, within universities and without.⁵⁰ As in other fields, academic

⁴⁷ Ibid., 79.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 75.

⁴⁹ Although hard to quantify these subtle shifts, it seems true that institutional affiliation took second place to discipline in scholarly identities. So, for example, in 1880 one might be a professor at Princeton who taught history, but by 1900 a historian who taught at Princeton.

⁵⁰ Much of the story about the professionalization of the university, and of biblical studies within the university, has already been well told. See: Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969); Jerry Dean Campbell, *Biblical Criticism in America, 1858-1892*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Denver, 1982; Mark Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals Scholarship and the Bible in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986); Laurence R. Veysey, *The emergence of the American university* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1965). Other works focus on specific features of this professionalization, including the wholesale adoption of German higher criticism and historicism, the founding and growth of the Society of Biblical Literature, and the battles to make the scholarly study of the Bible a naturalistic enterprise.

location and guild affiliation became the most significant symbols of intellectual status. Scholars in universities re-ordered the study of the Bible to emphasize novel research and interpretive explanations based on historical origins. It was not precisely a hierarchical ordering, but rather the construction of a separate sphere of knowledge production. ‘Amateurs’ (like Nathaniel West), ministers, seminarians, southerners, and Bible college teachers were gradually excluded from active participation in the scholarly production of knowledge about the Bible, and from corresponding academic societies. Certainly, university outsiders were welcome to try to keep up with the most current research, but the days in which an erudite minister like West could produce reputable scholarship, contribute valuable translations of theological texts, or publish in academic journals were quickly fading. Likewise, seminaries assigned books written by university professors, not by ministers, just as medical schools stopped assigning books written by practicing physicians. The intellectual work that merited attention and debate no longer took place in pulpits or in public, as at the 1878 prophetic conference, or on the pages of newspapers. A powerful network of university-based biblical scholarship emerged. This network began in the Northeast, with scholars who had studied in Germany (or later, at Johns Hopkins, Clark, or the University of Chicago), and who shared a basic recognition of the hierarchical prestige of the university itself as a mediating influence on debate.

The history of the Society of Biblical Literature is instructive in this regard. Began around 1880, founding members included Frederic Gardiner of Berkeley Divinity School, historian Philip Schaff, and Charles Augustus Briggs of Union Theological Seminary. Meetings began in New York, but gradually expanded both geographically and theologically. Gardiner was interested in including conservative scholars in the society, and invited Princeton professors C.A. Aiken, W.H. Green,

Charles W. Hodge, and James McCurdy.⁵¹ Yet scholars without university locations or foreign educations, such as Nathaniel West or C.I. Scofield, were rarely invited. Of the first 112 members active in the SBL, only ten were full-time ministers.⁵² As historian Jerry Dean Campbell noted, “the biblical critic had indeed become a distinctive career,” and this role was identified fully with the specialization of knowledge that took place in the university.⁵³ Disagreements in the SBL were common, to be sure, but the chief form of debate was between traditionalists who sought a philological study of the Bible, and modernists who sought to introduce historical-critical methods emerging from Germany. Scholars often bracketed popular theological concerns as unrelated to their work. As Thomas Olbricht noted: “Biblical study now centered on the origins and development of the Bible rather than its content.”⁵⁴ Right methods, credentialing, and university locations all became prerequisites for participation in the work of the SBL.

Professionalized networks and university locations acted, almost deterministically, to establish positions in theological disputes. While previous historiography has usually divided the landscape between theologically liberal scholars welcoming higher criticism and theologically conservative ones rejecting criticism, this distinction is problematic. The biblical scholars at Princeton Theological Seminary—commonly described by historians as representative of conservative theological positions—had more in common with their elite academic peers than they did with non-academic biblical interpreters. Professionalization and specialization drew the lines. Noting the similarity of Princeton scholars with others in universities, Olbricht wrote: “Though the Princeton biblical scholars defended the epistemological significance of the Scriptures ... they became increasingly sensitive to the historical settings out of which biblical statements were made

⁵¹ Ernest W. Saunders, *Searching the Scriptures: a history of the Society of Biblical Literature, 1880-1980*. (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982), 9.

⁵² Jerry Dean Campbell, *Biblical Criticism in America, 1858-1892* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Denver, 1982), 226.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 267.

⁵⁴ Thomas H. Olbricht, “Intellectual Ferment and Instruction in the Scriptures: The Bible in Higher Education,” in David L. Barr and Nicholas Piediscalzi, eds., *The Bible in American Education: From Source Book to Textbook* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 101.

and the historical nature of biblical documents.”⁵⁵ In the writings of Princeton Hebraist William Henry Green, described as an “arch-conservative,” Olbricht found that “Green had not quarrel with the thesis that reality emerges historically even in the Scriptures. What he challenged was the particular account of that history originating in German higher criticism.”⁵⁶ Despite their theology, Princeton scholars held the institutional posts and methodological assumptions that allowed them access to societies like the SBL. And such access made them more sympathetic to the belief that explanation involved origins. Dispensational scholars and most mainstream clergy did not.

2.5 Two paths of clerical re-professionalization

Knowledge producers outside of the university were caught on the horns of a dilemma. Their claims to expertness were undermined by a new class of Ph.D.s with additional layers of education and accreditation. Likewise, demonstrations of popular appeal were no longer sufficient proof of expertise. To face the challenge from academics it seemed they must specialize, enforce methodological homogeneity, and bathe their work in scientific jargon and abstruse sophistication. Respect appeared to emerge from incomprehension; the less penetrable a subject (like Einstein’s early-twentieth-century physics), the more venerated its practitioners became. Yet for the professions, and particularly clergy, to impale themselves on obscurity meant to abandon the old struggle with untrained populists. And ministers knew, as essayist Roger Angell once quipped, obscurantism pushes no pies. Among Protestants who cared deeply about right belief, ministerial work demanded that they educate the public. Yet often beliefs capable of popularization struggled to garner scholarly attention or respect. For clergy, intellectual authority seemed of little use without

⁵⁵ Olbricht, 99.

⁵⁶ Thomas H. Olbricht, “Intellectual Ferment and Instruction in the Scriptures: The Bible in Higher Education,” in David L. Barr and Nicholas Piediscalzi, eds., *The Bible in American Education: From Source Book to Textbook* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 99.

the ability to make their beliefs understood, yet beliefs that could be popularly understood were eyed suspiciously by segments of the public enamored with the inscrutability that seemed to accompany expertise and specialized knowledge.

Within two decades, the mediating tradition represented by the 1878 prophecy conference—professionalized clergy gathering for scholarly debate and to present original research about the Bible—started to divide into separate streams. The tensions that motivated this, and the choices made, surfaced in the wider history of the Bible conference movement. Bible conferences tended to form around personal networks, and unsurprisingly this proved less durable as a source of professional authority than the formal institutional location of higher education. Few thrived longer than a single generation. However, between 1880 and 1920, they played an essential role in building, housing, and promoting clerical networks. Ultimately unable to broker the tensions of professionalization, the movement eventually divided into the overlapping networks that might be described as fundamentalism and dispensationalism. The larger fork of Bible conferences, perhaps best described as mainstream fundamentalism or reconstituted conservative evangelicalism, chose to emphasize popular religious education. A smaller stream focused on professionalization and attempts to retain elite intellectual authority over biblical interpretation, mostly in the work of dispensationalists. The former continued the trajectory set by the populist evangelicalism of D.L. Moody and other revivalists. The latter attempted to form a non-university-based scholarly tradition of premillennial Bible study, first centered in the personal networks of James A. Brookes and the Niagara Bible conferences, then eddying around C.I. Scofield and Arno Gaebelein. Through the Bible conferences these two impulses (one toward populism and the other toward professionalism) met, blended, disputed, and eventually shattered again, leaving different movements in their wake: the contested fundamentalism of figures like William Bell Riley and Len C. Broughton, and the

scholarly dispensationalism of C.I. Scofield.⁵⁷ Squeezed out of university-based guild networks of status validation, and not content with populist or fundamentalist anti-intellectualism, dispensationalism coalesced as a distinct new movement seeking its own forms of validation.

2.5.1 Professional clerical networks

In 1883, John F. Kendall (“D.D.”), a Presbyterian minister from La Porte, Indiana, attended the Niagara Bible conference and described the atmosphere in an article for the *New York Evangelist*. Noting the lack of denominational tension and the unexceptional theological emphases, he wrote: “All who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ are welcome. No question is asked concerning church connection or preference. There is an utter absence of anything like the spirit of sectarianism.”⁵⁸ Kendall saw the primary purpose as clerical training. “It is a school,” he wrote, and went on to describe four hours spent each day in Bible study, adding only an off-hand mention of evening evangelistic services held “to reach the masses.”⁵⁹ Kendall found the main teaching of the conference not eccentric “hobbies” but mainstream Christian beliefs: “If one thought controls in all study and in every service, it is the thought of the amazing grace of God in Jesus Christ.”⁶⁰ In this, the participants at Niagara saw themselves, and were seen by many others, as not merely a tiny sect of militant premillennialists, but in the vanguard of mainstream American Protestantism. From this

⁵⁷ This idea that two movements were at work in the Bible conferences diverges from scholarly consensus. By assuming a coherent later movement called “fundamentalism,” scholars often conflate the happenings at these conferences, assuming that the products emerging from the movement was all aimed toward this singular end. See, for example, Walter Unger’s conclusion that: “the early Bible conference men were at the vanguard of the Fundamentalist movement and that the Bible and prophecy conference meetings and the vast body of literature emanating from them became the vehicle where Fundamentalist strategies and doctrinal emphases were formulated and carried out.” Walter Unger, “‘Earnestly Contending for the Faith’; The Role of the Niagara Bible Conference in the Emergence of American Fundamentalism, 1875-1900” (Ph.D. diss., Simon Fraser University, 1981), 6.

⁵⁸ John F. Kendall, “The Believers’ Meeting for Bible Study,” *New York Evangelist* (Aug. 9, 1883), 8. Freedom of attendance did not extend to theological relativism. Kendall noted “Spiritual ‘cranks,’ while not excluded from the meetings, have no voice in them, and if they attempt interference, as they sometimes to, they are promptly suppressed.”

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

position, the Niagara Bible Conference and its offshoots represented a unique attempt to utilize Bible conference gatherings to form networks for inter-denominational biblical scholarship. As expertise and technical proficiency became necessary components of intellectual authority, the Niagara network regularly chose to hold meetings that stressed erudition over outreach.

These developments in clerical professionalization among the larger Niagara community were evident in the second public American Bible and Prophetic Conference. Arranged by Niagara leaders to revisit the successes of the 1878 prophecy conference, hundreds of participants gathered in Chicago in November, 1886 to hear scholarly lectures on biblical interpretation. Meetings were held in Farwell Hall, seating more than 1300, and newspaper accounts described the auditorium filled with “Christian theologians and ministers of different evangelical denominations, bishops, professors in academic and theological institutions, Christian evangelists, secretaries of Young Men's Christian Associations, and others in sympathy with the study of the neglected fields of prophecy.”⁶¹ George Needham served as chief organizer and secretary for the conference, and drew heavily from the more scholarly branch of Moody’s network for the program’s lecturers.

Figure 12: Prophetic Conference at Farwell Hall

⁶¹ “The Prophetic Conference,” *Chicago Inter-Ocean* (Nov. 12, 1886).

This picture is from two decades later, at a 1914 Bible conference in Chicago. Yet some of the speakers on the podium were the same as those in 1886, and the packed auditorium gives a sense of the serious public interest these conferences generated. (Photo: Moody Bible Institute Archives, Torrey photo file.)

Although Moody did not attend, 1886 conference speakers often invoked Moody's work, and the second day opened by reading a letter from the absent evangelist. Moody conveyed his basic sympathy with premillennial doctrines, writing: "The coming of the Lord is to me a most precious truth and constant inspiration to work."⁶² Yet it was clear Moody's purposes were not entirely aligned with the conference as a whole. Moody believed the chief purpose of pastoral gatherings and conferences was to incite evangelistic work. "My prayer," he wrote, "is that the conference may result in sending every minister out to evangelistic work this winter. Evangelists cannot do one-tenth the work called for. Pastors must assist each other."⁶³ Certainly no one at the conference would have denied the usefulness of evangelistic work, and many speakers took pains to demonstrate how premillennial beliefs invigorated evangelistic efforts. Yet the conference itself had a more overt goal of facilitating a scholarly discussion of premillennial ideas.

For the published transcripts of the conference, Needham penned six "Reasons for Holding the Bible and Prophetic Conference." Only the third and fourth reasons upheld Moody's hopes. With an eye toward "awakening of Christians from slumber," Needham argued that the scholarly study of prophecy by ministers "presents the most majestic of all motives for world-wide evangelism."⁶⁴ Two other goals emphasized giving "prominence to neglected truth" by publicizing the doctrines of premillennialism.⁶⁵ Another was the related goal of educating clergy in the proper use of the Bible, intended "to emphasize the true principles of scripture interpretation [because]

⁶² Dwight L. Moody, in George C. Needham, ed. *Prophetic Studies of the International Prophecy Conference* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1886), 41.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 215, 217.

⁶⁵ Needham and compatriots were concerned with establishing premillennialism as the consensus theological position, and thus saw themselves as "endeavoring to bring Scripture prophecy out into the open sunlight of criticism and publicity." Ibid., 215.

the figurizing theory has made sad havoc of Bible prophecy.”⁶⁶ The final one indicated social and professional goals: “Thousands of our Lord’s dear saints ... many of whom live in isolated places, are hereby brought into nearer fellowship one with another,” so that at the conclusion of the conference, “brethren hitherto unknown will abide with us in memory and in influence.”⁶⁷ The conference worked to turn isolated participants from many denominations into a unified network of Christian workers anchored by a set of premillennial doctrines and shared interpretive authorities.⁶⁸

Additionally, intentions could be seen in the common rhetoric of the speakers.

Conferences organizers and speakers were continually emphasizing the intellectual authority of their colleagues on the podium. Needham described the scholarly aspirations of the lecturers: “The brethren ... are neither idle star-gazers, erratic time-setters, nor theological adventurers. We believe their names, their ecclesiastical standing, and their spirituality of heart, to say nothing of their scholarship and their eloquence, will compel respect, disarm prejudice, dissolve doubts.”⁶⁹ This intellectual authority was not merely based on spiritual reputation, but on reason and learning. Needham invoked the scientific virtue of testability when he noted of conference speakers that:

⁶⁶ Ibid., 216.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 217.

⁶⁸ Needham’s remarks left open the question of how inclusive this network ought to be. On the one hand, he ended his “Reasons” with the ecumenical admonishment: “Let me not, however, be misunderstood. We are no clique or party coterie—no exclusive company of self-admiring Pharisees. Thank God, we can and do say, with tender emotion, “Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” Our love in the Lord, our fellowship in service, our companionship in tribulation, embrace the friends of Jesus who, though not one with us in prophetic study, are one with us in eternal union.” Ibid., 217. Yet only a few paragraphs earlier, in speaking of the importance of right doctrine, he remarked less collegially: “This Bible and Prophetic Conference calls attention of the doctrine of “last things” as a bulwark against the skepticism of modern theology. ... The gentlemen at Andover feel deeply aggrieved that their smoky and sulphurous match-light of mongrel Aryan-German rationalism is not readily utilized by those who walk in the undimmed sunlight of divine revelation... Brethren, premillenarianism pure and simple forms a breakwater against every advancing tide which would throw upon the clean beach of a God-given theology the jelly-fish theories evolved out of man’s erratic consciousness, pride, and self-will.” Ibid. Perhaps, seeing modern theology as a tiny fringe movement, Needham imagined no overlap between sulphurous mongrel rationalism and the church universal, but the rhetorical extremes make it difficult to make warranted claims about Needham’s attitude toward those not sharing his theological beliefs.

⁶⁹ George C. Needham, ed. *Prophetic Studies of the International Prophecy Conference* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1886), ii.

“They submit their interpretations, convictions, and conclusions to the severest test of candid criticism.”⁷⁰

Criticism and disagreements did exist within the conference, particularly with regard to specific interpretations of biblical prophecy, and speakers seemed tolerant of internal theological disagreement. One example surrounded the identity of the biblical figure of the Antichrist. A.J. Gordon argued in one paper that this aspect of prophecy had been fulfilled historically in the papacy, noting: “How can we account for the source of the Roman apostasy for the last twelve hundred years—that career of blood and blasphemy unmatched by anything in human history, except under the supposition that behind the scene it is Satan who is the real pope and his subordinate demons who are the real cardinals.”⁷¹ But here Gordon presented a minority view, and W.G. Morehead, professor of theology at United Presbyterian Seminary in Xenia, Ohio, presented a 10,000 word, meticulously argued refutation. Morehead’s tone was conciliatory with Gordon’s view: “Romanism, it must be confessed, strikingly resembles the Antichrist. But wonderful as the parallelism between the two is... nevertheless the papacy does not fill up and complete, as yet, the titanic portrait of the great adversary.”⁷² Conference debates over issues such as the historic or future identity of the Antichrist or the shape of the future were lively, critical, and full of erudition.

Erudition was the overwhelming impression given by all the speakers. One representative example came on the morning of the fourth day, as the Rev. Dr. John Francis Kendall delivered a talk on the subject of “The Judgment.” Kendall, the minister of the LaPorte (IN) Presbyterian Church who had been so impressed with the Niagara Bible Conference in 1883, was in many ways a typical mainline minister, concerned with evangelism and described as a “champion of the poor,

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 67.

⁷² Ibid., 101.

underprivileged, and minorities.”⁷³ Making it on to the program of the 1886 conference, his paper was pitched high. With long and dense lexical excursuses, Kendall's speech included more than twenty (extra-biblical) footnotes or quotations, and only one of his sources was not identified with the title ‘Dr.’⁷⁴ Kendall and other conference speakers, like those of a decade before, held much German scholarship in high esteem. Making distinctions between German higher critics—whose rationalistic scholarship was unwelcome—and what they saw as mainstream German academic biblical scholarship, American premillennialists relied heavily the latter authorities in their scholarship. On the afternoon of the fourth day, letters were read from prominent European scholars, most of which were solicited and translated by Nathaniel West. The published transcript announced this contribution boldly, as: “IMPORTANT EXEGETICAL PAPERS. VOICES OF EUROPEAN PROFESSORS.” Again, premillennialists described their sources as famous, noting: “As for these professors, their names are household words with multitudes of our American scholars, and of great authority.”⁷⁵ This display of deep and serious scholarship seemed to make the desired strong impression on the audience. One newspaper account of the afternoon bubbled with second-hand enthusiasm:

The four foreign correspondents of Dr. West, whose letters were given to the Bible and Prophetic Conference yesterday, are unsurpassed as exegetical scholars in the whole world. Of Dr. Delitzsch not a word need be said, he is so well known. Professor Volck is the first exegete in Russia, in the university founded by Alexander I. Dr. Koch, of Oldenburg, is probably the ablest writer on the millennium now living. These four names must carry great weight with all scholarly men. They are all premillennarians, and represent the vast majority of standard exegetes in the world.⁷⁶

⁷³ “The Reverend John F. Kendall House,” *10⁶ Annual Christmas Candle-Light Tour, LaPorte, Indiana* (People Engaged in Preservation, 2005), 6.

⁷⁴ Needham, 108-119.

⁷⁵ Needham, 215. The glowing praise continued: “Drs. Godet, Delitzsch, and Luthardt are known so well by their great scholarship, piety, and Biblical labors that it is unnecessary to say anything more. Pastor Kockh, of Bardewisch, Oldenburg, Saxony, is one of the most powerful critics of the age, and, like Professor Volck, has vigorously defended the early church faith. Both, like many others in Germany, have answered, with effect, the spiritualizing commentaries of Keil and Hengstenberg on the prophets and the Apocalypse. Professor Volck, of the University of Dorpat, Russia, is unsurpassed, as an exegete, today, and his name appears as in the list of eminent contributors to Zockler's “Hand Book of Theological Sciences.” Ibid.

⁷⁶ “Prophecy and Judgment,” *Chicago Inter-Ocean* (Nov. 16, 1886)

Unlike the 1878 conference, which took little notice of theological modernism in the United States, participants at the 1886 meeting were clearly starting to feel the heat of debates in their backyard. Needham was not shy about wading into theological debates, particularly with respect to the hermeneutic liberalism being adopted at Andover Seminary. “The gentlemen at Andover,” he wrote, “feel deeply aggrieved that their smoky and sulphurous match-light of mongrel Aryan-German rationalism is not readily utilized by those who walk in the undimmed sunlight of divine revelation.”⁷⁷ As conference speakers believed themselves to represent the best of mainstream biblical interpretation and scholarship, they were not shy about policing the methodological borders of their discipline. Apart from Needham’s purple prose, most of this debate took place in scholarly language and techniques. Footnotes were amassed, jargon was marshaled, logic was commanded, and premillennialists charged into battle behind a phalanx of experts and professional titles.

Ministers in 1886 still attempted to preserve their intellectual authority, but a careful observer of the changes since 1878 would note the growing attention they paid to the world of higher education. It now seemed essential to remark on theological developments in American seminaries and universities, like the liberalism at Andover. Just as important was finding allies among academics. While only one professor appeared on the 1878 program, ten spoke at the 1886 conference, and countless more appeared in the footnotes. While clergy saw little decline in their moral or spiritual authority, intellectual authority over religious matters and biblical interpretation was increasingly contested by academics.

⁷⁷ Needham, 216.

2.5.2 Popular Bible conferences

Outside of dispensational circles, Bible conferences quickly became homes for populist evangelization rather than locations for professional networking or scholarly conversations. Following the success of Moody's Northfield conferences, a messy proliferation of Bible conferences sprouted throughout the nation. Through the connections made or strengthened at Moody's Northfield conferences a network of nationally recognized speakers emerged. Some became full-time evangelists, others would spend summers away from their home pulpits speaking at conferences in popular vacation destinations, or increasingly, on European tours. To be sure, there were popular precedents other than just Moody's Northfield conferences. The Chautauqua movement began in 1874, organized by Methodist minister John H. Vincent and Ohio businessman Lewis Miller, both of whom were heavily involved in the national Sunday school movement. Originally conceived as a project to train Sunday school teachers in intensive outdoor settings, the Chautauqua movement shared some of the same impulses, speakers, and intentions as the Bible conferences. However, from the beginning Chautauqua had a more popular focus, blending entertainment and education and seeking to disseminate biblical knowledge rather than to establish it through research and debate. Winona Lake, Indiana began to host an annual National Bible Conference in 1895. Again, it drew on the Sunday school movement for leadership and organization, appointing pickle baron and International Sunday School Association president Henry J. Heinz as an early director. By 1902 Winona Lake saw more than 1500 ministers from different denominations arrive for summer sessions. Additionally, existing denominational meetings sometimes turned into regular Bible conferences. Meetings at Ocean Grove, New Jersey, began in 1869 as an outgrowth of local Methodist summer camp meetings, developed into the yearly International Bible Conference (sometimes called the Inderdenominational Bible Conference), directed by Leander Munhall.

By the mid-1890s, the Bible conference movement began to move beyond the Northeast and Midwest, and outside of mainline denominations. A sprinkling of conferences in Ontario demonstrated the close integration of Canadian and U.S. clergy in religious networks. The year 1894 saw the first premillennial conference organized on the West Coast, in Los Angeles. In 1895 many of Moody's regular speakers appeared at Old Point, Virginia, for the first annual Bible Conference for the South. Organizers of a massive Bible conference in Los Angeles in 1905 ambitiously invited all the ministers in Southern California. In 1899, the Canada Conference of the Mennonite church began to hold an annual Bible conference; within a decade other Mennonite Bible conferences sprouted in Kansas and Nebraska. Accounts of African-American Bible conferences in Georgia appeared as early as 1902, and Catholics, Adventists, and other groups were quick to join the craze for concentrated Bible study.

One of the most successful spinoffs of the Northfield Bible conferences was the Tabernacle Bible Conference, held in Atlanta, Georgia beginning in 1899. This conference was the creation of energetic pastor Dr. Len C. Broughton, of Atlanta's Third Baptist Church (later Tabernacle Baptist). Broughton aggressively recruited speakers from Northfield and Moody's broader networks, and just as aggressively publicized his conferences. Held annually in February or March, Broughton wisely capitalized on the idea of Bible conferences as fair-weather getaways. By the fourth year more than a thousand visitors arrived in Atlanta, and crowds of several thousand were not unheard of for popular speakers. Englishman G. Campbell Morgan (promoted by Broughton as "Moody's successor"), became one of the most popular speakers, returning even after becoming the pastor of London's Westminster Chapel in 1904. Fellow English evangelist F. B. Meyer also drew large crowds, as did Northfield regulars like A.C. Dixon and A.T. Pierson. Broughton also expanded the platform for women speakers, including German Pietist evangelist

Countess Adeline Schimmelfmann in 1899, Salvation Army Consul Emma Booth-Tucker in 1902, and Gracie Saxe (the “greatest woman Bible lecturer on earth,”) in 1910.

From the beginning Broughton sought to engage lay audiences, and as time passed the Tabernacle Bible Conferences became increasingly populist—more camp meeting than academic conference. Speakers no longer read papers of original research, as 1878 and 1886 prophecy conference lecturers did, but gave well-rehearsed talks in fields in which they were renowned experts. Broughton kept the local press well stocked with promotional blurbs for speakers and topics, and worked hard generating excitement for the subjects. In 1906, this publicity resulted in record crowds attempting to force their way into the 5,000 seat Tabernacle Baptist Church, leading to the police being called to manage the crowds at the doors and contain the “dangerous crushes of humanity.”⁷⁸

Even still, the Tabernacle Bible Conferences were not simply devotional or revivalist. Broughton sought speakers both accessible enough for the popular audiences and yet difficult enough in order to appeal to the intellectually ambitious. For example, in 1906 Broughton invited Princeton linguist Robert Dick Wilson to give what was a version of his nationally famous speech on biblical interpretation, titled “The Follies of the Critics.” The *Atlanta Constitution* captured the atmosphere:

Dr. Wilson had delivered a most wonderful lecture, full of scholarly expression and thought, which, at times, was possibly fully appreciated only by the large ministerial representation which was present in the audience. ... Dr. Broughton made quite a hit at the close of the sermon-lecture when he arose and said: “I am sure many of you are like myself, knowing mighty little about what Professor Wilson is talking about, but we are mighty glad he is on our side. We have been standing on the old Bible... and we are powerful glad that some of the brainy theologians and scholars are coming over—and they are tumbling over to our side mighty fast.”⁷⁹

⁷⁸ *The Atlanta Constitution* (Mar. 12, 1906), 1.

⁷⁹ “Attack on Higher Critics Makes Tabernacle Shout,” *Atlanta Constitution* (March 15, 1906), 9.

Broughton's remarks showed his view of theological conflict: he sensed two parties at work in biblical interpretation and believed many scholars were on the far side of the barricades. While acknowledging the power of these scholars, yet still his tone was confident that his theological beliefs represented those of mainstream and orthodox American Protestantism. Finding scholars like Wilson to buttress this view was essential. Alongside ministerial professionalization, or perhaps even more important than it, Broughton made the goal of his Bible conference to help popular audiences feel like they stood on the side of scholarly wisdom, even if they struggled to understand the "brainy theologians" they listened to.

Wilson's talk aside, attacks on higher critics of the Bible were present by 1906, but by no means the main subject matter. Speaking topics at all the Bible conferences varied, as did methods of delivery. Lectures included technical talks on the inspiration of scripture or the exposition of particular books of the Bible, but mostly consisted of standard evangelistic fare on holiness, saving souls, prayer, righteousness, and so on. Often there were also speeches concerning prophecy belief, the second coming of Christ, or various premillennial topics. Well known speakers, like G. Campbell Morgan or A.C. Dixon spoke on a wide variety of theological topics, often focusing on evangelistic staples like salvation or holy living. Less well known speakers were often brought in to give talks in their areas of expertness, as was the case for prophecy writer W. E. Blackstone, whose lecture topics never varied far from the End Times.

As Bible conferences spread the focus became increasingly popular. Few retained explicit goals regarding clerical professionalization or scholarly exchange of ideas. The twentieth century saw the rise of middle-class desire for continuing education as a form of recreation, and Bible conferences and Chautauquas blended education and entertainment in satisfying ways. Students and young people became an ideal target audience for a movement that emphasized teaching without transmitting intellectual authority. University professors who once shunned Bible

conferences when they were locations for professionalization or intellectual exchange embraced the movement as a form of educational outreach. Expertise—created, debated, and validated in the 1878 prophecy conference—was unquestioningly just *performed* by speakers at popular student Bible conferences in the early twentieth century. For example, 1903 saw more than 1,000 delegates at the Young Women's Bible Conference at Lake George, NY, a gathering intended to train future Christian leaders in Bible study. In 1908 this trend continued at the First International Student Bible Conference held in Columbus, Ohio, with more than 1200 delegates from 300 colleges. Yet, unlike many earlier conferences, these were staffed with leaders from the emerging mainline and from academic institutions. Washington Gladden headlined the Columbus convention, and other speakers included missions maven Robert E. Speer, Shailer Mathews of the University of Chicago, and John Mott, General Secretary of the World Student Christian Federation. Just as tellingly, it also included Princeton Seminary professor of theology Charles R. Erdman. Charles Erdman was the son of William J. Erdman, longtime pastor and leader in the premillennial movement, and speaker at dozens of Bible and prophecy conferences. Yet despite his theological sympathies, the younger Erdman did not appear on the programs of Bible conferences affiliated with dispensationalism.⁸⁰

As Bible conferences became more focused on popular evangelism and education and less concerned with scholarly conversations or validating intellectual authority, their significance as a home for dispensational ideas faded. Dispensationalists appeared alongside devotionalists and generic evangelists at places like Broughton's Tabernacle conferences, just as liberal academics and higher critics rubbed shoulders with conservative academic scholars like Wilson and Erdman at student Bible conferences. But long before the World Christian Fundamentals Conference in 1919, popular conferences had ceased to resemble the professionalizing meetings of the late-

⁸⁰ I am not certain that Charles Erdman never attended premillennialist conferences, but his name did not appear on the programs of the conferences I researched.

nineteenth century. While dispensationalists continued to appear on the programs of evangelistic and later fundamentalist conferences—their presence often imparted legitimacy onto the proceedings—they no longer attempted to use conferences as a vehicle for clerical professionalization, nor as occasions to present original biblical scholarship, nor as a means to accumulate intellectual authority to vie with the prestige of universities and academic guilds.

2.5 Summary

Dispensationalism emerged out of the networks of professionalized conservative and mainstream Protestant clergy that attempted to use the Bible conference movement to preserve their cultural authority and participation in biblical scholarship. In the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, the rise of academic biblical studies in new universities—with their accelerated processes of specialization and disciplinary professionalization—challenged the cultural status of those clergy. Parallel forms of professionalization going on at Clark University and at the Niagara Bible conferences did not emerge directly in response to each other, but both grew from broader cultural changes that saw intellectual authority tied up in scientific rhetoric, specialization, and expertise. Yet for all their commonalities, these two forms of professionalization proved culturally incompatible. As the next chapter argues, the methodological demand in academic circles that humanistic studies embrace explanations from historical origins excluded conservative and mainstream clergy from new sites of scholarly biblical studies.

Bible conferences emerged partly out of these pressures, as many clergymen sought ongoing training, closer networks of colleagues, and greater scholarly specialization. Yet the Bible conference movement found itself in constant tension between the need for scholarly erudition on the one hand and the desire for popular education and evangelism on the other. For the bulk of the movement, populism won out, and gatherings like Atlanta's Tabernacle Bible conferences no

longer attempted to be sites where new biblical scholarship was conducted. Yet for a smaller group, those who initially formed at the Niagara Bible conference and grew into personal networks around figures like C.I. Scofield and Arno Gaebelein, the desire remained for professional clergy to retain the intellectual authority to provide mainstream, erudite biblical scholarship. Dispensationalism, and dispensational method, became the hallmark of this latter movement.

3. Dispensational Hermeneutics

3a Academic sciences of the Bible

3a.1 The terrain of science

In 1836 a squabble erupted at Andover Seminary between two prominent professors: Moses Stuart, professor of sacred literature, and Edward Hitchcock, professor of chemistry and natural history. The prior year Hitchcock had published a series of articles attempting to reconcile the Genesis 1 account of creation with modern geological findings. Hitchcock had a long-standing interest in geology, but like many other American naturalists, he was deeply shaken by the publication of Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (published in three volumes from 1830-1833). The British geologist Lyell propounded the theory of uniformitarianism—that naturalistic processes existing in the present could best explain the geological formation of the earth, as a series of small changes over enormous periods of time. Uniformitarianism arose in opposition to the more popular theory of catastrophism, which accounted for the past by theorizing moments of abrupt and dramatic changes attributable to external forces not continuously present, such as the story of Noah's flood in Genesis 6-9. Hitchcock's 1835 articles represented his attempt to come to terms with Lyell and interpret the Genesis account of creation through the lens of uniformitarian geology.

Hitchcock hoped to demonstrate that uniformitarian geology did not require the rejection of the Genesis account(s) of creation. He described his aim: “that there are modes of reconciling the Mosaic and the geological records so reasonable, that to disbelieve the former on account of apparent discrepancies, would be altogether unjustifiable and even absurd.”¹ Hitchcock felt that science and the Bible should reasonably correspond. The imagined contradictions, he argued, were

¹ Edward Hitchcock, “The Connection between Geology and the Mosaic History of the Creation.” *The Biblical Repository and Quarterly Observer*, 5:18 (Apr. 1835), 441.

the product of excessive disciplinary insulation. A unified interpretive theory was possible only through diversified expertise:

It will explain the numerous failures of writers on the connection between the Bible and geology, to state, that most of them have been merely theologians, or merely philologists, or merely geologists, or at best slightly acquainted with more than two of these branches.... it is quite clear to us, that without at least a respectable acquaintance with them all, no man can successfully discuss their connection, or reconcile their apparent discrepancies.²

Moses Stuart, one of the most eminent American biblical scholars, immediately took exception to the ideas of his younger colleague. Stuart and Hitchcock were both orthodox Congregationalists, and agreed on nearly every point of theology. Stuart respected his colleague's piety and intent. But what Stuart could not bear was the thought of a mere geologist telling him how to interpret the Bible. Stuart had spent a lifetime learning Greek and Hebrew, studying classics and German interpretive works, and in many other types of philological pursuit. And in the matter of interpreting a linguistic text, he wondered, should not the linguist be the expert?³ Stuart began a two-pronged attack on Hitchcock's ideas. First, he insisted that interpretation of texts belonged in the realm of philology, not natural science. He posited: "modern science not having been respected in the words of Moses, it cannot be the arbiter of what the words mean which are employed by him."⁴ Just as Moses would not understand the conversation of modern geologists, geologists should not believe they understood the real meaning of Moses' texts. Stuart mocked geologists' attempts to interpret the Bible by "traversing field, mountain, and flood; by invading the domains of Neptune, or plunging deep into the regions of Erebus."⁴ Stuart stopped short of calling his junior colleague a mere rock collector, but barely. The power of interpretation, Stuart held, had to come from linguist methodology. Only linguistic scholars could determine the proper meaning of the text, and if

² Ibid.

³ Moses Stuart, "Critical Examination of Some Passages in Gen. 1.; with remarks on the difficulties that attends some of the present modes of Geological reasoning," *The Biblical Repository and Quarterly Observer* 7:21 (Jan. 1836), 52.

⁴ Ibid., 50.

geologists had difficulties with the truths they uncovered, well then, it must be a problem in their science.⁵

The second prong of Stuart's attack, then, was to discredit the new science of geology. He suggested it was far too fractious, young, and hypothetical for anyone to give it serious consideration. He wrote: "What geology has to say we will listen to ... when she has made out a consistent and credible one that will bear cross-questioning."⁶ He was, he argued, methodologically not permitted to interpret the Bible to accommodate a science which was "yet in its babyhood."⁷ It seemed obvious to Stuart that geology should not be called in to tell philology—a mature and respectable scientific discipline—how to do its job. No doubt Stuart was concerned with the validity of interpretations of the biblical text. Yet in matters of interpretation among philologists, he accepted much greater diversity of opinion. What was unmistakably wrong in this scenario was not the particular set of biblical interpretations, but the relative authority of philology and geology as sciences. Stuart opposed the idea that natural science should become—in the university or in the wider culture—the arbiter of truth in all areas of human knowledge. He complained of Hitchcock and other naturalists: "they tell us that we must not so construe Moses as to contradict their geology, and that geology must be called in as the final umpire, where doubt and dispute may arise."⁸ Philology, he contested, was a science in its own right, and one with a long-standing tradition of inquiry and expertise. What was at stake was not just a particular interpretation of Genesis 1, but the very methodological grounds of biblical interpretation itself.

⁵ Stuart did not believe such conflicts could exist. He elaborated: "I am unable to see how the discoveries of modern science and of recent date, can determine the meaning of Moses' words. Nothing can be more certain, than that the sacred writers did not compose their books with modern sciences in view, or indeed with any distinct knowledge of them. My own belief most fully is, that there is indeed nothing in the sacred books, which, when rightly viewed, and interpreted according to the principles of sound hermeneutics, will contradict any of the real and established maxims or principles of recent science. I cannot suppose that God will contradict in one book, what he has taught in another. If he develops himself in the works of nature (as he surely does), then he cannot make an inconsistent and contradictory development in the volume of his holy word." Stuart, 50-51.

⁶ Ibid., 76.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 53.

Stuart's article caused lots of head shaking among the American natural scientific establishment. It was not only that he failed to understand the geology he objected to, although there was concern about that. But many saw philology as a discipline that dealt with “interpretation,” while geology was one that dealt with “facts” and “evidence.” It was clear to naturalist observers which one would have to give way. Hitchcock replied to Stuart's dismissal of geology by suggesting that the time of philology's prominence had passed: “But intelligent and candid men will not be satisfied with such a way of disposing even of geology. Fifty years ago it might have been sufficient. But a science ... which commands the respect of many of the most gifted minds in Europe, demands different treatment.”⁹ Natural science had already won, Hitchcock effectively claimed. He gave as evidence how modern astronomy—particularly the Copernican revolution—had already forcibly circumscribed the possible interpretations of Genesis. Finally, Hitchcock noted the real problem: disciplinary insecurity. “We have the secret of professor Stuart's unwillingness to allow geology to have any thing to do with the interpretation of Scripture,” he wrote. “He believes every thing in this science to be unsettled and conjectural.”¹⁰ The prestige and intellectual authority of geology had grown so quickly that Stuart felt the need to point out its relative immaturity, lest it overwhelm the interpretive work of philological studies. Within the American academy, this battle between the natural sciences and the humanistic ones over

⁹ Edward Hitchcock, “Remarks on Professor Stuart's Examination of Gen. 1. in reference to Geology,” *Biblical Repository and Quarterly Review* (1936), 451.

¹⁰ Hitchcock, *Remarks*, 461. Many later scholars attributed Stuart's refusal to acknowledge geology entirely to his “literal” hermeneutics, instead of this disciplinary turf war. Conrad Wright determined that Stuart's opposition was due to his position as a “conservative literalist.” Conrad Wright, “The Religion of Geology,” *The New England Quarterly* 14:2 (Jun. 1941), 335-358. George Marsden portrayed Stuart's position simplistically: “The meanings of Scripture, he insisted, must be plain. Interpretation, he said is “a native art.”” George M. Marsden, “Everyone One's Own Interpreter? The Bible, Science, and Authority in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America,” in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*. Ed. By Nathan A. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 92. Jerry Wayne Brown described Stuart's concern as: “Stuart insisted on the absolute validity of Biblical statements that had received sound grammatical and philological exegesis.” Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800-1870* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 101.

disciplinary power—particularly who had the right, or the right methods, to interpret the Bible—went on for more than a century, yet even by Stuart’s time the outcome seemed written in stone.

3a.2 Refining old-fashioned science

The Stuart-Hitchcock debates illustrated two of the ideas about the scientific interpretation of the Bible floating around in the nineteenth century. As much as anything, these and other nineteenth-century interpretive battles were attempts to establish the meaning of the term “science.” Hitchcock illustrated how natural scientists were gradually narrowing the meaning of science to materialistic investigation of the natural world.¹¹ But even while these external challenges from natural science were looming, Bible interpreters spent most of their energies arguing amongst themselves about the disputed meanings of “scientific interpretations.” Philology was just one such discipline that claimed scientific status. By the end of the nineteenth century, three other methods for scientifically determining the meaning of the biblical text found prominent and vocal supporters: common sense induction, higher criticism, and dispensational taxonomic reading.

How was the Bible made meaningful for American Protestants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? It is an endlessly complicated question. Just as Fanny Farmer’s cookbook with its level measurements changed conceptions of what a recipe was and how it worked, so too did the rise of scientific and engineering values change conceptions of what it might mean to understand

¹¹ Michael Kamen argued this: “The body of modern knowledge, by late century, had raised ever more troubling questions about the Bible’s once-presumed historical and scientific accuracy, and the encroaching philosophy of scientific naturalism appeared to threaten both the concept and the context of biblical revelation. But what is more, the very definition of science itself—what the term meant and how the “scientific method” functioned as a means of ascertaining truth – became a point of increasing controversy, even confusion, during the late nineteenth century. Recent work by James Turner suggests that the term “science” underwent a transformation during this period. Whereas the word had once described the systematic approach to knowledge in any of a wide variety of subjects, natural scientists in the latter half of the nineteenth century began to cut away at the term, limiting it more exclusively to their own naturalistic methods and approach.” Kamen, *The Science of the Bible in Nineteenth-Century America: From “Common Sense” to Controversy, 1820-1900*. (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2004.), 337. It was notably in this period as well that scholars such as Andrew Dickson White began to describe religion as anti-science, or as an obstruction for scientific inquiry and constraint on intellectual freedom, assuming “science” meant naturalistic study of material objects.

the Bible scientifically. By the end of the nineteenth century, two prominent developments had occurred. The first was a common recognition of the problem that the Bible seemed to have separate spiritual meanings and scientific meanings. The second was a periphrastic set of debates about what it meant to understand the meaning of the Bible scientifically. Rather than breaking down on theological, denominational, or epistemological grounds, these latter divisions were fundamentally methodological. One branch, associated with the theologians at Princeton seminary, attempted to reformulate nineteenth-century induction as a hermeneutic method. A second branch, often affiliated with academic higher criticism, claimed that the meaning of the Bible was primarily historical. Once you had explained its origins and provenance and human author's intention and historical context, you had a scientific explanation for what the text meant. The third branch felt that a scientific reading of the text had more to do with the formal arrangement of linguistic structures in the text, and that scientifically determining the meaning of the text involved analytical work of classification, cross-referencing, quantification, and inter-textual typology.

3a.2.1 Princeton common sense realism

Moses Stuart was an unusually rigorous devotee of the ideas of Common Sense realism, but he was just one of many in the United States. The Scottish philosophy of Common Sense realism developed in the eighteenth century as a somewhat esoteric debate in western epistemology. Thomas Reid (and fellow Scottish philosophers Francis Hutcheson and Dugald Stewart) attempted to respond to the skepticism of David Hume by reestablishing grounds for confidence in knowledge.¹² To do this, Reid sought to demonstrate firm links between sensation and knowledge.

¹² Scottish Common Sense realism and its impact on American Protestant thought has been widely studied. Representative works include: Sydney E. Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," *Church History* 24 (1955), 257-72; Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1977); E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America* (New Haven: Yale, 2005); George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American*

He argued that sense perceptions were *automatically* accompanied by beliefs about their reality, instead of those beliefs being merely secondary products of reflection or comprehension. “Every operation of the senses,” he wrote, “implies judgment or belief, as well as simple apprehension. Thus, when I feel the pain of the gout in my toe, I have not only a notion of pain, but a belief of its existence ... [belief] is included in the very nature of the sensation.”¹³ Thus, Reid concluded, we trust our sense perceptions because trust comes naturally as part of the process of perceiving. Sense perceptions are not mental objects, but direct experiences of the external world. Reid believed that beliefs about the veracity of our sense perceptions were natural, “part of that furniture which nature hath given to the human understanding,” and therefore trustworthy.¹⁴ With these rigorous reflections about the nature and operations of sense perceptions, Reid hoped, “Common Sense recovers her authority.”¹⁵

The epistemological ideas of Common Sense Realism claimed many adherents in America. Or more precisely, adherents of Common Sense Realism usually claimed everyone as an adherent (with the exception of a few notorious skeptics like Hume). Humans, they asserted, naturally believed in the trustworthiness of their sense perceptions. At a popular level, this made sense. Few eighteenth or nineteenth-century Americans took strong positions opposing “common

Culture (New York: Oxford, 2006), esp. 55-61, 212-220; George Marsden, “Evangelicals and the scientific culture: an overview,” in Michael Lacey, ed., *Religion and Twentieth-Century American Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1989), 23-48.; Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America*, (New York: Oxford, 1976), esp. 307-62; Mark Noll, *America’s God* (New York: Oxford, 2002); Mark Noll, “Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought,” *American Quarterly* 37:2 (Summer, 1985), 216-238.

¹³ Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (London: T. Cadell, 1785), 481.

¹⁴ He elaborated on the divine origins and nature of such beliefs: “Such original and natural judgments are therefore a part of that furniture which nature hath given to, the human understanding. They are the inspiration of the Almighty, no less than our notions or simple apprehensions. They serve to direct us in the common affairs of life, where our reasoning faculty would leave us in the dark. They are a part of our constitution, and all the discoveries of our reason are grounded upon them. They make up what is called the common sense of mankind.” Reid, 482. Subsequent physics and psychology seem to make this claim problematic. While it seems to be that fundamental electromagnetic forces (e.g. the forces that cause sound, touch, vision), act on all bodies the same, human brains have an astonishing capacity to interpret these sense perceptions in different ways. If there is some ‘common’ set of sense interpretations, it seems to be based in a statistical commonality rather than ontological reality.

¹⁵ Reid, 483.

sense,” and many instinctively trusted their sense perceptions, whether or not they had ever heard of Thomas Reid. Just as important, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries many intellectual middlemen (particularly clergy) seized on Common Sense, or at least its superficial principles.

The category of Common Sense realism expanded to include more than just epistemological ideas. Historian Mark Noll identified three key influences of the Scottish philosophy on American intellectual life. The first was “epistemological Common Sense,” described above and most closely identified with Thomas Reid. A second branch was “ethical Common Sense,” identified most closely with Scottish philosopher Francis Hutcheson, which suggested that humans have an innate sense of “foundational principles of morality,” similar to such perceptions of the natural world.¹⁶ The third emphasis Noll described as “methodological or scientific Common Sense,” and involved the idea that “truths about consciousness, the world, or religion must be built by a strict induction from irreducible facts of existence.”¹⁷ This methodological construction was associated most closely with Francis Bacon, Viscount Saint Alban, and philosophical polymath. Bacon’s description of inductive method—moving from fact to axiom to physical law—waxed astonishingly popular throughout the English-speaking world. In part this was because natural scientists and engineers found it a useful (and self-flattering) description of their process of inquiry. But even formal philosophers and humanistic scholars savored Bacon. Thomas Reid wrote: “Lord Bacon first delineated the only solid foundation on which natural philosophy can be built.”¹⁸ By the nineteenth century, many Americans concurred, giving at least lip service to the principles of inductive reasoning.

¹⁶ Mark Noll, “Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought,” *American Quarterly* 37:2 (Summer, 1985), 221.

¹⁷ Noll, “Common Sense Traditions,” 222-223.

¹⁸ Quoted in Noll, *Common Sense Traditions*, 223.

These three emphases in Common sense realism—epistemological, ethical, and methodological—proved particularly influential for American theologians, most notably those at Princeton Theological Seminary. At the head of Common Sense’s disciples and apostles stood Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge, who served as the principal of Princeton Seminary from 1851 to 1878. Hodge’s influence in spreading Common Sense ideas came partly through sheer fecundity. Among his many accomplishments, Hodge helped found the Chi Phi society in 1824 at Princeton with fellow professors Robert Baird and Archibald Alexander. This religious fraternity was based on the principle of prolificacy rather than profligacy, and had as its purpose: “to promote the circulation of correct opinions upon Religion, Morals, Education, etc., excluding Sectarian Theology and Party Politics.”¹⁹ To accomplish this goal, the constitution of Chi Phi stipulated that each member should “at least once a month to publish in any convenient way some article designed to answer the object specified above.”²⁰ And publish Hodge did, extensively, on subjects mundane and controversial. In 1825 he founded *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, and for forty years served as its editor and chief contributor.

Hodge offered dogmatic support of Common Sense philosophy, particularly as a methodological foundation for biblical interpretation. In his 1873 *Systematic Theology* he devoted a goodly chunk of the introduction to the problem of the scientific—that is to say, inductive—study of the Bible. Hodge compared the Bible to another prominent object of sense perception: Nature. “The Bible,” he wrote, “is to the theologian what nature is to the man of science. It is his storehouse of facts; and his method of ascertaining what the Bible teaches is the same as that which the natural philosopher adopts to ascertain what nature teaches.”²¹ The task of interpretation was to ascertain the facts contained in the Bible and “collect, authenticate, arrange, and exhibit [them] in

¹⁹ Henry M. Baird, *The Life of the Rev. Robert Baird, D.D.* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph, 1866), 39.

²⁰ Baird, 39-40.

²¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, & Co., 1873), 10.

their internal relation.”²² Hodge claimed that biblical interpretation was methodologically scientific in the same way geology was: “in theology as in natural science, principles are derived from facts, and not impressed upon them.”²³ Thus textual induction (moving from biblical facts to theological theories) produced not mere parochial interpretations, but authoritative scientific knowledge.

Yet even Charles Hodge found it difficult to maintain strictly inductive methods. In 1874, just a year after his *Systematic Theology* saw publication, Hodge found himself resisting exclusive claims for inductive thinking. In a long essay titled *What is Darwinism*, he responded to scientists who claimed Darwinism to be the strict product of inductive methods and sense perceptions.²⁴ Hodge suggested that in matters of religion, inductive method could only go so far. “It is inevitable,” he wrote, “that minds addicted to scientific investigation should receive a strong bias to undervalue any other kind of evidence except that of the senses, i. e., scientific evidence.”²⁵ Even though Hodge often insisted that biblical interpretation began with common sense facts and inductive methods, when faced with challenges from natural science he claimed that kind of evidence was insufficient. He complained about the closed-mindedness of scientists: “Now as religion does not rest on the testimony of the senses, that is on scientific evidence, the tendency of scientific men is to ignore its claims.”²⁶ In appealing to evidence that went beyond sense perceptions, he was not alone. As the nineteenth century drew on, it became clear that the “facts” found in the Bible were anything but

²² Ibid., 1-2.

²³ Ibid., 13. Hodge offered an unexceptional account of the inductive method, writing: “Everyone knows how much it cost to establish the method of induction on a firm basis, and to secure a general recognition of its authority. According to this method, we begin with collecting well-established facts and from them infer the general laws which determine their occurrence. ... This inductive method is founded upon two principles: First, That there are laws of nature (forces) which are the proximate causes of natural phenomena. Secondly, That those laws are uniform; so that we are certain that the same causes, under the same circumstances, will produce the same effects.” Ibid., 3-4.

²⁴ Hodge’s answer to his title question: atheism.

²⁵ Charles Hodge, *What is Darwinism?* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Company, 1874), 129.

²⁶ Hodge, 131. Like Moses Stuart, Hodge was concerned about external challenges to theology as scientists pontificated about interpretations of the Bible. Hodge wrote: “It is very reasonable that scientific men, in common with lawyers and physicians and other professional men, should feel themselves entitled to be heard with special deference on subjects belonging to their respective departments. But it is to be remembered that no department of human knowledge is isolated. One runs into and overlaps another. We have abundant evidence that the devotees of natural science are not willing to confine themselves to the department of nature, in the common sense of that word. They not only speculate, but dogmatize, on the highest questions of philosophy, morality, and religion.” Ibid., 138.

commonly perceived, and like Hodge, most American Protestants seemed happy to use a multiplicity of methods for reading the Bible.

3a.3 Forging a new science of higher criticism

Higher criticism of the Bible washed ashore in nineteenth-century America in the midst of a storm of competing ideals, striving interests, incomprehensible languages, and greedy scientific ambitions. Criticism was first found in the company of doubts and skepticism about the Bible. Some within an increasingly educated and secularizing public sphere saw the Bible as an ever-more problematic text, full of internal inconsistencies, contradictions with modern science, and fanciful miracles. Miracles and other forms of supernatural intervention in history were particular problematic for academics and intellectuals, as “science” became increasingly associated with naturalistic inquiries into the material world based on experimentation and reproducible results. Without such objects of study, many academic biblical scholars looking to create a reputable naturalistic discipline turned to historicism and the quest for origins as the best way to understand the scientific meaning of a text. They claimed to treat the Bible “like any other book.” Late-nineteenth-century historicism and comparative religious study of the Bible led to interpretations in which the scientific meaning was increasingly located outside the text—the text was given its meaning from its original context. As historian George Marsden noted: “The positivist claims that modern science provides the only sure ground for certainty combined with the modern historical model of explanation in terms of origins seemed for a time a nearly irresistible intellectual combination.”²⁷ Lastly, as academics sought to create a scientific *discipline* around the study of the Bible, they

²⁷ George Marsden, “The Collapse of Evangelical Academia,” in Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds., *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 220.

employed methodological discipline to regulate the interpretive landscape of American Protestantism.²⁸

3a.3.1 Newman Smyth and modern doubt

Three decades after Moses Stuart's death, Andover Theological Seminary was once again embroiled in controversy concerning scientific interpretations of the Bible. In 1881, Congregational minister Newman Smyth was appointed the Abbot Professor of Christian Theology. Smyth, an Andover alumnus who had followed up with studies in Germany, had just penned two provocative books, *The Religious Feeling* in 1877, and *Orthodoxy Theology Today* in 1881. The outspoken Smyth advocated for a controversial "New Theology" that would throw off the shackles of old-fashioned orthodoxies in order to conform better to modern conditions. With respect to the Bible, Smyth's efforts were directed at reshaping the conditions for modern doubt. Despite vigorous efforts from Charles Hodge and others, educated Americans increasingly stumbled over problems in the Bible that Common Sense and inductive interpretations failed to resolve. The Genesis account of creation, in light of modern geology, represented one such problem.

Miracles represented another, and were perhaps the most serious problem for belief. As a generation of American intellectuals grew up on with Lyell and Darwin, they came to believe that sufficient naturalistic explanations of the universe could be found in present-day physical laws. Supernatural interventions in history no longer were necessary to explain things like the origins of species. They seemed even less necessary to illustrate ethical principles. Correspondingly for many, supernatural interventions crossed over a fine line from unnecessary to implausible. Biblical

²⁸ This is not to say higher criticism or its adherents formed a uniform block of ideological positions. As Marsden noted, few nineteenth century critics or traditionalists actually stood near the far ends of their methodological poles, but: "Rather, a whole spectrum of middle positions attempted to reconcile Christian faith with modern intellectual trends." Marsden, "Collapse," 221. I do not attempt to chart all those middling options here, but merely note some of the common features (e.g. historicism, naturalism), perceived implications, and disciplinary power that higher critics came to wield.

stories like the parting of the Red Sea or the miracles of Jesus seemed to also pose aesthetic problems for modern thinkers. Critic after critic described the “repugnance” with which the “modern mind” considered miracles.²⁹ Miracles were not merely implausible. Worse, they were uncouth.

Facing these challenges was one of Smyth’s goals in campaigning for New Theology and higher criticism of the Bible. Higher criticism promised to leash the feral power of modern skepticism with the bonds of scientific rigor. Smyth plunged headlong into the question of who had the right to be skeptical about the Bible, and for what reasons. First, Smyth assumed that modern conditions and scientific knowledge created a whole series of *legitimate* skepticism about the Bible and how it had been read, particularly concerning the possibility of supernatural interventions like miracles. He welcomed the external challenges to religion from natural science that Moses Stuart so fiercely resisted. Smyth addressed his work to a populace for whom: “scientific studies had both brought them into unwilling doubts concerning those spiritual truths which give to life its real value, and, at the same time, thrown the prevalent proofs of religion out of all relation to their habits of mind.”³⁰ Smyth simultaneously wrote for this audience and attempted to create it. As adamantly as any physical scientist he argued for the incompatibility of naturalistic science with orthodox theology—a phrase Smyth used to mean historically outdated beliefs. When old biblical interpretations ran against the hard facts of modern science, Smyth believed, believers were right to harbor skepticism about their religious ideas.

²⁹ Conservative theologian James Orr would identify this disgust about miracles as the key divisor for biblical interpretation. He wrote: “It cannot be sufficiently impressed on student of current religious thought that the real issue on which practically the whole controversy in the newer phases of both Old and New Testament criticism turns is the relation to the idea of the supernatural.... the controversy turns on the admissibility of that particular form of the supernatural we call “miracle.” Everyone much be aware of the intense repugnance with which the “modern” mind regards everything of the nature of miracle.” James Orr, “The Issue in Theology: Natural and Supernatural in Religious Development,” *The Advance* (Sept. 26, 1907), 367.

³⁰ Newman Smyth, *The Religious Feeling* (New York: Scribner, 1877), vi.

Second, even as he sought to create such doubts, he tried strictly to limit their scope and power. This second front in the plausibility war was waged against the philosophical skepticism of European thinkers like David Hume and Thomas Huxley, as well as popular skepticism about religion Smyth found in his local newspaper. Smyth believed absolute doubts were unwarranted, based on the evidence of science. “It cannot be too strongly urged,” Smyth wrote, “that a real faith in God's Word can be afraid of no science.”³¹ In order to make this claim true, he jettisoned any Christian beliefs that seemed to come into conflict with modern thinking. The existence of traditional, non-materialistic theological positions should not trouble modern Christians, Smyth argued, because theology had no obligation to make a defense of any prior Christian doctrines. Moderns could simply “let the dead bury the dead.”³² Unable to cope with modern scientific facts, orthodox theology would fail to cope with modern moral dilemmas, and should be stripped of not only its scientific but moral authority. The key to avoiding extreme doubt was to create a new theology in keeping with the best of science, with new scientific morality. This meant a theology written by experts in tune with scientific findings and modern epistemic conditions, new theologians who could reconcile Darwinian, scientific evolution with the idea of a purposeful creation. Theologians should push on to seek an “adjustment of faith to its new surroundings” by presenting a “restatement of the evidence of things not seen somewhat more in harmony with the present condition of our knowledge.”³³ Alongside his efforts simultaneously to whip up and corral doubt, Smyth was attempting to construct a new religion that had nothing to fear from rationalism and science.

³¹ Newman Smyth, *The Orthodox Theology of To-Day* (New York: Scribner, 1881), 163.

³² Smyth, *The Religious Feeling*, vii. On the general uselessness of tradition, he wrote: “Burdens of human interpretation, therefore, too heavy to be borne, need not be carried by the champions of faith into the arena of modern controversy. Under clumsy and oppressive theories of God's method of creation, government, or revelation, he need not labor. To the main religious question of our times the Church may best go forth in light marching order.” Ibid., 14.

³³ Ibid.

Yet many remained skeptical of Smyth's methodological approach in his New Theology. In 1882, the Board of Visitors of Andover moved to block his appointment to the faculty. Because Andover trained nearly a quarter of all the denomination's ministers, Congregationalists all over the country spoke up about the controversy. The majority of scholars, clergy, and lay doubters alike were more enamored of traditional orthodox beliefs than Smyth credited. If modern science conflicted with long-standing theology, many wondered, should not Christians question the legitimacy of the upstart assumptions of modern science, instead of the other way around? Such doubts about New Theology represented the third front of Smyth's campaign. Responding to his skeptics, Smyth used dismissive language to suggest their concerns were illegitimate products of vices such as fear and ignorance. "The beginnings of intolerance," he intoned, "toward more scientific views of revelation and inspiration should be discouraged everywhere by all good men who believe that the "Word of God is able to stand in its own commanding truth, and that it does not need to be propped up by any mechanical devices of human invention."³⁴ He believed that the church would crumble without change. "Protestant faith," he wrote, "surely, cannot be saved by any protective policy of ignorance."³⁵ Coddling doubts about the need to update theology would surely lead to the church's doom.

Smyth's attempts to reshape modern doubt sent him zigzagging across the terrain of science and religion, feinting towards one position while pursuing another. He encouraged skepticism about traditional views of the Bible, and played up the threat of philosophical skepticism to suggest that the church was in mortal danger. In the no man's land between old faiths and absolute doubt, he attempted to create a new form of theology that that could withstand the sieges of modernity.

³⁴ Ibid., 163-4.

³⁵ Smyth, *The Orthodox Theology of To-Day*, 163.

3a.3.2 William Robertson Smith and higher criticism

Smyth's confidence in "New Theology" based many of its claims for scientific merit in biblical higher criticism. But what was this higher criticism?⁹ Confusion on this point prevailed in the nineteenth century. The name itself proved something of a marketing disaster, implying both snobbishness and truculent judgments. Yet initially the phrase served simply to distinguish the work from 'lower criticism' or textual criticism. Lower criticism focused on eliminating transcription errors in manuscripts. Higher criticism, by contrast, was launched to answer questions about the contexts of production of biblical texts. At first this work seemed to tackle fairly straightforward questions concerning the author, place, and time of composition.³⁶ Yet eventually the work expanded, and higher criticism came to represent a series of important methodological interventions in biblical interpretation. As scholars rejected canonicity or supernatural authorship as appropriate considerations for scientific studies of texts, so they turned instead to historical reconstruction to base their interpretations.

Although much of the influential nineteenth-century work on biblical higher criticism took place in Germany, Newman Smyth and his successors at Andover drew heavily on the work of Scottish scholar William Robertson Smith. Like his homophonous Andover colleague, Smith's work sparked controversies galore. He faced heresy charges from his own Free Church of Scotland from 1877 to 1880, and although acquitted, in 1881 he was dismissed from his academic post at Aberdeen. He subsequently became editor of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1887, which seemed only fitting as much of the prior controversy centered on his entry for "Bible" in the ninth edition of that work. Yet perhaps his greatest impact came from popularizing for English-speaking scholarly communities the kinds of higher critical ideas rampant in German biblical studies. Of particular

³⁶ Glenn Miller noted this self-description of higher criticism persisted long into the twentieth century: "To the advocates of the newer approaches, higher criticism was just another name for the historical study of the Bible, and, in particular, for those questions particularly associated with 'introduction:' authorship, place of composition, date, etc." Glenn T. Miller, *Piety and Profession: American Protestant Theological Education, 1870-1970* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 88.

importance was his approach to the Bible. It might best be described as naturalistic comparative modernist historicism, grounded in linguistic classification, for it located textual meaning in historical origins and processes of cultural and ethical development.

Scientific scholarly interpretation, Smith claimed, was necessarily different from devotional Bible reading. Seeking to explain his methods to a confused and concerned public, he attempted to distinguish the work of “Biblical science” from more popular forms of engagement with the Bible. “Ordinary Bible-reading is eclectic and devotional,” Smith claimed. While he praised the virtues of such devotional practice, yet he maintained that “a study which is exclusively practical and devotional is necessarily imperfect.”³⁷ The Reformation doctrine of the Bible demanded critical inquiry, which academic scholars were supposed to do: “The first condition of a sound understanding of Scripture is to give full recognition to the human side ... *Nay, the whole business of scholarly exegesis lies with this human side*. All that earthly study and research can do for the reader is to put him in the position of the man to whose heart God first spoke.”³⁸ Scholars, in Smith’s books, should be studying the Bible naturalistically, as a historical text (produced in the past and about the past), just like any other historical source, in search of its original meaning.

Hegel and historicism

Smith believed the key methodological approach for a naturalistic, scientific study of texts was a form of historicism. In basic form, this historicism referred to the belief that cultural artifacts—including the Bible—were not “natural” but entirely products of particular historical circumstances and contexts. Smith suggested: “The critical study of ancient documents means nothing else than the careful sifting of their origin and meaning in the light of history. The first principle of criticism is

³⁷ William Robertson Smith, *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, 2nd ed. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1908), 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

that every book bears the stamp of the time and circumstances in which it was produced.”³⁹ This quest for origins was notably different from simply discovering an author’s intent. Older philological studies were focused on issues of intent, teasing out precise meanings from dead languages. But historicism sought to *explain* the author’s intent in terms of context, much in the same way that psychological theories attempted to offer deeper explanations for patients’ words than such patients could consciously understand. Or rather, Smith believed that authorial intent was only part of the scientific meaning, and the less significant part at that. Smith suggested that scientific study treated theology and authorial intent as only of secondary interest. “In the study of Semitic religion,” he wrote in his seminal *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, “we must not begin by asking what was told about the gods, but what the working religious institutions were, and how they shaped the lives of the worshippers.”⁴⁰ Reconstructing the cultural interests, political power, and theological agendas of the ancient Israelites at various moments in history became the goal of historical critics.

Such biblical scholarship was influenced, both directly and indirectly, by Hegelian philosophy. Hegel’s doctrine of historicism indicated that truth was fundamentally rooted in history itself, or perhaps revealed in history.⁴¹ History was not merely a body of knowledge about the past, but a quasi-mystical process of development and emergence.⁴² Historian Joyce Appleby (et. al.) noted how historians’ adoption of Hegelian concepts led to an objective, progressive understanding of history: “In Hegelian terms, as history marches forward it reveals more and more of the meaning

³⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁰ William Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (London: A & C Black, 1889), 21-22.

⁴¹ Maybe. Or at least that’s what some interpreters think. Personally, I can’t make any sense at all out of Hegel’s high-falutin’ jibber-jabber.

⁴² Historian Richard Firda noted the crossover of these ideas: “From Lessing through Hegel there developed an alliance between the philosopher and the historian, and the end result was in fact the discipline of *Weltgeschichte* in which professional historians were forced to account for the historical process, to consider man’s history as a single chain of development from its primitive origins to its end in a rational and civilized society.” Richard Arthur Firda, “German Philosophy of History and Literature in the North American Review, 1815-1860,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32:1 (Jan, 1971), 137.

implicit in it and moral judgments improve accordingly.”⁴³ To explain the past demanded more than merely an understanding of how the past understood of itself (revealed in authorial intent). It also required hindsight to perceive how any particular society was positioned in this process of development, and the role it played in advancing human culture. The true meaning of the past, for historicists, was not the meaning the past attributed to itself. Instead it took the form of explanations of how historical contexts produced past forms of self-consciousness. Following this lead, the scientific study of the Bible for higher critics was not only interested in understanding the theology of ancient Israelites, but in the contexts and forces that produced that theology.

Comparative anthropology and the development of religions

A key assumption of historicism was often unspoken: that all of cultural history was a process of development. Drawing ambiguously on Hegelian notions of dialectic historical progress (or sometimes on Darwinian ideas), this premise permeated the late-nineteenth century humanistic studies that aspired to scientific status. In biblical studies, as elsewhere, these ideas about development often relied on anthropological studies of the contemporary world to construct hierarchical arrangements of persons, societies, and religions. William Robertson Smith described his work on ancient Israel as “a branch of comparative religions,” and argued that all religions, religious institutions, and religious communities underwent ethical and cultural development in response to social conditions. He retold the history of Israel as the history of a struggle between spiritual and unspiritual religion. In that struggle, increasingly modern ethical positions were dialectically spun out by the historical process. It was not that history was written by the victors, but that history was designed to produce victors. The Bible, for Smith, “set before us the graduate

⁴³ Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), 66.

development of the religion of revelation.”⁴⁴ As the furthest link in a chain of progress, present scholars stood in a privileged position to judge the past.⁴⁵ He wrote: “That the religious ideas of the Old Testament were in a state of growth during the whole prophetic period became manifest as soon as the laws of grammatical-historical exegesis were fairly applied to the Hebrew Scriptures.”⁴⁶ Historicist meaning emerged not in the words of the biblical text itself. It required interpreters to critically engage the less mature ethical and religious conditions in the original contexts of production.

Literary taxonomies

Alongside developmental hierarchies, higher critics parsed the biblical texts into to linguistic taxonomies. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the documentary hypothesis regarding the Pentateuch. This was the contribution of German scholar Julius Wellhausen. In his *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, first published in 1878, Wellhausen argued that the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) was not written by Moses (if such a person ever even existed) but were compiled much later from a variety of different sources, both oral and written. This documentary hypothesis suggested that scientific study could pick apart these various sources within the text through an analysis of linguistic particularities and cultural interests—arguing, for example, the extensive legal codes in Leviticus must have come from a priestly source interested in upholding the importance of the priesthood and ritual practices.

⁴⁴ William Robertson Smith, “Bible,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 9th ed., vol. 3 (New York: Werner Company, 1901), 634.

⁴⁵ Historian Bruce Kuklick suggested the authority of the present over the past rested in the conviction that modern epistemology, and consequent plausibility structures, were superior to those of the past: “By the late nineteenth century the influence of Strauss, Wellhausen, and comparable figures meant that present authority—one’s own experiences of how the world worked, the prized truths of contemporary investigation—was the background to one’s analysis of the past. If scholars would not believe something could be true in 1890, they could not warrant it to be true for AD 33. In the higher criticism was the coming to clear consciousness of the way the human mind reasoned: it presupposed that what one credited about the past must conform to current canons of rationality; the past was brought to the bar of present conceptions of believability.” Bruce Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America* (New York: Clarendon, 2004), 103.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

William Robertson Smith, like an increasing number of biblical scholars, found this textual gerrymandering compelling. Writing on the authorship of the Pentateuch, he claimed, “It is plain, however, that the whole work is not the uniform production of one pen.”⁴⁷ Smith appeared to harbor few doubts. He wrote of the “unmistakable” marks of a second author of the Pentateuch, of which “on many points there can be no uncertainty,” and of which scholars now “generally admitted.”⁴⁸ By discerning the linguistic identities of various passages of the Pentateuch—such as different names used to refer to God—scholars could divide the books piecemeal. By arranging such pieces according to theories of ethical and historical development, they could recreate the various original sources from which later redactors produced the biblical texts. Smith argued that such linguistic taxonomization and developmental reordering was the scientific process of historical biblical studies, writing:

It is our duty as Protestants to interpret Scripture historically. The Bible itself has a history. It was not written at one time, or by a single pen. It is our business to separate these elements [in the Bible] from one another, to examine them one by one, and to comprehend each piece in the sense which it had for the first writer, and in its relation to the needs of God's people at the time when it was written.⁴⁹

Dividing, judging, arranging in developmental order: these were the tools of the science higher criticism. The goal was to find the origins—the naturalistic causal sources—for the Bible. For higher critics, the explanations that linked these historical origins with their textual products were the objectively true, scientific meaning of the Bible.

3a.3.3 Egbert Smyth and disciplinary regimes of method

In 1880, higher criticism was just one possible option for what scholars meant by “scientific” interpretations of the Bible. Philologists, geologists, and Common Sense realists all had

⁴⁷ Smith, “Bible,” 636.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Smith, *The Old Testament*, 14.

different understandings of what it meant to parse texts scientifically.⁵⁰ But within thirty years, this pattern had changed dramatically. Within universities and mainstream seminaries, higher criticism routed its competitors for pride of place as the legitimate form of scientific interpretation. There were exceptions, of course. Princeton Seminary's allegiance to Common Sense became famous for its stubborn insistence on its own scientific status. But such exceptions merely highlighted the lack of such debates in other academic contexts. Similarly, many biblical scholars worked with other types of interpretive tools, such as lower criticism or theological interpretation. But most of them acknowledged the legitimacy of higher criticism and its claims to exclusive scientific status. Like other developments in the humanities, this was not simply a natural consequence of the methodological virtues of the various interpretive options, but a disciplinary regime. As Foucault reminds us, a discipline is both a field of study and a system of control, a product of "systems of subjection ... the hazardous play of dominations."⁵¹ In this period, academic biblical studies as a discipline was created around the idea of higher criticism, and established through accreditation, disciplinary subjugation and exclusion, and, of course, legal battles.

Back at Andover, controversy over higher criticism and consequent New Theology continued through much of the 1880s. Newman Smyth sidestepped the hubbub his appointment had sparked by taking up the pastorate of Center Church in New Haven instead, but the issues did not remain dormant for long. In 1886, battles over Andover's theological identity flared up as the Board of Visitors of Andover Theological Seminary launched a heresy trial against five Andover professors, all editors of the *Andover Review*. The chief charge was the heresy of teaching "second

⁵⁰ There were rarely clear distinctions between all these varieties of scientific interpretation. Moses Stuart was a scientific philologist, a committed Common Sense realist, and an early adopter of German higher criticism. Charles Hodge, although rejecting many of the conclusions of higher criticism, still came to see the scientific study of history as fundamental to biblical interpretation. In practice, porous boundaries existed between these communities and modes of biblical investigation. However these ideas blended, it was clear that academic biblical scholars saw that their intellectual authority rested on their ability to construct scientific interpretations.

⁵¹ Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 83.

probation”—the unorthodox idea that unbelievers might have a second chance, after death, to achieve Christian salvation. The grounds for this charge came from an 1885 book titled *Progressive Orthodoxy*. It reprinted a number of articles published in the *Andover Review*, and was compiled by that journal’s editors, most prominently Andover history professor Egbert Smyth. Like Newman Smyth’s work, *Progressive Orthodoxy* attempted to lay forth a new set of doctrines to supplant old Calvinistic orthodoxies. Under the general auspices of “New Theology,” its authors brashly argued for “certain theological improvements which we regard as already assured.”⁵² Written in the style of a manifesto, it confidently asserted its authors’ ecumenism and reasonableness even while painting its theological opponents as small-minded, dogmatically prejudiced, anti-scientific enemies of progress.

Progressive Orthodoxy argued that theology should not be left in the hands of the masses, but assigned to elites. “Theology is the science of God,” it claimed, and like any science, belonged in the hands of trained experts.⁵³ But what did it mean for theology to be scientific? It all began with the scientific status of historicist biblical interpretations. “Progress in theology is a progress in method, and then a progress in result,” claimed the editors.⁵⁴ Science, they claimed, respected no traditions but only the objective truths revealed through its untiring rigor. Moving out from the Bible, scientific jurisdiction extended over the whole field of theology. “There is no doctrine of the Bible,” they wrote, “however rudimentary and essential, which is not susceptible of illumination or higher systemization in the development of a scientific faith.”⁵⁵ The editors lamented that so few people yet understood these truths and the popular “repugnance to the historical way of thinking.”⁵⁶ Yet at the same time, like members of other professionalized guilds, they assumed the general

⁵² Egbert C. Smyth, et. al., *Progressive Orthodoxy* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1885), 4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 219.

populace would have little chance of understanding their sophisticated methods and data. This lack of widespread, specialized understanding left non-specialists susceptible to weak arguments and resistant to new scientific theology.

Moving beyond William Robertson Smith, who thought devotional and scientific interpretations ought to complement each other, the Andover editors claimed scientific interpretation offered the only true basis for meaning. In part, this was because *Progressive Orthodoxy* denied beliefs about supernatural authorship of the Bible, and thus the possibility of non-historicist truths. Of the Bible, they wrote: “There is not the slightest internal or external reason for pronouncing it a history set down from miraculous divine dictation.”⁵⁷ If the Bible were to be treated like any other book, it meant that historical reconstructions of the contexts of its production were necessary to discover the text’s true meaning. The editors thought naturalistic, historicist readings would lead to an understanding of the spiritual sense. Particularly with respect to the Old Testament, new historical discoveries and theories about authorship changed the religious significance of the text. “Studying the national exigencies which called out the teaching of the greater prophets, and entering into the historical relations of their words, we have felt ourselves entering into the spirit of the writings,” they proclaimed.⁵⁸

This is not to say that Andoverans believed historicist readings should undermine Christianity, nor that the Bible should not be treated as a religious authority. Egbert Smyth, in a report to the National Council of the Congregational Church, stated, “I know of no Professor at Andover who questions or ever thought of questioning the supreme authority of Scripture.”⁵⁹ Yet historical context was the absolute arbiter of the meaning of the Bible, and thus absolutely trustworthy. *Progressive Orthodoxy* claimed: “Clearly, Christian faith must leave the settlement of

⁵⁷ Ibid., 214.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 221.

⁵⁹ Egbert Smyth, quoted in “Probation After Death,” *New York Times* (Oct. 16, 1886), 3.

such questions [of theology] to historical scholarship. It has no reason to fear any conclusions to which science may come respecting those sacred facts.”⁶⁰ This claim might have seemed a bit dubious to many who equated Christian faith with orthodox theology, and for whom it seemed that historicist scholarship and science indeed created a great deal of cause for concern if it were given ultimate authority to settle theological questions. History now seemed capable of falsifying interpretations of the Bible, and theology itself, and many found this unsettling.

Concluding with a triumphant air, *Progressive Orthodoxy* argued that historical science, and the theological progress it eventuated, must eventually prove irresistible. Resistance would only make old-fashioned Christianity look foolish on its way to the trash-heap of history. The editors claimed:

The attitude taken towards Old Testament studies in some quarters is but a denial of the claims of historical science. Those who adhere to and preach this intellectual Sadduceeism in doing so are fighting against Christianity, which in all its appeal to the human mind justifies man's confidence in his own faculties. They might easily have learned from the experience of the church that attempts to make man believe science an impossibility must inevitably result in discrediting any system or faith in whose behalf they are made.⁶¹

Proponents of New Theology argued that rejecting higher criticism undermined all of Christianity, since an anti-scientific religion could not sustain any confident belief.

The cocksure tone was not unimportant. To be sure, scholars at Andover were attempting to salvage Christianity for the masses, and their New Theology displayed both generosity and humility towards a suffering world. But they were also simultaneously constructing a new discipline of theological and biblical studies. In this latter arena, they performed elitism as much as erudition. Dismissing opposing views as trivial and anti-intellectual was one means of marking the boundaries of their discipline.⁶²

⁶⁰ *Progressive Orthodoxy*, 228.

⁶¹ *Progressive Orthodoxy*, 226.

⁶² Perhaps such exclusion masked methodological doubts about the field's claims to scientific status. Insofar as science found proofs through falsifiability, biblical studies lacked scientific means for adjudicating disputes. While parties

The Andover controversy surrounding *Progressive Orthodoxy* and the theology of second probation—in many ways a quibble amidst all the methodological innovations—spent several years in courts, and was eventually dismissed over jurisdictional issues.⁶³ Yet legal victory only confirmed the victory that higher criticism had already made among the theological faculty at Andover. By 1886, the key issues were already settled. The true meaning of the Bible was its scientific meaning, and science meant the methodological approach of historicist higher criticism. Meaning came from origins, and context explained the text.

Similar revolutions were taking place in most academic contexts, as biblical studies sought to become a discipline in its own right, distinguished from lay or denominational study of the Bible, and a science that warranted respect from other academic disciplines. Andoverans were neither the first nor the last to adopt higher criticism in America.⁶⁴ Yet they illustrated a wave of change in the discipline of biblical studies in the American academy, as more and more prestigious institutions converted to higher criticism. In 1876 Charles Augustus Briggs began teaching at Union Theological Seminary. William Rainey Harper began at Baptist Union Theological Seminary in 1879, positioning him for his appointment as president of the University of Chicago in 1891. In 1880 Crawford Toy was appointed at Harvard. When the Society of Biblical Literature was organized that same year, higher criticism had taken strong enough root in elite universities and seminaries in the Northeast to serve as the defining feature of the association.

quibbled about the scientific merits of interpretive assumptions, to protect the boundaries of their discipline they relied on fuzzier techniques such as the performance of epistemic confidence.

⁶³ As one newspaper reporter quipped about the long-running attempts of the accused to “quash an indictment upon technicalities”: “Theological Professors are very much like other persons when they are engaged in litigation.” “Theologians on Trial,” *New York Times* (Oct. 12, 1886).

⁶⁴ As the answer to a never-asked trivia question, Henry Pochman discovered that: “Thomas Cooper, teacher at the University of South Carolina and at Carlisle College, is the first, so far as is known, among American authors, to cite German higher criticism of the Bible in attacking the claims of the Orthodox theologians.” Henry A. Pochman, *German Culture in America: 1600-1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957), 305. Cooper was something of a polymath, dabbling in politics and philosophy en route to his appointment as professor of geology and minerology at South Carolina College, and eventually becoming president of the university.

While not all members of the Society of Biblical Literature were scholars engaged in higher criticism, accepting the legitimacy of historicism became a principle of inclusion. While biblical scholars were involved who did philological or theological work on the Bible, the academic discipline became committed to the proposition that the only appropriate “scientific” study of the Bible was through historical-critical methods. Perhaps Harper summarized this best, writing: “The critical study of the remains of classical authority in the original language is the only means of obtaining a scientific knowledge of that authority. ... And surely no one can be satisfied with any other than a scientific knowledge.”⁶⁵

The victory was so complete that only a few decades later university scholars took for granted that they were engaged in scientific study of the Bible, and no one else. As one historian reflected: “It was the liberals of the later nineteenth and early twentieth century who saw to it that ... the “genetic paradigm” would govern the work of any biblical scholar who laid claim to academic credibility. ... The works of German masters became attractive to Americans who were eager to upgrade their standards of research.”⁶⁶ A generation of scholars later, this situation was assumed, naturalized. Shailer Mathews could, in 1924, confidently assert: “At the present time... there is no recognized biblical investigator who does not use the methods of criticism when studying the Bible to obtain knowledge of its origin, time of writing and composition, or who does not accept the general theory of the structure of the Pentateuch and synoptic gospels.”⁶⁷ While Mathews implied this move proved the legitimacy of the methods of criticism he embraced, it even more strongly demonstrated the structures of recognition and exclusion in the field of academic biblical scholarship.

⁶⁵ William Rainey Harper, “Scientific Biblical Knowledge,” *The Hebrew Student* 2:3 (Nov. 1882), 89-90.

⁶⁶ James O. Duke, *Horace Bushnell on the Vitality of Biblical Language* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), 89-90.

⁶⁷ Shailer Mathews, *The Faith of Modernism* (New York: Macmillan, 1924), 39.

3b Popular reading and grassroots science

3b.1 Vengeful elephants and meaningful questions

In his study of nineteenth century New England biblical scholars such as Moses Stuart, historian Jerry Wayne Brown expressed surprise at how little lasting impact their scholarship had on American religious or intellectual life.⁶⁸ He should not have been surprised. Throughout the nineteenth century, few people had less of a chance to make a popular impact on American religious life than a professor from New England. Republican sentiments, anti-elitism, and charismatic teaching coursed through the wild and unregulated landscape of popular biblical interpretation. It was not that non-elite interpreters ignored challenges to the Bible from both external sources (like physical science) and internal sources (like criticism). Grassroots skepticism ran deep in American culture, and the Bible's accounts of miracles and morals alike produced plausibility problems for plebeians. But popular readers largely ignored the solutions being mooted by academic scholars, insisting instead on the right to doubt for themselves.

Towards the end of the century this began to change. Debates about scientific methodologies of biblical interpretation took place throughout the organs of mass culture. One such example came in an 1886 letter to the editor of the *Chicago Inter-Ocean*. In it, an otherwise unknown layman name Mark Holroyd responded to the paper's favorable coverage of the ongoing prophetic conference. Holroyd attempted to refute the position of the premillennialists by affirming the assumptions of historicism. He began by raising questions about the status and intellectual prestige of premillennialists. He did not deny the prestige and ecumenism of the conference attendees, but suggested this was a recent gloss on a disreputable and seedy sect, noting: "how much

⁶⁸ Brown wrote: "The strangest feature of American critical biblical studies in this early period is the fact that they vanished so quickly and made so little impact on the development of American religion after the Civil War. When Charles Briggs accepted appointment to the Edward Robinson Professorship at Union Theological Seminary in 1890 and pronounced his agreement on certain points of German higher criticism, it was generally thought that something new had been introduced to America." Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800-1870* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 180.

more prestige second adventism has now obtained with D.D.'s, an Episcopal bishop, and Mr. Moody heading the movement than it had a few years ago when a few despised and comparatively unknown persons met in groves--churches being closed against them--and told us the world was growing worse and worse."⁶⁹ Yet Holroyd suggested there was little to be gained by all this erudition. "This question of the second advent," he argued, "is not to be proven by folioes of learned discussions starting from false premises, ransacking history."⁷⁰ Instead of the linguistic acrobatics of the premillennialists, Holroyd set forth the excavations of historicism, suggesting that historical recovery of the conditions of biblical provenance offered the key to interpretation. He argued: "Biblical students have a key to open the arcanum of old Hebrew archaisms. That key is the Bible itself. ... No exegete can read into the highly tropical language anything more than the terrible social and political changes about to come upon the land of Esau."⁷¹ It would be difficult to quantify this kind of non-professional acceptance of historicist assumption among lay Bible readers, but as lay arguments for historicism recapitulated academic ones, it seemed that higher criticism in American mass culture paralleled academic criticism.⁷²

It is surprising that such public conversations took place at all. Late-nineteenth-century America was not some dreary Puritan village with no forms of entertainment apart from theological debate. The alternatives to this type of preoccupation were immediately visible. Holroyd's letter ran opposite a story headlined: "POMPEY'S REVENGE: The Story of Josie Pickard's Murder by Her

⁶⁹ Mark Holroyd, "Letter," *The Daily Inter-Ocean* (Nov. 27, 1886), 12. Holroyd's caricature of the movement is surprising for its lack of historical accuracy. The cast of characters in the 1886 conference was largely the same as that of the first conference in 1878, and the urban leaders of the movements had likely never set foot in groves. Similarly, this group of ministers and evangelists might have been surprised to hear that churches had ever been closed against them, as they spent much of their time on conference circuits and visiting pulpits, and even more surprised to hear that their message was of the world getting worse and worse.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² For a dissenting view on this point, which argued for the popular appeal of higher criticism in American culture, see Robert Lee Carter, "The Message of the Higher Criticism: The Bible Renaissance and Popular Education in America, 1880-1925" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1995).

Jealous Lover, And How Her Death Was Revenged by the Elephant Trained by Her Father.”⁷³

The lurid headline did not disappoint. The article contained a rich set of characters: the widower and circus trainer “old man Thompson,” his kind-hearted and vivacious daughter Josie (who spent her winters in seminary in the east and summers on the circus trail), and a handsome Italian acrobat named Campi. Poor Campi fell for the girl, but Josie’s protective father scorned his attention, insisting “she was worthy of the best man in the land, even if she did wear tights and spangles a part of the year.”⁷⁴ Campi’s ongoing interest provoked the wrath of both the father and his elephant, Pompey, such that “the beast was continually on the watch for him [Campi], seeming to nurse his wrath.”⁷⁵ At a show in Bloomington, Indiana, Campi proposed to Josie. When she turned him down, in a fit of madness he stabbed her in the heart with a knife. The father, after shedding a tear over the dead body of his daughter, “asked for some garment belonging to Campi...turned to Pompey, unchained him, and the two went forth into the night.”⁷⁶ The elephant caught the scent and went barreling about the countryside, knocking down fences on the way. He chased Campi up a maple tree in the middle of a field, and shook the tree until the man fell out. The angry elephant Pompey grabbed the murderous Italian and whacked him against the tree, until he “was simply a bloody mass, with not one single bone unbroken.”⁷⁷

Delicious melodramas like this illustrate some of the broader context of American mass culture. Religious events—like the 1886 prophecy conference—were competing for popular attention in a big tent of entertainment options. Transportation and media that made prophecy conferences possible also turned pachyderm payback stories into everyday news. And the stakes for religious debates did not seem to be dramatic. Even in non-religious venues, such as circuses and *The*

⁷³ “POMPEY’S REVENGE,” *The Daily Inter-Ocean* (Nov. 27, 1886), 13.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Chicago Inter-Ocean, the ideas of Victorian moralism held strong—including self-discipline, chastity, paternalistic respect, and natural justice. Threats to these values seemed to come not from intellectual challenges—like German historicism or premillennial innovation—but from social changes. It was Campi’s ethnic passions that threatened cultural order, and not his beliefs about the eschaton.

In these contexts, it made sense that scientific higher criticism might struggle to find wide acceptance in mass culture. Even as they sought new certainties in science, most Americans experienced life more like a circus than a Hegalian process of dialectical, historical, unfolding truth. Hypothesized social conditions of ancient Israel seemed to be orthogonal to the questions and types of meaning that Americans faced, in grisly elephant rampages and in everyday life: questions of how to live amidst passion and grief, anger and loss, and the inevitability of death. If the Bible had meaning applicable to such questions it seemed like it must come from sources more direct, less abstract than the hypothesized origins Holroyd proposed. The scientific historicism of Holroyd seemed merely esoteric, rather than opaque-but-powerful—because it proposed to solve problems that few people seemed to have. At a practical level, belief in the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch was not that hard to sustain. In English translation the stylistic differences were smoothed over, and on any account, readers could easily point to a number of contemporary authors with a broad stylistic range. Likewise, the need for a documentary hypothesis was less intuitive than the need for hypotheses in natural science investigation. Historian Bruce Kuklick noted this need for hypothesis emerged in all forms of historical reconstruction: “Wellhausen said the Pentateuch derived from documents that no one had read, just as Darwin had inferred from present mineral deposits called ‘fossils’ the existence of certain antique life forms that no one had

ever seen.”⁷⁸ Yet not all imaginary historical objects weighed the same; while the bones of brontosaurus could not have come from any existing creature—not even the mighty Pompey—but the text of the Bible seemed like it could well have come from the pen of Moses.

From these trampled pastures of popular Protestant religion, a whole host of competing forms of biblical interpretation emerged. Some were grounded in traditions, others relied on charisma, others made claims to scientific status. It would be impossible to map the entire terrain of interpretive options. Yet several aspects of popular biblical interpretation became central to the emerging intellectual tradition of dispensational hermeneutics. Over time, dispensationalism would offer many Americans a compelling technical form of interpretation to rival higher criticism as a method for discovering the scientific meaning of the Bible. To understand the development of dispensationalism, it is first important to briefly excavate four interpretive impulses in popular Protestantism that would form the skeleton of dispensational hermeneutics: 1) the necessity for the Holy Spirit to discover biblical meaning, 2) the values of republican perspicuity, 3) the system of Brethren conversational Bible readings, and 4) the proto-dispensational methods of textual engineering, particularly typological reading, and biblical numerics.

3b.2 Spirit sightings

Theological confidence in the popular work of the Holy Spirit in guiding biblical interpretation permeated late-nineteenth-century Protestantism. Evangelist Dwight L. Moody offered a conventional portrait of this work. “The Holy Spirit is a person,” Moody claimed in an often-repeated sermon, who “will guide you into all truth.”⁷⁹ With this claim Moody implied a double absolute: the Holy Spirit would show believers *all* the meaningful truths they needed in this

⁷⁸ Kuklick, 103.

⁷⁹ Dwight L. Moody, “The Work of the Holy Spirit,” in *Twelve Penny Addresses* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1884), 3, 7.

life, and no meaningful truths were available without the Holy Spirit. Adamant that the teaching work of the Holy Spirit was tied to the Bible, Moody cautioned: “Do not think the Spirit of God leads you apart from the Word.”⁸⁰ Moody, like others, was convinced that mere curiosity or technical proficiency were bad motives for Bible study, and would only lead to profitless pedantry. Moody’s pastor in Northfield, C.I. Scofield, illustrated this with a story:

A very bright young man, in Northfield, said to me once, “I want to be known, before I am fifty years old, as the greatest Bible student in the world.” “Why”, I said, “my poor boy, do you suppose that God is going to open the treasures of His truth to you, in order that you may be spoken about as a great Bible student?” ... I have never heard of him since.⁸¹

Similarly, Methodist minister W.W. Clarke claimed, “if we come to the Scriptures as critics, it is a sealed book; if as students, God opens it to us by His Spirit.”⁸² For many American Protestants, the Holy Spirit played an essential part in biblical interpretation.

Popular readers saw little reason to believe that elite interpreters, such as the higher critics at Andover, had any special access to the Holy Spirit for the purposes of biblical interpretation. Their culturally configured American Protestant version of Holy Spirit was appropriately democratic and would guide anyone in meaningful Bible study, not just elites. Or perhaps: especially not elites. As popular religious movements throughout the nineteenth century demonstrated, “common” pedigrees often served as powerful marketing devices for religious leaders and Bible teachers.

3b.2 Republican perspicuity

Faith in the republican perspicuity of the Bible was widespread in the nineteenth century and produced a number of distinct interpretive systems. While often conflated with philosophical

⁸⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁸¹ C.I. Scofield and Wilbur M. Smith, *The Spirit and Method of Bible Study* (Philadelphia School of the Bible, 1915), 8.

⁸² Quoted in Unger, 122. From *Truth* 6 (1880), 425.

Common Sense realism (and in some expressions, a distant cousin of that tradition), it differed in several important respects. First, ideas about republican perspicuity drew more heavily from the rhetoric of the Protestant Reformation—"the Bible alone" and "the priesthood of all believers"—than from any distinct philosophical epistemology or consistent methodology. Second, Common Sense realism posited that confidence in our knowledge came from the (near) universal experiences of our senses and the products of a shared inductive reasoning—the capacity of our minds to hold ideas in "common." But ideals of republican perspicuity were not grounded in the authority of the masses or shared experience, nor in any particular method, but on the sovereign right of each individual to interpret as he (or, more rarely, in cases like that of Elizabeth Cady Stanton or Gracie Saxe, she) saw fit. Common Sense realism suggested that all interpreters, provided with sufficient evidence and following rigorously inductive methods, should come to the same interpretive conclusions. Republican perspicuity imagined a different script, in which the Bible was "opened up" to non-specialist interpreters through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Its "plain truths" revealed, individual Bible reading could become a source for a new tradition of interpretation. Common Sense implied that *all* minds could arrive at common interpretations; republican perspicuity implied that *common* minds could discover remarkable new biblical truths.

Ideas about the republican perspicuity of the Bible developed in lockstep with political ideologies dominant during and after the American Revolution. Historian Nathan Hatch showed how democratic ideals moved seamlessly between political and religious contexts as they came to dominate American's popular imaginations.⁸³ Two of the most important results of this process

⁸³ See Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale, 1989), and Nathan Hatch, "Novus Ordo Seclorum," in Nathan Hatch and Mark Noll, eds., *The Bible in America* (New York: Oxford, 1982). Hatch summarized this development: "Between 1780 and 1820 the notion of the sovereignty of the people captured the imagination of the American people—common people—and wrought a serious crisis of authority within popular culture. From the debate over the Constitution to the election of Jefferson, a second and explicitly democratic revolution united many who suspected power and many who were powerless in a common effort to pull down the cultural hegemony of a gentlemanly few." *Ibid.*, 64. And: "democratic values and patterns of biblical interpretation were moving in the same direction, mutually reinforcing ideas of volitional allegiance, self-reliance, and private judgment." *Ibid.*, 74.

were the individualization of moral conscience and of hermeneutic authority. Hatch noted how the “right of private judgment with respect to Scripture became deeply embedded in American democratic culture.”⁸⁴ By mid-century these individualized interpretations had wreaked havoc with established religious institutions and produced a slew of new religious bodies, including Adventists, the Christian movement, Mormons, and countless new breeds of Baptists.

One illustrative case of this hermeneutical sensibility can be found in Baptist preacher William Miller, founder of a movement that eventually became the Seventh-day Adventists. Miller, like many nineteenth-century religious thinkers, began with grassroots skepticism. He doubted both of the supernaturalism of the Bible and its history of undemocratic, elitist applications. He described these early reservations: “I could not, as I thought, believe the Bible was the word of God. The many contradictions and inconsistencies ... made me suppose it to be a work of designing men.”⁸⁵ This was combined with a strong mistrust of religious elites. “The history of religion,” he wrote, “was but a history of blood, tyranny, and oppression; in which the common people were the greatest sufferers.”⁸⁶ Miller was further suspicious of claims that the Bible could be popularly inaccessible—“so dark and intricate that no man could understand it”—yet still religious authoritative.⁸⁷ What kind of God, Miller wondered, would: “Reveal his will, which we cannot understand, and then punish us for disobedience!”⁸⁸ For Miller, as for many of his contemporaries, the difficulties of the biblical text grew with challenges from modernity and science and the claims of elites for esoteric professional knowledge. The mixture cast doubt on the whole idea of certain biblical knowledge.

⁸⁴ Hatch, *Bible in America*, 75.

⁸⁵ William Miller, in Joshua V. Himes, ed. *Views of the Prophecies and Prophetic Chronology; Selected from the Manuscripts of William Miller* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1842.), 9.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Sometime after 1815, Miller began attempts to reconcile a kind of skeptical Deism with his Baptist heritage. He began reading the Bible carefully by himself, seeking a meaningful experience of each verse of the text. “I laid by all commentaries, former views and prepossessions,” he wrote, “and determined to read and try to understand for myself.”⁸⁹ Instead of seeking theological help from experts or from consensus, he proceeded on his own in “a methodical manner; and by comparing scripture with scripture.”⁹⁰ The result was a hermeneutical conversion experience:

at length, when brought almost to despair, God by his Holy Spirit opened my eyes. ... the Scriptures, which before were dark and contradictory, now became the lamp to my feet and light to my path. My mind became settled and satisfied. ... The Bible now became my chief study; and I can truly say I searched it with great delight. I found the half was never told me. I wondered why I had not seen its beauty and glory before, and marveled that I could ever have rejected it.⁹¹

The core of this conversion experience was methodological enlightenment. Miller found that once he abandoned the use of commentaries, the Bible provided its own guidance for interpretation: “I found, on a close and careful examination of the Scriptures, that God had explained all the figures and metaphors in the Bible, or had given us rules for their explanation.”⁹² Although he believed the Bible was self-interpreting, Miller’s method was not inductive in a Baconian sense. Comparing scripture with scripture was a literary, analytical, and comparative exercise. It did not assume that interpreting the Bible began with self-evident facts, but that the meaning of the words and concepts of the Bible was established through the internal relations of the text and revealed by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Miller was under no illusions that his interpretive clarity would prove convincing to the general public. This proved correct, as he recounted: “I have received scoffs from the worldly and profane, ridicule from the proud and haughty, contempt from the bigot and pharisee, and insult

⁸⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid, 11.

⁹² Ibid, 12.

from the pulpit and press.”⁹³ Yet this realization did not bother him. For strict Common Sense realists, a lack of consensus ought to indicate problematic data or induction. Not Miller. He thought the meaning-value of his interpretations should be judged not by consensus but by consequences. “Thousands have been brought to read their Bibles with more pleasure;” he boasted, “hundreds have found faith in that word they once despised; false theories have been made to pass through a fiery ordeal; and undisputed errors have been searched out and exposed, and the word of God has mightily grown and multiplied.”⁹⁴

Despite his uncommon interpretations, Miller was just one of many in the nineteenth century who believed in the republican perspicuity of the Bible. While their rhetoric sometimes shared much with the philosophical Common Sense realists, for the most part their interpretive practices differed greatly. Less concerned with induction from Bible facts, they emphasized the need for a hermeneutic key to unlock the Bible’s true meaning. Unlike Common Sense belief in the *common ability* of minds to reach trustworthy knowledge, these interpreters tended to stress the unique guidance of the Holy Spirit in presenting authoritative interpretations to *common minds*. Biblical meaning was not available to *every* person, but could appeal to *any* person. Self-taught biblical interpreters—common thinkers—had as much potential as anyone to discover the true meaning of the Bible.

3b.3 Brethren conversational Bible reading

The values of republican perspicuity allowed many different approaches to the Bible to flourish in the nineteenth century. One of the more influential of these came from an unlikely source. Developed in the small communities of the Brethren in Britain in the nineteenth century,

⁹³ Ibid, 14

⁹⁴ Ibid.

conversational and expository Bible readings altered the landscape of biblical interpretation. This approach to the Bible was popularized in America through a series of itinerant Brethren evangelists, and relied explicitly on the belief that the Bible was a self-interpreting book, with themes throughout linked by the work of the Holy Spirit. More specifically, these readings assumed that the Bible was a literary whole, and the meaning of the whole could be best understood not through a search for origins or authorial intent, but by arranging and classifying the elements along thematic and symbolic lines.

The Brethren movement (often called the Plymouth Brethren by outsiders, but less often by insiders) began in the 1820s in Great Britain. Dissatisfaction with the Anglican Church and its relationship to the state prompted many small groups of dissenters to gather separately for prayer meetings and Bible studies. Some of these groups—particularly in Dublin, Plymouth, and Bristol—eventually coalesced into a discernable religious movement. The Brethren came to be distinctively known for their rejection of creeds and church hierarchies and their conviction that the only valid religious authority was the Bible.⁹⁵ In the absence of official ecclesiastical organizations or formal membership, leaders such as Irish Anglican priest John Nelson Darby and Bristol orphanage founder George Muller served as foci around which the loosely gathered Brethren networks orbited. Brethren leaders were all Bible enthusiasts. Without creeds, tradition, or ecclesiastical hierarchy, and with the state supporting the power of the Church of England, dissenters had little other than the Bible to rely on for alternate religious authority.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Neil T. R. Dickson uses the traditional method of identifying theological distinctives to define the Brethren. Dickson suggests four: (1) autonomy of the individual assembly; (2) believer's baptism; (3) weekly Lord's supper at which worship was from among the members; and (4) no ordained ministry. Neil T. R. Dickson, *Brethren in Scotland, 1838-2000* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2002), 6.

⁹⁶ Ultimately, the Bible proved insufficient to resolve disputes even among the various independent Brethren communities. In 1848, the movement withstood a large rupture over theological issues, leading to two separate bodies, generally described as the Open Brethren and the Exclusive Brethren. This proved only the first of many schisms that led to the Brethren gaining a reputation as a particularly schismatic sect.

And so the Bible became the heartbeat of the Brethren movement. It served not only as the chief source of religious authority, but also as the authority for most phases of life, as well as a principal leisure activity. Edmund Gosse spoke of the pleasures his Plymouth Brethren parents took in biblical study and debate; denied other pleasures it became their chief source of entertainment.⁹⁷ Brethren evangelist (later Baptist) George C. Needham described how, for the biblically saturated Brethren, “The Bible became very precious in its literalness and adaptation to the needs and craving of the heart.”⁹⁸ Even among Anglo-Protestants, the Brethren raised veneration of the Bible to new heights.

Beyond simple Biblephilia, though, the Brethren developed and popularized a new method of approaching the Bible that they often called conversational Bible readings, or simply “Bible readings.” The label—conversational Bible readings—referred to a range of new approaches to studying and teaching the Bible. In early small group settings this often involved discussions and discursions, while in later Bible conferences and for public evangelists this referred to particular ways of ordering public speaking. In most cases, a leader read a series of Bible passages concerning a common theme (such as justification, or hope), or concerning a common type or symbol (such as the Holy Spirit, or antichrist), and either conversationally or didactically explained each passage in light of the others, demonstrating a gradual development of a theological idea throughout the literary whole of the Bible. Lacking modern concordances, this approach demanded massive erudition of the biblical text.

⁹⁷ Gosse wrote: “My Father was in the habit of saying, in his later years, that no small element in his wedded happiness had been the fact that my Mother and he were of one mind in the interpretation of Sacred Prophecy. Looking back, it appears to me that this unusual mental exercise was almost their only relaxation, and that in their economy it took the place which is taken, in profaner families, by cards or the piano. It was a distraction; it took them completely out of themselves.” Edmund Gosse, *Father and Son: a study of two temperaments* (London: William Heinemann, 1907), 76-77.

⁹⁸ George C. Needham, “Introduction,” in James H. Brookes, *Bible Reading on the Second Coming of Christ* (Springfield, IL: Edwin A. Wilson, 1877), ix.

Although never numerically large, the Brethren and their Bible reading practices had an oversized influence on American Protestantism.⁹⁹ Henry Moorhouse ranked as the most influential of Brethren evangelists in America. Moorhouse pioneered public conversational Bible readings in his evangelistic campaigns, and converted many clergy to the practice. Born in 1840 in Manchester, England, he spent his youth making mischief. One early biographer noted: “There is no occasion to dwell upon the dark days of Henry's unregenerate life,” yet proceeded to detail Moorhouse's youthful “foolish companions,” “riotous living,” time “served in prisons,” and stint as a soldier.¹⁰⁰ After an evangelical conversion, Moorhouse became an itinerant evangelist working particularly with the poor. With a special regard for the seedy side of society, Moorhouse toiled so that: “Conjurers, burglars, pickpockets, skittle-sharpers and other professional and non-professional habits were not allowed to perish in their ignorance and sin.”¹⁰¹ Towards the end of his life, Moorhouse traveled around the United States distributing literature from a portable carriage, and in two years sold more than 150,000 Bibles and gave away millions of tracts to the boisterous masses.¹⁰²

Yet for all that, Moorhouse's greatest influence fell on religious leaders such as James Brooks and Dwight L. Moody. In 1867, Moody made a trip to Great Britain and made a brief acquaintance with “The Boy Preacher” Moorhouse. When Moorhouse visited Chicago later that year, Moody reluctantly allowed him a chance as a guest speaker in his church. Moody came away amazed with Moorhouse's expository preaching and Bible reading. He gushed: “I had never heard anything quite like it. He gave chapter and verse to prove every statement he made.... This heart of

⁹⁹ The 1906 United States census recorded only 403 Brethren congregations with 10,566 members. Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1906* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1910), 163. Yet in changing the methods of popular Bible interpretation, the small group of Brethren became perhaps as influential as any group in American religious history.

¹⁰⁰ George Needham, *Recollections of Henry Moorhouse, Evangelist* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1881), 19.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

¹⁰² Historian William McLoughlin found stylistic similarities between Bible readings and other working-class evangelical groups: “The three British itinerants, Varley, Moorehouse, and Needham, were lay preachers affiliated with the Plymouth Brethren. ... They specialized in Bible readings. ... All three men came from lower-class backgrounds in Britain and their style and methods closely resembled those of the Salvation Army. They all consciously directed their efforts toward reaching the urban poor.” William McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism* (New York: Ronald Press, Co, 1959), 159.

mine began to thaw out; I could not keep back the tears.”¹⁰³ Before hearing Moorhouse preach, Moody went on to say, he was “an untaught and unskilled disciple in the school of Christ.”¹⁰⁴ Despite his years and evangelical fame, Moody saw this type of preaching as the beginning of his more effective public preaching of the Bible.

What was this astonishing form of preaching? Moorhouse himself saw it in a simpler light. He related his beginning in conversational Bible readings as if it were merely a lucky encounter with an almanac, in the midst of his anxiety about his own untrained preaching:

I was trying to preach in a certain city as ministers do, regular sermons from a text. After a few weeks my Scriptures and stories and explanations gave out, and I began to repeat myself. One evening I was in my room just before going out to my appointment, and in great distress of mind, for I had no text, nor sermon, and could not bear the thought of telling over again what all had heard so often. I lingered, debating whether to go at all. Suddenly my eye fell upon an almanac lying on the table in my room. I took it up in a listless way, opened it at the month of February, and saw that opposite each day of the month was a passage of Scripture, and all on the subject of justification. I had my sermon.¹⁰⁵

Certainly the method was, in many Brethren hands, more developed than merely reading topical passages from an almanac. Yet this illustrates the basic ethos: letting the Bible speak for itself by collecting and organizing passages according to thematic developments.

Along with Moody, one of the earliest American converts to Brethren conversational Bible readings was St. Louis Presbyterian minister James Hall Brookes. He was, in many respects, the key bridge between Brethren Bible readings and the dispensational hermeneutics that would develop over the next few decades. Brookes had been a speaker in the early pre-Niagara Bible

¹⁰³ William R. Moody, *The Life of Dwight L. Moody* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1900), 138-139. Moody's son described this pattern with hyper-masculine metaphor: "Mr. Moorhouse taught Moody to draw his sword full length, to fling away the scabbard, and enter the battle with the naked blade." *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Needham, *Recollections*, 106-107. Needham continued: "I tore out the leaf, laid it in my Bible, and went to the hall. When the time to preach came I rose and said, 'My friends, I will not preach to-night, but will read some Scriptures, and all on the subject of justification. I began with the first passage, and spoke awhile on that, and then on the next, and before I was half through the month my time was up. I noticed during the reading and remarks how unusually interested everybody seemed; and at the close of the meeting the brethren crowded around me, saying, "That's what we want, Henry! That's what we want. Give us more of that to-morrow evening!" And I have never preached sermons since.'" *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Recounted by William Erdman, in Needham, *Recollections*, 205-206.

conferences arranged by James Inglis, where he came in contact with Brethren preachers George C. Needham and Henry Moorhouse. In 1875 Brookes founded a millenarian journal titled *The Truth*, and during the decades before his death in 1897 served as the president of the Niagara Bible conferences. Brookes' long shadow fell across nearly all the important leaders of the early dispensational movement.

In 1877 Brookes published an eighty-page book titled *Bible Reading on the Second Coming of Christ*.¹⁰⁶ Brethren preachers George C. Needham and Henry Moorhouse both penned short introductions, indicating the provenance and derivation of his methods. The Bible readings offered in the book were prepared for a public series of talks given in July 1876 at Swampscott, MA. Unfortunately the pamphlet held only the barest description of those proceedings; as Brookes explained: "Of course it is a mere summary of what was said, as all expositions and illustrations are necessarily excluded. Without such expositions, the bearing upon the points discussed of a few of the Scriptures quoted may seem obscure."¹⁰⁷ Yet even without a fuller account of Bible readings, Brookes' pamphlet illustrated many developments.

The theological goal of this particular set of readings was: "to show the prominence and importance of our Lord's second coming, as set forth in the word of God, but to indicate its relation to the Jews, and to the Church of the present dispensation."¹⁰⁸ All the chapters were concerned with themes about the second coming of Christ, although in practice Bible readings on traditional theological topics—such as salvation or justification—were just as common as those unique to premillennial or dispensational theology.

The bulk of the text of *Bible Reading on the Second Coming of Christ* consisted of printed Bible passages, usually less than a few verses, chosen thematically. Each of the twelve chapters

¹⁰⁶ James H. Brookes, *Bible Reading on The Second Coming of Christ* (Springfield, IL: Edwin A. Wilson, 1877).

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, v.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

offered a paragraph or two of introduction, then somewhere between one and eleven pages of King James Version Bible verses from the New Testament, perhaps with a few additional or closing paragraphs of exposition. Within each chapter, the verses were arranged in strict sequential order, from Matthew to Revelation. The brief introduction Brookes offered for chapter one illustrated the commentary:

First, the prominence of the subject in the teachings of our Lord and of the Holy Ghost. It is mentioned three hundred and eighteen times in the two hundred and sixty chapters that make up the New Testament, or if the whole book is divided into verses, it occupies one of twenty-five verses, from the first of Matthew to the last of Revelation.¹⁰⁹

Eleven pages consisting of verses showing the Bible's own preoccupation with the second coming of Christ follow.

Brookes and others saw this arrangement itself as a work of scholarship. This procedure developed beyond the haphazard scanning of an almanac, to involve a complex process of identifying texts thematically and drawing out the theological implications of the development of ideas surrounding each theme or symbol. George Needham praised this arrangement as both minimalist and holistic: "Little that is human is introduced save the explanatory remarks interwoven throughout, and these form but the connecting links whereby the harmony and fullness of the fullness of the word, presenting each special phase of truth, will be more readily appreciated."¹¹⁰ The convictions that the Bible interpreted itself and that the meaning of each text, theme, and symbol developed within the context of the literary whole, guided both the work and its reception. Methodologically, Brethren conversational Bible readings added a new dimension to the approaches that American clergy brought to the Bible.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 1.

¹¹⁰ Needham, in *ibid.*, viii.

Unlike traditions that relied on Common Sense realism, the Brethren did not seek to infer facts from the Bible, or inductively prove the truths of a particular doctrine.¹¹¹ Indeed, the Common Sense realists at Princeton were distinctly uncomfortable with the methods and messages of the Brethren. Evidence of this dislike was frequent and public. Through the late nineteenth century the American voice of Common Sense philosophy was *The Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review*, edited by first Charles Hodge, then Lyman Atwater after 1871. In 1872 *The Presbyterian Quarterly* printed a scathing article by Irish clergyman Thomas Croskery concerning the Plymouth Brethren. Croskery was mainly crotchety about Brethren ecclesiology and its lack of ecumenism. He concluded: “The history of Plymouthism is nothing but a weary chronicle of dissension and divisions upon ministry, doctrine, discipline, and prophecy.”¹¹² Unsurprisingly, then, Croskery’s main target was his countryman, the famously prickly John Nelson Darby. Although not the most influential of the Brethren in either Britain or the United States, Darby’s prolixity and disputatiousness made him the most common target of outsider’s ire and critiques.

But Croskery objected to more than Darby’s divisiveness. Bristling that the Brethren believed themselves “possessed of supernatural gifts,” Croskery disapproved of their methods of biblical interpretation, especially the claim that the Holy Spirit guided Brethren readings. Croskery noted that Brethren challenged the primacy of the common senses.¹¹³ Like the epistemological

¹¹¹ Historian David Bebbington, comparing the Brethren to the Disciples of Christ and Churches of Christ movements in the United States (the latter long included among the Common Sense traditions), argued that a fundamental distinction in epistemology marked these traditions: “The Churches of Christ overwhelmingly reflected the assumptions of the Enlightenment, but the Brethren predominantly accepted those of Romanticism. Alexander Campbell’s thought was moulded by the age of reason, and his followers were tinged with a similar rationalism. ... Brethren would never be found debasing the faith by arguing its merits in public.” D.W. Bebbington, “The Place of the Brethren Movement in International Evangelicalism,” in Neil T. R. Dickson and Tim Grass, eds. *The Growth of the Brethren Movement* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2006), 248.

¹¹² Thomas Croskery, “The Plymouth Brethren,” *Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review* 1 (Jan, 1872), 54. Croskery thought the Brethren were the superlative antagonists: “There never was anything so frightful as the spirit of their controversies: they exceed all the worst men of the Churches in their calm way of saying the most malignant things.” *Ibid.*, 76.

¹¹³ Darby acknowledged a limited capacity for the human senses to experience truth, but denied that this was sufficient for real knowledge of the Bible. He wrote: “The use of anything which may act on the senses, is a mere question of means, by which God in His wisdom may see fit to act and produce impressions, man being so framed as to receive them in this

Common Sense realists, the Brethren believed the mind was created with the capacity for knowledge of the world and of God. But distinctly, they insisted that this was merely a capacity, not a reliable property. The divine truths of the Bible were not available to all readers directly, but only to those who were moved by the inward power of God's revelation.¹¹⁴

Brethren hermeneutics stood within traditions of republican perspicuity in suggesting that truth was not common, although it was available to common people. Yet conversational Bible readings moved beyond republican perspicuity by turning common readers into technically proficient experts. Non-seminary-trained biblical interpreters could offer expert interpretations based on a thorough knowledge of the text of the Bible itself (and the guiding of the Holy Spirit). They were simultaneously technical methods and devotional practice, speaking to both the modernist epistemic demands and revivalist fears of a too-intellectualized faith. They involved rigorous study, thematic classification, and enumeration, all appealing to a generation of increasingly taxonomic thinkers who also sought to ground a religion of the heart in the epistemic foundations of modern science.

This combination of technical method and devotional accessibility found in Brethren Bible readings proved threatening. Liberal higher critics filled volumes with scathing and often patronizing critiques, until they no longer bothered to acknowledge the method. But conservative theological scholars found it just as unpalatable. Francis Patton, conservative president of Princeton University, took shots at Bible readings in an 1890 article on preaching. Patton saw the Brethren as

way. But without the inward power of the Holy Ghost there would by this be no certain revelation." John Nelson Darby, *The irrationalism of infidelity: Being a Reply to "Phases of Faith"* (London: Groombridge and Sons, 1853), 249-250.

¹¹⁴ I have found little evidence that Darby or other leaders of the Plymouth Brethren were strong adherents of Scottish Common Sense realism. Although they claimed an allegiance to Baconianism (like everyone else), they were more comfortable with the idea that knowledge of truth was a property of the few, rather than the common.

dangerous because of their apparent knowledge of the Bible and he argued that such knowledge meant little in the face of ahistorical methodology:

Then there is what is called a Bible-reading; very good too in its way, but a very poor substitute for a sermon. I suppose that the Bible-reading is a feature of the school of thought of which Mr. Moody is such a distinguished leader. With some of the theology of some members of this school I have no sympathy; and I particularly object to their arbitrary and unhistorical system of interpretation. ... But few, I fear, know the English Bible as they do. I advise you to learn their secret in this regard, but do not adopt their shibboleths; and I warn you against supposing that you have given an adequate substitute for a sermon when, with the help of Cruden's Concordance, you have chased a word through the Bible, making a comment or two on the passages as you go along.¹¹⁵

Like higher critics, conservative scholars at Princeton and elsewhere dismissed Bible-readings as superficial and unscientific because such readings were wholly unconcerned with the historical origins of the text.

All in all, Brethren conversational Bible readings introduced a number of innovations into popular biblical interpretation in the United States. They reinforced assumptions that the meaning of the Bible was not transparent to everyone, but available to anyone properly guided by the Holy Spirit. They helped popularize expository preaching, through their influence on Dwight L. Moody and other evangelical leaders. They insisted that the Bible was a literary and conceptual whole, that themes were developed systematically throughout the text, within and through the various books of the Bible. And they helped frame subsequent debates about "scientific" biblical interpretation as debates between those who believed that the meaning of the text came from its internal relations and thematic development, and those who believed that the meaning came from its external contexts of production and social development.

¹¹⁵ Francis Patton, "Preaching," *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 1 (1890), 36-37.

3b.4 Numerics and scientific typologies, from the ground up

Like Francis Patton, higher critics saw Brethren Bible reading methods as simplistic and superficial because they could not imagine complexity apart from a search for origins. Yet they trivialized the intricate intertextual connections made in Brethren Bible readings, and ignored nascent signs of the complex typological analysis beginning to appear. Higher critics assumed that the complexity of the biblical text concerned its contradictions, historical inaccuracies, and problematic scientific claims, and that the methodological approach needed to unlock this complexity came from historicism, explaining the original author's intent through historical context. Higher critics saw complexity as a metaphysical question. Yet the Brethren and their heirs assumed the complexity of the text was more like that of a train engine. The workings of a car engine could not be explained simply by a description of the locomotive factory on the day the engine was made, but required one to understand the function of each component and its relationship to the whole. As machines in general were explained better through descriptions of function and internal relations than in terms of origins, it is perhaps not surprising that many in the technologically enamored public found Brethren methods of interpretation more scientific and complex than historicism. Yet even so, the Brethren held that the complexity of the biblical text could be understood and unlocked by those without seminary degrees or German educations, but by engineering texts.

One example began in the tundra. In the late 1850s Frederick William Grant discovered a cache of Plymouth Brethren tracts at a pharmacist's office on the Canadian frontier. Born in 1834 in London, Grant had been ordained an Anglican minister and immigrated to Canada at the age of 21 to serve in newly established parishes. However, his encounter with the Brethren sent him back to the Bible with a new storehouse of methodological principles. Around 1860 he left the Church of England, eventually settling in New York and New Jersey, and became a leader among the

exclusive branch of the Plymouth Brethren. Far surpassing his institutional work, though, was his magnum opus, the seven-volume annotated *Numerical Bible*.

Like the work of the Brethren generally, Grant's *Numerical Bible* contained a populist impulse. He noted: "My desire was, not to make, in this sense, a learned book, but one available to all, and speaking the common language of all."¹¹⁶ Yet a common language did not imply, for Grant, simplification or superficiality. He warned readers that insights offered by the *Numerical Bible* did not come easy: "The knowledge of Scripture cannot be attained at first sight... It must not be expected, therefore, that any exposition can be given which will make plain every part alike to those in different stages of growth, and with different degrees of knowledge."¹¹⁷ Grant believed that the Bible was a self-interpreting, unified whole, and so comparative inter-textual work would reveal the full meaning. Literal meanings in local contexts offered only dim views of larger truths. "Remember the words of the apostle," he exhorted, "that "no prophecy of the Scripture is of its own interpretation," ... i. e., can be interpreted by itself; but every one needs comparison with the rest, and that because the one mind of the Spirit in fact connects them together."¹¹⁸ To understand complex biblical meaning, one needed both the guidance of the Holy Spirit and years of diligent, comparative study.

For Grant, the type of connections that best revealed the Bible's linked meanings could be found in numerical structures.¹¹⁹ He imagined that each number possessed a particular divine

¹¹⁶ F. W. Grant, *The Numerical Bible: Being a Revised Translation of the Holy Scriptures with Expository Notes: Arranged, Divided, and Briefly Characterized According to the Principles of their Numerical Structure*, 4th ed. (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1903), I:6.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Other interpreters made similar attempts at discovering numerical structures in the Bible. Russian immigrant and Harvard graduate Ivan Panin published a 1914 translation of the Bible as *The New Testament from the Greek Text as Established by Biblical Numerics*. Unlike Grant's interpretive system, Panin's numerics were an attempt to show how the original text of the Bible was constructed along a numeric plan by revealing the groupings and sequences of numbers of words and linguistic features and chapters and books of the Bible. Panin appeared to have no influence from the Brethren, but exhibited the same impulse to take quantitative values and methods from technological culture to create biblical interpretations. See: P. Marion Simms, *The Bible in America* (New York: Wilson-Erikson, 1936), 243.

significance, writing: “The numerals of Scripture all students of it believe to have... definite meaning.”¹²⁰ Any element in an ordered list that corresponded to that number inherited this significance. For example, Grant described: “the number 4 stands as the number of the world, and the symbol for “weakness” (which may come out in failure), “ trial,” “experience;” and so the book of Numbers [the fourth book of the Pentateuch] will be found to be characterized by these thoughts. It is, in fact, the testing and failure of Israel in the wilderness.”¹²¹ Every series, from the books of the Bible themselves to the minute divisions within them, was read through numerical symbolism. Divisions multiplied. Grant noted: “Now this is not only true of the books as a whole. Each one, we find... readily parting into similar divisions, and these again into subdivisions, and so to be divided again and again; and in the case of each division, whether smaller or larger, the same rule applies.”¹²² Grant found his system of analysis worked to very minute levels, and claimed that the book of Genesis alone included more than 200 numerical elements.¹²³

Although chiefly a method of interpretation, numerics also provided reasons for confidence in the inspiration and unity of the biblical texts. The patterns discovered by numerics seemed, to Grant, clearly to disprove higher criticism with its claims that the Pentateuch was “the piece of literary forgery so commonly now imagined.”¹²⁴ Instead, he believed that revealed structure proved the Bible was the product of careful, scientific, divine design. “The same delicate tracery is found every where,” Grant wrote, “declaring the hand whose workmanship it is.”¹²⁵ The “almost mathematical precision” and scientific merits of this structure made doubt in the inspiration of the

¹²⁰ Grant, *Numerical Bible I*, 8.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Grant insisted that no matter how deeply one divided, the numerical significance informed the members of every series. He wrote: “The numerals must in all these cases characterize plainly the divisions; they must elucidate the spiritual meaning of each part; they must harmonize with one another so as to make the interpretation of the whole harmonious; and they must bring out the teaching of the book as really one from end to end.” Ibid., 9-10.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 10.

¹²⁵ He continued: “Its almost mathematical precision, easily to be discerned substantially by the most unspiritual, challenges the infidel to account for what he cannot conceive to have been done by the contrivance and connivance of man.” Ibid., 10.

Bible seem anti-intellectual to Grant. Just as “all the natural sciences in the present day are ranging themselves under arithmetical law,” and “every law of nature tends to express itself in terms of arithmetic,” Grant wondered, “Why should not a law of numbers pervade Scripture also?”¹²⁶ After all, mathematics seemed like the purest expression of human intention and design. Grant philosophized: “Nothing more simply expresses mind than these arithmetical series.”¹²⁷ If numerical structures explained the real meaning of things in every field from biology (“the plants in the arrangement of their leaves and the division of their flowers”) to industrial chemistry (“the crystal talks mathematics to you from the window-pane”), then one could reasonably assume that knowledge of such structures, discovered in the Bible, would be essential for understanding the real, scientific meaning of the text.¹²⁸

Alongside numerics Grant employed types and antitypes as literary devices that revealed the same work of design and the same kind of structural meaning. Types were persons, figures, events, or images that recurred throughout various books of the Bible in a process of progressively deepening and developing meaning. Most frequently, types were introduced in one or more Old Testament antecedents, developed and elaborated in repetition, and concluded in the form of a New Testament antitype. An antitype was alternately described as a fulfillment, consummation, opposite, or reversal of the prefiguring types. As Grant saw it, the point of types was to be an “instructive contrast” to the more fully developed antitype.¹²⁹ Types’ primary duty was to point forward to fuller truths, to: “antitypes greater than themselves.”¹³⁰

The presence of an antitype was what made the system more than just allegorical imagery. Grant saw instances of allegorical language in the Bible unrelated to types, and even within the type-

¹²⁶ Ibid., 10-11.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 11.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Grant, V, 499.

¹³⁰ Grant, I, 189.

antitype relationship the imagery was not expected to correspond wholly. “It is not necessary to believe,” Grant explained of a passage in the book of Revelation, “that these plagues in Revelation must have the same physical form that the plagues in Egypt had. We are intended to learn, no doubt, by the resemblance.”¹³¹ The relationship between types and antitypes helped reciprocally explain each. Other types highlighted particular aspects of antitypes, but antitypes, once understood, revealed the true significance and meaning of the types, a significance that was often hidden from its original audience. Noting how Old Testament figures rarely seemed cognizant of the typological meaning of their imagery, Grant claimed: “Christianity, with all belonging to it, is a “mystery hid in God,” — abundantly spoken of in types and figures throughout, but of course needing the light of the New Testament for its discovery.”¹³² As such, types were predictive. Many were found in the prophetic books, but not all. All types offered insights about subsequent fulfillments in New Testament events or persons. Often types referred to Christ, or found their fulfillment in an aspect of Christ’s work or being. Standing as Grant saw himself, on the far brink of salvation history, types appeared as shadows cast backwards in time, as the light of divine revelation shone past-ward across the towering antitypes of redemptive history.

¹³¹ Grant, VII, 406. He elaborated: “the relation that we have seen exists here, so far as it is a relation of type and antitype, would speak rather for a dissimilarity than complete likeness between them. The shadow differs from the substance, and we are led rather to expect the repetition of these Egyptian plagues in their symbolical meaning than literally.”

¹³² Grant, V, 56.

Figure 13: Larkin's "The Types and Anti-Types of Scripture"

Dispensational chart maven Clarence Larkin would later attempt to map some biblical types in three classes, identified as: “Personal – Historical – Ceremonial.” The aesthetics of the image reveals the teleology of the system, as the mass of Old Testament types all point forward and inward to a few New Testament fulfillments. Clarence Larkin, *Dispensational Truth* (Philadelphia: Clarence Larking Est., 1920), 153½.

Like numerics, types illustrated the intricate and endlessly nuanced connections between the literary parts and the whole of the Bible. Only in those relationships could the true, scientific textual meaning be found. “It will be seen,” Grant wrote, “that in this way the types are exhibited, not as fragmentary and haphazard as to order, but in perfect connection with each other and with the whole ... Let it be noted, too, that this typical meaning gives us alone to see the real importance of many parts of these books, which as simple histories would seem unworthy of the detail with which they are narrated.”¹³³ In his *Numerical Bible* Grant far surpassed the thematic emphases of

¹⁸³ Ibid., 23. For example, Grant claimed: “That [Exodus] is largely typical needs no insisting on. Every Christian will recognize this in the whole tabernacle-service, which forms so large a part of it. But the truth, less generally received, is that the whole division — the whole book, therefore, — is typical, a perfect system of types, which is only properly appreciated when seen as a whole, — every part joined to every other part in a symmetry which at once proclaims itself divine. And this is the character of all these historical books: but there is no need to dilate upon this, as the book itself is before us, and will surely respond to the reverent inquiry of faith.” Grant, I, 201.

earlier Brethren conversational Bible readings.¹³⁴ Both Grant's emphasis on numerics—the quantitative structures underlying the Bible—and his elaborately developed ideas of typological coherence and correspondence within the text illustrate the process by which the assumptions of late-nineteenth-century popular Bible reading—that meaning was revealed by the Holy Spirit, available to common thinkers but not commonly known, and related to the topical structure of the text—strove to become more scientific. If the Bible was a feat of divine engineering, then technological hermeneutics were necessary to unlock its true meaning.

3.c Taxonomic dispensational hermeneutics

By the last decade of the nineteenth century, dispensationalism had come into its own as an interpretive method. Just as academics sought to shore up confidence in their work by adopting the discourse of scientific methodology, so too popular religious leaders craved the authority of scientific interpretations. To gain such sureties they adopted and expanded technological-seeming methods for engineering texts. In increasingly complex discourses—ones that often embraced Baconian language while shifting assumptions far from inductive method—dispensationalists grounded their methods in engineering principles and re-read the Bible through a taxonomic hermeneutic. Even more than their unique theological interpretations of prophecy, it was their hermeneutics that distinguished dispensationalists from other American Protestants.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Theologian Michael Stallard noted that this usage of types came not from Darby or other founders of the Brethren: "This writer's limited review of Darby finds nothing of detail, especially in the search for typological patterns, which can be found in Gaebelein." Michael Stallard, *The early twentieth-century dispensationalism of Arno C. Gaebelein* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 2003), 171.

¹³⁵ Arno Gaebelein's biographer Michael Stallard noted the predominance of hermeneutics in the most influential of dispensational thinkers: "It is clear that the dispensationalism that Gaebelein was accepting as his own was first and foremost a way of looking at Scripture, not primarily a set of doctrines to be believed. Methodology was to be at the center of the question. It is not surprising then to find Arno Gaebelein's son, Frank, writing in the forward to Ryrie's *Dispensationalism Today* in 1965 his opinion that dispensationalism was primarily a methodological approach to the Bible." Michael D. Stallard, *The Early Twentieth-Century Dispensationalism of Arno C. Gaebelein* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 72.

The key features and assumptions of a dispensational, taxonomic hermeneutic were: 1) the belief that the Bible must be interpreted to “unlock” its mysteries, clear up contradictions and confusion, and reveal the deeper meanings; 2) that the truths revealed were not merely common sense or literal readings, but were available to anyone who humbly accepted the guidance of the Holy Spirit and spent years in careful, comparative study of the Bible; 3) that study required the use of engineering methods, such as classification, quantification, cross-references, and endlessly bi-referential examination and dissection of literary units; 4) that the biblical text contained an internal coherence and unity that demonstrated design, intention, and a progressive unfolding of truth; and 5) that meaning was located in elaborately coded systems of inter-textual references, particularly numerical sequences, types and antitypes, literary analogical figures, theological themes, and other intentional ordered systems.

3c.1 Background

Dispensationalists rarely attributed their theological ideas to any particular influence (such as Brethren leader John Nelson Darby), and they were probably not being disingenuous in suggesting that most of their theology came from their study of the Bible rather than particular commentaries or secondary works of theology. Once they adopted dispensational and taxonomic interpretive methods, they found in the Bible sufficient resources to develop their own distinct theological ideas. While it is clear the Brethren influenced the methodology Brookes would come to adopt, it seemed to be a far more subtle process than a direct transmission of ideas. Brethren conversational Bible readings proved popular and compelling, and F.W. Grant’s efforts to engineer texts to discover numerics and tropes offered an example of one way to find scientific structure in a literarily unified Bible. Together with the taxonomic values in American mass culture, these helped buttress methodological assumptions about the possibility for non-historicist scientific readings of the text.

Chief among those who helped turn generic premillennial theology into a complexly articulated dispensational method was St. Louis Presbyterian minister James Hall Brookes. Born in 1830 in Pulaski, Tennessee, Brookes was one of the few members of the early dispensational movement with ties to the south or west. Brookes attended Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and then Princeton Seminary. In 1858 he became the minister of the Second Presbyterian Church of St. Louis, and served in Presbyterian churches in the city until his death in 1897.¹³⁶ Brookes's "conversion to pre-millennial truth" came relatively late in his ministry, after many settled years as a pastor. Like most early converts to dispensationalism, he described this as an epistemic revolution deriving from reading the Bible carefully (particularly Daniel and Revelation), and marking and comparing the verses he found that spoke about the future of the church.¹³⁷ Brookes described the consequences of his ideas as alternately alienating and as an essential hermeneutic key: "It has made me a lonely man, but it has been an unspeakable blessing to my soul ... It frets me no longer because many of my dear brethren can not see this precious truth, which shines like the sun at noonday from the Word of God, and which is a veritable key to unlock the meaning of the Scriptures."¹³⁸ The alienation extended both to other intellectuals—particularly academic scholars who treated him with scorn—and to more popular audiences. Brookes saw himself as an intellectual for the masses. Biographer David Riddle Williams claimed he had a firm grasp of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, as well as just enough German to keep up with "destructive German critics."¹³⁹ Yet Brookes was more famous as a champion of the English language Bible and its study by "plain" people.

¹³⁶ One of the few early dispensational leaders whose degrees all seem traceable, Brookes received an honorary doctorate degree from the University of Missouri, Columbia in 1860, and a second from Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri, in 1864, and thereafter the initials D.D. were omnipresent after his name.

¹³⁷ David Riddle Williams, *James Hall Brookes, a Memoir* (St. Louis: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1897), 147.

¹³⁸ Williams, 151-2.

¹³⁹ Biographer Williams dispassionately noted: "He studied the German theological professors' "sensation"-seeking utterances in the original, something which (let it be said under the rose) it is to be doubted if many of their subservient followers in American seminaries can do, with all their I'm-holier-than-thou air of philologic eruditeness." Williams, 163.

Brookes's method of personal Bible study involved regular cross-referencing and annotation. Williams described: "To make himself certain as to the use of any one word, he thought nothing of reading the entire Bible through for that particular purpose. If the word appeared three times that fact he established for himself. He believed in being his own concordance."¹⁴⁰ Alongside a penchant for memorization, this form of study meant that he wielded a significant battery of biblical quotations and citation on nearly any topic.

Figure 14: A page from Brookes' Bible

¹⁴⁰ Williams, 165.

The margins of Brookes' Bible were completely covered in his handwritten notes. Williams noted: "When he wished to fortify himself as to any doctrine from the Bible, he, of course, read the Bible through with such especial end in view. The passages were carefully marked. When he reached the end of Revelations, every text bearing on the topic was at his tongue's end. He had gone to the court of last resort, and all was settled." Image: Williams, 164. Quote: Williams, 165.

3c.2 Interpretive prerequisites

It is difficult to pinpoint a place and time when generic premillennial theology and assumptions transformed into a fully articulated dispensational hermeneutic, although one could do worse than to point to the Niagara Bible conferences in the dying decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁴¹ By the first decade of the twentieth century a complex and coherent dispensational method had emerged. One of the clearest statements of this dispensational hermeneutics was Arthur T. Pierson's 1910 book *Knowing the Scriptures: Rules and Methods of Bible Study*.¹⁴² Pierson began by extolling the Bible's "self-interpreting power," noting that, "to a remarkable degree, God's Word explains and interprets its own contents, is its own grammar and lexicon, library and encyclopedia."¹⁴³ Pierson qualified this claim, however, arguing that for all the Bible's self-interpreting power, mere curiosity or academic interest could not produce useful meaning. The guidance of the Holy Spirit was necessary. Further, Pierson believed the student needed to be internally receptive to the Bible in order to make any profitable study. "Spiritual vision," he wrote, "like the physical, is binocular: it depends on both reason and conscience."¹⁴⁴ He held that such binocular, guided study was necessary to unearth deeper meanings revealed in biblical structure. "We must be content to dig deep and not trust surface appearances," Pierson wrote. "Truth's

¹⁴¹ Historian Walter Unger argued this point, writing: "Dispensationalism as a hermeneutic was introduced gradually into the teaching at Niagara and by the late 1880s was gaining acceptance as being the only correct approach to the Scriptures." Walter Unger, *Earnestly Contending for the Faith: The Role of the Niagara Bible Conference in the Emergence of American Fundamentalism: 1875-1900*, Ph.D. dissertation (Simon Fraser University, 1981), 84.

¹⁴² Arthur T. Pierson, *Knowing the Scriptures: Rules and Methods of Bible Study* (New York: Gospel Publishing House, 1910).

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

harmonies are not such as are heard by the common ear, but to those whose hearing is divinely quickened, the whole word of God is a glorious anthem.”¹⁴⁵ Only with such a spiritually motivated and guided approach to the Bible could one see the true meaning of the text.

The Holy Spirit’s guidance was necessary but not sufficient. Truth did not merely spring from pages into the minds of believers without the application of hermeneutic methods. Pierson admitted: “The Scriptures, being a form of sacred literature, need to be interpreted, in part, by literary methods though not exclusively as if they were a merely human product.”¹⁴⁶ He saw four textual layers in the Bible that demanded interpretation: structural, philological, historical, and spiritual.¹⁴⁷ Unfolding these layers and their relationship to the whole was the chief and necessary work of interpretative method.

3c.2.1 Excursus on inspiration

The Holy Spirit’s ability to reveal structure in the Bible rested on increasingly contentious assumptions that the Bible was a work of supernatural fabrication. Ideas about the inspiration of the Bible became a site of much debate. Dispensationalists scoffed at the ideas that the Bible was either a mere storehouse of facts or a book to be treated like any other. The latter claim seemed as foolish as saying that a train engine was just like any other carting system. Perhaps one could tell something about oxen by examining their breeding history, but a train engine needed to be understood as a mechanical whole, an intricate composite of collaboratively functioning components, a product of design.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 50.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 77.

¹⁴⁷ Pierson elaborated on these four ways in which Scripture needed interpretation as: “1. Structurally-.to find out how the body of divine truth is framed and fitted together; of what parts composed, how those parts are combined, and what is their mutual relation and bearing upon the whole result. 2. Philologically-with reference to the three or four original languages in which the Bible was written or which mould its forms of speech, the Hebrew and Chaldaic, Greek and Aramaic with the peculiarities of each. 3. Historically, with relation to the times and places, persons and events connected with its preparation, and the effect of temporal circumstances and conditions upon its character as a book and its mission to mankind. 4. Spiritually, as a book of salvation, pre-eminently, and a revelation of God in His essential character, and dealings with the human race, all else being incidental and subordinate.” Ibid., 77.

Yet despite this trend, dispensationalists had relatively little to say about the inspiration of the Bible, compared with their conservative contemporaries. Generally speaking, they were concerned with inspiration as a concept that related to the unity of the Bible, not as a Baconian first principle required for interpretive success, nor out of interest in the mechanism of biblical authorship. Inspiration was, for dispensationalists, a conclusion drawn from examining the evidence of the Bible's structural unity, not an assumption that drove induction. One commonly offered explanation for twentieth century battles over the Bible suggests that the idea of inerrancy has stood at the heart of controversy. While true of some later, well-publicized fracas, early dispensationalists seemed only tangentially concerned with defending theories of inspiration for their own sake.

Of all the dispensational leaders, perhaps only Presbyterian James Brookes closely followed the theological arguments surrounding questions of inspiration and inerrancy elaborately formulated by Princeton theologians. Brookes was first critical of the ideas about inspiration being developed by Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield, but gradually adopted much of the language they used. And in some respects, dispensational and Princeton ideas about the Bible seemed to mirror each other. Like the Princetonians, dispensationalists made no claims about the infallibility of the Bible in English translation. The "inspiration of the text in its original autographs" was the most common formulation of the position, allowing for interpretive differences in translation, historical transcription errors, and the introduction of human error into the modern translations of the Bible. The entire discipline of lower criticism (or textual criticism) was invented to alleviate these problems by collecting as many early manuscripts as possible and painstakingly comparing and compiling them to approximate the original texts.

Yet despite commonalities, the motives and concerns of Princeton theologians and dispensationalists diverged. Princeton theologians were led to a defense of inerrancy because their

Common Sense views required incontrovertible base data to build interpretations. They needed the Bible to function as a storehouse of facts, and thus needed an inerrant Bible. Dispensationalists, on the other hand, were more concerned about the prestige of the English-language translations of the Bible than an ideal original text. Few, if any, dispensationalists engaged in serious lower criticism. They were less absorbed with securing the Bible as a source of objective facts about the world than they were with showing it represented a literary whole. Most important for dispensational method was the belief that the Holy Spirit inspired the writing of the Bible, and particularly the connected and developing systems of literary types and antitypes, as instructive comparative textual devices.

This is not to say dispensationalists never spoke about inspiration. Fresh off the relative success of the 1886 prophecy conference in Chicago, tireless organizer George C. Needham helped arrange a smaller conference in Philadelphia in November 15-20, 1887 concerning the “Plenary Inspiration of Scripture.”¹⁴⁸ The conference call began by piously rebuking critics, suggesting that “Irreverent skeptics persistently attack the foundation of our most holy religion, while professing friends of Christianity are doing incalculable injury through their adverse criticisms on the Bible.”¹⁴⁹ And when Philadelphia’s Rev. Wayland Hoyt opened the lectures, he used Princeton-like language to aver that: “Inspiration is to be claimed only for the primal sacred autographs.”¹⁵⁰ But only three of the nineteen speakers made any reference to Charles Hodge or his theories of inspiration, and none mentioned Warfield. One of the three was James Brookes, who spent as much time critiquing bad theories of inspiration as he did arguing for the principle. Brookes offered biting jibes for “mechanical” theories of inspiration, or ones suggesting that God used pen-men like a bunch of organic typewriters. He gave as justification for dismissing these ideas: “It is a theory, and for this

¹⁴⁸ Needham served as Secretary, and the published conference proceedings were dedicated to him: “in whose mind the idea of the Conference first originated, and by whose persevering efforts it was carried to a successful completion.” Arthur T. Pierson, ed., *The Inspired Word. A Series of Papers and Addresses Delivered at the Bible-Inspiration Conference, Philadelphia, 1887* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph & Company, 1888), vi.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, v.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

very reason it is worthless.”¹⁵¹ No one could argue for or against any theory of biblical authorship, Brookes held, since “the Scriptures do not inform us how they were inspired.”¹⁵²

More tellingly, the conference ended not with a sweeping restatement of plenary inspiration, but with a talk by Arthur Pierson on “The Organic Unity of the Bible.” The title spoke to the conference’s chief concerns. Inspiration was a conclusion to be drawn from the elaborate structural features found throughout the Bible. Alongside structural unity, they saw prophecy as the second form of proof of inspiration. C.I. Scofield wrote: “Fulfilled prophecy is a proof of inspiration because the Scripture predictions of future events were uttered so long before the events transpired that no merely human sagacity or foresight could have anticipated them, and these predictions are so detailed, minute, and specific, as to exclude the possibility that they were mere fortunate guesses. ... It is certain, therefore, that the Scriptures which contain them are inspired.”¹⁵³ Yet here as well, inspiration served not as an inviolable first principle, but a theological theory proved from other, more basic deductions. For early dispensationalists, the doctrine of inerrancy was more conclusion than premise.

Princetonians constructed a theology of plenary verbal inspiration to undergird their subsequent labors, but dispensationalists rarely bothered. C.I. Scofield, in his reference Bible, presented only a brief statement of his views about inspiration. In a note to Revelation 22:19, he summarized these under the heading: “The testimony of the Bible to itself.” He argued that the Bible spoke with divine authority, that the words of the Bible were inspired, and not merely the ideas, that the Pentateuch was written by Moses, that the New Testament was prophesized by the Old even as the Old was treated as authoritatively inspired by the New. The brevity and

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 151.

¹⁵² Ibid. To be sure, some dispensationalists later came to accept more rigid popular theories of inspiration and inerrancy. In 1920 Baptist preacher and chart maker Clarence Larkin wrote: “We know that thought can only be expressed in words, and those words must express the exact thought of the speaker or writer, otherwise his exact thought is not expressed. We see then that inerrancy demands that the sacred writer be simply an amanuensis.” Clarence Larkin, *Dispensational Truth: or God’s Plan and Purpose in the Ages* (Philadelphia: Rev. Clarence Larkin Est., 1920), 3.

¹⁵³ C.I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, Note to 2 Peter 1:21.

unobtrusive location of these notes spoke volumes. Scofield's methodological tract, "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth," did not mention inspiration at all. Dispensationalists saw inspiration as a secondary issue, significant insofar as it was proven by the unity of the Bible and the evidence of fulfilled prophecy. It was not a bedrock prerequisite for interpretation, in the same sense as the need for the Holy Spirit's guidance.

3c.3 Wholes: progressive structural unity

What were the premises underlying dispensational method? The first was belief in the unity of the literary text of the Bible. The Bible, in Pierson's hands, was an elaborately crafted whole in which the "weavings" of God's workmanship were progressively made known. This unity was structural, mechanical, ordered, and designed. Pierson construed this as a product of design:

"God is not the Author of confusion but of order." Form is the embodiment and expression of order. It is a scientific term conveying the idea of a fixed model, a definite pattern, with certain dimensions and proportions in accordance with a plan and purpose. ... To discover the Divine Builder's design explains both what is present and what is absent, and interprets the meaning of every part.¹⁵⁴

Thus, the "architectural symmetry and mathematical proportion" of the Bible revealed the perfection of its supernatural design, demonstrating "unity, symmetry and completeness; the variety and multiplicity of the various parts, all contributing to the perfection of the whole, the individual beauty of all subordinate features, and the structural law pervading, controlling, unifying all, and determining their mutual relations."¹⁵⁵ Like a cathedral built over centuries to a single plan, the underlying structure of the Bible showed the unified vision of the architect.

Yet unlike a cathedral, where the architectural plan was known ahead of time to the builders, the overall structure of the Bible was not known to any of its various writers, but only

¹⁵⁴Pierson, *Knowing the Scriptures*, 44.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 46.

present through the guidance of divine revelation. Pierson saw the structural unity of the Bible as evidence of the progressive revelation of divine design.¹⁵⁶ “There is unity in diversity and variety,” he wrote, “and a progress of doctrine in consecutive teaching, where every human condition would forbid; and all this in as large a measure as could be expected, were there but one writer and in the same period.”¹⁵⁷ Arguing that no mere historical chance or conspiracy of historical authors could have constructed such elaborately linked thematic unity within disparate texts, Pierson wrote: “Notwithstanding the composite character and complex structure of the Word of God, it is another sign and proof of a single mind that truth is unfolded in it according to a definite plan.”¹⁵⁸

3c.4 Parts: distinctions between Old and New

The idea of progressive revelation helped dispensationalists solve one interpretive problem—how to describe the structural unity they discovered in the Bible—but it left them with another one. At its heart, this latter problem concerned the relationship between history and power. Like the higher critics, dispensationalists understood that the Bible was a historical book and they struggled to make sense of its change over time. Yet for dispensationalists God stood outside of history. To have power over history meant that God was not subject to the processes of change within time, and thus revelation must also stand outside of time. Most significantly, dispensationalists saw dramatic differences between the content and intent of the Old Testament and that of the New Testament. For some, the Bible seemed to mandate two separate religions: Judaism and Christianity. If the theological proclamations and ethical impulses of the Old

¹⁵⁶ Unlike F.W. Grant, who thought the structural form that best revealed the Bible’s unity was numerical and mathematical, Pierson saw the development of thematic content as the key to revealing the progressive structural unity of the text. He wrote: “There is also consecutive and progressive teaching. If from the first to the last reference to a subject, the intermediate mention of it is traced, there will be found often, if not always, an advance from what is rudimentary and fundamental to what is higher and completer, but which can only be understood when first principles have been taught; so that when the last mention is reached it is like placing the capstone upon a building.” *Ibid.*, 260.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 258.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 258.

Testament led to Judaism, they wondered, how could it also be authoritative for Christians, particularly in those arenas where religious demands seemed to have shifted over time? Higher critics and liberal theologians attempted to solve this problem by stripping the Old Testament of religious authority. They found in the Bible infrequent signs of progressive revelation, but regular evidence of progress in theology, in social and individual ethics, and in other kinds of spiritual enlightenment. Dispensationalists who cared about the unity of the Bible, though, and who were uncomfortable with the idea that God might have changed his mind over time, needed different solutions.¹⁵⁹

To make sense of this change over time in the Bible, dispensationalists proposed that the text needed to be interpreted in light of some hard theological distinctions. Chief among these stood a distinction between the categories of “Israel” and “the Church.” This became the most

¹⁵⁹ Here, dispensationalists differed most from historicist thinking. For many Hegelians, God (such as it was) was unfolded within the historical process. Change over time revealed God, and thus the absolute truths available to minds were fundamentally historical.

Dispensationalists had no such reverence for historical process. They rejected the idea that a search for origins could produce meaning. Believing the Bible a product of inspiration and provenance, they accepted the idea that the processes of supernatural design in the past were largely mysterious, but also in many respects inconsequential, since the Bible revealed its full meaning in the present independent of any historicist explanations. They rejected naturalistic accounts that attempted to explain away design as a matter of chance history. Dispensationalists recognized that higher critics, despite their claims to naturalistic study, were engaged in a form of inquiry just as speculative, just as teleological, and just as grounded in metaphysical assumptions about the nature of time as they themselves were.

While critics described dispensational views as ahistorical, this was an oversimplification. Many dispensationalists revered the study of the past. But they were uniformly a-historicists, disbelieving that origins explained development. Similarly, they uniformly rejected the Hegelian presuppositions underlying historicism: that history represented a process of development and a grand unfolding of truth. As Mark Noll noted: “American evangelicals had gone a long way toward making their peace with biological evolution by the end of the century. What they could not accept was the European assumption—fueled more by Hegel than by Darwin—that later was always better, earlier always more primitive.” Mark Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 34. Dispensationalists rejected not the idea of progress in the present—particularly not technological progress, which they wholeheartedly embraced—but the idea that history itself gradually unfolded truth. Instead, truth was revealed within history yet from outside of time, through the progressive revelation of the Bible.

It would not be for several decades, until 1927, when Werner Heisenberg would publish his famously mis-analogized uncertainty principle. Heisenberg proposed that, for very small particles like electrons, one could not measure precisely both the electron’s position and its velocity at the same time. This limitation of quantum elements meant it was impossible to describe precisely the motion of any electron. Analogically, it might be said that higher critics sought to describe the meaning of the Bible in terms of its historical velocity, seeking to identify its point of origin, its trajectory and momentum in the present. Dispensationalists, by contrast, sought to identify the meaning of the Bible in terms of its precise present (literary) position, its relationship to other particles. Both groups sought to locate some essence of biblical meaning, either in origins and development, or in present position. But, like Heisenberg’s physicist observer, the closer and more precisely they came to describe their object of study, the less capable they seemed of recognizing the uncertainty inherent in their quantum half-views.

central interpretive division they found in the Bible and the key to subsequent hermeneutic parsing.¹⁶⁰ C.I. Scofield illustrated the absoluteness of this distinction, writing, “Comparing, then, what is said in Scripture concerning Israel and the Church, he [the Bible student] finds that in origin, calling, promise, worship, principles of conduct, and future destiny that all is contrast.”¹⁶¹ This distinction grew out of the interpretive system of types and antitypes. Like Brethren annotator F.W. Grant, A.T. Pierson saw the Old Testament primarily as a set of useful comparative types that illumined New Testament truths. Pierson argued that recognition of this division between the two was necessary to understand the relationships between the typological elements of the Bible. He wrote: “The entire old Economy, including its history and prophecy, ritual and ceremony, is a parable of Christ, which finds its amplification, explanation and illustration in the history and economy of the new. If the Bible, in its two great divisions, be thus regarded and studied, correspondences will continually reveal themselves.”¹⁶² It was only by reading the Bible as a book of two parts that its unity was shown.

Pierson identified prophecy as the primary mechanism for communicating biblical meaning across the divide between Old and New Testaments. Defined broadly, prophecy formed two-thirds of the text of the Bible. Pierson wrote: “This prophetic element pervades all the rest. It is the eye of Scripture, with supernatural vision--backsight, insight, and foresight, or power to see into the past, present, and future.”¹⁶³ The prophetic element in the Bible was important because it was

¹⁶⁰ Historian Walter Unger argued this distinction between Jews and Christians became central for James Brookes as early as 1876: “In the same year of the first public Bible conference, Brookes published an article in *Truth* entitled “Dispensational Truth” in which he clarified the key feature of this new hermeneutics - the distinction between God’s dealings with the Jews and his dealings with Christians. The clear-cut distinction between the Jewish and Christian dispensations must be maintained, he said, for “the failure of many to discover which of the two dispensations any particular statement of truth is to be referred, is the source of much of the confusion and perplexity that prevail concerning the meaning of the Bible.”“ James Brookes, *Truth* 2(1876): 525, quoted in Unger, 134.

¹⁶¹ C.I. Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, 6.

¹⁶² Pierson, *Knowing the Scriptures*, 32-33.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 36.

the mechanism for God, from outside of time and apart from historical change, to break into the temporal order to reveal the eternal plan of salvation.

Theologians and historians have made much of the significance of this theological distinction between Jews and Christians, Old and New Testaments, for the subsequent development of dispensational theology. Certainly it also had many social and political implications, both explicit and unintended. However, focusing on methodology instead of theology, the existence of the distinction itself was more important than its particular content. Distinctions were essential because they served as a reminder that the world still had qualities. Distinctions allowed the interpreter to divide the heterogeneous jumble of existence into clear, scientific categories defined by essential features. Ordering the history of the world through the text of the Bible made the existential chaos of modernity more regular, less resistant to the power of human knowing. Pierson wrote: “The Spirit of God uses language with divine discrimination, not only when erecting bold landmarks and limitations, but in drawing lesser lines of demarcation and distinction. ... Only by tracing these lesser features, both of thought and language, do we avoid confusing things that differ, or missing delicate shades of meaning which evince the work of a divine artist.”¹⁶⁴ Believing the world a product of design meant, for dispensational modernists, that it must submit itself to analysis by distinction, differentiation, and division. Order must be revealed by the knife.

3c.5 Parts: numeric distinctions

The distinction between Israel and the church, although central, was just one of many that illustrated what Pierson called the “structural form in Scripture.” Following F.W. Grant and others, dispensationalists believed that God’s mind was full of numbers, and biblical structure was revealed in part through mathematical and numeric order. “There is unquestionable evidence of a numerical

¹⁶⁴ Pierson, *Knowing the Scriptures*, 116.

proportion and symmetry in this marvelous book,” Pierson wrote. “Numbers and mathematical proportion mark it as a whole, and appear in its individual parts, with such frequency and in such definite relations and conditions as to evince a mathematical mind.”¹⁶⁵ Mathematical structure was not apparent to the casual reader, but visible only through a scientific study of the text. Likening it again to architecture, Pierson wrote: “Often this numerical structure is hidden, but like the fixed proportions of an Ionic column, are disclosed after patient examination.”¹⁶⁶ Like many of his contemporaries, Pierson imagined that sciences like geology, astronomy, and botany consisted of the search for mathematical order in the natural world. If physical sciences focused on revealing the enumerated structure and order in the natural world, as Pierson imagined they did, it only made sense that scientific hermeneutics should be engaged in similar processes of counting, dividing, and ordering.

3c.6 Parts: literary relations

Numerical structures in the Bible stood hand-in-hand with literary ones. “Grammar is the science of correct language,” Pierson expostulated. “In all speech, the exact expression and conveyance of thought and meaning depend on ... the right relation of every member of a sentence to all the rest.”¹⁶⁷ In dispensational hermeneutics, it was not the mere literal meaning of the words that mattered, but the structural relationships between the literary elements that indicated their true meaning. Pierson wrote: “As in any organism, no member or part, however minute, can be fully understood aside from its relation to the whole; so, in scripture, every paragraph and sentence are

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 69. Pierson had some familiarity with Grant’s *Numerical Bible*, and had been influenced by it in his thinking about numerical structures in the Bible. He wrote: “Of numerical structure, many students, like F. W. Grant, in his ‘Numerical Bible,’ find numbers so embedded in the very structure of the Word of God that they believe it to be one method of stamping divine design upon the Scriptures; and close investigation shows amazing numerical symmetry where a careless reader would never suspect it.” Ibid., 73.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 76.

part of its totality, and must be studied in relation to all the rest. ... Hidden relationships must be traced like underground roots and subterranean channels.”¹⁶⁸ Meaning was born from linguistic relationships.

The most important components of literary structure were types. Although he avoided the technical language of typology used by Grant, Pierson offered a similar description of themes in the Bible: “There is, quite uniformly, a peculiar significance in first mention. Whenever any person, place, important word, or subject is first referred to in Scripture, all subsequent recurrence of the same is forecast, or hinted; so that such first glimpse indicates its relation to the entire testimony and teaching of Scripture.”¹⁶⁹ Given this textual structure, proper hermeneutics involved inter-textual thematic study. Pierson wrote: “To examine the scriptures topically is very fruitful in results. Taking great leading subjects or themes, we should seek to find the total testimony of the Inspired Word upon each, gathering up and arranging scattered or fragmentary hints... it is for the student to bring together the material, discover its mutual relation, and construct out of it a full testimony to the truth.”¹⁷⁰ The Bible gave up its deeper meanings only when themes were drawn out from the whole.

3c.6.1 Nonsense and the literal sense

One of the most persistent misapprehensions about dispensationalists and fundamentalists relates to their use of the rhetoric of “the literal sense.” Critics of dispensationalism have seized on this to describe their hermeneutics as woodenly mechanical, simplistic, or simply wrong-headed. Scholars have all too often followed, taking claims of “literal” readings literally. Along with the charge of “proof-texting,” “literal” readings have become synonymous with anti-intellectual interpretive positions.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 186.

¹⁶⁹ Pierson, 259.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 204.

¹⁷¹ For example, historian Mark Noll asserted: “For their part, the revivalists who emerged as fundamentalists... were increasingly likely to advocate a dispensational theology that featured eschatological speculation prominently, and they

While dispensationalists rarely offered a precise definition, they spoke of “the literal sense” to refer to several different ideas. Rather than a universal approach, the literal sense was one of many tools they used to interpret the Bible. It did not imply a flat, shallow mechanical relationship between words and meaning.¹⁷² Occasionally they simply meant common or plain meanings of language. Most often they meant linguistic meanings informed by historical and grammatical usage. Frequently they used the term not in a technical sense, but as instructive contrast, to oppose interpretations they considered spiritualizing, allegorical, phantomizing, or otherwise hostile to the sense in which they believed the original audience might have understood the text. The most adamant dispensational adherents to the rhetoric of literal interpretation still recognized that the Bible contained more than one type of language, and employed more than one linguistic method to understand it.

One of the clearest explications of the hermeneutic of literal interpretation came in a speech by Henry Lummis, a professor at Lawrence College in Wisconsin, at the 1886 Chicago prophecy conference. Lummis began by acknowledging the challenges presented by all the trippy, weird imagery found in the Bible: “There are unquestionable difficulties in our sacred book. Some cases occur that the light enjoyed in the present life may never satisfactorily enable us to explain. The key has been lost, possibly never to be recovered.”¹⁷³ Even so, Lummis argued that the majority of language used in the Bible was straightforward. Referring to a prophetic proclamation in the New Testament, Lummis wrote: “The statement of the Saviour requires the adoption of no mystical sense to harmonize His words with the facts. A child of twelve, with ordinary intelligence would

tended toward an ahistorical mode of proof-texting in their use of Scripture.” Mark Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 38.

¹⁷² To be sure, some later fundamentalists would mean this, but none present in this story.

¹⁷³ Henry Lummis, “Christ’s Predictions and Their Interpretation,” In George C. Needham, ed. *Prophetic Studies of the International Prophetic Conference* (Fleming H. Revell: Chicago, 1886), 45-46.

understand the prediction as Christ declared it.”¹⁷⁴ This was not to say that such language did not require interpretation, but that it involved the kind of interpretation that most people seemed capable of doing automatically: basic grammatical work. This included both historical and linguistic elements: understanding language as speech acts that took place in particular historical contexts, and whose overall symbolic contexts informed the interpretation of any particular element. Lummis noted this as instinctive or natural, writing: “I insist that the New Testament statements conform to the laws of language as truly as do those of Xenophon.”¹⁷⁵ In contrast to the literal (i.e. historical-grammatical) use of language, Lummis admitted that many passages in the Bible used figurative words, while others were clearly allegorical. He took to task critics who accused dispensationalists of simplistic and absolute literal hermeneutics, writing:

Is it a lack of perspicacity or of attention that allows the critics who attack the doctrine of literal prediction to assume that literality excludes the occurrence of any word not literal in a prophetic chapter, or in a chapter historic, like **Matthew II**. No literalist entitled to respectful attention claims a literality of statement beyond that of ordinary history. A metaphor, a synecdoche, a metonymy, a simile may, instead of obscuring a sentence, illuminate it.¹⁷⁶

Lummis saw such attributions of wooden literality as nonsense. He added: “The true literalist makes no protest against metaphor, metonymy, or any recognized figure. He only protests against interpretations which violate the laws of rhetorical figures.”¹⁷⁷

By contrast, Lummis resisted the historicist reimagining of prophetic language that dismissed the possibility of temporal foresight. “Any one familiar with the history of prophetic interpretation,” he wrote, “finds not merely the ludicrous and extraordinary in the theories that ignore literal interpretation, but results that distort language and make it utterly worthless as a

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 46.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 47.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

medium for communicating thought”¹⁷⁸ Lummis saw non-literal interpretations of prophecy as the chief source of interpretive violence committed against the Bible. He wrote, “The vice of the spiritualizer is his use of what he is pleased to call a figure, yet a figure to which no rhetorician of ancient or modern times has ventured to stand sponsor. ... its seeming use is to turn the ordinary statements of the Scriptures into allegory, not to explain allegory.”¹⁷⁹ Opposing the nonsense they found in arbitrary grammatical allegories, dispensationalists insisted that language possessed a literal—that is to say, historical-grammatical—meaning that was essential for communication. The “literal sense” was never by itself a hermeneutic method, nor the only interpretive method used to understand the Bible or its prophetic passages. It was one aspect of the linguistic approach that took place within a framework of the larger project of taxonomic dispensational hermeneutics.¹⁸⁰

3c.7 Methods and techniques

Dispensationalists believed that only a taxonomic approach to the Bible was fundamentally scientific. It was, as they rightly saw, closer to the methods of inquiry and organization used by the natural sciences than historicism. Although dispensational assumptions explicitly required supernatural revelation to account for the unity of the Bible, they felt that their methods and approaches were more quantitative, methodical, ordered, and rigorous than the speculative hypothesis used by the higher critics. Dispensationalists boasted of their scientific prowess. A.T. Pierson described dispensational methods of classification as: “one of the last, best results of the scientific method. It originally brought creative order- cosmos-out of primitive chaos, and it everywhere reduces confusion to systematic and orderly arrangement. It is a perpetual process of discovery. Exact habits of research disclose hitherto hidden features, relations and adaptations;

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 48.

¹⁸⁰ For additional discussion of the rhetoric of the literal sense, see chapter 5.2.2.

variety and complexity are seen to be subordinate to unity and simplicity.”¹⁸¹ Pierson extolled the technological processes that went into dispensational interpretive methods. “If we would get the complete testimony of the inspired Word,” he argued, “we must collate, compare, combine.”¹⁸² Of the value of comparative analytical study, he noted: “This principle of classification, thoroughly carried out, would reduce the whole of Scripture to a consistent system of teaching, where one fact or truth offsets another and modifies and qualifies it.”¹⁸³ Like other dispensationalists, the verbs he used to describe his interpretive process invoked natural science and technological production, such as: classify, modify, qualify, collate, compare, combine, and order. Dispensationalists saw their methods, above all, as scientific.

3.d Summary

In 1880, American Protestant intellectuals—professional academics, clergy, and laypersons alike—were largely convinced that the Bible needed to be interpreted scientifically. Those seeking to build a professionalized discipline of the study of the Bible (either in universities or among the clergy) required scientific methods of interpretation. Yet there was little consensus about what a “scientific” reading of texts might mean. In traditional academic locations, philologists found science in the study of ancient languages. Embracing the unfolding truths of German historicism, higher critics discovered science in the explanations provided by speculative and comparative reconstructions of the contexts of textual origins. Conservatives at Princeton induced science in thickly elaborated restatements of Common Sense realism and Baconian method. Yet other scientific hermeneutics emerged from impulses in mass culture. Drawing from technological values in popular culture and from the typological and numeric Brethren Bible studies, dispensationalists

¹⁸¹ Pierson, 240.

¹⁸² Ibid., 224.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

constructed scientific interpretations based around principles of distinction, dividing and enumerating the unities they saw in the Bible.

Even as these various forms of scientific interpretation developed at the end of the nineteenth century, the stakes of the enterprise rose. Geologists and skeptics required refutation. Disciplinary boundaries were being created and enforced as universities, seminaries, and similar institutions were caught up in ecstatic waves of professionalization and specialization.¹⁸⁴

Resistance to academic forms of biblical interpretation mounted.¹⁸⁵ Dispensationalists were wary of the prestige that higher criticism had gained.¹⁸⁶ In response, they developed their own taxonomic hermeneutic in institutional homes like the Bible conference movement, Bible schools, and their own journals and networks. As their own prestige began to wane in the wake of the rise of universities, they sought increasingly popular outlets for communicating their methods and results. They spent an increasing amount of energy disputing claims that *all* serious Bible scholars accepted rationalistic higher criticism, and offering taxonomic dispensational methods as the scientific methodology that best revealed the true meaning in the Bible.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ David Hollinger saw these types of development happening broadly within the university, not just in biblical studies, as German concepts of scientific humanities proliferated. He wrote: "Yet it was the broader, German sense of science—embracing humanistic and social scientific scholarship—that informed most efforts to address the promise of a scientific culture, whether in America, Britain, or on the continent of Europe. ... The truths sought by Wissenschaft were exact and secular, and were "empirical" in the general, modern sense of this English word. They were discovered, not divined." David Hollinger, "The Knower and the Artificer," *American Quarterly* 39:1 (Spring 1987), 42-43.

¹⁸⁵ Dispensationalists were not opposed to all forms of higher criticism. They generally welcomed the study of provenance, authorship, and history of the text, within limits. For example, Arthur Pierson wrote: "Critical study is not to be discouraged; it is not only proper but helpful in its proper sphere, when conducted with a proper spirit. But there is a sort of analysis that is destructive; like the vivisection that invades the domain of life, in cutting in pieces the organic body of truth, it sacrifices vitality and leave only dead, disconnected fragments of what was one living organism. The Bible is such a living organism. Its various parts are members of a common body; they have a vital connection and relation, and must be examined, not in isolation and separation, but in union as integral parts of a great whole." Pierson, *Knowing the Scriptures*, 4.

¹⁸⁶ James Brookes' early biographer captured the sense of indignation that dispensationalists felt about the claims of higher critics to sole scientific status: "This acknowledged champion of the Plain People's English Bible knew all that they did concerning the Bible in the original, and a great deal more, in numerous instances. ... he was fully equipped to battle with the destructive Biblical critics in their own camp. He saw through the pretensions of many alleged great textual scholars, and despised their lofty and exclusive assumption of sacred learning." Williams, *James Brookes*, 164.

¹⁸⁷ Proving that higher critics won the intellectual battles, historian Mark Noll identified dispensational concerns as intellectual weaknesses or obviously false assumptions that flawed scholarship. He wrote: "The rapid spread of dispensational convictions affected study of the Bible in three ways. It first provided an accessible scheme for making

Yet despite these fundamental differences and interpretive competition, commonalities existed between higher critics and dispensationalists. Both groups believed that scientific interpretation involved the systematic parsing of unity. Higher critics believed in the unity of *history*, while dispensationalists began their work with assumptions about the unity of the *text*. William Robertson Smith wrote: “the fundamental principle of the higher criticism lies in the conception of the organic unity of all history.”¹⁸⁸ A.T. Pierson countered Smith’s argument, arguing that the Bible itself “unmistakably teaches the organic unity of the two Testaments, and in various ways exhibits their mutual relations.”¹⁸⁹ Scientific parsers needed to locate an object of study that possessed the property of organic unity, either in the past or in the text. Second, from that unity, distinctions emerged. Higher critics found divisions within the text that revealed the composite nature of the literary work. Dispensationalists found distinctions revealed in the text that divided history itself into distinct dispensations. Likewise, critics believed progress and development were external to the text, or demonstrated by the text; that is, progress lay in the historical development of Christianity as a religion. Typological and dispensational interpreters believed development was revealed within the text, as an essentially literary phenomenon, through the process of progressive revelation and systems of types and antitypes. Higher critics found theological doctrines an absolute property of historical context, thus relative to the reader’s own context. The interpreter’s gaze thus became authoritative, rather than historically relative doctrines. Dispensationalists believed theological

sense of the Scriptures—simple enough for ordinary people who would study hard, yet complex enough to afford the exhilaration of special knowledge.... Second, dispensationalism emphasized the supernatural character of the Bible to such an extent that the historical contexts of Scripture receded into the background. ... The difficulty came, however, when the effort to understand Scripture according to its divine character undermined efforts to grasp its historical context. Under this impetus, the Bible was all too readily taken out of history and read as an artificially unified text. ... Third, dispensationalism flourished in communities that distrusted professional scholarship. Most of its major proponents were neither academically trained nor professionally certified students of Scripture.” Mark Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 58-59.

¹⁸⁸ William Robertson Smith, *Lectures and Essays* (London: Black, 1912), 164.

¹⁸⁹ Pierson, *Knowing the Scriptures*, 53.

authority was absolute and came from outside of history, thus any past understandings of doctrine were necessarily relative to their historical location.

In these respects, and in many other ways, dispensationalism and higher criticism represented mirror images of each other, twinned outgrowths of modernist thinking, reflecting back to each other inverted assumptions about the nature of history and biblical texts. Although historiography often characterizes fundamentalism as a conservative reaction against higher criticism, the adoption of higher criticism in America was as much a reaction against the modernist scientific claims of dispensational methods as the inverse. Perhaps neither could have developed fully apart from the opposition of its antipodal twin. Both sought to answer the question of how the Bible was made meaningful in the modern world, and both found the answers not in doctrine or behavior, but in scientific hermeneutic methods.

4. Dispensational Time

4.1 New tenses of time

With the 1837 publication of British geologist Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology*, the ground beneath American Protestants' feet began to shake.¹ Even more than Charles Darwin's 1859 *Origin of Species*, Lyell's work altered American religious and academic understandings of time.² Prior to Lyell, most American Christians assumed the earth to be of relatively recent origin. Many accepted Irish Bishop James Ussher's (1581-1656) popular chronology of biblical history, contending that the divine creation of the universe took place on the eve of October 23, 4004 BC. Before Lyell, a common theory among geologists for explaining the physical evidence went by the name catastrophism, which suggested the earth had been shaped by periods of dramatic upheaval, such as the Genesis flood. Lyell, however, became convinced that natural physical processes now in operation were sufficient to explain the geological record. This theory became known as uniformitarianism after its central presupposition, that: "The order of nature has, from the earliest periods, been uniform in the same sense in which we believe it to be uniform at present, and expect it to remain so in future."³ Simply put, uniformitarianism posited that the present was the key to the past. Uniformitarianism demanded vast amounts of historical time. Millions of years were needed

¹ Lyell's work first appeared in Britain in three volumes between 1830 and 1837. The first American edition appeared in 1837, and I use that edition here: Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology*, 1st American ed. (Philadelphia: James Kay, Jun. & Brother, 1837). Historian James Turner argued that Lyell "delivered the crushing blow to Biblical literalism ... [as] Geology suddenly obsessed American theologians." James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1985), 145.

² Darwin noted his reliance on "Charles Lyell's noble views:" "Natural selection can act only by the preservation and accumulation of infinitesimally small inherited modifications, each profitable to the preserved being; and as modern geology has almost banished such views as the excavation of a great valley by a single diluvial wave, so will natural selection, if it be a true principle, banish the belief of the continued creation of new organic beings, or of any great and sudden modification in their structure." Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, 2nd ed. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1861), 90. Like Lyell, Darwin opposed the idea of rapid change, referring often to the "old canon of natural history: *natura non facit saltus*" (nature does not make jumps). Darwin proposed a view of time nearly identical to Lyell's: "As natural selection acts solely by accumulating slight, successive, favourable variations, it can produce no great or sudden modification; it can act only by very short and slow steps." *Ibid.*, 409.

³ Lyell, 162. For the development of uniformitarianism and other models of geologic time, see: Davis A. Young & Ralph F. Stearly, *The Bible, Rocks and Time* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008).

to account for geologic change, instead of Ussher's meager 6,000. Time became an unimaginably long, slow process of gradual change, virtually all of it preceding any human gaze. Verbs revealed the difference. Catastrophism spoke in the simple past tense: the ground shook, the earth flooded, God made. Uniformitarianism relied on the past perfect progressive: water had been running over rocks for millennia.

For many American Christians, uniformitarianism threw the meaning of time into question. What was the significance of human life in an ancient universe? What could a vast history-less past teach people about themselves? Before, time glowed with cosmic significance—in the form of a divine creation and purposeful change directed towards a purposeful consummation. But Lyellians suggested otherwise. In their hands geologic time derived its meaning from its linearity, uniformity, and continuity. Others wondered if the lesson of geologic time was its very meaninglessness; that it explained origins and development of the world and all its life without recourse to any purposeful causes.

Even as Lyell's scientific theories sent seismic shocks through the popular imagination, technology simultaneously provided Americans with a yet another regime of time through the proliferation of clocks and watches. In 1862, United States clockmakers produced 50,000 watches alone. A decade later that number jumped to 400,000, and by 1882 they were turning out 1.25 million watches per year.⁴ On the face of it, this explosion of timekeeping seemed like it should reinforce geologic time. Clock time was universal, uniform, and continuous. It did not conform to human experience—after all, clocks kept marking time even while their owners slept. Clocks marked the relentless linear progression of time; for all their rotating, the hands of a clock moved only in one direction. Clocks spoke in the eternal present tense. Even the process of manufacturing watches signaled regular forward movement: between 1853 and 1859, the time it took to produce a

⁴ R.A. Church, "Nineteenth-Century Clock Technology in Britain, the United States, and Switzerland," *The Economic History Review* 28:4 (Nov. 1975), 618.

watch fell from 21 man-days to only four, as efficiency and time keeping often appeared to move forward synonymously.⁵ Watches were on hand to promote the rationalization of time that began with Lyell, as an endless, relentless, uniform progression from past to future.⁶

But as is often the case with technology, the human consequences proved much different from expectations. Through clocks, Americans began to experience time as polyvalent. Clocks made time divisible, punctuated, and measurable. They made it possible to engineer time, and to use time for engineering purposes, popularizing new values like efficiency, punctuality, calculability, and speed. Clock time offered owners agency to construct time according to their needs and desires, unlike geologic time which turned humans into accidental products of history.⁷ This mechanization of time seemed a new source of agency. Yet it also led to a widespread loss of autonomy to the inexorable tyranny of timekeeping. Even more disconcerting was the inconsistency between *chronos* and *tempus*. Clocks marked out universal, geologic, continuous time. Yet personal experience never conformed to this uniform sense of time. In the course of everyday life, some periods were rich and full of meaning while others remained empty and wasted.

⁵ Ibid., 621.

⁶ Some social theorists have argued that the primary effect of clocks was this uniform rationalization of time. For example, see Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1990), 17: where Giddens argues: “The invention of the mechanical clock and its diffusion to virtually all members of the population ... were of key significance in the separation of time from space. The clock expressed a uniform dimension of “empty” time.” Ibid., 17.

⁷ Agency over time came partly through instruments of measurement, but also through changes in linguistic structures for communicating time. By the late nineteenth century a spate of new economic and spatial metaphors portrayed time as something saved or wasted, a landscape that stretched out ahead and behind. Spatial metaphors proved the most dominant. As a recent scholar has noted, it is now very difficult to imagine time in non-spatial categories: “Linguists have noted that it is virtually impossible to talk about time without invoking motion (engines, chariots, arrows) and spatial content (short, long). A clock face, for instance, provides both motion, the moving hand, and spatial content, the space traversed by the hand. Even more modern conceptions of time seem to require spatial representation.” Lynn Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History* (New York: Central European University Press, 2008), 4. Yet both the new economic and spatial metaphors held in common the sense that humans had some control over time, could spend it, or measure and record it. See, for example: “The movement between governed time and surplus time had the effect of heightening the sense of time’s new social valuation in modernity as something more akin to a commodity--“time is money.” Time was something that could be controlled, manipulated, lost, stolen, exchanged, and so on. It was anything but static.” Edward J. Gitre, “The 1904-05 Welsh Revival: Modernization, Technologies, and Techniques of the Self.” *Church History* 73:4 (Dec. 2004), 808. Spatiality, economic metaphors, and an instrumental imagination with respect to time all contributed to the sense that time was something constructed or managed by people.

Moreover, by the late nineteenth century, American's collective experience involved profound disjunctions in time. Amidst the rapid social changes and national crises like the Civil War, it became commonplace to observe present moments that seemed to bear no relationship to their immediate pasts. Technology helped identify and mark those stark boundaries, as specific dates and times received meaning. Emulating factories, post-Civil War schools became some of the first public institutions to be run by the clock, opening and closing bells indicating transitions from one mode of being to another. The more deeply technologies of time became integrated into social life, the less it seemed that the meaning of time came from its blind historicity. Unlike breaks in the older, natural regime of time—such as births, deaths, and holidays, which marked changes in individuals' relationship with the external world—it became more common to experience disjunctions within personal identity. Daily transitions between home-selves and work-selves also came with industrialization. Country boys became city youths, daughters became factory workers; in both dramatic and daily ways personal identity was subject to transition. Sometimes no grammatical tense at all seemed to capture this disjunction, as not just the verbs but the subject too became unstable.

Collectively, these accounts help establish a framework to explore how early American dispensationalists experienced, understood, and portrayed time. Like other Americans, they believed that Christianity incorporated a time-concept—that is, that one of the proper functions of religion was to give meaning to time. This included both time as a measured, meaningful past—history—and time as a measurable present. Dispensationalists wrestled to reconcile ideas of linear, progressive, time connected to history, with ideas of ruptured, discontinuous time, laden with external meaning. In the midst of new scientific claims to understand time, and new technologies that radically transformed the experience of time, dispensationalists struggled to grasp time that seemed to have a multiplicity of contradictory experiences and meanings. Ultimately they worked

out a system that blended values and experiences from several tenses of time, and proclaimed that the ultimate meaning of times—past, present, and future—came from outside itself, given narratively in the text of the Bible, and included ruptures in time itself.

4.2 Millennial pasts and modern critics

4.2.1 Modernist response to continuous time

For philosopher William James, understanding the significance of time proved central to experience, and the modern experience of time was one of disenchantment. “The progress of science,” James wrote in 1907, “has seemed to mean the enlargement of the material universe and the diminution of man's importance.”⁸ For many, Lyellian and Darwinian science confirmed this suspicion, identifying history as a process of random, meaningless, incessant change. Finding patterns in history was suspect and scientifically unverifiable.

Yet most Americans did not follow James's lead. A past without meaning proved too bitter to swallow. Some, post-Lyell, accepted the disenchantment of time by dismissing the possibility of supernatural or external meaning, but still sought to find objective meaning within naturalized temporality, and so shifted their allegiance to the idea of secularized progress in history. Progress meant history with a happy ending. Ironically, popular rephrasing of Darwinian ideas of evolution, with its random mechanisms of change, translated loosely into ideas about cultural, material, and biological *improvement*. The Progressive historian Charles Beard described this sense of forward motion as: “the notion of constant change directed toward to the material health of humanity.”⁹ The idea of progress transformed religious conceptions of time also. In the first decades of the twentieth

⁸ Quoted in Roger Lundin, *From Nature to Experience: The American Search for Cultural Authority* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 75.

⁹ Charles Austin Beard and Mary Ritter Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 444.

century the liberal Protestant magazine *The Christian Century* ran a regular column titled, “The World is Growing Better.” Optimism about human destiny and social improvement soared.

In the decades bracketing the turn of the twentieth century this vision of disenchanted time matched with secular progress flourished, particularly among American urban and intellectual elites. Influenced by Lyell and Darwin, by German thinkers (particularly Hegel), and by the social optimism of the Progressive era, they imagined that time was universal, continuous, and yet progressive.¹⁰ Events happened “in” time, and all the causes for these events manifested themselves wholly in time, and through social contexts, physical laws, and human agency. The study and writing of history, then, consisted of analyzing the residual evidence from the past and discovering their sequences and causal relationships. Since every event was naturalistically caused, and every cause subject to scientific explanation, the meaning of an event, in this view, was exhausted by explanations of origins and development. Progress functioned as a secular teleology—a modern marvel—driven by the simple engines of historical cause and effect.

By 1924, this theory of time applied to the study of the religious past found pristine expression in University of Chicago historian Shirley Jackson Case's article “The Religious Meaning of the Past.”¹¹ Case sought to explain why traditional religious views of the past were no longer tenable for scientific minds, and thus bore no present authority. He argued: “In the past the history of Christianity has usually been studied for the sake of its supposed normative worth. But the method of modern science applied to the study of history has shown it to be an ever moving evolutionary process no part of which can properly be regarded as a final authority for all future

¹⁰ Other scholars locate this shift to universal, disenchanted, progressive time earlier in Anglo-American thought. Lynn Hunt argued that this idea of time begins with Isaac Newton. The popular acceptance of universal time with Lyell, then, perhaps might be represented as the consummation of this changing time-concept in the west, which took hold progressively between about 1700 and 1850. See: Lynn Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History* (New York: Central European University Press, 2008), 26.

¹¹ Shirley Jackson Case, “The Religious Meaning of the Past,” *The Journal of Religion* 4:6 (Nov. 1924), 576-591.

time.”¹² For modern historians, Case suggested that the past derived its meaning by virtue of illustrating evolutionary processes: “how in the sequence of events the present has come to be what it is.”¹³ Indeed, human and natural forces constituted historical time; accounts that relied on providential causality instead could not be regarded as historical in the modern, scientific sense.

Case believed that the study of the past also bore meaning for the future, or at least for how people in the present ought to look towards the future. The future, he held, would inevitably be shaped by the same laws of moral progress that he witnessed in the past and present. Much like Lyell’s geologic processes, Case saw moral and social progress as a regular, unchanging feature of time, and of Christian history in particular: “Constructively, history reveals in Christianity a long course of spiritual evolution constantly accumulating momentum and worth with the multiplication of the years. ... [I]t is the very nature of historical Christianity that the quest for righteousness renew and realize itself afresh with each new stage of social evolution.”¹⁴ Case represented one branch of modernist responses to Lyell and clock-time, imagining time as disenchanted and uniform, given meaning only through the human scientific exploration of natural causes that revealed the perpetual upward vector of progress. The meaning of time came not from specific or authoritative lessons passed down, but from how the process itself revealed, to the historical scientific gaze, the advance—and thus also the prognosis—of evolution and spiritual progress.

¹² Ibid., 576. Case objected to more than just the idea that the past held normative value in the present. Other outdated features of the older religious conception of history included excessive periodization and segmentation, views of an idealized past and degenerate present, and ideas of divinely inspired revelation: “all of which no longer accorded with the findings of scientific research.” Ibid., 581. Incongruously, however, he was willing to accept “modernity” as a type of essential periodization, a dramatic break with the past that allowed modern thinkers access to clearer epistemological methods than any previous generations. Although Case sometimes made provisions for understanding modernity as a historical development, more often he used the concept to refer to a scientifically fuelled break with the past.

¹³ Case wrote: “the evolutionary hypothesis of modern science, in its application to history, proposes only to tell, so far as the available data permit, the story of how in the sequence of events the present has come to be what it is.” Ibid., 583.

¹⁴ Ibid., 591.

4.2.2 Alternating American millennial visions

In arguing for continuous, natural, progressive time, Case sought a break with older American Protestant ideas. Most European-Americans, from Christopher Columbus to Abraham Lincoln inclusive, held some version of millennial beliefs. Many focused on the role of the Americas or the United States as a divinely anointed project that would usher in a millennial kingdom of peace and righteousness. The cords that tied together Christian millennialism, republican ideology and civil apocalyptic rhetoric, and Enlightenment utopianism proved both formidable and endlessly entwined. Blurring religious, political, and philosophical hopes, many Americans—both old stock patriarchs and firebrand revivalists—imagined a national utopia ahead as God led the country through processes of individual spiritual renewal, collective religious revival, and social reform. Before the Civil War, this American dream was an essentially millennial dream, whereby the experiments in the “new world” would lead eventually to a kingdom of justice ordained to redeem the world.¹⁵

By the mid-nineteenth century, though, radically new forms of millennialism began to appear. Some commonalities existed between this nationalistic postmillennialism and the new movements that rose up to challenge it. Nearly all Protestant millennial systems in American history held shared beliefs that: 1) time was teleological, leading towards a definite ending or consummation; 2) both the beginning and ending of time resulted from supernatural intervention (Creation and Judgment); 3) the Bible included accurate and coherent predictions of the future, alongside accurate periodizations of the past; and 4) the Christian hope looked forward to (at least)

¹⁵ For assessments of early American millennialism, see: James West Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Nathan O. Hatch, “Millennialism and Popular Religion in the Early Republic,” in *The Evangelical Tradition in America*, ed. by Leonard I. Sweet (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984); James H. Moorhead, “The Erosion of Postmillennialism in American Religious Thought, 1865-1925,” *Church History* 53 (Mar. 1984), 61-77; Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America’s Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968); and Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

two events: the Second Coming of Christ, sometimes called the “blessed hope”, and a long period of peace, prosperity, and human goodness (perhaps a thousand years long) called the Millennium.¹⁶

Yet mid-nineteenth-century movements represented a dramatic shift in attitudes towards the American experiment and its ability to produce a righteous nation, and they structured their visions less and less around the redeeming power of the state. Instead they found new resources in the apocalyptic imagery and figures in the Bible or in new revelations from charismatic leaders. Groups like the Shakers, Mormons, and (perhaps most famously) Millerites expected God’s imminent supernatural intervention in history.

The Millerite movement was sparked by Baptist preacher William Miller’s biblical calculations that showed the Second Coming of Jesus Christ would occur in the 1840s. Popularized by Boston publisher Joshua Vaughan Himes, it paired popular enthusiasm with great disappointments, as several specific dates of the Advent were predicted but did not occur. Millerites created elaborate chronologies of past and future, grounded in what historian David Morgan described as an “aesthetic experience of interpreting revelation.”¹⁷ Time was made into a visual object that could be organized by sense perceptions. Morgan argued that Millerite prophecy interpretation emphasized a “harmony of parts” and “symmetry, correspondence, and similitude,”

¹⁶ To be sure, different millennial groups interpreted the exact events of “the blessed hope” and millennium differently, some seeing the former as the pretribulational rapture of the saints, while others saw this event temporally synonymous with the return of Christ. The “blessed hope” language came from Titus 2:13: “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” (KJV) Other assessments of the commonalities include James Moorhead: “Crucial to all millennial systems had been the notion that the Bible contains a unified system of accurate predictions.” James M. Moorhead, “The Erosion of Postmillennialism in American Religious Thought, 1865-1925,” *Church History* 53:1 (Mar. 1984), 62., and Ernest Sandeen, who described the overlap: “In the Christian tradition, all millennial theologies involve the triumph of Christ, the vindication of the suffering saints, and the eventual reign of Christ on earth.” Ernest R. Sandeen, “Millennialism,” in *The Rise of Adventism*, ed. by Edwin S. Gaustad, (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 105. Apart from these basic shifts in time-concept and views of the state, these millennial movements embraced vastly different theological content. The variations of interpretive nuance are nearly infinite. Seemingly everyone came up with a different presentation of the eschatological schemes of the future, of when Christ would return, or how, or what events would accompany or presage this. For example: some millennialists believed in a figurative Second Coming, in the hearts of believers, or a historical Second Coming at various points in the past. However, paying too much attention to minute theological detail has often led scholars to imagine these groups as strange outliers or disenfranchised outsiders in American society. Focusing analysis on the big shifts—in time-concepts and interpretive methods—helps reveal the fundamental epistemic patterns being drawn in Protestant America.

¹⁷ David Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production* (New York: Oxford, 1999), 129.

all grounded in a “schematic imagination.”¹⁸ This schematic gaze was turned on prophetic Bible passages to produce a reified charting of temporal meaning. Combining calculations from William Hales' chronology of world (that is, biblical) history alongside the schematic interpretations of harmonized prophetic images, Miller and his followers predicted dates when biblical prophecy would be fulfilled.¹⁹ They popularized these interpretations through elaborately designed prophecy charts. These charts provided simplified predictions of the future, but also communicated a series of assumptions about how time itself was structured.

Figure 15: Millerite chart of “God’s Everlasting Kingdom”

The most famous Millerite chart, titled “God’s Everlasting Kingdom,” offered visual representations of prophetic imagery from the books of Daniel and Revelation. First published by

¹⁸ Ibid., 133.

¹⁹ The bulk of this harmonizing work took place in the past, as Miller embraced a historicist view of prophecy, seeking to locate signs of prophetic fulfillment in the history of the church. As Morgan noted: “The Adventist reading of scripture sought to transform it into a uniform field of correspondences, a homogenous fabric of similitudes. Interpreting scripture properly consisted of discerning similarities between prophetic symbols and historical periods.” Ibid., 131.

Joshua V. Himes around 1843, it saw wide circulation. Historian David Morgan suggested: “The chart metaphor configured time as linear and progressive, as moving uniformly toward an explicit destination,” and thus “provided an orientation in time in the manner that a map offered position in space.” David Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production* (New York: Oxford, 1999), 150-1.

The Millerite time-concept blended many features that later became separate streams: linear, measured time but with the urgency of an apocalyptic end. This was paired with an aesthetic that mapped biographical time and cosmic time on the same scale. As the movement institutionalized, the experience of disappointment led these millenarians to develop what historian Jonathan Butler described as “a pattern for dealing with future disappointments in a nonfalsifiable way.”²⁰ Adventists strove to keep alive their predictive temporal aesthetic while reducing the institutional trauma cause by failed predictions. Yet date-setting forms of millennialism were largely a parenthesis for mainstream Protestant thought. In many ways, Millerite millennialism appeared before its time, indicating disillusionment with millennial views tied up with nationalism, and employing technologies of representation not yet fully popularized in the early nineteenth century. Symptomatic of things to come, it showed future millennialists some of the rewards and dangers of reimagining sacred time as distinct from progress.

While early nineteenth-century millenarian movements struggled for survival, mainstream Protestant ideas about time were shifting in opposite directions. By 1860 the most commonly held position among American Protestants was postmillennialism. Unlike the millenarian movements of earlier in the century, postmillennialists did not expect imminent supernatural intervention, or engage in date setting, or provide resources for social protest. Instead, postmillennialism grew out of republican civil millennialism, a sense of national destiny, and a firm belief in the linear progress of history. It proposed that Christ would return only after the church initiated the thousand-year

²⁰ Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, eds., *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), xix.

millennium by evangelizing and reforming the world. Secularized values of postmillennialism helped construct the “Idea of Progress,” which, as historian Ernest Lee Tuveson remarked, had become “an absolute article of faith,” for Americans in the nineteenth century.²¹ This progress was more than just material. Tuveson described it as: “the great characteristic modern belief that advance in technology, standard of living, and other purely material aspects of culture is advance religiously and spiritually as well—that man gets better and better as he controls nature more and more.”²² Postmillennialists benefited from theological changes that sought to emphasize “process” and slow development over abrupt changes.²³ Process applied equally to history and biography. Congregational theologian Horace Bushnell championed this view in his 1847 work *Christian Nurture*, which argued that religious education of children should focus on the gradual development of Christian character, instead of looking for abrupt moments of spiritual crisis and conversion.²⁴

Postmillennial belief in progress (and process) represented a transition between early colonial views of national millennial destiny and later, non-millennial, evolutionary views held by historians such as Case.²⁵ But it proved short-lived, and by 1925, postmillennialism had largely disappeared. Indeed, heirs of the postmillennial tradition proved some of its fiercest foes. Higher

²¹ Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia: A Study in the Background of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964 [1949]), 1.

²² *Ibid.*, vi.

²³ Rather than progress, James Moorhead thought this later idea of *process* served as the central metaphor of postmillennial thought. He wrote: “Perhaps the key word to describe the emerging attitude is “process.” Distrustful of sharp discontinuities in the spiritual life, many Protestants preferred to speak of continuous maturation and of the natural unfolding of religious experience.” Moorhead, 69.

²⁴ Bushnell looked for spiritual process in individual lives, reflected in social and technological progress. In *A Discourse on the Moral Uses of the Sea* he described things “of the highest interest to man—the progress of society, art, government, science, and religion—in a word, all that is included in moral advancement.” Horace Bushnell, *A Discourse on the Moral Uses of the Sea* (New York: M.W. Dodd, 1845), 6.

²⁵ Moorhead described this transitional function: “During its heyday in the mid-nineteenth century, this eschatology [postmillennialism] represented a compromise between an apocalyptic and an evolutionary view of time, between a history characterized by dramatic upheavals and supernatural events and one governed by natural laws of organic development. The theory postponed history’s cataclysmic end until after the millennium and thereby allowed the temporal interval necessary for the gradual evangelical conquest of the world and the triumph of secular progress.” Moorhead, 61-62.

critics like Case stumped for wholly naturalistic views of times, and argued that predicting the future was not a major biblical concern, that prophecies were unreliable and incoherent, and that modern minds could no longer embrace the idea of supernatural interventions in time, past or future.²⁶ A bodily second coming of Christ was clearly out of the question, as was an apocalyptic end of time, whether it came before or after a secular millennium. The meaning of time, they insisted, came from understanding the long continuous upward slope of naturalistic social evolution, not from any kind of supernatural periodization or intervention.

All of these millennial options—and their many cousins and offspring—helped illustrate Ernest Sandeen’s claim that “America in the early nineteenth century was drunk on the millennium.”²⁷ Each contributed to the stock of available reality: colonial national destinies, Millerite visual aesthetics of time, and postmillennial ideas of progress. Each served as a foil for subsequent time-concepts. Amidst this jumble of temporal systems emerged premillennial views of disjunctive time.

4.3 Premillennialism and ruptured time

Postmillennialism succumbed to both the evolutionary naturalism of the higher critics and a revival of premillennialism. By the twentieth century, premillennialism and materialistic modernism had largely drowned out the other options, at least in Protestant mass culture. Premillennialism, in various forms, suggested that the natural progress of history would end when Christ returned and established a millennial kingdom that would stand in stark contrast with all that

²⁶ Distrust of prophecy was the mirror image of historicism, or the historicist gaze directed at the future. Higher critics first directed their gaze toward the past, insisting the Bible was not the product or normative supernatural interventions in the past, but the product of history itself. Building a naturalistic theology that could face the scientific scrutiny of modern minds, Case and other stripped the past of its supernatural elements—prophecy, miracles, an infallibly inspired Bible. Turning their gaze to theologies of the future, they applied the same criteria denying the possibility of non-natural processes anywhere in time, and rejecting theological systems that suggested any essential change in the continuity of time.

²⁷ Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 42.

came before.²⁸ While proposed schemas of the end times varied dramatically, the essential conflict between premillennial belief and evolutionary naturalism centered on the principles of continuity and discontinuity in time. For premillennialists, things happened “to” time, not just within it. Breaches in the temporal past focused on divine revelation, recorded in the Bible, where knowledge from outside of time broke into human history, giving it shape and meaning. Crucially, this past revelation also included prophetic knowledge of the future—accurate and trustworthy both because God was active in shaping the course of history, and because this knowledge and intent came from outside of time and spoke of the end of time. For premillennialists, past and future alike were marked by rupture.²⁹

By the late nineteenth century, beliefs in disjunctive time found a receptive audience. Lyell and Case’s theories notwithstanding, many Americans experienced modernity not as slow, gradual progress, but as a site of violent disruptions. Discontinuous time was made plausible by the scarring turmoil of wars, urbanization, industrialization, massive technological change, immigration, depressions and natural disasters, and yet more devastating wars.³⁰ The Civil War set the precedent. Its key descriptor was “divided”: referring to nations, families, churches, loyalties, even time itself.

²⁸ Although this version of eschatology shared some beliefs with the millenarianism of the mid-nineteenth century, it also differed in easily recognizable ways. Most notably, premillennialists did not generally engage in any kind of date setting about the future. Historian Timothy Weber argued that mainstream premillennialists had little trouble distinguishing themselves from Millerites and other early millennial movements. Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, 2nd Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 24ff.

²⁹ To be sure, there was a broad variety of premillennial systems, impulses, and emphases concerning time. Dramatic ruptures in time itself stood at the far end of the spectrum from non-premillennial ideas of time as uniform. Yet rupture was not the only metaphorical alternative to uniform time. Others saw time as “dispensed” or “orchestrated,” suggesting more gentle supernatural interventions into natural time. Yet focusing on ruptures into time and between times helps illustrate the difference between premillennial time and its modernist alternatives. It was not a pre-modern outlook of natural, cyclical time, nor a disenchanted modernist linear time, nor an anti-modern protest against the discontinuity of the present, but a counter-modern, or alternatively modernist vision of time’s structure.

³⁰ I am not suggesting there was (or is) a causal relationship between personal experiences of discontinuity and premillennial belief. Instead, what I am suggesting here is a *propensity* to certain beliefs, or a set of material conditions that make possible and plausible this particular understanding of time. Any monocausal explanation of complex beliefs like premillennialism, whether based on ideological transmission or social conditions, would ultimately prove unsatisfying. Instead, I find compelling the argument of Vyvyan Evans that time represents a sufficiently complex phenomenon that accounts of temporal systems must attempt to grapple with it across many domains of intellectual and social life: “Phenomenological experience and the nature of the external sensory world to which subjective experience constitutes a response, give rise to our preconceptual experience of time, and so contribute to our conceptualization of time in

This was the experience of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., who served in the northern army from 1861 to 1864. He was seriously wounded three times, each wound leaving such an impression that he would note their anniversaries years later. Holmes emerged from the war with shattered beliefs, and returned home to find the world of his youth equally shattered.³¹ In the disorienting post-war context, he felt that the present bore little relationships to what had come before it. Decades later he described the war as a common experience of biographical rupture: “The generation that carried on the war has been set apart by its experience. Through our great good fortune, in our youth our hearts were touched with fire. It was given to us to learn at the outset that life is a profound and passionate thing.”³² For Holmes, the most important lessons of life were learned in this experience of violent discontinuity.

Even those without a direct experience of the war felt the effects. Clergy watched as denominations and churches were split and congregations decimated. Others experienced the ruptures of the Civil War more explicitly through the lenses of biblical prophecy. Certainly the rhetoric and poetry of the war drew on apocalyptic imagery. Julia Ward Howe's “Battle Hymn of the Republic” spoke of it as “the coming of the Lord” with “his terrible swift sword.” Quaker abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier compared a battle scene to “the dream of the Apocalypse,” in

important, complex, and subtle ways. As we will see, a metaphysics for time cannot be solely physicalist, or cognitivist or phenomenologist. Time is not a unitary phenomenon restricted to a particular layer of experience. Rather, it constitutes a complex range of phenomena and processes which relate to different levels and kinds of experience. A balanced view is one which takes seriously this complexity and adopts a suitably responsible approach to the study of temporal cognition.” Vyvyan Evans, *The Structure of Time: Language, meaning, and temporal cognition* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003), 6.

³¹ As Louis Menand described, Holmes deeply mourned all that “the war had destroyed. Holmes had grown up in a highly cultivated, homogenous world, of world of which he was, in many ways, the consummate product: idealistic, artistic, and socially committed. And then he had watched that world bleed to death at Fredericksburg and Antietam, in a war that learning and brilliance had been powerless to prevent. When he returned, Boston had changed, and so had American life. Holmes had changed too, but he never forgot what he had lost. “He told me,” Einstein reported, “that after the Civil War the world never seemed quite right again.”“ Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 69.

³² Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., “An address delivered for Memorial Day, May 30, 1884, at Keene, NH,” in *The Essential Holmes: Selections From the Letters, Speeches, Judicial Opinions, and Other Writings of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.*, ed. by Richard A Posner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 86.

his poem, “A Word for the Hour.” Abraham Lincoln’s famous second inaugural address described the war’s losses as “the judgments of the Lord.” Soldiers returned from battlefields to find the world around them so changed it could hardly be recognized. It is no coincidence that the generation of youth who fought in and watched the Civil War was at the forefront of the premillennial revival in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century.³³

Many others found their lives bifurcated into seemingly irreconcilable eras, as the post-war decades saw frenzied technological and social change. Geographical and social disruptions did not directly refute a philosophy of time as continuous, evolutionary change and progress, but they made conceptions of time as apocalyptic and disjunctive more plausible. By the twentieth century this propensity had grown stronger. Temporal disorientation seemed to go hand in hand with the embrace of technology. The modernist poet William Carlos Williams earned his medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1906, in the same year and from the same institution that efficiency expert Frederick Winslow Taylor was awarded a doctorate.³⁴ Sharing something of Taylor’s values, Williams would later write, “A poem is a small (or large) machine made of words.”³⁵ Those who found the world made up of machines often saw time cut off from older forms of meaning. Williams described the temporal disorientation of modern mobility in a poem “To Elsie,” about youths who find themselves inheritors of a despoiled nation:

to be tricked out that night
with gauds
from imaginations which have no

peasant traditions to give them

³³ Not only premillennialism, but other social movements that viewed time as discontinuous sprouted at this time. For example, the Socialist Labor Party was formed in 1876, and soon accompanied by a plethora of socialist and labor movements that suggested that history represented a process of uneven and disjunctive development. As one scholar noted: “The idea that human history is marked by certain “discontinuities” and does not have a smoothly developing form is of course a familiar one and has been stressed in most versions of Marxism.” Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1990), 4.

³⁴ Cecelia Tichi, *Shifting Gears: Technology, Literature, Culture in Modernist America*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1987), 257.

³⁵ Quoted in Tichi, 267.

character
but flutter and flaunt

sheer rags-succumbing without
emotion
save numbed terror³⁶

Left to their own devices, cut off from the past, having bound time to their desires and having been bound in return, many Americans began to believe that the meaning of time emerged from its fissures. The task, for dispensationalists, was to find ways to redeem this experience of disjunction, not by denying it, but by investing it with sacred meaning.

4.3.1 Universal and subjective times

The idea that personal, subjective experiences of time offered a glimpse into time's meaning ran counter to modern scientific ideas. By the time of the Civil War, American philosophers looked to geology and evolution to supply the standard of measurement for time. By the early twentieth century this outlook had shifted again, to cosmology and physics, which collectively reified the concept of universal time.³⁷ This view of continuous time proved irresistible and powerful.³⁸ Scientists used it to ground new explanations of past and present, and new technologies of communication, transportation, and measurement all assumed it.

Yet even though science blessed universal time, the links between a personal experience of time and the full expanse of history remained profound. When theoretical science provided meaning to time, philosophers, scientists, and historians were often left staring blankly at what

³⁶ William Carlos Williams, *The Collected Poems: Volume I 1909-1939* (New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1945).

³⁷ Or, as Vyvyan Evans described, physics “built a theoretical edifice on the foundational axiom of the reality of time.” Evans, 4.

³⁸ Perhaps this notion of universal time is also irresistible for modern academic historians. Historian Lynn Hunt suggested the idea that time is universal and continuous is, at least in some sense, unarguable in the modern West: “The power of a universal, homogeneous, and deep notion of time is incontestable. The notion undergirds Western science, Western imperialism, globalization, and the current vogue of world history, which some might consider all facets of the same phenomenon.” Lynn Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History* (New York: Central European University Press, 2008), 39.

seemed like “homogenous, empty time.”³⁹ While they realized that the subjective experience of time often differed from universal time, they took for granted that universal time was the real, meaningful, measurable entity, while subjective time—such as the discontinuities experienced in the Civil War—was private, personal, and epistemically unreliable.⁴⁰

American Protestants had long sought to make connections between personal destiny and divinely ordained time, or between their story and The Story.⁴¹ In particular, they sought to narrate their lives in ways that mirrored the grand narratives they saw in Christianity. An experience of ruptured time in one sphere was often paired in the other. Social crisis worked alongside older theological anthropologies, such as conversion, to offer premillennialists an experiential model for understanding temporal discontinuities. Conversion regularly emerged as a point of confluence, where the temporal trajectory of the individual duplicated the pattern of cosmic history. While Horace Bushnell in *Christian Nurture* suggested this pattern was one of gradual ascent, more frequently American Protestants imagined conversion as disjunctive. Conversion was narrated as a temporal division of the self: “before I was... but now I have been...” Following Jonathan Edwards and a long tradition of revivalists, conversion was portrayed as an abrupt experience of crisis and

³⁹ Walter Benjamin described materialistic history: “Universal history has no theoretical armature. Its method is additive; it musters a mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time.” Walter Benjamin, “Thesis on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 2007 [1955]), 262.

⁴⁰ Ronald Schleifer suggested that this privileging of universal time began to become popular through the work of Isaac Newton and produced an epistemic crisis: “When Newton distinguishes “absolute, true, and mathematical time” from “relative, apparent, and common time” in terms of the latter’s sensible and external measure of duration, he is distinguishing between absolute time and the events that inhabit time.” Ronald Schleifer, *Modernism and Time: The Logic of Abundance in Literature, Science, and Culture, 1880-1930* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 76. Fredric Jameson argued that this dual view of time and its objects comes closest to resolution in utopian visions, writing: “discussions of temporality always bifurcate into the two paths of existential experience (in which questions of memory seem to predominate) and of historical time, with its urgent interrogations of the future. I will argue that it is precisely in Utopia that these two dimensions are seamlessly reunited and that existential time is taken up into a historical time which is paradoxically also the end of time, the end of history.” Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005), 7. Thus it makes sense that millennial movements with strong utopian rhetoric would become popular in the nineteenth century as they seemed best capable of healing the fractures between universal time and the experience of time.

⁴¹ James Moorhead noted the similarities between these two spheres of time, writing: “The pilgrimage of each soul, in other words, traced a course similar to that of history. Well into the nineteenth century, the congruence between apocalyptic views of history and conceptions of personal destiny persisted; indeed the two often blended together. ... evangelical piety provided vivid experiential analogues to apocalyptic views of history.” Moorhead, 68.

change: a period of fierce anxiety about the state of one's soul followed by a sudden release of that anxiety in a moment of spiritual rebirth.⁴² This kind of dramatic conversion stood at the heart of evangelical autobiography, demarcating two distinct eras within every Christian life.⁴³ Alongside social disruptions of the time, theological ideas like radical conversion helped Americans create stark distinctions between different periods of their own lives, and made more plausible theories of the past and future that opposed the geologist's continuous, universal time.

4.3.2 Future discontinuous

The experiences of the Civil War and evangelical conversion both highlighted a dramatic break with the past even as they drew the horizon of the future very close to the present. The immediacy of the future proved both exhilarating and energizing, and in the subsequent half-century Americans became obsessed with the future. Despite the talk of continuity in history, modernists and progressives often, in practice, treated the "modern" as a dramatic break from the past. Science and technology bore the visage of the newness of the world, and they gained cultural

⁴² The prototypical model of conversion came from the biblical story of the conversion of Saul of Damascus, recounted in Acts 9:17-18: "And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized." (KJV) This narrative structure became subsequently canonized in Augustine's *Confessions*, and most conversion accounts suggested a moment of epiphanic transformation: an instantaneous event of conversion in which spiritual vision was granted, a crisis of conscience resolved, and moral reform enabled. Anthropologist Joel Robbins suggested that, although conversion is always a process of change, the typical Christian pattern is to represent this as an event, a singular moment in which the self in time is dramatically altered. He wrote: "Christian converts tend to represent the process of becoming Christian as one of radical change. ... But conversion itself, however long it takes to get there, is always an event, a rupture in the time line of a person's life that cleaves it into a before and after between which there is a moment of disconnection." Robbins, 11.

⁴³ On conversion and narrative identity, see: D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford, 2005). Hindmarsh argued that in early modern England conversion narratives became an important means for constructing narrative identity for increasingly self-determined individuals. Following Northrop Frye's literary analysis, he suggested that "the pattern of original prosperity, descent into humiliation, and return is the overall structure of the biblical story and of the small narratives within it," and as such, ideas of rupture and recreation came naturally to individuals seeking the meaning of their own subjective time." Hindmarsh, 345. Furthermore, the personal narratives, insofar as they reflected the grand narrative, both drew from and reinforced the sense that the large, cosmic meaning of time was also discontinuous, not a steady, constant line of progress stretching endlessly forward and back. He wrote: "This is the way the gospel actually went to work as 'theory' to shape early evangelical narrative identity. But again, this larger story (of creation, fall, redemption, new creation) was explored within a deeply personal narrative of my life, since the autobiographer had the vivid sense that this story had to do with me. The pattern offered an opportunity for men and women to locate themselves personally in a kind of spiritual and moral space and to explore how their story uniquely reflected common themes." Ibid., 346.

authority through their capacities to predict and manipulate the future. As a type of secular conversion, merchants and consumers alike embraced a “cult of the new;” a break with the past that reveled in present and future possibility.⁴⁴

Even more so than most, premillennialists harbored a sense of broken time. They believed not just in discontinuities of experience within time, but dramatic ruptures of time itself.⁴⁵ The 1878 Prophetic Conference in New York—one of the first national gatherings of American premillennialists—offered many examples of this sensibility. Consider the metaphors that appeared in the hymns they sung. The final day of the conference began with Isaac Watt’s hymn “Joy to the World,” proclaiming a future time when human nature, alongside the entire natural world, would be reconstructed: “No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to make His blessings flow.”⁴⁶ This anticipated time of rejoicing represented a complete break from what came before—as anthropologist Joel Robbins described it, the sense that “tomorrow might not bear a temporal (and causal) relationship to today”—and celebrated a second beginning to time. The 1878 conference ended with a hymn by Scottish minister Horatius Bonar titled “The Day of the Lord.” As they sang:

All earth in a moment reeleth,
And goeth down with the shock...
And labors the groaning creation,
In the pangs of its second birth.
Then the day of evil endeth,

⁴⁴ On the emergence of the cult of the new in American culture, see: William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993).

⁴⁵ Joel Robbins described this as the belief that: “something does not just happen in time but rather happens to it. One temporal progression is halted or shattered and another is joined,” he noted. “It is this kind of thinking about the possibility of temporal rupture that allows people to make claims for the absolute newness of the lives they lead after conversion and of the ones they hope they will lead in the millennial future.” Robbins, 12.

⁴⁶ “The Pre-Millennarians: Closing Exercises of the Prophetic Conference,” *New York Times*, November 2, 1878, 2. Although it later became known as a Christmas hymn celebrating the birth of Jesus at Christmas, Watts, a premillennialist himself, had written the hymn in anticipation of the remaking of the world to occur at Christ’s second coming.

the gathered aristocracy of American premillennialists invoked visions of crisis by which time will be broken and made anew⁴⁷

Over the next century, the same forces of social and theological dislocation that made time seem ruptured made premillennialism's disjunctive view of time plausible for growing segments of the population. The two World Wars not only boosted premillennial visions of time, but broke the spine of its major religious competitor, the Progressivism of the early twentieth century. As historian Timothy Weber eloquently noted: "It would be a serious mistake... to assume that premillennialism merely adapted itself to the time. Rather, it looked as though the times had adapted themselves to premillennialism."⁴⁸ Believing in the possibilities of radical ruptures in both their personal lives and the grand sweep of history, premillennialists looked for, and found, signs of discontinuity within their times, while simultaneously expecting the end of time in the sudden and unexpected bodily return of Jesus Christ.

4.4 Dispensations

Formally, as a theological system, premillennialism involved a set of doctrines about eschatology, particularly the end times and the future of the church. Variants of premillennialism proliferated. By the 1880s, however, the mainstream premillennial movement in the United States had gradually shifted to dispensationalism.⁴⁹ Dispensationalism grew in the same soil as

⁴⁷ Nathaniel West, ed., *Second Coming of Christ: Premillennial Essays of the Prophetic Conference* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1879), 478.

⁴⁸ Weber, *Living in the Shadow*, 105.

⁴⁹ Dating a shift from premillennialism to dispensationalism has been a contested interpretive point. For example, Ernest Sandeen saw the entire premillennial revival in the post 1860s United States as dispensational, tracing possible lines of influence from John Nelson Darby. However, this account fails to account for non-Darbyite premillennialism like that of Nathaniel West or Southern Baptist leader J.R. Graves. Timothy Weber argued the shift occurred around 1875 as the Brethren influence became dominant. Both Sandeen and Weber, like most other historians of dispensationalism, used John Nelson Darby's doctrinal system as the definitional standard, and thus highlighted theological similarities and any possible direct links between Darby and American premillennialists as evidence of some direct transmission of dispensationalism. Recognizing, however, that there were multiple forms of dispensationalism and varied sources, it seems useful to reconsider the development of these ideas. If we describe premillennialism as a collection of

premillennialism, and many early adherents saw no important distinctions between factions. But while premillennialism was a set of doctrines concerned with making sense of prophetic futures—a purely theological category—dispensationalism represented a much larger set of interests. Instead of offering an account of eschatological events, dispensationalism represented a broad system of biblical interpretation that produced particular views of time. It focused the gaze on the prophetic past as much as the future, it modulated the sharply discontinuous sense of time, and it applied a sense of modern engineering values to thinking about time.

4.4.1 Precursors: two Isaacs

The concept of the direct divine administration of time had been a source of speculation for millennia. In the eighteenth century this view started to take more modern forms in the thinking of two Englishmen: Isaac Newton and Isaac Watts. Between stints of revolutionizing mathematics and physics, Isaac Newton spent much of his time calculating biblical history, chronology, and prophecy. Published the year after his death in 1728, *The Chronology of the Ancient Kingdoms Amended* saw his attempt to synthesize ancient sources to come up with a common chronology of the human settlement of Europe.⁵⁰ It measured all time against biblical history.⁵¹ Newton began by

eschatological visions of the future, and dispensationalism as a much fuller system concerned foremost with biblical interpretation, and secondly with time as a whole, it seems the shift to dispensationalism occurred much later. Obviously there were many overlaps; the word “dispensation” was prominent in the Niagara Bible Conferences from the beginning. But I am convinced by Walter Unger’s claim that dispensationalism grew in influence primarily during the 1880s. He wrote: “Dispensationalism as a hermeneutic was introduced gradually into the teaching at Niagara and by the late 1880s was gaining acceptance as being the only correct approach to the Scriptures.” Walter Unger, *“Earnestly Contending for the Faith”: The Role of the Niagara Bible Conference in the Emergence of American Fundamentalism, 1875-1900*, (Ph.D. Diss, Simon Fraser University, 1981), 84. On the other hand, perhaps the final shift came later. Niagara premillennialism until the death of James Brookes in 1897 was inclusive, dispensationalism being just one of several forms of eschatological belief, and the central theme being the relationship between prophecy and evangelism. Yet by the end of the century, dispensationalists’ self-identity was fully distinct from generic premillennialism, evinced by the split of the Niagara movement after 1897 which effectively isolated those with dissenting, non-dispensational views of the future—most notably the post-tribulationist leaders like Robert Cameron, Nathaniel West, and W.J. Erdman.

⁵⁰ Newton described confidently: “I have drawn up the following Chronological Table, so as to make Chronology suit with the Course of Nature, with Astronomy, with Sacred History, with Herodotus the Father of History, and with it self, without the many repugnancies complained of by Plutarch. I do not pretend to be exact to a year: there may be Errors of five or ten years, and sometimes twenty, and not much above.” Isaac Newton, *The Chronology of the Ancient Kingdoms*

calculating that Israel under Joshua defeated the Canaanites around 1100 BC. Then, with a credulousness that might have made Herodotus blush, Newton described how these Canaanites fled to Egypt, only to find the vegetarian Egyptians did not take kindly to the cannibalistic Canaanites and their human sacrifices and so chased them onward to Greece, leading to the first perpetual European settlement.⁵² In this, and many other things, later premillennialists did not follow Newton's lead. Among his eccentricities, Newton offered a historicist understanding of biblical prophecy, and he constructed an elaborate key for, he insisted, reliably interpreting all the figures and images found in prophetic language. Most of all, he demonstrated supreme confidence about the knowability of exact events and dates of the past and God's purposes in time—discovered through computing and comparing star appearances and lunar calendars and average generation durations in ancient texts—that later premillennialists found immodest, if not irreverent.

Despite his fame, Newton's arcane biblical numerology never found a large following or produced much derivative work. Yet in two respects, Newton's religious writing about time presaged modern dispensational time. The first was his instance that all prophecy was of a piece; not just about the future, but gradually revealing God's unfolding purposes in history.⁵³ The second was his integration of secular, non-biblical histories into the chronologies and divisions provided by biblical

Amended (London: J. Tonson, 1728), 8. Newton, for all of his mathematical precisions, seemed to make little distinction between sources, equally trusting accounts of Noah's flood, Alexander's reign, and the voyages of Hercules. Perhaps this was why publisher John Conduitt, writing in the introduction, hastened to assure the Queen and public that this work, for all its importance, did not distract Newton from his paying job in natural philosophy, claiming: "the following treatise was the fruit of his vacant hours, and the relief he sometimes had recourse to, when tired with other studies." *Ibid.*, vi.

⁵¹ At least, I think he begins his calculations with biblical dates, although the scale Newton used to measure events is arcane and opaque, since all the dates and events were given relative to other events. But he suggested that Greek history and European history were not older than biblical history, and began somewhere in the period of the Israelite judges.

⁵² Newton wrote: "The Canaanites who fled from Joshua retired in great numbers into Egypt... until the days of Eli and Samuel. They fed on flesh and sacrificed men after the manner of the Phoenicians, and were called Shepherds by the Egyptians, who lived only on the fruits of the earth." *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵³ Newton wrote: "The Prophecies of Daniel are all of them related to one another, as if they were but several parts of one general Prophecy, given as several times. The first is the easiest to be understood, and every following Prophecy adds something new to the former." Isaac Newton, *Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John* (London: J. Darby and T. Brown, 1733), 24.

history. While the facts and details he used to produce his chronologies came from all sorts of textual remainders of the past, the meaning and basic periodization of this time came from the Bible. These two features—a holistic view of prophecy and an integration of secular events into biblical history—illustrate Newton’s participation in developing concepts of divinely administered time.

By contrast, the biblical history of English nonconformist pastor Isaac Watts more closely resembled the periodization work of later premillennialists. Watts won fame as a hymn writer—composing more than 750 in his lifetime—but he moonlighted as a theologian. In 1742, Watts published *The Harmony of All the Religions Which God Ever Prescribed to Men and All His Dispensations toward Them*. The title introduced most of his key themes. “Harmony” described the unity of God’s purposes in time, in terms of a continuous development of the plan of salvation through various expressions of divine grace. By “all religions,” Watts meant the various developments of religious forms recorded in the Bible, from the first covenant with Adam and Eve to the future millennial kingdom.⁵⁴ Watts’s dispensations referred to God’s “public government of the universe” through “several constitutions.”⁵⁵ He believed these divisions of time were political forms of periodization, marking the changes based on the legal requirements and benefits of human citizenship. In his systemization of the divine divisions of time, Watts offered a version of history that appeared nearly identical to the scheme used later in the *Scofield Reference Bible* and popularized in the twentieth century.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Watts referred to each dispensation as “different religions, or, at least, different forms of religion,” not language that later dispensationalists would be comfortable with, with their greater awareness of world religions. Yet the difference was semantic; he made no attempt to harmonize Christianity or its historical precedents with, say, Hinduism or Rastafarianism.

⁵⁵ Isaac Watts, *The Harmony of All the Religions Which God Ever Prescribed to Men and All His Dispensations Toward Them*, in *The Works of the Rev. Isaac Watts*, Vol. 3 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1812 [1742]), 333.

⁵⁶ Enough similarities exist that, after an in-depth comparison of theological details and assumptions, Larry Crutchfield argued that if Scofield stole directly from any previous dispensational scheme for his reference Bible, it was not from John Nelson Darby but Isaac Watts. See: Larry V. Crutchfield, *The Origins of Dispensationalism: The Darby Factor* (New

The plan of salvation expressed in the dispensations was revealed slowly and methodically. Watts wrote: “This general design of God to recover sinners, as manifested in these divine revelations, may be called the covenant of grace proposed to men. It was not published all at once, in its various and complete glory and beauty, but in many successive ages ... under several dispensations of increasing light.”⁵⁷ This concept of progressive revelation developed into a central tenet of dispensational thinking. Like most modern Bible interpreters, Watts believed the religious duties that people owed to God had changed over time, and this development was recorded in the Bible. That is, the Bible progressively revealed God’s everlasting plan of salvation in light of continued human sinfulness, or “failure.” Like later dispensationalists, Watts believed that in each separate dispensation God offered a clear account of the duties required by his people, and in each case the people failed to respond to God appropriately.

The purpose of temporal divisions, however, was not to judge the past or cast a prophetic finger at the present, nor to predict future events. For Watts, the inveterate composer, the goal was harmony. Specifically, hermeneutic harmony: making the Bible make sense as a whole. He wrote: “A due survey of these dispensations of God to man in this light, perhaps may enable us to understand many parts of the bible much better, since it will happily account for many difficulties in the Old Testament and the New, which seem to me very hard to be solved in any other way, to the satisfaction of a diligent enquirer.”⁵⁸ Textual disjunctions became smoothed out and transitions eased when ordered as part of a disjunctive temporal plan.

York: University Press of America, 1992), 206ff. For anyone keeping score, Watt’s divisions were: I. Innocency; II. Adamical; III. Noahical; IV. Abrahamical; V. Mosaical (or, Jewish Religion); VI. Christian; VII. Last Judgment. Watts described the first as a “covenant of works,” the next five as “covenants of grace.”

⁵⁷ Watt, *Harmony*, 331.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 373.

The two English Isaacs reveal new ideas about time that proved central to later dispensational thinking, concerning the ultimate meaning of time derived from God's plan of salvation, the progressive unfolding of this plan in distinct dispensations, the "failure" of humanity in past dispensations, the unity of prophecy, the incorporation of non-biblical history in the prophetic past and future, and the discernment of temporal disjunction to establish the textual harmony of the Bible. When premillennialists embraced the idea of dispensations in the late nineteenth century, they drew on longstanding schemes of divine administration.

4.4.2 Linguistic precursors and definitions

What was a dispensation, and why did it become an *ism*? Adherents were often happy to explain it. This language and idea of divine dispensations possessed a long and complicated history. The English term derived from the Latin word *dispensatio*, used to translate the Greek *oikonomia*. Appearing seven times in the New Testament, it was translated in the King James Version four times as "dispensation" and three others as "stewardship."⁵⁹ A once-popular lexicon defined the Greek term as: "the management of a household or of household affairs; ... the office of administrator ... which in a theocratic sense is ascribed to God himself as providing for man's salvation."⁶⁰ Prior to the twentieth century, English speakers often used it to refer to any generalized phenomenon like household management, implying an economic and governmental oversight or administration of affairs.

⁵⁹ Occurrences: Luke 16:2, 3, 4, 1 Corinthians 9:17, Ephesians 1:10, Ephesians 3:2, Colossians 1:25. Ephesians 1:9-10 offered the closest version of temporal usage: "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him." (KJV)

⁶⁰ Joseph Henry Thayer, ed., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: American Book Company, 1889), 441.

By the seventeenth century the term had already entered common usage in religious discourse.⁶¹ The 1646 Westminster Confession of Faith employed the term twice, referring to a single “covenant of grace” that provided salvation for all times, yet “under various dispensations.”⁶² Puritan honcho Jonathan Edwards repeatedly used the term, sometimes in the technical sense of ages of governance, writing: “God hath been providing, from the beginning of the world to this day, various means and dispensations, to preserve and rescue mankind from the devil.”⁶³ By the eighteenth century the idea of dispensations carried the connotation of disjunctive periods in life. Writing to his friend and confessor John Newton in 1788, the English poet William Cowper used the term to describe his experience of biographical disassociation: “There is a certain style of dispensations maintained by Providence in the dealings of God with every man... The style of dispensation peculiar to myself has hitherto been that of sudden, violent, unlooked-for change.”⁶⁴

By the nineteenth century, Protestants regularly made theological distinctions between separate dispensations of ‘law’ and ‘grace,’ or distinct dispensations for ‘the Jews’ and for ‘the Church.’ Many non-Protestants also employed the concept. Mormon prophet Joseph Smith announced in 1841: “The dispensation of the fullness of times will bring to light the things that have been revealed in all former dispensations.”⁶⁵ Adventist leader Ellen G. White published a book titled *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan During the Christian Dispensation*.⁶⁶ Noah

⁶¹ I make no attempt to trace the history of the concept before modern English usage, partly because of the linguistic difficulties of such a task, and partly because it would likely imply a continuity of theological ideas that is probably unwarranted. However, some scholars have tried to locate a similar concept of dispensations in the sixteenth century Jesuit Francisco Ribera (often described as the progenitor of the modern premillennial movement), or the fifteenth century Taborites, or the twelfth century apocalypst Joachim of Fiore, and so on all the way back. See, for example: Arnold D. Ehlert, *A Bibliographic History of Dispensationalism*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965).

⁶² Westminster Confession of Faith, VII:VI. http://www.reformed.org/documents/westminster_conf_of_faith.html (accessed 18 June 2010).

⁶³ Jonathan Edwards, “Original Sin” [1758], in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 3 (Yale Univ. Press, 1957-2008), 111.

⁶⁴ William Cowper, quoted in George B. Cheever, *Lectures on the Life, Genius, and Insanity of Cowper* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1856.), 254.

⁶⁵ Joseph Smith, “Minutes,” *Times and Seasons* (Oct. 15, 1841), 578. [In *History of the Church*, 4:426]

⁶⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan During the Christian Dispensation*, (New York: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1907).

Webster's 1857 dictionary described a 'dispensation' as: "The dealing of God to his creatures; the distribution of good and evil, natural or moral, in the divine government."⁶⁷ Although it has since become a specialized theological concept, the idea and language of dispensations was once commonly used to speak of many different types of divine administration of the world.

4.4.3 Dispensational definition of dispensations

The concept of dispensations was not primarily temporal—not a simple synonym for 'ages' or 'eras'—but a metaphysical idea.⁶⁸ It posited a universe in which God administered political governance and supernatural management of spiritual affairs. Later dispensational theologian Charles Ryrie offered a similar version of this definition, writing: "A dispensation is a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God's purpose."⁶⁹ He continued:

Dispensationalism views the world as a household run by God. In His household-world God is dispensing or administering its affairs according to His own will and in various stages of revelation in the passage of time. These various stages mark off the distinguishably different economies in the outworking of his total purpose, and these different economies

⁶⁷ Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia, J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1857), 309.

⁶⁸ Or maybe an ontological idea. I can never keep those categories straight. This shift from an essentially temporal sense of periodization and prophecy to a governmental metaphysics that produced periodization was one key marker of the shift from generic premillennialism to dispensational modernism. For example, in contrast to the dispensational idea of "divine administration," early prophecy writer William E. Blackstone showed a premillennialist tendency to posit temporality first by giving a central role to the concept of "aions." He wrote: "An aion has an end (see Mat. 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20), and as another follows (see Mat. 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30 and 20:35; Eph. 1:21), it must have a beginning. The end of one and beginning of another overlap so that Paul could say "the ends of the aions have come upon us." 1 Cor. 10:11. There are many aions, both in the past and in the future. the aions are not of the same duration, but each marks a change in God's method of dealing with mankind. Probably the aions of the past, the Hebrew olams of the Old Testament mark the geological periods of the earth and the various eras in the development of the universe. And as the past has been an orderly unfolding of creation and revelation of the Creator, so shall the future be, not a limitless aion called eternity, but a limitless succession of aions measuring infinite duration." Blackstone, *Jesus is Coming* 3rd ed. (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1916 [1878]), 221, 224. Compare with the more sophisticated way in which Southern Baptist minister J.R. Graves indicated the metaphysical number of divine systems of governance reflected a prior metaphysical division of time. Graves wrote: "How many ages or dispensations did Christ make or appoint for his earthly administration? It strikes me that these were indicated or foreshadowed by the division of time. The time he allotted to himself for fitting up man's abode he divided into seven periods, which he called seven days. Each marked a stage, or step, in the grand accomplishment, and the last marked the consummation of all, and was appointed as a day of commemoration by resting. These days were seven, which is the sacred division of time." J. R. Graves, *The Work of Christ in the Covenant of Redemption; Developed in Seven Dispensations* (Texarkana, AK: Baptist Sunday School Committee, 1883), 165. For Blackstone and early premillennialists, a dispensation was a label attached to time. For Graves and later dispensationalists, a dispensation was a structure of the universe, a divinely created object used to order time.

⁶⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995 [1966]), 28.

constitute the dispensations. The understanding of God's differing economies is essential to a proper interpretation of His revelation within those various economies.⁷⁰

Congregational minister Cyrus I. Scofield suggested the essential element that defined each dispensation was "God's method of dealing with mankind, or a portion of mankind, in respect of the two questions: of sin, and of man's responsibility. Each of the dispensations may be regarded as a new test of the natural man."⁷¹ Said differently, within the period bracketed by each dispensation, God provided a structure for governance, involving both commandments and promises, and communicated this structure to some portion of the population through revelation. Commandments revealed the responsibilities of the people—involving social, material, and spiritual elements—while promises and blessings indicated God's reciprocal responsibilities.⁷²

Dispensationalists held that through all the various ages these commandments and promises arose from God's redemptive purposes: at the beginning to preserve human flourishing in the period of 'innocence,' and thereafter to rescue people from the consequences of sin. Yet, reading their biblical history, dispensationalists were keen to notice that humans continually failed in their duties with respect to divine governance, and thus disappointed God's redemptive plan. Eventually God brought each of these eras to a close, and as Scofield noted, "each ends in judgment, marking [humanity's] utter failure in every dispensation."⁷³ Although this language of "utter failure" often incited furious critique from foes, in reality it represented a fairly mild view of the doctrine of sin. Christians had long held that humans were unable to meet God's standards for achieving salvation, thus necessitating God's intervention in history. Like most Christians,

⁷⁰ Ibid., 29.

⁷¹ Cyrus I. Scofield, "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth," (Findlay, OH: Dunham Publishing Co., 1888), 13.

⁷² The relationship between dispensations and covenants proves far too complex for a theological troglodyte (such as myself) to summarize. Perhaps: covenants offered the formal contractual grounds that pertained to each dispensation? For example, the Scofield Reference Bible listed this elements of the "Edenic Covenant" of the first dispensation of Innocency as: "(1) To replenish the earth with a new order—man; (2) to subdue the earth to human uses; (3) to have dominion over the animal creation; (4) to eat herbs and fruit; (5) to till and keep the garden; (6) to abstain from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; (7) the penalty—death." C.I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1917), 6.

⁷³ Ibid.

dispensationalists did not argue that people achieved no good whatsoever, but rather that they never succeeded in achieving ultimate, salvific goods.

Yet despite the definitional focus on governance, in mundane usage both inside and outside Christian circles the idea of dispensations always invoked something of disjunctive time and periodization. For example, in an 1876 article lamenting changing perspectives on women's health, editor Margaret E. Sangster wrote: "There used to be a popular impression that fragility was beautiful... Now this has all been changed... We have entered into a new dispensation. The gospel of pure air, of exercise... has been proclaimed throughout the length and breadth of the land."⁷⁴ There were perhaps two primary reasons for the growing popularity of these temporal implications of the term "dispensations." The first was the constant pluralization of the term. Whatever else they believed, Christians generally agreed that there was more than one dispensation. Because divine administration was universal—the whole world as a single household under a single set of rules—a plurality of dispensations must come temporally, one following after another. The second was more prosaic: because it was awkward to speak of a "period in time in which a certain dispensation of divine governance was in effect," so the word 'dispensation' came to represent both governance and the period when it took place. Thus by 1909, when Scofield published his reference Bible, no one blinked when he defined a dispensation as: "a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God."⁷⁵ Although Scofield reversed the order of elements from earlier dispensational definitions (time appearing before governance), his definition and usage still relied on divine governance to structure the divisions of time and the boundaries of each dispensation.

In this way, postulating a metaphysical reality in which God's governance, salvific purpose, and intervention changed through successive periods, dispensationalists developed a

⁷⁴ Margaret E. Sangster, "Sermons to Girls," *Sunday School Times* (July 1, 1876).

⁷⁵ C.I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), 5.

comprehensive understanding of time. Becoming distinct from generic premillennialism—which concerned itself with the future end times (or the present’s relationship with the future) dispensationalism’s time-concept concerned itself not only with the course of events, but the metaphysics of time itself.

4.4.4 Progressive revelation

Dispensationalists affirmed that human knowledge about the metaphysical nature of the divine periodization of time came solely through revelation recorded in the Bible. Revelation was not given all at once, but gradually and sporadically. This idea of progressive revelation was foremost a hermeneutic strategy to deal with changes in religious requirements and doctrines throughout the Bible. Accounting for change in this way became increasingly important for conservative Protestants in the twentieth century, in light of challenges from higher critics. These latter suggested that doctrinal changes in the Bible represented a natural evolution of human religion—from material and totemic forms to spiritualized ethical values and social concerns—and not a divinely pre-ordered plan of salvation. So dispensationalists often began their expositions by arguing for their view of the process of revelation. As Scofield described it:

Whoever reads the Scriptures with any consecutiveness or attention cannot fail to perceive that in them may be traced a gradual unfolding of divine truth and purpose. Such a reader sees that nothing is told all at once, that nothing is done without preparation, without deliberation. Intimations go before revelations; types before anti-types; prophecies before fulfillment. “First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear,” is ever the divine method. God always has things to tell which we are not able to bear. When this is understood, then it begins to be seen that there is a beautiful system in the gradualness of unfolding.⁷⁶

Instead of a disorderly process of natural change, God’s direct intervention in history revealed an orderly and unified system and plan. Development appeared in the vehicle of the dispensations and changes in divine administration. Scofield wrote: “The Dispensations are distinguished, exhibiting

⁷⁶ C.I. Scofield, *Addresses on Prophecy* (Chicago: Bible Truth Depot, 1914), 13.

the majestic, progressive order of the divine dealings of God with humanity, ‘the increasing purpose’ which runs through and links together the ages, from the beginning of man to the end in eternity.”⁷⁷ This purposeful direction from God could only come from outside of history, as revelation enchanted time itself.

One of the most common metaphors for teaching progressive revelation was that of epistemic mountains. The idea of progressive revelation located the human viewer in a history whose meaning was not necessarily transparent. Baptist minister Clarence Larkin illustrated this situated knowing in his chart “Mountain Peaks of Prophecy.” Human perspectives were limited. “The Old Testament prophet,” Larkin wrote, “saw the future as separate peaks of one mountain. He did not see that these peaks assembled themselves in groups, with a valley, the “VALLEY OF THE CHURCH,” between.”⁷⁸ Although Larkin expressed confidence that present observers had reasons to trust their interpretations of this “history written in advance,” other dispensational thinkers were not so sure that more hidden valleys might exist in the future.⁷⁹ Dispensationalists believed confidence was warranted in knowledge about the future with regard to the divine story of salvation, but they remained wary of the overconfidence that came along with falsifiable predictions.

⁷⁷ Scofield, *Reference Bible*, iii.

⁷⁸ Clarence Larkin, *Dispensational Truth, or God’s Plan and Purpose in the Ages* (Philadelphia: Rev. Clarence Larkin Est., 1920), 7.

⁷⁹ Larkin imagined that the present had a privileged viewpoint, despite the ocular implications of his chart. He wrote: “Our viewpoint is from the side ... This simplifies the study of Prophecy.” Clarence Larkin, *Dispensational Truth, or God’s Plan and Purpose in the Ages* (Philadelphia: Clarence Larkin, 1918), 7.

Figure 16: “Mountain Peaks of Prophecy”

Larkin’s chart “Mountain Peaks of Prophecy” shows the prophetic viewer on the left, situated in time. “The Prophet,” Larkin described, “saw in a direct line along the “Peaks of Prophecy,” and did not see the “valley” of “The Church” in between.” That religious observers all perceived the divine plan with a gaze situated in history seemed unarguable, yet progressive revelation implied that meaning did not emerge in any of these interstitial eras; it could ever only be glimpsed partially through revelation. Chart: Clarence Larkin, *Rightly Dividing the Word* (Philadelphia: Clarence Larkin, 1921), 66. Quote: Larkin, *Dispensational Truth*, 7.⁸⁰

4.5 Meanings of dispensational time

At the end of the nineteenth century, many dispensational thinkers made pronouncements about the realities of metaphysical time and its significance. Summing up his view, prominent Philadelphia Presbyterian minister Arthur Tappan Pierson wrote: “Within [the Bible] may be found a philosophy which interprets its history, and a history which interprets its philosophy.”⁸¹

⁸⁰ Larkin imaginatively appropriated the name “Mountain Peaks of Prophecy” from a series of eight articles on prophecy given by Moody Bible Institute president James M. Gray, published around 1917 in *The Christian Herald*.

⁸¹ Arthur T. Pierson, *Knowing the Scriptures: Rules and Methods of Bible Study* (New York: Gospel Publishing House, 1910), 3. This aspect of Pierson’s view of time became common among dispensationalists, as theologian Charles Ryrie would later demonstrate when he wrote: “The Scriptures per se are not a philosophy of history, but they contain one.” Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 17.

Pierson argued that time was not a seamless whole, but made up of discontinuous parts soldered together: “God made the “time worlds” (aiona) as he did the matter worlds, and framed them together like the joints of a body or the beams of a house.”⁸² The Bible revealed the reality of divinely created time, they argued, and it was elaborately structured, and just as elaborately ruptured.

By the first few decades of the twentieth century, though, dispensationalists had become more cautious in their claims about absolute time. Like their contemporaries, they found the modern experience of time contradictory, blending social unrest, scientific theories, and the technological mediation of time zones and train schedules. They seemed to suggest that time was polysemic. A number of interpretive options emerged about “gaps” in the biblical creation story that could account for a long, slow, continuous process of geologic (or perhaps evolutionary) change. Former engineer Clarence Larkin accepted the “Nebular Hypothesis” of the formation of the earth (“verified by spectroscopic analysis”) thereby making space for the countless ages of geologic time independent of human time.⁸³ Reviewing the process of coal formation, he puzzled: “How many millenniums of years must it not have required then for the earth to pass from a molten state to a habitable condition?” Assuming a very large number in his answer, he continued: “the “Word of God” and the “Works of God” must harmonize. There can be no conflict between the Bible and science. Science demands thousands of years for the formation of the earth and all the time it demands is given to it in the sublime words of Gen. 1:1: “In the BEGINNING God created the heaven and the earth.” This verse then covers the whole period of the formation of the earth and its preparation for the habitation of man.”⁸⁴ Here Larkin employed a “gap” or restitution theory of creation, which assumed an undefined period between the first divine creation of the

⁸² A.T. Pierson, “The Life Story, and the Dream as Interpreting the Man,” in A.J. Gordon, *How Christ Came to Church: The Pastor's Dream: A Spiritual Autobiography* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1895), 108.

⁸³ Larkin, *Dispensational Truth*, 22.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

world and a second process of divine re-creation, or restitution. The restitution theory proved popular among scientifically minded dispensationalists, and C.I. Scofield used this theory in his explanatory notes in his reference Bible. Claiming Genesis records three creative acts, he offered, “The first creative act refers to the dateless past, and gives scope for all the geologic ages.”⁸⁵ Perhaps some aspect of time, they imagined, was long, continuous, and universal.

Yet while answers about the *nature* of time became more ambiguous, dispensationalists never wavered in their assertions that the Bible clearly revealed the *meaning* of time. Moody Bible Institute president James Gray reminded readers of this distinction: “From the beginning let us keep in mind that the Bible is not a history of creation, nor a history of the world, nor of the human race, but a history of redemption—the redemption of the race and of the earth on which it dwells.”⁸⁶ Just as directly, Scofield argued that the inevitability of human death demanded that the meaning of time come from somewhere other than science: “Science cannot help up. The utmost word of science is that it is unscientific and irrational to infer that physical death is the cessation of all life. ... How unsatisfactory it is after all.”⁸⁷ Science and history both offered an account of events and an explanation of their causes and origins, he conceded, but neither could provide meaning. In this respect, dispensational ideas about time and texts were a mirror opposite of that of the biblical higher critics. While higher critics insisted that the times explained the text, dispensationalists argued the text explained the times.

For dispensationalists, meaning resided not in chronological time but redemptive time—that is, temporal meaning came from understanding God’s plan of salvation. Time had an external *purpose*, and that purpose was given to it by God. Faith and history were used equally for evidence that God had shown a part of that plan to people through the Bible in a process of progressive

⁸⁵ Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 4.

⁸⁶ James M. Gray, *A Text-Book on Prophecy* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1918), 11.

⁸⁷ Scofield, *Addresses on Prophecy*, 120.

revelation. In a kind of theological shorthand, revelation itself—i.e. the Bible—was often ascribed the agency for dividing time. Scofield wrote: “The Scriptures divide time (by which is meant the entire period from the creation of Adam to the “new heaven and a new earth”) ... into seven unequal periods.”⁸⁸ Meaning, then, was not evenly distributed through the endless, homogenous continuity of natural history, but interjected into time’s ruptures.

Figure 17: Larkin’s “The Messages to the Seven Churches compared with Church History.”

Clarence Larkin linked a passage in Revelations with the history of the European church, showing how the meaning of each historical development was predicted and explained by biblical prophecy. Larkin, *Dispensational Truth*, 129.

Real changes happened to the meaning of time, over time, as each segment was governed by a different divine logic. Scofield suggested: “These periods are marked off in Scripture by some change in God’s method of dealing with mankind.”⁸⁹ Unlike Lyell and Darwin, who believed explanations for the development of the world that invoked unchanging laws were better,

⁸⁸ Scofield, “Rightly Dividing,” 13.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

dispensationalists believed that the laws ordering of the universe really did change, at least in respect to divine moral governance. These cosmic disjunctions mirrored the biographical sense of discontinuity produced by modernity and the practices of evangelicals who narrated their Christian “rebirth” as an experience of instantaneous conversion and radical transformation. Reading breaks in time in biblical prophecy, dispensationalists held that dramatic rupture was coming in the future as well. An absolute discontinuity between this social order and the next one represented utopian hope for a divinely initiated millennium of peace and justice. This future discontinuity, ultimately, would reveal the teleological culmination of God’s plan of salvation.

5. Engineering Time

5.1. Measurement, division, and classification

If the Civil War prodded Americans to reflect on the disjunctive nature of time, the technological changes of the early twentieth century induced them to think not only about what time *was*, but what time *did*, or what could be done with time.¹ Rather than representing an absolute matrix of reality, time emerged as a resource to be commodified, measured, and used. As historian Stephen Kern described, even a development as unremarkable as the proliferation of pocket watches was capable of: “accelerating modern life and instilling a sense of punctuality, calculability, and exactness in business transactions as well as human relations.”² The unparalleled boom in engineering values that accompanied new technologies in American popular culture ensured that many Americans would be receptive to these kinds of new applications of time.

Doing things with time produced new cultural values as well. The popularity of scientific and household management schemes indicated the spread of related time-values like measurability and efficiency. In the fifty years surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, a new hierarchy of professionals bequeathed to American popular culture new techniques, methods, and standards for managing time. The two primary tools of engineers were the stopwatch, used for quantifying time precisely, and the scientific diagram, used to disseminate technical knowledge. Experts like Frank and Lillian Gilbreth—industrial engineers and efficiency gurus who became famous for their autobiographical book about efficient household management, *Cheaper by the Dozen*—showed how anyone could use these instruments in time and motion studies to discover and teach “the one

¹ The question of the interaction between time and technology represents one of the central questions of modernity. Many scholars have approached this as a question fundamentally about practice, and this chapter attempts to follow their lead in pursuing questions of how American Christians practiced time. Perhaps Bruno Latour best articulated this position, suggesting: “In fact, time does not count. Time is what is counted. It is not an explanatory variable; it is a dependent variable that needs to be explained. It doesn't offer a framework for explanation, since it is an effect that has to be accounted for among many other, more interesting ones.” Bruno Latour, *Aramis or The Love of Technology*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 88.

² Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003 [1983]).

best way” to accomplish work profitably in everyday life. Euphoria for classification led to the construction of ubiquitous systems of ordering time such as railroad schedules and time zones. Meanwhile, commercial pressures to tighten control over the use of time created metaphors for describing time as a commodity: something spent, saved, used. All told, in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century Americans discovered many new malleable functions for time, and found themselves changed in the process. Dispensationalists stood at the forefront of American Christians thinking about the functions and uses of time. Perhaps, given the widespread popularity of engineering values, the surprising thing is not that dispensationalists were such avid adopters of new systems for measuring time, but that other Christians were not as quick to do the same.

Dispensationalists saw these new techniques for managing temporality as a mirror of God’s methods. Presbyterian minister A.T. Pierson calculated that God “has His own arithmetic and mathematics... His own calendar, reckoning time in His own fashion, and divided all duration into ages and dispensations, to suit His eternal plan.”³ Given this temporal provenance, dispensationalists’ task was to discern this underlying structure and function. Turning their gaze to the past, they re-measured and reclassified history, erecting complex models of past eras. Fascinated with the future, they mapped predictive sequences of divinely pre-ordained future history. The present, with these reshaped relationships with past and future, basked in new temporal values such as acceleration, urgency and hope. Dispensationalists brought together all these values and temporal moods in narrative time, imagining that time’s ultimate function was to structure a meaningful story about human destiny and God’s plan for salvation.

³ Arthur T. Pierson, *Knowing the Scriptures: Rules and Methods of Bible Study* (New York: Gospel Publishing House, 1910), 22.

5.1.1 Doing things with time

The first step dispensationalists took to engineer time was to refigure the whole. In one sense, the emptiness of homogenous, universal time proved resistant to meaningful ordering, apart from the uniform ticking of clocks. Americans invested vast cultural authority in the technologies and practices of measuring, labeling, and classifying time, such as the watch, the calendar, and a common dating scheme.⁴ Like and yet unlike secular moderns, dispensationalists felt a need to understand the structure of time, but suggested that the most meaningful structures need not be arbitrary (like picking Greenwich as a standard reference point) nor defined by cosmology or physics, but instead could be found in the Bible. C.I. Scofield described this idea as the “doctrine of the Ages,” and pithily remarked: “Not only is it directly taught in express terms, but these ages constitute the structural divisions of an orange.”⁵ Peeling away layers of obscurity to reveal deeper divisions came through correctly interpreting biblical prophecy.

Prophecy, as dispensationalists viewed it, was not merely about the future, but comprised the better part of revelation about God’s purposes. “Prophecy,” A.T. Pierson wrote, “in its larger sense, covers two-thirds at least of all Scripture. It is not necessarily predictive, but may be perceptive, the result of insight into truth as well as foresight of the future.”⁶ As such, interpreting prophecy provided the means for understanding the divisions and functions of time. Biblical prophecy was ripe for engineering-based interpretations, as well: full of numbers, figures, and symbols, and constantly elaborating the relations between prophetic elements.

⁴ Two seminal moments for this process of standardizing time in the modern West were the 1884 International Meridian Conference in Washington D.C. (which formalized the adoption of World Standard Time, or Universal Time, dividing the world into 24 time zones, with Greenwich, England as the prime meridian), and the 1912 International Conference on Time, held in Paris, which devised plans to determine and transmit accurate time signals. Hunt, *Measuring Time*, 9-12.

⁵ Scofield, *Addresses on Prophecy*, 14. Earlier dispensationalists such as A.T. Pierson used primarily geometric metaphors to describe the structure of time. Describing the “prophetic element,” Pierson proposed, “when its fragmentary utterances are brought together, they are found to constitute one organic body. All predictions of the Word of God may be arranged in concentric circles.” Pierson, *Knowing the Scriptures*, 40.

⁶ Pierson, *Knowing the Scriptures*, 32.

5.1.2 Charting time

Dispensationalists proved adamant about charting the results of their hermeneutics and using charts to elaborate on theological distinctions about time. Diagrams and charts served a number of purposes. As for efficiency experts, charts provided the best means for recording work done in order to measure efficiency. Likewise, the visual display of information proved an effective teaching tool. Charts proved effective marketing as well. The precision and elaborate measurement revealed in charts implied that knowledge was produced through engineering methods, which instilled confidence in viewers already dazzled with technology.

Some of the first simple premillennial charts appeared in 1878, in prophecy teacher William E. Blackstone's *Jesus is Coming*.

Figure 18: William E. Blackstone's diagram of biblical time.

Blackstone described it as, “merely as an outline of the order of events, in connection with our Lord's return.” Nevertheless, he exhorted “a faithful study of it, together with the references and explanations appended, believing that, as an object lesson, it will be a great help to the reader to understand these mighty questions.” Following the chart were nearly three pages of explanatory keys, identifying each of the elements in the diagram and its significance. William E. Blackstone, *Jesus is Coming*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1878), 72.

Blackstone's chart exemplified a new type of visual depiction of time. Mid-nineteenth-century Millerite charts were full of mathematical calculations and visual representations of history, but they lacked the unity and structure of dispensational charts. Blackstone portrayed time as linear—moving unidirectionally from left to right—and as narrative—possessing a single plot that directed all meaningful temporal demarcations. The horizontal axis of the diagram represented universal time, while the vertical axis showed the encounters between natural history and the supernatural realm, as lines and arrows indicated moments of direct divine intervention in history.

Like Blackstone, A.T. Pierson played a significant role in popularizing charts through dispensational networks, and illustrated how they were shared and spread. As Pierson's biographer Dana Robert noted, by the late nineteenth century he relied on a "variety of prophetic charts for references, from a chart showing seven dispensations by Henry M. Parsons to a map by A.J. Gordon outlining the present and coming age in more general terms."⁷ Pierson saw the chief purpose of charts as pedagogical, writing: "Visible form or representation addressed to the eye is found greatly helpful in the impression and retention of ideas. Hence the value of charts, maps and drawings in connection with scripture study and exhibition of truth."⁸ Pierson's own attempts at charting emphasized textual more than graphical elements, as his chart of the dispensations illustrates.

⁷ Dana Robert, *Occupy until I Come: A.T. Pierson and the Evangelization of the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 274.

⁸ Pierson, *Knowing the Scriptures*, 427.

PICTORIAL HELPS TO IMPRESSION.

There is general accord in the following scheme of dispensations as in harmony with the Word of God:

I.	II.	III.	IV.	V.	VI.	VII.
In Paradise.	Antediluvian.	Postdiluvian.	Abrahamic.	Mosaic.	Church.	Kingdom.
Creation to Fall.	Fall to Deluge.	Deluge to Abram.	Abram to Moses.	Moses to Christ.	Christ to Second Ad- vent.	Second Ad- vent to End.
	About 1650 years.	About 450 years.	About 450 years.	About 1450 years.	2000?	1000?

Figure 19: A.T. Pierson's chart of the dispensations.

Pierson suggested that having such a chart was “very helpful” for understanding “God's ways of successive dealing with man in successive periods and experimental methods.” Pierson described: “Between the Eternity Past and the Eternity Future, the whole duration or period of time is usually divided into at least five subordinate periods.” Pierson’s chart reveals the early stages of dispensational efforts to represent temporal data visually, with only chronological sequence noted and a simple system of seven dispensations. Chart: Pierson, *Knowing the Scriptures*, 431. Quotes: *ibid.*, 429-430.

Yet Pierson in his critical interpretive work on the Bible engaged in more sophisticated efforts at chronological integration and computation.

TABLE OF COMPARATIVE CHRONOLOGY
 Showing the ascertained or probable time when the various portions of the
 New Testament were written, and the corresponding events in the history.
 Interrogation points mark the more doubtful times of events.

A.D.	PLACES	I. THUS.	II. THUS.	GALA.	I. CON.	I. TIM.	TITUS.	II. CON.	ROM.	EPIH.	COL.	PAPAE.	PAPUL.	II. TIM.	HEB.	JAMES.	I. PET.	II. PET.	JUDE.	I. JOHN.	II. JOHN.	III. JOHN.	REVEL.
33	Pentecost, Tiberias, <i>Emp.</i>																						
34	Lame Man, Sanhedrim																						
35	Ananias, etc., Stephen																						
36	{ Persecution, <i>Philip</i> , Conversion, <i>Saul</i>																						
37	Caligula Emperor																						
39	Paul in Arabia 37-39.	Damascus,																					
40	Paul in Syria. Peter	at Joppa																					
41	Claudius Emperor, Lydda																						
42	Paul in Cilicia, Cesarea.	<i>Cornelius</i>																					

MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Figure 20: Pierson’s “Table of Comparative Chronology”

This excerpt from Pierson's elaborate table shows his chronology of New Testament composition. While unexceptional in the context of lower critical scholarship, it revealed his impulse to visually represent texts in time. Scanning for signs of historical context, Pierson attempted to locate the temporal origins of biblical sources and order each text within the comparative structure of universal, calendar time. Pierson, *Knowing the Scriptures*, 433.

Charts and diagrams never replaced biblical texts as the center of dispensational ideas about time, but their popularity illustrated many significant developments. They symbolized the cultural authority of the engineer in knowledge production. The forms of measurement used to make temporal charts were designed to facilitate communication and trust through universal constants, like numbers, scales, and standards. Calendars, to be effective, needed to be universal (or easily convertible), and once established, offered everyone a means of common understanding. Charting became a social practice that established collective meaning. Their work toward establishing a common, universal calendar of God's divisions of time first set dispensationalists apart.

5.2 Dividing the past, telling history

Where generic nineteenth-century premillennialists began their theological work by turning their gaze to the future, dispensationalists first sat down with their hermeneutical slide rules to draw elaborate blueprints of the past. Understanding the biblical divisions of the past offered the key for understanding the entire structure of time. C.I. Scofield described the guiding logic:

The past is seen to fall into periods, marked off by distinct limits, and distinguishable period from period, by something peculiar to each. Thus it comes to be understood that there is the doctrine of the Ages, or Dispensations, in the Bible. The clear perception of this doctrine of the Ages ... has the same relation to the right understanding of the Scriptures that correct outline work has to map making.⁹

While mapping the past became an elaborate pastime, more often dispensationalists concerned themselves with the “outline work”: communicating the basic structural divisions of time.

This doctrine of the ages was made manifest differently than secular history. It relied on God's revealed structural divisions of the past, rather than on events that seemed important to humans. A.T. Pierson suggested that God constructed “his own annals and chronicles, writing up

⁹ Cyrus I. Scofield, *Addresses on Prophecy* (Chicago: Bible Truth Depot, 1914), 13.

history according to methods of His own, leaving great gaps of silence, chasms of oblivion, where He deems nothing worthy of record.”¹⁰ Faced with the need to select events and stories from the past to bear the narrative meaning of history, dispensationalists unsurprisingly began with traditional biblical history. Yet they did not simplistically restate Bible stories, but fleshed out the events and chronologies that they found there with modern secular history. Biblical history and prophecy provided the selection criteria for important events (and the overall meaning of the past), but other historical sources and accounts helped organize the outline.

5.2.1 Jews and Gentiles

Dispensationalists often noted that the most important distinction between secular history and their own biblically inflected reading of history was the latter’s emphasis on the singular and exceptional role of Israel and the Jewish people. “Called out” from among the nations at the time of Abraham, God chose Israel to reveal and fulfill divine plans and purposes. As Scofield claimed, “it is the unique distinction of Israel that she has for a historian the Holy Spirit of God.”¹¹ The key events of Jewish history, as recorded in the Bible, held universal significance, because they revealed divine temporal structure. Although biblical higher critics fiercely disputed the historical veracity of the biblical accounts of Israel, dispensationalists interpreted the material evidence differently. Scofield wrote: “the entire Old Testament is filled with historical material. The accuracy of these writings, often questioned, has been in recent years completely confirmed by the testimony of the monuments of contemporaneous antiquity.”¹² Although the Bible was not a complete record of the past, it was a trustworthy one.

¹⁰ Pierson, *Knowing the Scriptures*, 22.

¹¹ Scofield, *Addresses on Prophecy*, 56.

¹² C.I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, note to Joshua 1:1. The argument about the factuality of biblical history was based in mutually incompatible assumptions about what the evidence from the past was supposed to prove or disprove. Dispensationalists and other conservative Christians were interested in how contemporary archeology and the comparative study of other ancient texts confirmed the biblical narratives and chronology. Higher critics began by suggesting that the history of Israel was not to be found in the accounts of the Bible as contemporarily arranged, but in the

Jews, ancient and otherwise, lived in a world filled with other people, so dispensational histories eventually had to account for “the nations.” Ideas about other ancient peoples often relied on extra-biblical sources to understand the events, sequences, and chronologies of the past. Scofield’s reference notes to the Old Testament frequently located events in a wider history, providing context from Egyptian, Babylonian, and Assyrian histories, for example. Yet Scofield maintained that the meaning of the doings of other nations came from their role in God’s plan of salvation: sometimes as a foil, or as an enemy of the Jews, or a missionary object, or an instrument of God’s mysterious interventions in time. Much centered on the book of Daniel. Daniel provided both the history of other nations and prophetic revelations of their destiny; indeed, Scofield identified the author as “the prophet of the ‘times of the Gentiles.’”¹³ Often secular history was used to confirm the history provided by Daniel. Where this confirmation was not present, dispensationalists found it reasonable to expect that it would emerge as secular history matured. For example, of one character in Daniel, Scofield noted: “Concerning this Darius [the Mede] secular history awaits further discoveries, as formerly in the case of Belshazzar.”¹⁴ Scofield and others maintained that the best of secular history helped shed light on the important events in God’s plan of salvation, or it would eventually. Yet secular history unrelated to the biblical narrative was, no matter how interesting, meaningful only insofar as it illustrated the failure of all human societies to live in accord with the universal dispensations of conscience and human government.

underlying textual structure, taken apart (most famously illustrated by Wellhausen’s documentary hypothesis of the Deuteronomical books) and rearranged to reveal an idealized “scientific” history of Israel and its religious development. Dispensationalists were not averse to *any* rearrangement of biblical texts—they often identified Job as the oldest book chronologically—but they never accepted the logic that suggested that individual books needed to be divided to explain the origins of the doctrinal and historical ideas.

¹³ C.I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, Introduction to the book of Daniel.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, note to Daniel 5:31.

5.2.2 Prophetic history

Dispensationalist understanding of prophetic elements in history extended beyond the doctrine of the nations. They took a broad view of the category of prophecy, usually including anything that revealed God's purposes in time. Much of this, as A.T. Pierson noted, was perceptive rather than predictive. Scofield described prophets in this presentist vein, as: "primarily revivalists and patriots, speaking on behalf of God to the heart and conscience of the nation."¹⁵ Above all, prophets were portrayed as evangelists, reformers, and agitators concerned with the spiritual realities of their own times, and only secondarily concerned with the future. Further, the concept of progressive revelation meant that most prophets had, at best, a foggy view of God's plan of salvation in the future, relative to the clear vision they were given of their contemporary societies' apostasy.

Interpretive opponents accused dispensationalists of employing simplistic literal interpretations of prophecy, and dispensationalists were sometimes proud to agree. Yet this was far from accurate. Dispensationalists usually saw prophetic texts as temporally multivalent. Prophecy, they maintained, spoke to the contemporary (historical) situation and the near temporal horizon, and concurrently to the distant future. "The prophetic messages," Scofield wrote, "have a twofold character: first, that which was local and for the prophet's time; secondly that which was predictive of the divine purpose in future. Often the prediction springs immediately from the local circumstances."¹⁶ Thus prophecies could simultaneously refer to both events in the immediate future of Israel (such as the restoration from Babylonian captivity) and to events in the distant, millennial future. Still, sometimes the past and future merged. In his notes interpreting Isaiah 29:3 ("And I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a mount, and I will raise forts against thee."), Scofield wrote: "Here, as often in prophecy, and especially in Isaiah, the near and far horizons blend. The near view is of Sennacherib's invasion [of Judah, in 701 BCE]...

¹⁵ Ibid., Introduction to Isaiah.

¹⁶ Ibid. introduction to Isaiah.

the far view is that of the final gathering of the Gentile hosts against Jerusalem at the end of the great tribulation.”¹⁷ Describing this phenomenon as the “blending meanings of near and far fulfillment,” Scofield intimated about the ultimate mutability of time and text, as both the past and future were given meaning by the same symbolic reference. Yet at other times it seemed that prophecies had only one referent, such as messianic prophecies about the coming of the Kingdom of God, which could refer to either the first advent (Jesus in first century Palestine) or the second (the future anticipated millennium), but rarely both. Scofield breezily suggested, “The context is always clear,” but the mass of studied references and notes in his Bible used to contextualize prophetic utterances belied the simplicity of discernment.¹⁸ Making sense of the twofold prophetic temporalities was complicated, even for those guided by the Holy Spirit. “This duality,” as Scofield noted, “perplexed the prophets.”¹⁹

To rightly divide between various prophetic contexts, Scofield argued that one must begin with the big picture of time: the formal structures of scriptural divisions and dispensations that made sense of each instance. “The whole scope of prophecy,” he attested, “must be taken into account in determining the meaning of any particular passage. Hence the importance of first mastering the great themes.”²⁰ Even still, sometimes fuzziness remained as the past and future merged. Suggesting extraordinary horometric fluidity, past prophetic pronouncements were understood as sometimes prescriptive, sometimes predictive but already fulfilled, sometimes predictive but yet outstanding, and sometimes prescriptive and predictive, having fulfillments in both past and future. Yet despite all this complexity, properly understood prophecy produced utterly reliable knowledge. The process by which prophecies became history, and the confidence

¹⁷ Ibid., note to Isaiah 29:3.

¹⁸ Ibid. Scofield was not averse to a little obfuscation when doubts persisted. In one note he suggested: “This passage [Daniel 8:10-14] is confessedly the most difficult in prophecy, a difficulty increased by the present state of the text. Historically this was fulfilled in and by Antiochus Epiphanes, but in a more intense and final sense Antiochus but adumbrates the awful blasphemy of the “little horn.” Ibid., note to Daniel 8:10. Adumbrates indeed.

¹⁹ Ibid. introduction to Isaiah.

²⁰ Ibid.

about how prophetic futures would follow suit, led dispensationalists to popularize the slogan: “prophecy is history written in advance.”

This conflation of prophecy and history displayed an alternative form of modernism in the rejection of absolute historicism. Historicism in its most demanding pose insisted that all human culture was a product of historical context. Causal relationships in history explained origins, and understanding origins explained historical meaning. Dispensationalists, however, regarded the explanations provided by naturalistic origins as supplemental to real meaning, which resided in the divine revelation given progressively to each successive present. Moreover, such historicist explanations could never be fully causal, because they could not account for supernatural guidance and intervention in history. God’s guiding hand in history was so omnipresent that it was more often assumed than argued for, as, for example, when Scofield described one ancient leader as: “Cyrus, whose victories and rapid growth in power are here ascribed to the providence of God.”²¹ For dispensationalists, providential intent revealed in prophecy provided meaning for Israelite and Gentile history, and linked those histories collectively into a single grand narrative.

5.2.3 Periodization and Scofield’s dispensations

Making meaningful sense of the past meant grappling with the various divine administrations and interventions of God in history. And this became clear through the structure of dispensations. The number and nature of the dispensations differed in dispensational thought. Most schemes involved seven divisions—the number seven widely understood to symbolize divine completion in the Bible—but less frequently systems proposed three, five, or twelve distinct eras.²²

²¹ Here he referred to Cyrus the Great of Persia, presumably, and not himself. C.I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, notes to Isaiah 41:2.

²² William E. Blackstone described the common perception of sevens: “The division of time into sevens, or weeks, permeates the Scriptures.” William E. Blackstone, *Jesus is Coming* 3rd ed. (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1916 [1878], 38). James Brookes, who perhaps more than anyone influenced the thinking of the first generation of American dispensational leaders, likewise divided time into seven, and much of the subsequent schematization mirrored his language, if not exactly his divisions. Brookes offered: “The history of man in his relation to God may be divided into

Adherents sometimes portrayed these variations as essential differentiators, and plenty of breath and ink were spent arguing the merits of opposing systemizations.²³ Yet despite variances, nearly all dispensationalism schemes shared an understanding of time: as divinely ordered, linear but disjunctive, divisible into distinct eras, and teleological, headed to a divinely initiated consummation in an apocalyptic and millennial future.

The system or periodization that became most well-known (with minor variations) was popularized by C.I. Scofield through his widely distributed pamphlet *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, his correspondence courses and Bible teaching, and the *Scofield Reference Bible*. With some variation in his own terminology, Scofield's dispensations were: 1. Innocency; 2. Conscience; 3. Human Government; 4. Promise; 5. Law; 6. Grace; 7. Kingdom.²⁴ For Scofield, the first five dispensations occurred prior to the birth of Jesus and were recorded in the Old Testament. The first three of these pertained to the whole of the human race; the next two concerned only God's chosen people, the Jews.²⁵ The sixth of Scofield's dispensations, Grace, dealt with the period of time

seven periods or dispensations. These are the age of Innocence, before the fall in Eden; the age of Conscience, when there was no written rule of life, previous to the Deluge; the Patriarchal age, when Jehovah talked with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, as one talked with his friends; the age of the Law that clearly announced the divine statutes; the age of our Lord's Personal Ministry; the age of Grace; and the Age of the Millennium." James H. Brookes, *I Am Coming*, 7th ed. (Edinburg: Pickering & Inglis, 1895), 112.

²³ Historian Carl Sanders argued that historians ought to pay more attention to this extensive diversity among dispensational schemas, and treat the subject not as a singular, unified movement, but an aggregation of 'dispensationalisms,' consisting of a "group of systems that share a family resemblance." Carl Sanders, "Dispensationalism or Dispensationalisms: A System or a Family?" (Paper presented at Evangelical Theology Society Meeting, 2005).

²⁴ For each dispensation, Scofield identified the temporal beginning, the general logic of divine governance, the temporal ending (with respect to human failure and God's judgment), and biblical passages identifying and distinguishing the age. For example for the first dispensation, he wrote: "1. Man innocent. This dispensation extends from the creation of Adam in Genesis 2:7 to the expulsion from Eden. Adam, created innocent and ignorant of good and evil, was placed in the garden of Eden with his wife, Eve, and put under responsibility to abstain from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The dispensation of innocence resulted in the first failure of man, and in its far-reaching effects, the most disastrous. It closed in judgment: "So he drove out the man." See Genesis 1:26; 2:16,17; 3:6, 22-24." C.I. Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* (Findlay, OH: Dunham Publishing Co., 1888), 13.

²⁵ Scofield described the transition between these groups and its consequences: "Heretofore the history has been that of the whole Adamic race. There has been neither Jew nor Gentile; all have been one in "the first man Adam." Henceforth, in the Scripture record, humanity must be thought of as a vast stream from which God, in the call of Abram and the creation of the nation of Israel, has but drawn off a slender rill, through which He may at last purify the great river itself. Israel was called to be a witness to the unity of God in the midst of universal idolatry... to receive and preserve the divine

from the death of Jesus through the present, and on into the indefinite future. As such, its involvement with time demonstrated the most complexity. Only the seventh, Kingdom, represented the future alone.²⁶

revelations... and to produce the messiah. ... The human race, henceforth called Gentile in distinction from Israel, goes on under the Adamic and Noahic covenants; and that for the race (outside Israel) the dispensations of Conscience and of Human Government continue. The moral history of the great Gentile world is told in Rom 1:21-32 and its moral accountability in Rom 2:1-16. Conscience never acquits." C.I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, note to Genesis 11:10.

²⁶ Scholars conflating dispensationalism with Darby's theology have often argued that dispensationalism, generically, taught that the present "church age" was a "Great Parenthesis" in history. This view was held by Darby, and popularized by Plymouth Brethren Harry A Ironside. It offered a way to deal with the prophetic interpretation of the "seventy weeks" described in Daniel 9, as well as the problem that Old Testament prophets did not appear to realize which of their prophecies were to be fulfilled by Jesus's first advent and which related to the (as-yet-future) second advent. Ironside wrote: "Between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks we have a Great Parenthesis which has now lasted over nineteen hundred years. The seventieth week has been postponed by God Himself who changes the times and the seasons because of the transgression of the people. As I have put it elsewhere, though some have objected to the expression, the moment Messiah died on the cross, the prophetic clock stopped. There has not been a tick upon that clock for nineteen centuries. It will not begin to go again until the entire present age has come to an end, and Israel will once more be taken up by God." Harry A. Ironside, *The great parenthesis: timely messages on the interval between the 69th and 70th weeks of Daniel's prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1943). In general, Brethren found significance in this parenthesis because it reflected their particular ecclesiological beliefs. And indeed, dispensational chart maker Clarence Larkin conflated the concept of the "Church age" with the dispensations, spreading the idea that this idea of a Great Parenthesis in prophetic history was a central aspect of the system of dispensations.

Yet for many American dispensationalists, this was a minor point of prophetic interpretation. Scofield did not use the phrase "Great Parenthesis" in either his reference Bible or *Rightly Dividing the Word*. It played no role in his system of dispensations, which saw the present not as a break in prophetic history but as the dispensation of "Man under Grace." For Scofield, the prophetic chronology in Daniel 9 overlapped the more essential structure of the dispensations but did not supplant it. That is to say, he spoke of the "Church-age" as a concept necessary to interpret Daniel coherently and consistently, but not a central feature of the divine administration of time or ecclesiology. He wrote: "When the Church-age will end, and the seventieth week begin, is nowhere revealed. Its duration can be but seven years. To make it more violates the principle of interpretation already confirmed by fulfillment. ... Between the sixty-ninth week, after which Messiah was cut off, and the seventieth week, within which the "little horn" of Dan. 7. will run his awful course, intervenes this entire Church-age." *Scofield Reference Bible*, note to Daniel 9:24. Scofield's notes only made eight references to the "Church-age," to interpret Daniel and to explain the conflation of first and second advent prophecies in other prophetic passages. None of these references put the Church-age in relation to the system of dispensations or suggested that the present age represented a postponement of the prophetic temporal order.

The undue historiographical emphasis that has been placed on the concept of a "Great Parenthesis" reveals interpretive assumption. George Marsden argued, "The key to understanding the whole dispensational system is a very genius and complex interpretation of a prophecy in Daniel 9 concerning "seventy weeks." Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 52. For Marsden, the significance of this parenthesis was that it revealed dispensationalists' anti-institutional theology and rejection of modern culture. He argued that this view implied: "The present era, the "church age," therefore could not be dignified as a time of the advance of God's kingdom." Ibid., 51. Yet if one rejects assumptions about the militant anti-modernism of dispensationalists and the centrality of Darby's ecclesiology, the significance of the "Great Parenthesis" fades. Neither of the two most influential twentieth-century dispensationalists viewed this as an interpretive key; Scofield making little of the concept while theologian Charles Ryrie rejected the language of a parenthesis altogether. While the "seventy weeks" of Daniel were an important prophecy about secular history, they had little to do with understanding the structure of the dispensations, the divine ordering of time, or the value of present institutions.

5.3 Present becoming: progress and pessimism

Reflecting on the complexity of understanding time through the lenses of biblical prophecy, Scofield advised, “Prophetic time is invariably so near as to give full warning, so indeterminate as to give no satisfaction to mere curiosity.”²⁷ This dual experience of living under warning but within uncertainty encapsulated dispensational approaches to the present. Yet the contentious theological landscape in which dispensationalists tried to express this duality led to misunderstandings, particularly about the dispensational mood of the present and its implications.

5.3.1 Progress and the teleology of modernity

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the present took on unprecedented importance for understanding the past and future. In naturalistic progressive conceptions of time the past and future were increasingly seen to derive their meaning from the present. The present became the moral culmination of the past, and the seed for all meaningful germination of the future. The adoption of global systems of recording time accelerated this presentism by enhancing distinctions between past and present. Riding on the backs of technologically driven changes came the (usually implicit) belief in the teleology of modernity. Historian Lynn Hunt described this as “the notion that history as a process has a direction and that its goal is modernity.”²⁸ Teleological modernity implied that the present stood across a dramatic temporal break from the past. In essence, this became a form of periodization with only one division: what came before, and the Now. Unlike millennialisms, which always posited teleological fulfillment in the future, modernity’s future was not a space of expectation, but of responsibility. The present bore full responsibility for the conditions of the future, and particularly the duty of continuing the progress of humanity. Unlike

²⁷ Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, note to Daniel 9:25.

²⁸ Hunt, 107.

the old balanced temporal trinity of past, present, and future, modernity promoted a unified temporality in which the present gave meaning to both past and future.

Progress, and the sense of acceleration that progress created, marked this intensification of the present. The sensation of temporal acceleration—time speeding up—was widely noted around the turn of the twentieth century. Capturing the regnant mood, Boston poet Charles Gibson titled an 1894 poem “How Fast Time Flies,” lamenting “How swift the moments go!”²⁹ In part, this sense grew from the increased distance from the past summoned up by modernity, and magnified by technologies that transformed social life and the introduction of significant complexity into the tasks of everyday life.

Alongside acceleration stood faith in progress. Belief in progress inherently focused attention on the present, and in doing so it linked moral evaluations to social and species advancement. In progressive visions the grand sweep of history led in an upward spiral to the contemporary self, which then bore the responsibility for extending progress into the future. Progress cut off individuals from the temporal past as a vector of aspiration, insisting that true moral, social, and intellectual development could only come in the direction of the future. Yet unlike the future-directed versions of millennialism, or evolutionary theories that found temporal meaning only in historical origins, progress insisted on the primacy of the ever-becoming present, as the past served only to produce the present, and the future served to receive it. Making a definite break with past and future, emerging teleologies of modernity insisted that progress had brought us to the present, and progress would lead us on.³⁰

²⁹ Charles Gibson, *The Spirit of Love, and other poems* (Boston: Self-published, 1906), 176.

³⁰ Jurgen Habermas argued: “The notion of progress served not only to render eschatological hopes profane and open up the horizon of expectation in a utopian fashion, but also to close off the future as a source of disruption with the aid of teleological constructions of history.” Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1987 [1985]), 12-13.

Theologically, American Protestants seemed to agree that modernity's reformations of temporality created a new balance between individuals and society. Liberal theologians were among the first to consider the implications of the idea of progress for religious ideas of self and society. In 1887, Congregational minister Newman Smyth described human history as "a process of divine education."³¹ Criticizing traditional theology for misunderstanding "the nature of any human probation in relation to the general redemptive purpose and educational method of God in the history of the world," Smyth suggested that a proper understanding of progress changed our understanding of time, from a period of individual moral testing to a broader process of social development. "If we regard this life simply as a scene of moral probation for each man by himself," he wrote, "it is exceedingly difficult, if not morally impossible... to bring human history in its successive ages and different degrees of illumination under one divine purpose and love."³² For the next half-century, liberal theologians would argue that social development revealed the divine purposes in time, and that the teleological end of this process was modernity's self-conscious decision to shoulder responsibility for continued progress.³³

5.3.2 Progress's critics

Not everyone agreed. Dispensationalists, in particular, read the signs differently. They strongly denied that the present offered any evidence that progress extended to human nature. With respect to both morals and piety, they argued, people seemed pretty much the same as they always had been. Dispensationalists did not deny all types of progress. In most respects they were

³¹ Newman Smyth, *Old Faiths in New Light*, rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), xiii.

³² *Ibid.*, xiii-xiv.

³³ While Newman Smyth still argued for the evidences of progress in the present, half a century later liberal theologians often asserted it as bald fact. Shirley Jackson Case simply stated: "Viewing the course of civilization in its totality, no one can fail to perceive numerous evidences of progress." (Shirley Jackson Case, *The Christian Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943), 81.) Herbert Willett more generously allowed that one could deny spiritual progress as a present reality, if one were wholly benighted: "The coming of the Lord ... is increasingly realized in personal experience and in the prevalence of his ideals in human society and institutions. Nothing but spiritual blindness can prevent the recognition of the gradual attainment, however slow and painful, of the objectives toward which our Savior directed the thought of his followers." (Herbert L. Willett, "Activities and Menace of Millennialism," *Christian Century* (August 29, 1918), 7.)

whole-hearted enthusiasts for Progressive Era social improvements. None denied scientific or technological progress, nor did they suggest that such progress was anything but good.³⁴ They took advantage of technology in their personal lives and religious work. For example, of all religious groups at the beginning of the twentieth century dispensational leaders were perhaps the most avidly engaged in modern travel, taking trains across the country for conferences, and steaming over to Europe for speaking tours. Additionally they recognized some forms of social improvement. William Blackstone conceded “that the world has made great progress in civilization and refinement, in benevolence, in personal liberty, international fraternity, Christian work, etc.”³⁵ If the world was perhaps not growing better, it was certainly growing easier.

Despite acknowledging progress in so many spheres, dispensationalists held a bifurcated view of how progress shaped the moral character of the present. They looked at the present and saw much to be dismayed about. In the arena of public morality, many saw the growth of evil keeping pace with the growth of good. Social progress was matched by ever greater deprivations. Vice, particularly in new urban settings, seemed to be worse than ever. James Brookes soberly noted: “the Revenue Office in Washington City proves conclusively an enormous increase in the consumption of spirituous and malt liquor in the United States, notwithstanding the earnest efforts of temperance leagues.”³⁶ Dispensationalist writer Arno Gaebelein felt that polite society merely

³⁴ For example, C.I. Scofield noted the positive consequences of technological development in producing a global sensitivity: “In our day the development of means of rapid intercommunication by steam and electricity, and the instantaneous dissemination of intelligence by the press, have created a world-consciousness more sensitive and acute than even national consciousness was one hundred years ago. Every morning our nerves of sensation are touched by the hearth-throbs of yesterday in the remotest continent. A race solidarity is beginning to underlie our philosophy of life, and we are coming to understand that in a very real and practical sense “no man liveth unto himself, and no man dieth unto himself.” It cannot be a matter of indifference to the most self-centered man in American that insanitary conditions prevail in farthest India, for he knows that next year the dread scourge there generated may be in his own house. We are knit together, friends, whether we will or no, and it is not open to any thoughtful man to be indifferent to the problem of human destiny.” C.I. Scofield, “The Problem of Human Destiny in the Light of Prophecy,” 1895. C.I. Scofield Sermon Notes, Moody Bible Institute Special Collections.

³⁵ Blackstone, 150.

³⁶ James H. Brookes, *I Am Coming*, 173. Lest readers underestimate the severity of the problem, Brookes continued: “the Gambirinus, the organ of the Austrian brewers and hop-growers, and the acknowledged authority on the subject

disguised moral failures: “People who know declare that the morals of the so-called society ‘are rotten.’ Now and then something becomes known, but money and influence generally hide these things. The sanctity of the marriage relations are more and more ignored.”³⁷

Education and civilization showed little promise for improving individual character. Scofield illustrated the point: “Fifty years ago it was observed that most of the criminals in our jails and penitentiaries were illiterate; and in that worldly, blind sense with which we reason... we said if these people could read and write, if they were educated they would not go to jail. Now all the jails are full, and they can all read and write.”³⁸ Blackstone went further, suggesting that even if public morals did improve, it proved little about individual character, since “The cultured and scientific atheist is as surely in the service of Satan as the thief or the murderer.”³⁹ There were no consensus metrics by which one might determine whether or not human nature was improving, but dispensationalists did not struggle to find evidence to the argue against progress.

Since human nature remained basically unchanged, it seemed dubious that human institutions would demonstrate moral progress. As with individuals, Blackstone argued, depravity kept step with progress: “Oppressive monopolies, systematic peculation and fraud are parallel with charitable institutions.”⁴⁰ Despite all the triumphs over despotism, governments fared little better. “The nation which opened the way for the missionary,” he lamented, “also forced upon the teeming millions of China the awful curse of opium.”⁴¹ Human governments revealed the mixed moral character of their people. World War I confirmed dispensationalist’s skepticism about social

[wrote:] “The total quantity of beer brewed in 1890 was ... 92,834,000,000 gallons [which gives about 60 gallons to every man, woman, and baby in the world].” Ibid., 174.

³⁷ Arno Gaebelein, “Current Events and Signs of the Times,” *Our Hope* (Jan. 1909), 497.

³⁸ C.I. Scofield, *The World’s Approaching Crisis* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia School of the Bible, ?) Moody Archives pamphlet collection, 14.

³⁹ Blackstone, 150.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

and governmental progress. Victories for progress existed, but when weighed in the balance, greater evils still shaped the present. Scofield described the present “times of the Gentiles” as a “testing of the capacity of the natural man to govern himself and his fellows.” He added:

We are witnessing in the present World War the final demonstration of his inability. Every resource available to man for the great task of organizing humanity into the social order and establishing peace with righteousness has been tried. The answer is the war of wars. So far from restraining in any effective fashion the bloodthirstiness that is latent in humanity, the Gentile nations have succeeded but in organizing it, in organizing human killing on a prodigious scale.⁴²

Like many others, Scofield felt the greatest lesson of the Great War was humility about the prospects of human progress.

Institutions and nations had not improved, but what about the church? Liberals again held high hopes, and a high estimation of what had been attained. Harris Franklin Rall, a Methodist theologian and president of Garrett Biblical Institute, wrote: “The most notable fact in the life of the church today is the larger way in which it has grasped its task. It has seen that God’s purpose is nothing less than to redeem the world, to make a new humanity.”⁴³ Rall felt that both the evolution of modern theology and the works of the church revealed the fingerprints of progress. Yet here perhaps dispensationalists offered the most scathing of their critiques. Arno Gaebelein bristled at “The Onward Course of Apostasy” in the churches, writing:

Before us is a pile of newspapers and magazine clippings, personal letters and communications, sent to us from different parts of the world. They all tell the same story. The denial of the Truth of God, the Word of God, the Christ of God, and the blessed Gospel of God goes on unhindered in Christendom. ... There is no abatement whatever of the wicked and outspoken denial of the faith.⁴⁴

Dispensationalists did not see improvement either in character nor numbers. Although Christianity was expanding all over the world, they argued that the demographic picture was far from rosy.

⁴² C.I. Scofield, “The Last World Empire and Armageddon,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 108:431 (July 1951), 355.

⁴³ Harris Franklin Rall, “Premillennialism: III. Where Premillennialism Leads,” *The Biblical World* 53:6 (Nov. 1919), 623.

⁴⁴ Arno Gaebelein, “Current Events and Signs of the Times,” *Our Hope* (Jan. 1909), 494.

William Blackstone produced a dramatic diagram in 1886 that showed the vast preponderance of the world's population as "heathens," while the number of converts to Protestant Christianity was shown by a single white square in a vast field of darkness.

Figure 21: Blackstone's chart of global religious demographics.

As the caption noted, at the current rate of missionization, Christian converts were dramatically outpaced by demographic growth among the "heathen" hoards. From: George C. Needham, ed., *Prophetic Studies of the International Prophecy Conference* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1886), 204.

Even more significantly, dispensationalists argued that neither progressive improvement of human nature and society nor the conversion of world was the point of present-day Christianity.

The divinely given purpose of the church was preaching, not conquest. Scofield argued for the distinction: “The evangelization of the world, then, and not its conversion, is the mission committed to us.”⁴⁵ If anything, this modest view of the powers and demands of the church irked their opponents even more than dispensational diagnostics of present progress. Liberal theologians insisted that the Christian hope rested in the present efforts of the church, and treated skepticism about those efforts as refutations of the gospel. In contrast, dispensationalists divided their hopes between the present and the future, the church and the kingdom. The church was purposed to preach and to be called out from society; conversion of the world must wait for the millennial kingdom. Scofield distinguished between these two separate hopes:

the kingdom which is the rule of Christ over the earth, redressing every wrong, establishing every right, and raising humanity to the highest ideal of social order; and the church, a body called out from the world, and having toward it the one mission of heralding everywhere the glad tidings of salvation through the blood of the cross; watching meanwhile, and waiting for the coming of the King to set up the glorious kingdom.⁴⁶

Dispensationalists did not believe the present church wholly impotent in producing present goods, encouraging moral and social reform, and converting the world. Yet they cautioned against imaging these goods as the purpose of the church. Scofield argued:

That the preaching of the gospel produces everywhere many of the kingdom conditions is blessedly true. ... But what we need to guard ourselves against is the notion—now, alas! all but universally prevalent—that these results are the chief object and end of our mission; that we are sent into the world to civilize it. ... The true mission of the church is not the reformation of society.⁴⁷

As historian Leonard Sweet described it, dispensationalists held to “a logic inherent in the “afflictive model of progress” wherein the world was getting worse and better at the same time.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ C.I. Scofield, *Addresses on Prophecy*, 22.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Leonard Sweet, “Millennialism in America: Recent Studies,” *Theological Studies* 40.30 (2004), 514. Sweet was quoting James West Davidson’s phrase “afflictive model of progress.”

Liberal critics (and their academic heirs) often sought to dismiss dispensationalists' alleged pessimism about progress as a disturbing product of troubled times. Herbert Willett, Professor of Semitic languages at the University of Chicago, wrote "the millennialist belief has probably persisted at all times in certain sections of the church, but has tended to break out in more self-assertive manifestations at particular periods. Such periods have always been the times of trouble and depression in the order of the world's life."⁴⁹ Skeptics of progress, Willett suggested, were by-products of social and political unrest.

In retrospect the question might just as easily have been: from what background and social position was it possible to believe in the progress of humanity? Although dispensationalists did employ the category of social class, their critiques of the present sometimes suggested that faith in progress was primarily available from a privileged social position.⁵⁰ For critics of modernity's hierarchical arrangement of time, presentism and progress led to an unsustainable view of the modern self—as neither selfhood nor society could sustain the full weight of the meaning of time. Prophecy teacher Blackstone rejected the liberal practice of social evaluation, writing: "There seems to be a prevailing disposition to balance up the good and the bad in the world by a process of general average, in which the triumphs of art and science, the progress in inventions, discoveries, etc., are counted as moral goodness, and it is concluded that the world, on the average, is growing better. But this is utterly fallacious."⁵¹ Facing liberal theologies of a teleological present, critics—particularly dispensationalists—responded with increased emphasis on utopian visions of the future.

⁴⁹ Herbert L. Willett, "Activities and Menace of Millennialism," *Christian Century* (August 29, 1918), 6.

⁵⁰ From casual reflection, it is that while a number of dispensationalists came from elite backgrounds—such as Rueben Archer Torrey—few proponents of progress (if any) came from marginal or lower class backgrounds. Although it does not pay to assume causal links between class background and millennial beliefs, this suggests that social location might have done more to make possible beliefs in progress than dispensational beliefs.

⁵¹ Blackstone, *Jesus is Coming*, 145.

5.3.3 Temporal mood: critical pessimism

Outsiders perennially tarred the movement with the ubiquitous charge of pessimism. It is unclear when the charge of premillennial pessimism first emerged, but it grew in step with the movement. Blackstone's influential 1878 book *Jesus is Coming* was one of the earliest popular American statements of premillennial ideas. Blackstone, in a 43-page chapter titled "Objections Considered," meticulously examined and contested critiques of premillennial thought, particularly that of temporal pessimism. He wrote:

It is objected that this doctrine presents a gloomy view of the future; that "it is the philosophy of despair," - that it stands opposed to the popular idea, viz.: that the world is growing better, and "if it is true," it is sarcastically said, "we might as well fold our hands and wait for Christ to come." We candidly think that many who raise these objections have altogether mistaken the spirit and work of pre-millennialists.⁵²

Yet, while Blackstone treated it as a common objection, charges of pessimism, despair, and gloominess were not common before 1878. Scottish Presbyterian David Brown was widely considered the strongest advocate of postmillennialism in the mid-nineteenth century, yet Brown made no mention of premillennial pessimism, or despair, or gloomy dispositions.⁵³ Likewise in 1878 at the first premillennial prophecy conference, the speakers spent considerable time

⁵² William E. Blackstone, *Jesus is Coming*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1916 [1878]), 142. I have been unable to locate a source for the "fold our hands" notation, if it was a quotation. My best guess is that Blackstone might have been responding to critiques from Charles Hodge or one of his cronies, perhaps printed in the *Princeton Review*. The fundamental irony here was that, among American intellectuals, pessimism and a philosophy of despair were seen as features of modern, sexy German scholarship, particularly the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer—and premillennialists were rarely charged with being too cozy with German scholarship. Yet Hodge would have been familiar with the language of Schopenhauer criticism, Hodge and most of the Princeton theologians were strongly anti-premillennialist and usually anti-Schopenhauerian, and they would have been in the best position to translate this philosophical critique between contexts. It is possible that William Blackstone read the *Princeton Review*. So it seems plausible that the charge of pessimism that has dogged every dispensationalists step originated from their sometimes future allies among the conservative Princeton theologians.

⁵³ Brown's 1846 book *Christ's Second Coming: Will it be Premillennial?* was the text against which most early premillennialist theologians staked their positions. For example, the presenters at the 1878 premillennial prophecy conference in New York regularly positioned themselves in opposition to Brown, although usually respectfully acknowledging his reputation. One described Brown's impact on postmillennialism as: "The ablest work that has been written in defense of the current theory on this subject." S. H. Kellogg, "Christ's Coming—Is It Pre-Millennial?" in *Premillennial Essays of the Prophetic Conference*, ed. by Nathaniel West (Chicago, Fleming H. Revell, 1879), 59.

defending their position from theological critiques of all sorts, but felt no need to defend themselves against charges of pessimism.

Even so, after Blackstone premillennialism and pessimism rarely marched unshackled. By the time of World War I, liberal academics mounted a concerted attack on premillennial ideas. In both critical and popular debates, pessimism became the platform's chief talking point. Many liberal critics extracted the accusations of gloomy dispositions straight from Blackstone, disregarding his laborious attempts at refutation. Rall summed up premillennial theology: "That position can be put in the one word, pessimism."⁵⁴ Willett wrote a twenty-one-part series of articles in 1918 for the mainline organ *The Christian Century* denouncing the evils of premillennialism. Evaluating its temporal mood, he argued: "The first and most striking feature of the entire adventistic propaganda is its pessimism."⁵⁵ Willett thought pessimism serious enough to constitute a denial of Christianity itself, writing: "This assurance of a better time to come, that is to be attained by the winning of men to a better comprehension of the divine purpose, is the very essence of the message of both Testaments. In contrast to this, millenarianism denies the efficacy of the gospel."⁵⁶ Both Rall and Willett used unattributed quotations from Blackstone's popular *Jesus is Coming* to characterize all premillennial thought; it is unclear whether the latter was familiar with any other premillennialist works.⁵⁷

The vague charge of pessimism spread through most later academic accounts, and never lost its tone of disapprobation. Writing as a theologian, Rall conflated analysis and evaluation by

⁵⁴ Harris Franklin Rall, "Premillennialism: I. The Issue," *The Biblical World* 53:4 (Jul. 1919), 340.

⁵⁵ Herbert L. Willett, "Activities and Menace of Millennialism," *Christian Century* (August 29, 1918), 7.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Willett inaccurately referred to Blackstone's *Jesus is Coming* as "the leading millennialist textbook," which, not surprisingly, he also found to be a work of "entire naivete." *Ibid.* Rall at least made reference to the "brutal" theology of premillennialist I. M. Haldeman and the "personal abuse" that R.A. Torrey dealt out while arguing his ideas. Presumably Blackstone, Haldeman, and Torrey were all part of what Rall described as a "concerted, vigorous, and well-financed propaganda in favor of this doctrine," a vast network that included: "Numerous Bible schools, popular Bible conferences and institutes, "prophetic conferences," numberless professional evangelists, tract and book circulation in great quantity, weekly and monthly periodicals, with an occasional independent church or mission, have been the agencies of this work." Rall, 339.

suggesting that gloominess was spiritual failure: “premillennialism is something more than a belief in the power of evil and a despair as to the present age. It means despair as to the power of spiritual forces to redeem the world: in other words, moral pessimism.”⁵⁸ Nearly a century later religion scholar Glenn Shuck mirrored the claim and its tone, claiming premillennialists embraced: “the form of a despair which is neither an absence nor a renunciation, but rather an active, expansive sense of pessimism.”⁵⁹ In between, few scholars seemed to question seriously the category of pessimism as explanatorily appropriate. Eventually, even dispensationalists themselves began to accept modified applications of the label to their ideas.

5.3.3.1 Psychological pessimism

What was pessimism? Was the label descriptively useful? Answers varied over time and social location. Technical definitions of philosophical pessimism were occasionally invoked, yet most often the term evoked a popular sense of psychological gloominess.⁶⁰ This common usage in the late nineteenth century was captured by English psychologist James Sully, who diagnosed pessimism as: “a temper of mind with its accompanying intellectual predisposition. In everyday language a man is a pessimist who habitually emphasizes the dark and evil aspects of life... a peculiar make of person characterized by a kind of constitutional leaning to a gloomy view of the

⁵⁸ Rall, “Premillennialism: I,” 341.

⁵⁹ Glenn Shuck, *Marks of the Beast: The Left Behind Novels and the Struggle for Evangelical Identity* (New York: NYU Press, 2005), 79.

⁶⁰ Philosophical pessimism, popularly associated with German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, suggested that the world we inhabit is the worst of all possible worlds. A few critics loosely banded together these variants of “philosophies of despair.” Yet few premillennialists seemed to be familiar with Schopenhauer, and fewer would ever have been comfortable with his ideas. Instead, most took pains to identify signs of God’s grace in creation and society. Scofield probably represented a common view suggesting the world was far from as bad as it could be, on account of the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the world: “The world has never yet seen a full manifestation of Satan’s world-kingdom. Who is the hinderer? You can find no other power adequate to that task but the Holy Spirit dwelling in the church.” C.I. Scofield, “The Last World Empire and Armageddon,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1955), 358. Most Christians, after all, tended to think Christianity made the world better than it could otherwise be. That dispensationalists would also reject its opposite—philosophical optimism that suggested this is the best of all possible worlds—did not make them pessimists except in the most binary of minds.

world and its affairs.”⁶¹ And indeed, many critics attributed premillennial beliefs to gloomy personality types. Herbert Willett illustrated: “It is this curious frame of mind which causes millenarians to take what seems a melancholy satisfaction in whatever signs of disorder and trouble the age witnesses.”⁶² The suspicion of “melancholy satisfaction” escalated as liberal critics charged premillennialists with taking gruesome delight in wars and social unrest, reveling in moral decay in society, and keenly yearning for the violent cataclysmic end of the world.⁶³

Yet the charge of pessimism always held dubious descriptive value.⁶⁴ When dispensationalists spoke of humankind's “utter failure” in the present age, it was not because they saw nothing of goodness or holiness in the present, nor because they gloomily yearned for a dystopic future full of wars and chaos. Instead, they were expressing a healthy skepticism about the possibility of creating a millennial kingdom here on earth through natural means. By contrast, dispensationalists most often spoke of themselves as hopeful and optimistic. Their “blessed hope” was for the utopian kingdom of righteousness and peace, not for the destruction and chaos that they believed would precede it. Scofield insisted: “No Christian ought ever to be a pessimist. He is not of the night or of the darkness, but is a child of the day. To him belong the exceeding great and

⁶¹ James Sully, *Pessimism: a history and Criticism* (London, Henry S. King & Co., 1877), 1.

⁶² Herbert L. Willett, “Activities and Menace of Millennialism,” *Christian Century* (August 29, 1918), 7.

⁶³ For example, Willett charged: “What then can be the value of any efforts in behalf of democracy, decency, and world-brotherhood? The very atrocities which have shocked the soul of mankind... are in fact to be welcomed as proof of the failure of civilization and the gospel, and the token of the last times.” Herbert L. Willett, “Activities and Menace of Millennialism,” *Christian Century* (August 29, 1918), 8. Incidentally, everyone involved in these debates seemed to ignore the fact that there *was* an emerging class of citizens in American society who delighted in catastrophes and disasters, relishing war and grisly murder, cheering for sensational stories of vice. They were called journalists.

⁶⁴ Attributions of psychological pessimism were never based on empirical research—indeed, biographies of premillennial and dispensational leaders do not show any common predispositions to gloominess or pessimism—but critics insisted that psychological gloom was the necessary consequence of premillennial beliefs. Despite its rhetorical force, this claim is mostly nonsense. At heart it involved a process of elision: for critics, premillennial belief that the world would end in flames was equivalent to a desire for such an end. Ignoring adherent's claims to the contrary, they embraced the supposition that the “blessed hope” of dispensationalists was the cataclysmic end of time, and not the utopian future to follow. But a little reflection exposes the logical flaws that conflate diagnosis with prescriptive delight. Believing in an end itself is not a sign of pessimism: For example, most astronomers believe the universe will eventually end either in heat death as it expands infinitely or in catastrophic contraction, yet few scholars suggest that the pursuit of astronomy represents destructive psychological desires.

precious promises of God. He has a “blessed hope” and is an heir of glory. He is, therefore, by very necessity, an optimist.”⁶⁵

5.3.4 Prophetic, apocalyptic, utopian

Although scant evidence suggests that dispensationalists were, on average, more dispositionally pessimistic than other Americans, they did offer complex and often conflicting assessments about the fate of the present era. Dispensationalists graphed their repudiations of teleological modernity along two axes: explicit expositions of the social failures of the present, and the critical negativity provided by utopian visions of the future. In this, they followed the dual tradition of critique they found in their Bibles: the prophetic and the apocalyptic voices. And, like other Americans, they demonstrated a haphazard capacity to blend synchronically disparate elements from these distinct genres.

The Civil War steeped the United States in biblical rhetoric. One result was the proliferation and conflation of several genres of religious imagery, applied to social contexts. Messages of liberation lay lamb-like next to moral judgments and damnations, prophetic rebukes of social disarray blended with apocalyptic and utopian hopes for a better world remade by justice. Americans found their Bibles flooded with a surplus of meanings, spilling out imagery and ideology in unexpected directions.⁶⁶ Out of this mixture flowed a popular conflation of two distinct biblical genres: the prophetic and the apocalyptic.

⁶⁵ C.I. Scofield, *Addresses on Prophecy*, 89. Scofield, like most other premillennialists, believed that predicting cataclysm before utopia represented the historically orthodox Christian position about the future, and thus it made little sense to suggest that it represented a particular personality type. He wrote: “I have no novel interpretation. Here is the great universally accepted interpretation, that the end of governmental force, then end of social order, is by judgment, destroying that social order, and then setting up another, the central principle of which is righteousness and the result of which is peace.” C.I. Scofield, *The World’s Approaching Crisis* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia School of the Bible, ?), 20. Moody archives pamphlet.

⁶⁶ For one fuller description of the American use of the Bible in the Civil War, see Mark Noll, *America’s God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

The prophetic mode of rhetoric strove for moral and social reform in the present.⁶⁷ It drew on the record of the Old Testament prophets, who reminded the people of Israel of their covenant with God and resultant religious duties. Prophetic pronouncements proffered warnings to the chosen people: reform, or suffer the consequences for abandoning the covenant. The prophetic vision drew a downward-sloping line from an idealized past to the present.⁶⁸ Most important, it called for a reversal of the trajectory of moral decline: repentance, conversion, and restitution of relationship with God. The apocalyptic mode, on the other hand, spoke of future events and supernatural intervention in time, independent of human agency. The apocalyptic referred not to the present, but to the end of time, when evil would be judged and destroyed, all wrongs set right, and a new and righteous world born. Apocalyptic rhetoric drew a firm line between present and future. While prophetic tropes attempted to modulate the sine wave of moral behavior in society, apocalyptic voices diminished the significance of the present by insisting the future represented a radical departure. The apocalyptic gaze shifted focus from the *preservation* or reconstitution of moral societies to the *preparation* of individuals and groups within society for the end. This preparation involved a hopeful imagination of a better world to come. To be sure, destruction preceded re-creation. Remade through fire, human nature, society, and the physical world must all be scourged of evil, injustice, and suffering in order to prepare the world for a truly righteous future. Yet the cataclysmic purging was not the central feature of apocalyptic visions, but merely an instrument necessary for the future utopia.

⁶⁷ Debra Bergoffen suggested that because of its concern with action in history, prophetic rhetoric had no actual interest in future prediction: "This dialectical sense of covenant focuses the prophet's attention on the human dimension of the historical process. As history is the realm of human action, the prophets are in no position to predict the future." Debra Bergoffen, "The Apocalyptic Meaning of History," in *The Apocalyptic Vision in America*, ed. by Lois Parkinson Zamora (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1982), 21.

⁶⁸ Generally speaking, for the prophets and their premillennial descendants, this past was idealized and self-consciously ahistorical—not a real past of perfect justice and peace to compare with the present, but a mythical past when the covenant was first made and all people were in fellowship. Premillennial histories show little evidence of factual belief in a romanticized era from which the present descended, so most often the comparative (e.g.: "the world is getting worse") was a comparative only of the present, a temporal decline limited to the immediate context of the prophetic gaze.

Premillennial adherents confused these genres as much as anyone, seamlessly mixing prophetic diatribes about present immorality with apocalyptic visions about the future. This habit produced a confusing jumble of prescriptions about how to understand the present and its relationship to the future. On the one hand, prophetic pronouncements of doom demanded moral reform, but implied an open, non-determined future in which human effort could postpone or eliminate divine wrath. On the other hand, apocalyptic belief implied the utopian future would arrive from outside of history, signaled by, but not produced by, world events or social reform. Most often dispensationalists mismatched prophetic diagnoses with apocalyptic implications: calling the faithful to repent and return to covenant, but insisting that the goal was not the preservation of holy society, but preparation of God's people for the apocalyptic end of time.

5.3.5 Hope and present character

The greatest implications of blending prophetic critiques and apocalyptic expectations pertained not to the future, but the present. While “preparation” looked toward the future, it worked in the present. Critics feared the present tense consequences of dispensational beliefs would be destructive. University of Chicago theologian Shirley Jackson Case called premillennialists “a pronounced enemy of democracy,” and Herbert Willett claimed that “atrocities which have shocked the soul of mankind... are in fact to be welcomed as proof of the failure of civilization and the gospel, and the token of the last times.”⁶⁹ Yet dispensationalists argued that suspicion of present moral progress combined with expectation for the re-making of time did not lead to abnegation of the present, but moral formation within the present. They sought to produce virtues such as watchfulness, purification, urgency, and hope.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Shirley Jackson Case, “The Premillennial Menace,” *The Biblical World* (1918), 23. Herbert L. Willett, “Activities and Menace of Millennialism,” *Christian Century* (August 29, 1918), 8.

⁷⁰ The historian Grant Wacker sagaciously suggested similar implications emerged among Pentecostals with similar eschatological beliefs: “One ramification involved a sense of doom just ahead, especially for those who discounted the pentecostal message. Another ushered in an exhilarating sense of hope, especially for those who embraced the full gospel

To this end, dispensationalists argued that prophecy interpretation was useful not because it produced knowledge, but because it developed character. Decrying “vulgar curiosity,” C.I. Scofield despaired of purely intellectual studies of biblical prophecy that have “no effect upon conduct and character, simply because it is heard or studied without faith.”⁷¹ Noting that many people interested in prophecy “desire to know what all these images, and beasts, and horns signify, believing in a way, that there is in them some unfolding of that which is to come to pass, if one can but hit upon the right interpretation,” Scofield concluded that such seekers after mere knowledge “derive no profit whatever.”⁷² Instead of knowledge for the sake of mere curiosity, Scofield advocated “a believing understanding of prophetic truth ... has an influence upon either character or conduct.”⁷³ Present character, not future prediction, provided the motivation for study.

How did prophecy belief produce character? Scofield thought it came by leading prophecy students into “a peculiar intimacy with God himself.”⁷⁴ Claiming that Christians were called to be friends with Christ and not mere servants, he suggested that the difference was that servants were not given insight into secrets. Quoting from John 15:15 (“For all things that I have heard of my father I have made known unto you.”), Scofield concluded: “Friendship is an intimate relation, you see, and involves confidence.”⁷⁵ Understanding God’s plans for the future—as laid out in biblical

message, as partisans put it. Finally this hope prompted saints to a frenzy of expansionist activity. In principle of course it should not have been so, for the Bible pictured the end times drama unfolding outside history, independent of human wishes or cooperation. But in practice pentecostals proved unwilling to leave themselves out of the most exciting story ever told.” Grant Wacker, “Present Tenses of the Everlasting Life: Pentecostal Visions of the Future,” in *Visions of the Future in Germany and America*, ed. by Norbert Finzsch and Hermann Wellenreuther (New York: Oxford, 2001), 71. In a similar vein, Hillel Schwartz noted: “Most millenarians conflate the restorative and retributive. They act in some way to assure themselves that the New World will not be unfamiliar. Images of a fortunate future are primed with nostalgia.” Hillel Schwartz, “Millenarianism” *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd Edition. 1987, 6029.

⁷¹ C.I. Scofield, “Influence of Prophetic Truth Upon Character and Conduct: Sermon preached at First Congregational Church, Dallas, TX, Dec. 17, 1893.” Reprinted in C.I. Scofield, *Addresses on Prophecy* (New York: Our Hope, 1910), 165.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 158.

prophecy—was useful because it brought believers into closer intimacy, a goal directed at present hope and character.⁷⁶

Hope was the theological key for dispensational evaluations of the present. Premillennialism was often described as pessimistic because its chief late-nineteenth-century alternatives—postmillennialism or evolutionary progressivism—were optimistic about human potential in the present in a way that prophetic voices resisted. But neither optimism nor prophetic pessimism were actually postures about the future; both poses projected attitudes about the present forward and backward in time. Although the prophetic voice spoke of the future as threatening (e.g.: repent, or else), premillennial ideas of the future were more thoroughly grounded in apocalyptic imaginations. Rejecting pessimistic projections of prophetic present tenses, C.I. Scofield wrote: “No Christian ought ever to be a pessimist. ... He has a “blessed hope” and is an heir of glory.”⁷⁷ Hope became the watchword of the movement, ubiquitous in language about “the Blessed Hope” of Christ's second coming, and appearing in dozens of book titles as well as Arno Gaebelein's leading dispensational journal *Our Hope*. “Hope,” Gaebelein wrote, “is the emotion of time.”⁷⁸ Dispensationalists sought to cultivate it as a source of character, and to preserve the possibilities of hope at any cost. They fiercely distanced themselves from the date-setting interpretations of prophecy that caused the great disappointments of the Millerites in the mid-nineteenth century, avoiding predictions that could be falsifiable and thus destructive to hope. Even more, they imagined a disjunctive end of time as the source of hope. Because so many of the causes of suffering in the present resided outside human control—sickness, natural disasters, and most of all, death—they held that apocalyptic hope demanded a deep fissure between the present and

⁷⁶ The mechanism by which intimacy and hope led to character was not made explicit, but it was always assumed certain. Scofield wrote: “If it is a hope in the heart, then according to the inspired word itself, that hope will be a purifying hope; it will lay hold upon conduct and character.” *Ibid.*, 164.

⁷⁷ Scofield, *Addresses on Prophecy*, 89.

⁷⁸ Arno C. Gaebelein, *Hope of the Ages* (New York: Our Hope, 1938), 18.

future. Responding to progressive views of technological and human improvement, Gaebelein asked: “Can seismographs stop earthquakes? ... Will science do away with cemeteries?”⁷⁹ For Gaebelein and others, death raised the ultimate question of hope: we die, and then what? Imagining a hopeful future—not just an idyllic afterlife, but a cessation of endless patterns of human death and suffering—demanded supernatural intervention, a millennial kingdom established on radically new grounds. Hope for a new order demanded a disjunctive interruption of time between the present and future, and radical change not possible through the existing naturalistic progress.

5.4 Predicting the future

Predictive prophecy belief always presented itself as the popular face of dispensationalism. Dispensationalists themselves believed the ultimate purpose of scanning for signs of the times—seeking signifiers for already-known signifieds—was preparation and character development in the present. Yet popular imagination remained fascinated foremost by the potential for future prediction. Savvy marketers, dispensationalists recognized and exploited this curiosity about the future, even while being suspicious of it. “Inherent in the heart of man,” recognized dispensational leader Arno Gaebelein, “is a deep desire to know the future.”⁸⁰ Much like with questions of theodicy, inquiries about the future could lead seekers to God. In marketing the possibility of knowing some things about the future, dispensationalists found an eager audience.

American popular desire to know the future reached a crescendo in the early twentieth century. The sense of acceleration and complexity in the present raised the stakes for knowing the future. It became an object of anxious attention, and at the same time the future seemed closer to falling under human control as nature and society were harnessed by technology for human

⁷⁹ Gaebelein, *Hope of the Ages*, 71.

⁸⁰ Arno Clemens Gaebelein, *World Prospects: How Is It All Going to End?* (New York: Our Hope, 1934), 11.

flourishing. Facing the perennial uncertainty of the unknown, science and technology waged a two-front battle for greater prediction and control over the future. The growth of natural and social sciences in this period was predicated on the possibility of increasingly precise prediction. These sciences assumed that one could know the future through the study of patterns in the past, insofar as the uniformity of time and natural laws would make past causal relations and patterns would prove predictively accurate. Simultaneously, technology gave people increased tools to predict the results of human labor. The goal of engineering time was to control the future through the standardization of practices, thereby securing accuracy, efficiency, and most of all, predictability. Success followed. Scientific management expert Lillian Gilbreth, one of the most successful popularizers of time studies and measured efficiency, announced in 1914: “Prophecy becomes possible under Scientific Management. The calendar, or chronological chart, becomes a true prophecy of what will take place.”⁸¹ While science promised the ability to read the prophetic signs of natural laws, technology turned her devotees themselves into prophets. Belief in the universality of mechanical causality made prediction seem an achievable goal in everyday life.

5.4.1 Problematic predictions

Few saw much in common between scientific or technological prediction and dispensational prophecy belief. After all, the former derived from observable, repeatable experimentation in the present, while the latter looked to vague symbols from ancient texts. When liberal academic religious historians led the social scientific charge for predicting the future, they emphatically rejected any possibility for supernatural foreknowledge communicated in ancient texts. Instead, scholars such as Case sought knowledge of the future from the study of patterns in the past. “There is no reason to suppose,” he supposed, “that the sources of vitality which have generated past and present attainments will not continue permanently ... Progress is in process of becoming; it

⁸¹ Lillian Moller Gilbreth, *The Psychology of Management* (New York: Sturgis & Walton Company, 1914), 195.

has not yet arrived at any final goal. When this fact is appreciated, the story of civilization's achievements is prophetic of a better future."⁸² In Case's language prophecy was not a category of future awareness, but merely the promise of a bright future. What served to fill in the everyday details of future expectation were the certainties of progress and the means of technical achievement. Case scorned the idea that divine revelation offered a picture of the future, or that any future "capricious intervention of the Deity" would interrupt the continuity of time and natural laws to bring about an apocalyptic or utopian end.⁸³ Instead, he held the faith that "man could know the future" through a projection of historically constructed scientific laws.

Dispensationalists were not so sure. Because they disagreed with liberals about the meaning of the past and the trajectory of the present, predictions based on such grounds did not seem all that promising. Additionally, many dispensationalists were wary of too much certainty, and particularly cautious about their motivations to seek future certainty. Although their conception of prophecy affirmed the possibility of certain knowledge about the future, they maintained that the purpose of that knowledge was present-day intimacy with God. It was not for mastery over future events, nor for predictive manipulation of natural or political spheres. Dispensationalists did not perceive themselves as prophetic—they were interpreters of prophecy, not creators. They suspected methods of knowing things about the future that seemed directed towards producing mastery. Arno Gaebelein expressed these doubts, asking: "Can man know the future? We answer without hesitation, Yes. We can know the future through the Bible, the Word of God, but never apart from it."⁸⁴ Methodological skepticism about the effectiveness and virtue of non-biblical attempts to know the future often left dispensationalists reserved in the face of bolder progressive claims to future prediction.

⁸² Shirley Jackson Case, *The Christian Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943), 81.

⁸³ Gaebelein, *Hope*, 205.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

If they proved wary of scientific attempts to know the future, dispensationalists were avidly opposed to religious groups that attempted to claim too much certainty about the future. Gaebelein regularly denounced "institutes of psychic research" and spiritualism. These were, in his opinion, nothing more than a continuation of the long history of sorcery, astrology, and augury, grounded in "the powers of darkness," seeking false means for knowing the future. Equally as problematic were religious groups that tried to determine the times and dates of future events. The activities of mid-nineteenth-century date-setters, particularly the Millerites, and their religious descendants smelled of hubris. Prophecy illustrator Clarence Larkin warned: "Satan is very subtle in his methods... He has tried to rob the Church of her "Blessed Hope" of the Lord's return by mixing with it a lot of false teaching and "time setting" as seen in "Millerism," "Seventh Day Adventism" and "Millennial Dawnism."⁸⁵ Dispensationalists had private theories, and in weaker moments some speculated about when the end might come. But the party line was uncompromising in insisting that the time and date of the beginning of the end of history could not be known. Canadian minister P.W. Philpott, leader of a Christian Worker's church movement, wrote: "The Scriptures gives us approximate signs of the end of this age—I say approximate, mark you—because I believe that they enable us only to approximate, certainly not to calculate—the time of the end."⁸⁶ While calculations from prophetic history remained popular, they were just as often treated with a healthy dose of

⁸⁵ Clarence Larkin, *The Spirit World* (Glenside, PA: Rev. Clarence Larkin Estate, 1921), 18. Arno Gaebelein offered a similarly vituperous critique of time-setting religious movements, in his discussion of prophetic days: "We believe these 2300 days are therefore literal days and have found their literal fulfillment in the dreadful days of this wicked king from the North. There is no other meaning attached to these days and the foolish speculations that these days are years, etc., lacks scriptural foundation altogether. Such views and fanciful interpretations bring the study of Prophecy in disrepute. We have special reference to the Seventh Day Adventist delusion. They teach the abominable untruth that the Lord Jesus Christ did not enter into the Holiest till the year 1844 had been reached, because this is according to their reckoning 2300 years after Cyrus had issued the command to build the temple. That this is a denial of the Gospel itself and satanic is self evident." Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Annotated Bible: The Holy Scriptures Analyzed and Annotated, vol. 4* (New York: Our Hope, 1921), 100.

⁸⁶ P. W. Philpott, "Coming Events Cast Their Shadows Before," in *Light on Prophecy: The Proceedings and Addresses of the Philadelphia Prophetic Conference* (New York: The Christian Herald, 1918), 196.

suspicion.⁸⁷ For some the trouble seemed even more severe. For some dispensationalists, prophetic time setting was more than just a hermeneutic error; it was an assault against the appropriate boundaries of human knowledge about the future.

5.4.2 Method for knowing the future

Although suspicious of scientific prediction and religious date setting, dispensationalists maintained that with the right methods of inquiry, some things about the future confidently could be known. Proper use of method was essential to produce legitimate knowledge of the future. While matters of prophetic detail mattered a great deal to adherents, they were more open to schematic diversity than differences in epistemic methods. Over time, this methodological approach became described as literal interpretation of biblical prophecy.⁸⁸

When dispensationalists claimed to interpret prophecy literally, they meant something more like “materially,” in opposition to “spiritualizing” interpretations. Spiritualizing approaches (sometimes confusingly called allegorical) were those that claimed that prophecy would be fulfilled only “in spirit.” The most famous example was the idea that the Kingdom of God would emerge in the hearts of Christians rather than as a socio-political reality. Dispensationalists formed ranks to battle against proponents of such non-material fulfillments of prophecy, and language about “literal interpretation” served as their banner. Despite diverging chronologies and predictive schematics, premillennialists all believed that the future would involve supernatural intervention in the material

⁸⁷ For example, of Daniel’s famous “seventy weeks,” C.I. Scofield waffled between precise calculation and vague prediction: “These are “weeks” or more accurately, sevens of years; seventy weeks of seven years each. ... The seventy weeks are divided into seven = 49 years; sixty-two = 434 years; one = 7 years” all to be calculated accurately, yet the weeks in Daniel 9:26 were “obviously an indeterminate period. The date of the crucifixion is not fixed. It is only said to be “after” the threescore and two weeks.” Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible*, note to Daniel 9:24.

⁸⁸ Much ink has been spilt about the dispensational use of “literal” hermeneutics, and much of it misguided. Few dispensational leaders used only one method for reading the Bible, and none employed a simple mechanistic approach to language. Claiming “the literal sense” rarely implied a particular linguistic philosophy, nor indicated an absolute, one-to-one correspondence between signifiers and signified. Instead, the rhetoric of “literal interpretation” served to stake out affiliations with a particular theological tradition.

world, not just changes in the hearts and minds of people. Early premillennialist Nathaniel West described this approach as:

a protest against that vapid idealism which volatilizes the perfect kingdom into a spiritual abstraction, apart from the regenesis of the earth. It asserts that the literal is always the last and highest fulfillment of prophecy. It adopts the deep truth ... that glorified "corporeity is the end of the ways of God," working from within outward, from the spirit to the body of the believer, and from both to the renovation of the planet.⁸⁹

This emphasis on physicality was not universal in early-twentieth-century American Protestantism, and proved controversial. Most forms of evolutionary theology imagined spiritual realities as later developments, and thus better. Willett judged that emphasis on literal, corporeal prophetic expectation: "reverses the entire program of Christianity, and reverts to the conception of a material rather than a spiritual leadership as the means of realizing the ideals of Jesus."⁹⁰ Yet dispensationalists did not waver in their belief: for their eschatological hope to be a truly "blessed hope," Christ must return with a physical body to establish a material Kingdom.

Dispensationists expected all prophecy to have a literal, corporeal fulfillment, beyond just the Second Coming. "Prophecy invariably receives a literal fulfillment." Scofield wrote. "Not one exception can be found. Figures and visions, of course, abound in these writings, but when the thing signified by the figure is ascertained we may be sure that thing will come to pass."⁹¹ Scofield and his co-believers recognized that figures and visions were analogical language, and like everyone else, they thought analogical language required analogical interpretations.⁹² They created a complex dispensational hermeneutic that attempted to link symbols from past prophetic revelation to "things signified" in the present and future.

⁸⁹ Nathaniel West, "History of the Pre-Millennial Doctrine," in *Second Coming of Christ: Premillennial Essays of the Prophetic Conference*, ed. by Nathaniel West (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1879), 315.

⁹⁰ Herbert L. Willett, "Activities and Menace of Millennialism," *Christian Century* (August 29, 1918), 70.

⁹¹ Scofield, *Addresses on Prophecy*, 59.

⁹² Thus, prophetic signs were not thought literal in the sense of having signifiers relate only to their common sense signified. E.g.: the word "lion" in the book of Revelation did not refer only to *Panthera leo*.

5.4.3 What could be known

Even with appropriate methods, prophecy spoke only to a limited spectrum of reality. Given that, what did dispensationalists think the future looked like? What could be known? Three broad categories of future knowledge emerged: 1) the conditions of the world necessary to inaugurate the end of time; 2) the sequence of events during the end; and 3) the nature of the millennial kingdom to come.

Although dispensationalists avoided setting dates, they engaged avidly in searching current events for signs of the times. “Now, it is not only our privilege but it is our duty to read in the light of prophecy the events that are now transpiring.” Philpott remarked.⁹³ The purpose of such scanning was to produce watchfulness and urgency.⁹⁴ Assessing the proximity of the end was a complex task. Dispensationalists found their Bibles full of descriptions of the end times. Illustrating the scope of expectations, Philpott broke these down into categories: “Political, Commercial, Social, Moral, Spiritual, and National or Jewish signs.”⁹⁵ Wars, the general apostasy of the church, the political restoration of Israel, natural disasters, reconfigurations of the nations, false prophets and new religious sects all served as signs of the end times. But progress and acceleration could also indicate the nearness of the end. The speed with which time was now hurtling itself into the future seemed unsustainable. Philpott wrote: “Someone has said that the 19th century advanced human progress more than all the centuries before, and that the first decade of the 20th century surpassed the whole of the 19th. ... Surely we have reached the very acme of human genius and invention. I believe that all this is not only a sign of the times, but it is a *foregleam* of that most glorious day

⁹³ Philpott, 196.

⁹⁴ Dispensationalists drew on a passage from 1 Thessalonians 5 to both reject date-setting and promote a sense of watchful urgency: “But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3, KJV.) The figure of “a thief in the night” became so closely associated with dispensational watching for the end of time that it served as the title to a popular 1972 Christian film about the end times.

⁹⁵ Philpott, 196.

which is yet to dawn for this world.”⁹⁶ Progress, disasters, political and religious re-configurations: all of these proved important not for their own sake but for their possible correspondence with the pre-declared pattern that would usher in the end. Matching prophetic preconditions with existing national, social, and religious conditions proved both exasperating and exhilarating. Like listening for a single part played in a full orchestra, dispensationalists honed their ear on one instrument after another; excitement at hearing the expected notes often quickly followed when the score diverged from the expected pattern.

These conditions, collectively, made possible the fulfillment of prophecy in a historically unique way. “I do not believe,” Philpott believed, “that these conditions prevailed in the days of the Apostle, but a man must be blind who cannot see that we are living in the times of which James wrote.”⁹⁷ Likewise, Scofield wrote: “The passage [Daniel 2:44] fixes authoritatively the time relative to other predicted events, when the kingdom of the heavens will be set up. ... That condition did not exist at the advent of the Messiah, nor was it even possible until the dissolution of the Roman empire, and the rise of the present national world system.”⁹⁸ The more prophetically announced conditions that could be found in the world, the more likely the end loomed near. Yet even when all the preconditions existed, they still believed it would not be clear exactly when the end would come. And dispensationalists also scanned for evidence of prophetic conditions that had not yet come into being, as if to assure themselves that although the end could come very soon, it would probably not be today.

An aversion to date-setting precluded certainty about when the end times would begin, but once started, the sequences of events could be accurately predicted. Dispensationalists believed the end of time would begin with the Rapture—the bodily removal of living Christians to heaven. After the

⁹⁶ Ibid., 198.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 199.

⁹⁸ Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible*, note to Daniel 2:44.

Rapture, however, predicted sequences diverged among most gatherings of prophecy believers. The division, ordering, and sequencing of these events remained the great joy of prophetic interpretation. As one representative system, Scofield offered seven elements in his panoramic overview of the end of time: 1) wars would continue throughout the age; 2) the age would end in great tribulation; 3) a particularly evil person would emerge called the “little horn” or Antichrist; 4) ten nations would exist in the area once comprising ancient Rome and become a federated empire with the little horn as the head; 5) a remnant of Christian Jews in Jerusalem would begin preaching; 6) the second Advent would occur, with Christ returning to judge the nations; 7) a final battle at Megiddo, or Armageddon.⁹⁹

Figure 22: Larkin's "The Second Coming"

⁹⁹ C.I. Scofield, "The Last World Empire and Armageddon," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 108.430 (July-Sept. 1951), 356-357.

Mapping and arranging all of the elements of the expected end times was an enormously complicated and elaborate activity, and one that produced very little consensus among premillennialists. Larkin, *Dispensational Truth*, 12.

Others parsed these events in ever more precise sequences. Generally speaking, the first generation of dispensational leaders in America were more interested in the meaning and nature of these future event than in creating elaborate systemization of the end times. But subsequent dispensationalists produced dazzlingly elaborate schematic descriptions of the future.

Lastly, dispensationalists believed one could accurately know the character of the millennial kingdom that would follow the end of history. James H. Brookes described seven changes that the Second Advent would lead to: 1) creation restored; 2) animals at peace; 3) civil governments at peace; 4) Israel restored; 5) end of sickness; 6) the dead risen; 7) the world converted.¹⁰⁰ Unlike subdued modernist visions of the Kingdom of God—as states of relatively greater justice and virtue—dispensationalists hung their hopes on a more dramatic utopia. The Blessed Hope they looked for was one where real, corporeal lambs could rest in safety and fellowship with actual lions.

Alongside universal curiosity about the future, Arno Gaebelein asserted that humans had, fundamentally, a teleological consciousness: “Man has a future. Nations have a future and a destiny. It is a postulate of our consciousness, that human history is heading towards a definite end.”¹⁰¹ Desire to understand the future, and the end to which it was directed, led dispensationalists away from the provisional mastery of the future that science promised, and instead to the robust system of signs and patterns they found in biblical prophecy. Claiming there were a limited number of things one could know with certainty about the future, they insisted these could only be known when approached through proper epistemic methods. Biblical prophecy, literally interpreted, revealed a modest set of facts: the preconditions for believing that the end would come soon, what

¹⁰⁰ James H. Brookes, *I Am Coming*, 7th ed. (Edinburg: Pickering & Inglis, 1895), 104ff.

¹⁰¹ Gaebelein, *World Prospects*, 12.

sequence of events would constitute the end times, and what the world would look like on the far side of the end of time. Yet collectively, these gave meaning to the whole of time.

5.5 Narrative time

Dispensational attempts to harness time—by dividing the past, critiquing the present, and predicting the future—all proved distinctive in American cultural life. Collectively, their approaches to time were all directed towards a more dramatic end: that of making time serve the purposes of narrative. Dispensationalists believed that time told a story, or at least that time was instrumental to the cosmic story being told.

Narrative time was time made attentive to people. The demand for such a temporal construction grew alongside the nineteenth-century popularization of ordinary time, the time of geologists and evolutionary historians. As philosopher Paul Ricoeur noted, ordinary time appeared as little more than “a linear succession of instants.”¹⁰² The problem with ordinary time was that it had limited capacity for sustaining plot, and thus limited capacity for containing meaning. Even the simplest story demanded that time function as more than just a succession of instants. Instead, plot provided meaning by linking events, suggesting that the meaning came not simply from their sequence, but from their relationships with each other.¹⁰³ Without a sense that it led somewhere, ordinary time (as in geology, evolution, and annalistic history) revealed the most boring story ever told, in which one thing followed another for no particular purpose, towards no particular goal. For dispensationalists (as for many others) narration rescued meaning from ordinary time. Narrative time was measured in terms of human concerns. “The time of a narrative is public time,” Ricoeur

¹⁰² Paul Ricoeur, “Narrative Time,” *Critical Inquiry* 7:1 (Autumn, 1980), 170.

¹⁰³ Ricoeur described this need for non-chronological time in narrative as “the configurational dimension, according to which the plot construes significant wholes out of scattered events. ... I understand this to be the act of the plot, as eliciting a pattern from a succession.” *Ibid.*, 178.

suggested, “but not in the sense of ordinary time, indifferent to human beings, to their acting and their suffering.”¹⁰⁴ Instead of ordinary time, narrative time directed people from a meaningful past to a comprehensible present and towards a purposeful end.

The future, or the end, offered the key to compelling narrative.¹⁰⁵ Teleological dispensational narratives balanced knowable predictions with uncertain contingencies in order to produce a compelling drama that gave meaning to all of time and the cosmos. Within these teleological narratives, plot provided the mechanism by which history became encoded in memory.¹⁰⁶ In turn, the plot that dispensationalists saw streaking through time—“God’s Plans and Purposes for the Ages”—was one in which time was not absolute, nor inexorable, but disjunctive, controlled by God, and leading purposefully toward a glorious end in the corporeal Kingdom of God. As dispensationalists rejected ordinary time as meaningful, exchanging it for grand narratives, they came to accept what Ricoeur called: “the primacy of the future over the past and the present in the unitary constituting of time.”¹⁰⁷

Dispensational time, stripped of its ultimate authority, became important for its narrative role, and for its practical function. C.I. Scofield, reflecting on the future-directed narratives of dispensationalism, remarked, “it is expectation which forms us—that which we look forward to; a large element of hope or of fear, whichever it may be.... [God] unfolds for us the magnificent future, and shows us our relation to that future, and then says in effect, now let that mould you

¹⁰⁴ Ricoeur, “Narrative Time,” 175.

¹⁰⁵ In some cases, like in the case of modernity with its teleology of the present, the meaningful end was not the future, but the present.

¹⁰⁶ Ricoeur described this process: “By reading the end into the beginning and the beginning into the end, we learn to read time backward, as the recapitulation of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences. In this way, the plot does not merely establish human action “in” time, it also establishes it in memory. And memory in turn repeats—re-collects—the course of events according to an order that is the counterpart of the stretching-along of time between a beginning and an end.” Ibid., 183.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 189.

here; let that react upon what you are now.”¹⁰⁸ This, then, was the purpose of engineering and harnessing time: to tell a story directed at the future that would produce present character and give meaning to life.

¹⁰⁸ C.I. Scofield, “Influence of Prophetic Truth Upon Character and Conduct,” *Addresses on Prophecy* (New York: Our Hope, 1910), 5, 8.

6. Engineering Texts and the *Scofield Reference Bible*

By 1915, California oilman and fundamentalist partisan Lyman Stewart had built a philanthropic empire. Stewart gave broadly from his considerable wealth, supporting Bible colleges and foreign missions and, most famously, funding the publication of *The Fundamentals*. As his philanthropy became well known, requests for aid poured in. One historian estimated that Stewart received ten thousand letters asking for money.¹ One of those letters, from a convict named Harold A. Lane, made an unusual request:

Dear Mr. Stewart: As I have been sentenced to spend 20 days in the County Jail and to read the Bible cover to cover, and as the Bible I now have is of a very fine print, and the light rather dim, I would like to ask you to loan me a Scofield Reference Bible, which I will return as soon as my time is up. Altho I am in here for stealing Bibles I assure you most sincerely that I will return yours....²

Beyond the irony of the request, the most important point to notice is that Harold Lane did not ask for just any Bible, but for a *Scofield Reference Bible*. We can only speculate about his motives. Perhaps, as the letter suggests, Lane had seen a copy of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, and knew its innovative typography would be easier on his eyes than a prison Bible. Or perhaps he was more intrigued by the elaborate system of reference notes found in Scofield's "self-interpreting" Bible, and, forced to read the Bible alone in his jail cell, he sought exegetic help from the guided commentary. Perhaps, knowing that Lyman Stewart was not only a fundamentalist but also a dispensationalist, Lane hoped to improve his chances for success by requesting a Bible that had become a symbol of dispensational identity. Or perhaps, as a practiced, if not entirely successful, Bible thief, Mr. Lane just wanted to get his hands on an expensive edition of the Bible.

¹Robert Martin Krivoshey, "Going through the Eye of the Needle": The Life of Oil Man Fundamentalist Lyman Stewart, 1840-1923" (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1973), 363.

²Harold A. Lane to Lyman Stewart, January 14, 1915 (in Krivoshey, 363).

Figure 23: Harold Lane in prison

Harold Lane, seen here with the “black-covered volume provided him by Probation Officer Libby.” The judge in Lane’s case offered him the option of seven years in San Quentin or 30 days reading the Bible cover to cover. Lane was quoted: “I have always wanted to read the Bible, but it has always seemed that I never have had the time. Now I must and I am glad of it. I only hope that Judge Wilbur will not expect me to remember all of the names I have read in it. I have been told that for nineteen hundred years wise men have been pondering over this the Bible’s wisdom, so naturally I cannot be expected to understand all I have read.” Harold Lane, in “Must Read Bible 30 Days: Sentence Follows Theft,” *Los Angeles Examiner* (January 14, 1915), 1.

The sources do not reveal whether Harold Lane's request was granted, and we will never know his true motives. But the story suggests how the *Scofield Reference Bible* functioned in twentieth-century North American religion. It acted as a theological resource, as a symbol of fundamentalist identity, and as a commodity. But most important, the Scofield Bible’s reputation came from its role in articulating and disseminating a new understanding of the world, best described as dispensational modernism.

What was this dispensational modernism? Dispensationalism was usually described in terms of theology. Most historical accounts describe dispensationalism as a set of strange

eschatological beliefs about biblical prophecy. In this vein, historians such as Ernest Sandeen offered a standard account of dispensationalism as a theological development, with origins in Plymouth Brethren preacher John Nelson Darby, and emphasizing distinctive beliefs such as an any-moment secret rapture and a doctrine of the church as part of a “great parenthesis” in prophetic history.³ But when viewed more broadly, dispensationalism is better understood as a constellation of ideas about time, narrative, and epistemic authority. Dispensationalists emphasized the necessity of *method* in theological, epistemological, and cultural inquiry, and sought to produce confidence through precision, quantification, professionalized scholarly explanation, and scientific analysis. Of the various expressions of modernism that emerged between 1880 and 1920, dispensational modernism—though seldom credited as a form of modernism at all—wielded the greatest influence over American popular and religious culture throughout the twentieth century and into the present.⁴

6.1 History of marginal annotation

For all its innovations, the *Scofield Reference Bible* did not emerge from thin air. It had many predecessors, in form and function. Annotated editions of the Bible existed in all eras of history, and the text of Christian Scripture appeared on a page with marginal company more often than without. Among the early English Bibles, commentary was the rule rather than the exception, because clergy mistrusted what would happen if the masses tried to interpret the Bible without

³ Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism; British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 62ff., In his account, Sandeen stressed that the systems of dispensations themselves were not as important to Darby as his futurist eschatology: “Darby’s distinctive beliefs were ... the doctrine of the secret rapture and the subsequent necessity to divide the New Testament into Jewish and churchly texts.” Ibid., 70.

⁴ Even though dispensational theology has lost ground over the past decades, dispensational thinking more broadly understood is deeply rooted in American popular culture. Examples abound. In the past decade, the 65 million copies sold of the *Left Behind* books surely appealed to millions of Americans who do not have any kind of fully formed dispensational theology, but instead harbored vague notions of teleological end, rapture, or biblical prophecy. Even more telling is the presence of dispensational ideas and interpretive methods in global religious movements.

guidance. For example, the Geneva Bible, first published in 1560, included 300,000 words of theological commentary in its margins, making up roughly thirty percent of the printed text.⁵

Yet alongside this tradition of marginal annotation stood a competing tradition of textual purity. In the sixteenth century, the translator William Tyndale opposed annotation, believing it promoted the power of the Church by bolstering its interpretive authority. And in 1611 the Authorized, or King James Version of the Bible was published without any interpretive commentary. James, it was reported, demanded that no marginal notes be added, as he felt the Geneva Bible included: “some notes very partiall, vntrue, seditious, and sauouring too much of daungerous, and trayterous conceites.”⁶

These two impulses in Bible publishing—for guided interpretation and for the undiluted Word—have remained in tension to the present. As James astutely recognized, at stake was interpretive power. In the intervening years, struggles over the right to interpret the Bible pitted professional clergy against lay readers, scholars against uneducated believers, and theologian against theologian. Literary scholar Evelyn Tribble described these tensions as: “The bitter struggle for possession of the Bible, which is framed by competing and contested understandings of authority.”⁷ Repeatedly these struggles for hermeneutic authority played out on the very pages of the Bible itself.

These parallel traditions immigrated to North America along with the first efforts at Bible publishing and distribution. In 1778, the Scottish minister John Brown published a “Self-

⁵Harry S. Stout, “Word and Order in Colonial New England,” in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 21. On average, English translations of the Bible have approximately 750,000 words. See: Karen H. Jobes, “Bible Translation as Bilingual Quotation,” paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (2007).

⁶Quoted in Evelyn B. Tribble, *Margins and Marginality: The Printed Page in Early Modern England* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 52.

⁷*Ibid.*, 17. Law professor Laurent Mayali also makes this point about annotation, noting that “the relationship of annotation to the text is less a relation of meaning than it is a relation of power. ... In our culture it might be said that the text is the dominant image of knowledge. The annotation achieves its political function by fulfilling a need for knowledge that is first of all an essential need for authority.” Laurent Mayali, “For a Political Economy of Annotation,” in *Annotation and Its Texts*, ed. Stephen A. Barney (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 185.

Interpreting Bible” that included alongside the text of the Authorized Version: “Marginal notes, summaries, 'Paraphrases On The Most Obscure Or Important Parts', analyses and “Evangelical Reflections.”⁸ Dozens of editions of John Brown's Bible were reprinted before 1896 throughout North America. Unlike the Geneva Bible, which came with ready-made theological interpretations, John Brown's Bible offered guidance for lay readers to interpret Scripture for themselves. This populist appeal played well for nineteenth-century American audiences committed to the premise that every reader was capable of understanding the Bible alone, without clerical guidance.

Yet in nineteenth-century North America, un-annotated Bibles—particularly those of the American Bible Society—dominated the religious marketplace. Formed in 1816, the American Bible Society aimed to make the Bible available to every person. A radically inverted expression of the populist faith in self-interpretation informed their practices. They committed to publishing all Bibles “without note or comment.” This decision was partly pragmatic; the competing denominations that supported the ABS would not have been able to agree on any single set of annotations. However, it also encoded a different series of assumptions about the clarity and perspicuity of the Bible. Readers were expected to approach the text without any guidance from either church tradition or textual commentary and still divine eternal truths.

Both annotated and un-annotated Bibles fought for readers steeped in Common Sense realism. The dominant epistemology for many nineteenth-century Americans, Common Sense realism posited that the human mind was designed to understand accurately the natural world through sense perceptions. Mid-nineteenth-century evangelicals relied on a Common Sense hermeneutic to understand how they read their Bibles. Believers assumed that the message of the Bible was simple, clear, reasonable, and available to all. Combined with the prevailing republican sentiments in the United States, this philosophical position led to stark theological conclusions: that

⁸David Daniell, *The Bible in English* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 601.

each reader was warranted in making moral judgments and drawing theological conclusions from individualized readings of the Bible.⁹

After the end of the Civil War, however, Common Sense realism could not hold back the floodwaters of change. The devastating effects of the Civil War in the United States seemed to undermine both popular and elite confidence in Common Sense, as the consequences of Common Sense interpretations of the Bible—particularly regarding slavery—filled the graveyards of the North and South. Questions of authority prevailed: on what basis could believers believe, or have confidence in their beliefs? For readers with fully formed historical consciousness, authority came to rest in the technical, scholarly, critical method for Bible interpretation. Those unaffected by historical consciousness, though, were not spared from the epistemic crisis. Although the rhetoric of common sense persisted among evangelicals well into the twentieth century, shifts in their consumption of annotated Bibles and practices of Bible reading told another story. In both philosophical and everyday ways, common sense no longer offered sufficient warrants for believers. As practices changed, hermeneutical authority shifted from the individual empirical mind to the theological annotations accompanying Bibles, and the religious authorities that produced them.

Although Protestants retained the Reformation rhetoric of “the Bible alone,” their practices relocated epistemological foundations to higher ground. Annotated Bibles served as one means to shore up confidence in individual reading, by making it less solitary. Tribble described an annotated Bible as “a book which provides the private reader with the guidance of a congregation.”¹⁰ Lacking strong commitments to historical traditions, without strong clergy or church structures, and believing the Bible ought to be sufficient on its own, North American

⁹Mark Noll noted: “The hermeneutic inspired by these Reformed practices revered the Bible as the supreme guide to life but also inculcated a suspicion that other authorities beside biblical chapter and verse were not just secondary but dangerous. In other words, all of the Bible, but only the Bible, for all of life.” Mark A. Noll, *America's God* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 377.

¹⁰Tribble, *Margins and Marginality*, 32.

Christians sought other means for gaining assurance that their theological ideas were coherent and warranted. Annotated Bibles offered an ingenious solution to this dilemma.

Not surprisingly, then, the American Bible Society's "without note or comment" approach did not win the day. In the 1820s, 27 percent of English Bible editions published in the United States included some kind of commentary. By the 1870s, however, that number had jumped to 60 percent, as more and more Americans sought guidance for understanding their Bibles.¹¹ Despite the persisting Common Sense rhetoric of "the Bible alone," readers flocked to annotated Bibles to bolster their confidence in interpretation, and in doing so became increasingly adept at negotiating the contested forms of authority found in the text and margins of their Bibles.

6.2 Taxonomic reading

Technical biblical annotation appealed to the taxonomic minds of many Americans. The life of Baptist minister Clarence Larkin offers one of the best illustrations of the taxonomic mind employed by dispensationalists. Born in Chester, Pennsylvania in 1850, Larkin earned a college degree in mechanical engineering before working as a professional draftsman. At age 34 he was ordained as a Baptist minister and he spent the rest of his life in the pulpit. Larkin's combination of engineering education, drafting skills, and theological impulse proved powerful. This modest minister began drawing prophecy charts and other graphic representations of biblical doctrine to aid in his Sunday teaching, and his charts quickly captured the visual imaginations of American audiences. In 1918 Larkin published his first book, titled *Dispensational Truth, or God's Plan and Purpose in the Ages*.¹² Larkin's charts entered a world ready-made for their adoption. Seeking

¹¹Paul C. Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 37.

¹²Clarence Larkin, *Dispensational Truth; or, God's Plan and Purpose in the Ages* (Philadelphia: Clarence Larkin Est., 1920).

greater interpretive confidence, Protestants shifted their faith from their senses alone, and instead located authority in the *instruments used* to measure, classify, quantify, and describe the Bible.

Larkin offered a glimpse into this shift by suggesting that interpretation worked like architecture. He wrote: “A workman cannot intelligently do his work without a plan. He must have drawings and specifications.... To this end charts are indispensable. ... While the drawings and specifications of a building are separate, they must correspond. So a Biblical chart must correspond with the “Word of God,” or it may lead to error. The two must be compared.”¹³ Larkin, like many other Christians of his generation, felt believers could not read the Bible without a plan—expert guidance—or without specifications—such as charts. As engineers and their tools became the new authorities for the production and validation of knowledge, North American Protestants reflected the impulses of the broader society and embraced the overall mindset of these technological values. Larkin's charts show how two key features of this emerging taxonomic mind helped dispensationalists interpret texts: classification and quantification. These tools provided the basis for new processes of interpretation and the authority that gave people confidence in the meanings derived from these hermeneutical practices. From their origins in popular culture, taxonomic ideas became the backbone of the newly developing intellectual world of dispensationalism. Clarence Larkin did not create this taxonomic mind, but he, and to an even greater extent, Congregational minister Cyrus Scofield, appealed to it in what would turn out to be wildly successful ways. Scofield's heavily annotated *Scofield Reference Bible* encoded mainstream and dispensational theology in a framework of taxonomic methods and values, and became the most popular instrument for spreading dispensational modernism.

¹³ Ibid., 19.

6.2.1 Classification

At the core of the taxonomic mind lay the work of classification. Classification involved division, order, systematic regularity, and the imposition, or discovery, of hierarchy. Technical classification became the new, best means for constructing order in the world. Between 1880 and 1920, North America was flush with a popular mania for classification, as systems of order derived from tradition gave way before new taxonomies, which quickly became second nature to most Americans. Examples abound. In 1874 the Philadelphia Zoo opened. The first publicly owned zoo in North America, it symbolically demonstrated the human effort to divide and organize the natural world into genus and species, square cage next to square cage. In 1883, Canadian and U.S. railroad companies conspired to divide the continent into time zones, another symbolic effort to bring order, rigor, and clear demarcations to the continuous flows of time and geography. The Oxford English Dictionary was first published in 1884—a monumental effort to bring classification, definition, and precision to the unruly and disobedient practices of language itself.

Religious life was not immune to classificatory desire, particularly among dispensationalists. The key text for them came from 2 Timothy 2:15: “Study to show thyself approved of God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.” “Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth” became a catchphrase of the movement, appearing as the title of an 1896 tract by C.I. Scofield and peppering the books and sermons of dispensational leaders. The phrase alone communicated volumes. It acknowledged the Bible as the Word of Truth and thus the repository of authoritative meaning. But meaning did not appear directly to the reader, it came through the use of method. The work of interpretation was division, but division could be used for proper understanding (“rightly dividing”) or for misunderstanding. Scofield explained this need for

classification: “The Word of Truth, then, has right division, and it must be evident that ...any study of that Word which ignores those divisions must be in large measure profitless and confusing.”¹⁴

Building on this premise, the *Scofield Reference Bible* kept up a relentless pursuit of division, organization, and classification. The introduction, where Scofield outlined the “distinctive features” of his reference Bible, revealed the quest for order. It prominently highlighted: “a new system of connected topical references [in which] all the greater truths of the divine revelation are so traced through the entire Bible, from the place of first mention to the last, that the reader may for himself follow the gradual unfolding of these.”¹⁵ These chain references linked each mention of a theme or linguistic construct with each previous and subsequent occurrence. Chain references, appearing almost simultaneously in the 1908 publication of the rival Thompson Chain-Reference Bible, were a new development in marginal analytics, grounded in ambitious attempts to identify and isolate each theme in the Bible as instances of a distinct taxon. But Scofield’s Bible exhibited organizing impulses beyond the chain references. Scofield described how: “The entire Bible has been divided into paragraphs by italicized sub-heads while preserving the chapter and verse division.”¹⁶ Equally important, the commentary in the notes was built around systematic theological classification and divisions, such as those between Israel and the church, the famous system of seven dispensations, and a myriad of types and antitypes. Tallying up all these organizing aids, the *Scofield Reference Bible* included 806 notes, 3,040 subheads, and about 27,000 cross-references. This bold venture of classification brought a grander order to each passage of the Bible, by systematizing disparate themes into a coherent and harmonious whole.

¹⁴C. I. Scofield, “Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth,” (1896), 4.

¹⁵C.I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1917), iii. Furthermore, Scofield claimed, “All of the connected topical lines of reference end in analytic summaries of the whole teaching of Scripture on that subject, thus guarding the reader against hasty generalizations from a few passages or proof texts.” Ibid., iii.

¹⁶Ibid.

6.2.2 Quantification

The second major facet of the taxonomic mind was faith in quantification. The *Scofield Reference Bible* re-envisioned Scripture through the lenses of quantification. The notes brimmed with numerical references, units of measurement, and expository and recursive numbered lists. Clarence Larkin, who followed the same logic, explained it in a chapter titled “Scripture Numerics.” “God has been called ‘The Great Geometrician,’” he wrote, “and is said to do everything after a plan and by number, weight and measure.”¹⁷ Through quantification, the illuminated manuscripts of the medievals were transformed into enumerated manuscripts for the modern reader.

Quantification for dispensationalists involved more than just numerals. Its most basic form was enumeration: counting everything that could be counted. But more sophisticated quantitative devices were also used. Biblical math became a sub-specialty among dispensational scholars. Biblical mathematicians calculated everything from 3000-year-old exchange rates to the sizes and shapes of ancient Israel's sacred relics. Precision mattered. Numbers produced confidence by invoking scientific accuracy.

¹⁷Larkin, *Dispensational Truth*, 171.

Figure 24: Larkin's chart of "Daniel's 70 Weeks"

Showing biblical math at work, Larkin's chart attempted to translate the numeric symbols in the text of Daniel into precise periods of historical time.

The most fertile sites for biblical math were the apocalyptic books of the Bible, particularly the books of Daniel and Revelation. Dispensationalists pored over these texts with an unprecedented focus and relentless efforts at explication, enumeration, and harmonization. As such, it is no wonder they claimed these texts for their own, and that the dispensational movement came to be popularly recognized by its relationship to the biblical math of prophecy exposition.

The shifts in religious authority that this trend produced were so subtle as to be almost imperceptible. But where mid-nineteenth-century readers professed that their Common Sense reading of Bible offered reasons for confidence, their dispensationalist heirs expressed doubts. (After all, all sorts of people were reading the Bible yet getting it wrong: liberals, academics, Germans.) Reasons for confidence came not in the Bible per se, but in the means and methods for accessing and interpreting it. Quantification produced confidence; and in interpreting the Bible,

numbers counted. As the *Scofield Reference Bible* and Larkin's charts employed classification, quantification, and precise measurement in their hermeneutics, they tapped into existing cultural faith in the modern instruments for the production of knowledge. Even as liberal Protestants increasingly put their faith in historical-critical methods for producing reliable knowledge about the Bible, for dispensationalists taxonomic method became necessary to “rightly divide the word of truth.” This shift located dispensationalism in the heart of the modernist turn in epistemology: accepting the necessity of method for the construction of knowledge.

6.3 Intellectual status

This epistemic shift in American Protestantism was accompanied by the rise of new institutional structures for authenticating knowledge. These structures were predicated on two new forces at work in American culture: professionalization and specialization. On the one hand, professionalization challenged older hierarchical social models, and allowed greater opportunities for women, new immigrants, and cultural others to enjoy access to realms of authority. Expertise was learned, not born into. But on the other hand, this new class of experts threatened the epistemological assumptions of populism, Common Sense realism, and democratic order, by suggesting that knowledge production was not a job for an untutored mind, but a task best reserved for trained specialists. In formal settings for learning—such as universities and laboratories—authority increasingly came to rest on specialists, recipients of guild-based credentials.¹⁸

The structures of early-twentieth-century dispensationalism mirrored those of the culturally credible sphere of secular higher education. Dispensationalists developed schools (colleges like

¹⁸Historian John Higham noted the pace and breadth of this change: “Of the leading countries in the western world, the United States in 1830 was perhaps the least specialized and surely the most committed to the omniscience of the ordinary citizen. By 1920, however, America had embraced the specialist and sanctified the expert with an enthusiasm unmatched elsewhere.” John Higham, “The Matrix of Specialization,” in *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860-1920*, ed. Alexandra Oleson and John Voss (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 13.

Moody Bible Institute and seminaries like Dallas Theological Seminary), journals (such as *Our Hope* and *Watchword*), conferences (like the ones at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario and Sea Cliff, New Jersey), and networks of expertise and influence. Specialization, titles and degrees, and institutional affiliations all mattered. Sometime around 1892 C.I. Scofield began prepending the title of “Dr.” to his name, despite never having attended college. It is unknown whether he received an honorary degree or merely possessed a strong sense of self-worth. But the mechanics matter less than the implications: by the twentieth century, a Bible scholar needed a degree. A doctorate indicated institutional affiliation, the validation of one's peers—all specialists themselves—and authority derived from systematic, exhaustive study.

Scofield appealed explicitly to professional warrants throughout his edition of the Bible. His name and degree appear prominently on the title page, along with a list of scholarly consulting editors: all authors, professors, or college presidents. He emphasized his years of careful study and specialized knowledge in his introduction. Scofield described his notes as a distillation of:

the study of God's Word by learned and spiritual men, in every division of the church and in every land, during the last fifty years, under the advantage of a perfected text, [that] already form a vast literature, inaccessible to most Christian workers. The Editor has proposed to himself the modest if laborious task of summarizing, arranging, and condensing this mass of material.¹⁹

Expertise, so constructed, conveyed authority and confidence.

The genius of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, however, lay not only in its claims for expertise but in its ability to navigate the tensions between democratic populism and scientific specialization. The Reference Bible offered the masses the opportunity to become experts for themselves. Scholarly but clear annotations promised to produce non-hierarchical elites with distributed interpretive authority. That is to say, the Reference Bible promised the benefits and authority of specialized knowledge production to *any* reader. Unlike pure theological commentary—which took

¹⁹ Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible*, 21.

interpretive power away from readers—the reference notes helped readers interpret the Bible on their own, technically and professionally, to derive concrete theological insights. Scofield proved to be well positioned for navigating this tension. Despite having never attended college or seminary, by the twentieth century he had garnered significant accolades, in some circles, as an expert Bible scholar and teacher.

Scofield's initial plans recognized the goal of populist hermeneutical empowerment. "The thought," he wrote, "is to prepare an edition of God's Holy Word so clearly and simply divided and arranged that any believer of ordinary intelligence may read the Bible understandingly. People are not interested in the Bible because they do not understand it when they read it."²⁰ After years of pastoral work, Scofield knew that despite the rhetoric of Common Sense and "the Bible alone," readers struggled to make sense of the complicated interpretive options. A reference Bible was the perfect compromise, bringing the guidance of theological tradition and congregational interpretation into the pages of their Bibles alone. Scofield's work promised to make true again: "The conviction ... that the Bible is a self-interpreting Book."²¹

6.4 Scofield Reference Bible history

When the *Scofield Reference Bible* first hit shelves in January, 1909, it held several important competitive advantages. First, in content and features it appealed to the taxonomic minds of twentieth century readers. Second, it adroitly navigated the tension between interpretive populism and professionalized expertise. In production, marketing, and consumption it drew heavily on the resources of the emerging dispensational network. And finally, in its basic theology

²⁰A. Arno C. Gaebelein, *The History of the Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Our Hope Publications, 1943), 52.

²¹Ibid.

and purpose it reflected the beliefs and impulses of mainstream American Protestantism, particularly among the laity.

By the first decade of the twentieth century, C.I. Scofield was already an influential cog in the machinery of conservative evangelical networks that had coalesced around prominent evangelist Dwight L. Moody and his lieutenants.²² As a minister, he had built the First Congregational Church of Dallas from seventeen to more than five hundred members in just twelve years, before accepting an offer to become the pastor of the Trinitarian Congregational Church of East Northfield, Massachusetts. East Northfield was the home church of Moody, and being pastor to the famous preacher brought Scofield enormous prestige. By then, he was also well known for his writing. In 1896 he published his first work, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*. This tract laid out many of the key principles of dispensational teaching, and quickly burned through many print runs. Scofield was also institutionally vigorous. He helped found the Central American Mission organization in 1890, wrote and administered a thriving Bible correspondence course—described as “the largest Bible class in the world,”²³ and served on the boards of numerous Christian schools and institutions. All these achievements brought Scofield cultural capital, to be sure. But his greatest assets were the personal connections made through his involvement in the Bible and prophecy conference movement, particularly at the Niagara Bible conferences.

²² Scofield’s biography has become a controversial, and often badly told, tale. The period between his discharge from the Confederate Army in 1862 and his appointment to the Dallas pastorate in 1882 is full of more confusion than clarity. He was married, had two daughters, and divorced. He may possibly have spent some time working as a lawyer, and likely was involved in politics in Missouri. He may have been imprisoned, likely for debt, and possibly had problems with alcohol. Despite the many fascinating implications of this biography, I avoid the subject here since delving into the historiographic and theological controversies that motivated Scofield’s biography offers little payoff for understanding his epistemic premises and products. For a sympathetic overview of Scofield’s life and some of the biographical controversies, see: Todd Magnum and Mark Sweetnam, *The Scofield Bible: Its History and Impact on the Evangelical Church* (Paternoster, 2010).

²³ I am unsure about the veracity of this claim. It was possible that the line came from Scofield himself, as it appeared in a long article in the *Dallas Morning News* that appeared to have relied on Scofield as its font of information without indicating its sources. It noted: “He enjoys the distinction of conducting by mail the largest Bible class in the world, through the medium of the Scofield correspondence course, the number of students being over 5,000, 2,000 of whom are in America and other in all the civilized countries of the world.” “Dr. Scofield Publishes New Reference Bible,” *Dallas Morning News* (April 26, 1909), 5.

After his 1879 conversion, Scofield developed a close relationship with James Brookes, pastor of the Walnut Street Presbyterian Church in Saint Louis, Missouri and president of the Niagara Bible conferences. This opened up to Scofield a host of opportunities for revivals, speaking invitations, and conference presentations. Around 1900 he met the well-connected Arno Gaebelein, editor of the journal *Our Hope*. When James Brookes died in 1897, the prophecy conference movement divided over theological interpretations of the sequence of the end times. C.I. Scofield and Arno Gaebelein formed one coalition, and they organized new Bible conferences at Sea Cliff, Long Island, beginning in 1901, on property owned by department store owner John T. Pirie.²⁴

At the first two Sea Cliff conferences, Scofield and Gaebelein discussed a plan to systematize and popularize the methodological and theological ideas of the Bible and prophecy conferences. Scofield laid out an initial seven-point plan for a new reference Bible that would be compelling to a culture seduced by the taxonomic mind, including: “a wholly new system of references,” “definitions,” “divisions,” distinctions between fulfilled and unfulfilled prophecy, types (“conservatively treated”), “the important themes... grouped in footnotes under orderly heads,” and “right pronunciation.”²⁵ These features were designed to move beyond superficial understanding and prepare experts. “But along with this ministry to the whole flock,” Scofield wrote, “it is intended so to indicate the “deep things of God” and the larger aspects of divine revelation, that ministers, evangelists, and advanced students may be led into a deeper knowledge of the Book.”²⁶

Between 1900 and 1902, Arno Gaebelein introduced Scofield to a number of wealthy laymen who agreed to fund Scofield's project. Chief among the donors were Alwyn Ball Jr., a real estate broker in New York, and John T. Pirie, owner of the Carson, Pirie, Scott and Company

²⁴Walter Unger, ““Earnestly Contending for the Faith”; the Role of the Niagara Bible Conference in the Emergence of American Fundamentalism, 1875-1900” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Simon Fraser University, 1981), 103.

²⁵Gaebelein, *The History of the Scofield Reference Bible*, 52.

²⁶ Ibid.

department stores.²⁷ With this financial backing, Scofield was able to resign his pulpit at Northfield in 1903, and devote himself over the next five years to preparing the reference Bible. Scofield migrated in these years between Montreux, Switzerland, Oxford, England, Dallas, Texas, and Clifton Springs, New York. By 1906 Scofield had appointed seven “consulting editors” and conducted extensive mail correspondence with them on his work. The title page of the reference Bible would boldly list each of them with the title D.D., identifying them as professors, seminary presidents, and authors.²⁸ The intended effect was one of collective expertise, conveying the sense that the Reference Bible rested on amassed scholarly authority and professional interpretations.

²⁷ Sandeen, 223, Gaebelein, 49.

²⁸ Accounts vary on how much the consulting editors were involved in the project, although Gaebelein at least claimed significant input. See: William A Be Vier, “A Biographical Sketch of C. I. Scofield” (MA Thesis, Southern Methodist University, 1960), 77. Editors listed were: Rev. Henry G. Weston, DD, LLD, President Crozer Theological Seminary; Rev. James M Gray DD, President Moody Bible Institute; Rev. William J. Erdman, DD, Author “The Gospel of John,” etc., etc.; Rev. Arthur T. Pierson, DD, Author, Editor, Teacher; Rev. W.G. Moorehead, DD, President Xenia (U.P.) Theological Seminary; Rev. Elmore Harris, DD, President Toronto Bible Institute; Rev. Arno C. Gaebelein, DD, Author “Harmony of Prophetic Word,” etc., etc.;” An eighth editor was added to the list some ten years after Scofield’s death, listed as: Rev. William L Pettingill, DD, Author, Editor, Teacher.”

Figure 25: *Scofield Reference Bible* title page

Scofield's title and degree are prominently featured here, along with the credentials of his consulting editors.

In 1904, while in England, Scofield was introduced to Henry Frowde, publisher of Oxford University Press. Frowde was foremost a bookseller, and surrounded by the august intellectualism of Oxford he became distinguished by caring less about the contents of a book than its binding, margins, and potential advertising channels. However, he was particularly interested in religious publications, and he greatly expanded the Bible publishing business for Oxford. When he took charge in 1874, there were 25 Oxford editions of the Bible; within twenty years that number had

expanded to 78.²⁹ His crowning achievement was overseeing the publication of the Revised Version of the Bible, which sold more than a million copies before its release in 1881. Frowde's Bible publishing boomed in part because of Oxford India Paper. Between 1875 and 1914 Oxford India Paper was manufactured in great secrecy and used exclusively by the OUP, to significant competitive advantage. This paper was particularly thin, tough, and opaque, and it proved essential for making thinner and lighter editions, particularly those long books such as Bibles with added commentary. As a lifelong member of the Plymouth Brethren, Frowde presumably had sympathy with much of the theology expressed in Scofield's notes, but the overall increase in Bible publishing suggests that for him dispensational theology was less important than market viability.

Frowde had terminated agreements with American publisher Thomas Nelson and Son in 1895, and the *Scofield Reference Bible* became the first major work to be published by the newly established American branch of Oxford University Press. The first edition of the *Scofield Reference Bible* was printed in January 1909. It originally came out in eight formats, varying in type of material and price. The cheapest sold for two dollars, the most expensive—on Oxford India Paper and featuring: “Sealskin, divinity circuit, calf lined to edge, silk sewed, round corners, red under gold edges”—was priced at a hefty ten dollars.³⁰

²⁹ On Frowde's influence on the Bible industry, see: Peter Sutcliffe, *The Oxford University Press: An Informal History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978).

³⁰ “Ad,” *Our Hope*, March 1909.

OVER A QUARTER MILLION COPIES HAVE BEEN SOLD

The Scofield Reference Bible

Edited by REV. C. I. SCOFIELD, D.D.

With a New System of Connected Topical References to all the Greater Themes of Scripture, with Annotations, Revised Textual Marginal Renderings, Summaries, Definitions, and Index. **To which are added:** Explanations of Seeming Discrepancies, and a New System of Paragraphs, a Panoramic View of the Bible and Bible Chronology, with Twelve Colored Maps and an Index to Maps

HELPS ON THE PAGE WHERE NEEDED

Now made in two sizes identically the same, page for page, except for size of type

Complete synopsis of each book, giving important facts

Bible truths traced consecutively by connected references

Helps at the hard places on the page where needed

Chapter sub-heads dividing the text into paragraphs

The latest textual renderings are shown in the margins

Summaries of great Bible truths, explained Biblically

*Specimen of Type
SMALLER EDITION*

14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

Endorsed by the Pulpit

Rev. S. Parkes Cadman, D.D., says: "One of the best reference Bibles I have ever seen. It is especially desirable for the constant reader of the Bible who cannot obtain access to reference books or dictionaries at the time of reading."

Rev. J. Wilbur Chapman, D.D., said: "It is positively invaluable to me. I cannot express in words my appreciation of this great book."

Rev. M. A. Matthews, D.D., says: "I most heartily recommend it to all ministers, students, and gospel workers."

Rev. John Timothy Stone, D.D., says: "Many of our best Bible students consider the edition of the Bible edited by Dr. C. I. Scofield, as the most useful edition. His notes, printed on the same page with the text, are not only enlightening, but timely, constructive, and valuable."

Rev. J. H. Carter says: "If I could not replace it I would not take \$50.00 for my Scofield Bible."

TWO SIZES—Page for page the same. Both printed on Fine White and the famous *Oxford India* paper.

Smaller Size: Minion Black-faced type, size 7x14 1/2 inches.
Larger Size: Brevier Black-faced type, size 8 1/2 x 14 1/2 inches.

Smaller Size		Larger Size	
No.	Price	No.	Price
50	\$2.75	70	\$3.25
51	5.00	71	6.50
52	5.00	72	6.50
53	6.00	73	7.75
54	8.25	74	10.00
OXFORD INDIA PAPER EDITION			
55x	8.25	75x	10.50
56x	9.50	76x	12.00
57x	10.25	77x	12.25
58x	12.25	78x	14.50
59x	15.50	79x	17.50
Interleaved with a Blank Ruled Leaf between Every Two Leaves.			
265x	16.50	285x	19.00
With Dictionary of Scripture Proper Names, Oxford Index, Concordance and Maps.			
153	6.75	173	8.25
155x	10.25	175x	13.00
159x	12.25	179x	15.00
165x	14.25	185x	17.00
SPECIAL EDITIONS			
With helps compiled by Rev. E. A. Torrey, D.D.			
How to study the Bible. Including the Best Texts to use in dealing with different classes of people, and how to use them.			
50T	2.25	70T	4.00
65xT	13.25	85xT	15.00
NOTE: "X" after a number means Oxford India paper.			

*Specimen of Type
LARGER EDITION*

14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (a beheld his glory, the glory as of only begotten of the Father,) grace and truth.

Endorsed by the Press

The Sunday School Times
"Into a volume smaller than the ordinary sized Bible, printed in beautiful bold-faced type, are packed the concentrated results of the world's reverent scholarship, and all of it a thrill with spiritual power and with the presence of a living and coming Lord."

Association Men
"A piece of work of unique value . . . We commend this book to the favorable attention of the thousands of young men and boys in our Bible classes."

The Presbyterian
"There is a most reverent and scholarly yet simple tone through the whole comments."

Christian Nation:
"For ingenuity and results, this system defies improvement and renders superfluous scores of other volumes which have hitherto been esteemed an essential equipment of every scholar's library. . . . It is not improbable that its introduction will mark a new epoch in Bible-making, and largely supplant every other teachers' and reference Bible."

THE CHRISTIAN PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION, 5th and Ludlow, Dayton, Ohio.

Figure 26: *Scofield Reference Bible* ad

Ads such as this one highlighted the many interpretive helps in the Bible along with mainstream and expert endorsements, connecting professional and popular biblical interpretation in a single volume. *The Herald of Gospel Liberty* (Dec. 14, 1922), 1196.

The *Scofield Reference Bible* entered a crowded market. The January 3, 1909, edition of *The Sunday School Times* advertised more than a dozen Bible editions or study references.³¹ And the *Scofield Reference Bible* was far from the most affordable; for ten dollars a prospective Bible scholar could purchase the full six volumes of S.S. Scrantons's *The Exposition of the Bible*, over 5000 pages of commentary from "Twenty-seven of the World's Most Eminent Biblical Scholars."³² Other annotated study Bibles offered competitive features, filled with new archeological data, maps, textual references, and graphics of every sort. Yet the price of the Scofield Bible indicated its intended value, pricing it comparatively with a full library of scholarly biblical commentary.

The *Scofield Reference Bible* saw slow early growth, but by the time the first revision was published in 1917, sales had begun to accelerate.³³ A mixture of savvy promotion, built-in competitive advantages, and personal connections played a key role in this success. The *Scofield Reference Bible* inherited prestige by virtue of being published by Oxford University Press, lending formal academic credibility to a dispensational product. A breathy newspaper review from Scofield's adoptive hometown of Dallas proudly noted the connection between global prestige and

³¹Including: "The Westminster Series of Sunday-School Manuals," "The Adult Bible Class Magazine," "Tools for Sunday School Teachers: Three Great Lesson Helps," "Oxford Teachers' Bibles and Sunday School Scholars' Bibles," "The Holman Bibles (The Famous Self-Pronouncing Text Originated with the Holman Bible)," "Stout's Students' Maps of Palestine," "The Superintendent's Helper," "St. Paul's Travels Maps," "The Bible Study Union (Blakeslee) Lessons," "Wilde's Bible Picture Sets," "Pell's Notes," and "The American Standard Bible."

³²"Ad," *The Sunday School Times* (Jan. 16, 1909).

³³The rate of growth and geographic spread remains somewhat opaque. In 1959, Frank E. Gaebelein, commissioned by Oxford University Press to write a short history of the Scofield Reference Bible, made the claim that success followed soon after 1917: "For some ten years after the publication of the new reference Bible, its circulation showed a steady but unspectacular increase. But with the appearance in 1917 of the 'New and Improved Edition,' what was already a substantial success was greatly accelerated." Frank E. Gaebelein, *The Story of the Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 5-6. Yet in Scofield's will, drafted in 1921, a different picture of the Bible's prospects was presented. The will noted a gradual increase in sales, seen by the yearly royalties paid, noting: "Payments from Oxford to Scofield (March 31 to March 31): 1916: 9975.79; 1917: 14,891.91 1918: 13,541.80; 1919: 17,908.94; 1920: 20,028.89" Yet Scofield's will settlement papers presented a gloomy view of future prospects, noting: "Since the death of Cyrus Ingerson Scofield, the ledger of the Oxford University Press shows that there has been a consistent falling off of the royalties due the estate, as through the death of Cyrus Ingerson Scofield, there is no one to promote the sales of the various books written by the deceased, and that within a few years these royalties will be a minimum." "Will, Cyrus Ingerson Scofield," Joseph Canfield Papers, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary Archives. Nevertheless, sales did continue to increase. Frank Gaebelein noted: "Thus in 1930 the Scofield Reference Bible became the first book published by the Oxford University Press, New York, to attain a sale of one million copies." Frank E. Gaebelein, 5. Not fifteen years later, according to Arno Gaebelein, the Bible reached its second million in sales, or more than 1,925,000 copies sold by 1943. Arno Gaebelein, *History of*, 11.

local talent: “From the press of one of the oldest universities in Europe, that of Oxford, England, where for centuries the learned and the cultured of all the world have looked for inspiration and help, comes this volume, edited by the pastor of the First Congregational Church of Dallas.”³⁴

Scofield’s inauspicious background, self-education, and local past were not advertised, but not precisely hidden either. His popular roots mattered, in part because they cast even more starkly his achievement in finding national prestige and the scholarly credibility associated with Oxford’s press. The reference Bible was regarded as a masterpiece in translating the products of erudition back to the popular arena. The *Dallas Morning News* gushed: “Never before have so many reverent learned and spiritual men brought to the study of the Scriptures minds so free from merely controversial motives. A new and vast exegetical and expository literature has been created, inaccessible for bulk, cost and time to the average reader. The winnowed and extended results of this half-century of Bible study have been summarized, arranged and condensed by the editor.”³⁵

Moreover, Scofield had a network of influential friends and supporters. The March, 1909, edition of Arno Gaebelein’s magazine, *Our Hope*, devoted eight full pages to advertising Scofield’s Bible. It led off with a breathless advertising blurb (“Just Published! A Wonderful Bible for the English Speaking World, with many new and striking Features”), followed by a reprint of the three-page “Introduction” in full, then three pages of excerpts from Genesis, Isaiah, and Romans, and finally a sheet listing the “Styles and Prices” for each of the eight available editions. Regular promotions recurred, such as the September 1909, editorial tidbit stating: “We call attention to the *Scofield Reference Bible*. It is doing great good. If you have not yet obtained a copy, write us about it at once.”³⁶ While other reference bibles saw such accolades appear in the advertising sections, the presence of recommendations within the editorial section spoke to the special promotion of

³⁴ “Dr. Scofield Publishes New Reference Bible,” *Dallas Morning News* (April 26, 1909), 5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁶ *Our Hope* (September, 1909).

Scofield's work. The far more widely circulated *Sunday School Times* also proved to be a friend of the Reference Bible. In June, 1909, it ran a similarly glowing review that began: "There is something very stimulating in the new *Scofield Reference Bible* ... concisely presenting the best scholarship of the past generation or so, and characterized by a positiveness of faith and earnestness of expression that stir the reader's mind and heart."³⁷

From the beginning it was recommended as a tool for specialists, particularly among the laity. A 1909 editorial in *Our Hope* suggested: "It ought to be in every family and in the hands of every Bible teacher and S.S. worker."³⁸ Three months later the same source targeted clergy: "We think it would be a good work if this new Reference Bible could be put into the hands of as many preachers as possible," believing so strongly in the Bible's usefulness that it offered: "If any of our readers will do this we will gladly furnish these Bibles at 15% discount and pay the Postage besides."³⁹ In January, 1910, the first edition of the *King's Business*, the Bible Institute of Los Angeles's official magazine, announced the opening of a Book Room, and led off their list of "Best Books" with an ad reading: "The Scofield Annotated Bible: The best Bible for popular use. ... Every teacher and student should own one."⁴⁰ Conservative seminaries and Bible colleges routinely recommended the Scofield Bible to students, and dispensational ministers endorsed it for their flocks. Ownership became seen as proof that one was a serious Bible student. Charles Ryrie, a second generation dispensational leader, recounted how a childhood ministers "saw to it that all the pew racks contained *Scofield Bibles*."⁴¹ Later scholars of dispensationalism commented on this

³⁷ *Sunday School Times*, June 5, 1909, Vol 51, n 23, p 293.

³⁸ *Our Hope* (March 1909), 604.

³⁹ *Our Hope* (June 1909), 801.

⁴⁰ *King's Business* 1:1 (Jan., 1910), 18.

⁴¹ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 9.

wide institutional adoption, noting: “For many years, Scofieldism was the scholastic form of dispensationalism, being practically canonized in Bible schools, colleges, and seminaries.”⁴²

Scofield’s Reference Bible found broad acceptance beyond dispensational networks as well. The most frequently overlooked aspect of Scofield’s work was how it clearly presented mainstream American Protestant views about the central elements of the tradition. A fierce critic of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, Dutch Reformed Bible professor Albertus Pieters, conceded: “On the great fundamental issues of the Christian religion, such as the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, the deity of Christ, the atonement, justification by faith, regeneration, sanctification through the Holy Spirit, the resurrection of Christ, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting, it rings clear as a bell.”⁴³ To be sure, Pieters believed Scofield’s positions on typological interpretation, eschatology, dispensations, and ecclesiology represented an eccentric minority view, a “party within a party” of Darbyite futurist premillenarians, and he warned that his Bible was “one of the most dangerous books on the market. ... Its use should be quietly and tactfully, but persistently and villigantly opposed.”⁴⁴ Yet while Pieters and other critics focused on the perceived particularities of Scofield’s interpretations, readers were more likely to embrace the work for its mainstream interpretations of central doctrinal beliefs. Frank Gaebelein assessed that the central appeal of the edition was Scofield’s “genius for concise and thorough definition of the central doctrines of the evangelical faith.”⁴⁵ For the most part, the theological themes Scofield defined and traced were those central to historic Protestantism. Scofield’s plan highlighted his intention to make clear the most common theological ideas: “Whoever understands twenty great words of the Bible, understands the Bible. In the proposed edition, all the great pivotal words of Scripture, such as atonement, justification, sanctification, world, glory, kingdom, church, sin, sacrifice, predestination,

⁴² Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: BridgePoint, 2000), 23.

⁴³ Albertus Pieters, *A Candid Examination of the Scofield Bible* (Swengel, PA: Bible Truth Depot, 1938), 6.

⁴⁴ Pieters, 31.

⁴⁵ Frank E. Gaebelein, *The Story of the Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 10.

worship, etc., some sixty in all, will be briefly defined in footnotes.”⁴⁶ For many, the appeal of Scofield’s Bible came not from its premillennial distinctives. Instead, it found audiences because mainstream theological beliefs were presented and explained clearly through taxonomic methods that produced popular confidence.

All of this institutional support and popular appeal paid dividends, as the *Scofield Reference Bible* became ubiquitous among conservative Protestants in the first half of the twentieth century. Pieters, returning from a mission trip to Japan in 1923, was told by a colleague that: “no one could be a teacher of the Bible, in these days, without reckoning with the Scofield Bible, since it was so widely used, and so highly esteemed by many Christian people.”⁴⁷ By 1938 Pieters affirmed that the Scofield Bible “may fairly be called one of the most influential books—perhaps it is the most influential single work—thrust into the religious life of America during the twentieth century.”⁴⁸ By 1930 it had sold more than a million copies, and by 1943 that number had nearly doubled again. In 2011 it ranked as the best-selling book in the 500 year history of Oxford University Press, and the best-selling reference Bible in American history, with more than ten million copies purchased in the past century.⁴⁹ Three generations of dispensationalists have looked to it for guidance, and scholars have routinely confirmed Pieters’ assessment of it as one of the most important religious publications of the twentieth century.

⁴⁶ Arno Gaebelein, *The History of the Scofield Reference Bible*, 52.

⁴⁷ Pieters, 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁹ Perhaps. These are somewhat dubious facts that I have been unable to verify, but which get repeated often in scholarly literature. Donald Kraus, executive editor at Oxford University Press, U.S., agreed that the claim that the Scofield Reference Bible, in all additions, was the best-selling book in the history of the Press was “almost certainly true,” although records no longer exist to corroborate this claim. He also offered that Scofield Reference Bible editions remained the highest sellers “in terms of unit sales and dollars” although individual editions of other Bibles outsell comparable Scofields. Donald Kraus, email to the author, May 1, 2008.

6.5 Conclusion

The *Scofield Reference Bible* offered readers many new tools for specialized interpretation: chain references and hierarchically ordered texts, distinctive and enumerated systems, dispensations, and elaborately constructed typological interconnections. All of these instruments were created to satisfy the hunger of the modern taxonomic mind for classification, quantification, and precise measurement, and tapped into pervasive cultural desires for popular, accessible, professionalized expertise. Collectively, they built a new religious model of the world—dispensational modernism, with its characteristic understandings of texts and time—that revealed a deep modern conviction about the necessity of method in knowledge production.

One last story will help illustrate how the *Scofield Reference Bible* and its dispensational ideas functioned. Cameron Townsend founded the Protestant missions organizations Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics, and was an untiring translator of the Bible. Someone once asked Townsend about his qualifications for Bible translation. “Well,” he replied, “I didn’t finish college and never went to Bible school. Maybe I’ll finish my education sometime. But here [in Guatemala] I seldom see a book on theology or church history. I spend my devotional time studying the Bible and Scofield’s notes.”⁵⁰ For many American Protestants, this answer would prove sufficient. Scofield’s notes—the condensed expert interpretations and taxonomic divisions—offered methodological proficiency and theological confidence to anyone who cared to study it.

⁵⁰James C. Hefley and Marti Hefley, *Uncle Cam : The Story of William Cameron Townsend, Founder of the Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1974), 59.

References

- Adams, Henry. *The Education of Henry Adams*. Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1918.
- Ahlstrom, Sydney E. "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology." *Church History* 24 (1955), 257-72.
- Appleby, Joyce, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob. *Telling the Truth about History*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1994.
- Ariel, Yaakov. *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880 - 2000*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2000.
- _____. *On Behalf of Israel: American fundamentalist attitudes toward Jews, Judaism, and Zionism, 1865-1945*. Brooklyn: Carlson, 1991.
- Bailey, Kenneth. "Typologies and Taxonomies." *Sage University Paper Series on Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994.
- Baird, Henry M. *The Life of the Rev. Robert Baird, D.D.* New York: Anson D. F. Randolph, 1866.
- Barkun, Michael. "Millenarianism in the Modern World." *Theory and Society* 1 (1974).
- Bass, Clarence B. *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960.
- Beard, Charles Austin and Mary Ritter Beard. *The Rise of American Civilization*. New York: Macmillan, 1930.
- Beard, Frederica. "Why Every Sunday-School Should Have a Beginners' Department." *The Sunday School Times* 44:32 (Aug. 9, 1902).
- Bebbington, David W. "The Place of the Brethren Movement in International Evangelicalism." In *The Growth of the Brethren Movement*, ed. Neil T. R. Dickson and Tim Grass. Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2006.
- Bell, Marion L. *Crusade in the City: Revivalism in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1977.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Thesis on the Philosophy of History." In *Illuminations*. Translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 1955.
- Bergoffen, Debra. "The Apocalyptic Meaning of History." In *The Apocalyptic Vision in America*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1982.

- Be Vier, William A. "A Biographical Sketch of C. I. Scofield." M.A. thesis, Southern Methodist University, 1960.
- Blackstone, William. *Jesus is Coming*, 3rd ed. Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1916 [1878].
- Bloch, Ruth H. *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Boyer, Paul. *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Boylan, Anne M. *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.
- Bozeman, Theodore Dwight. *Protestants in an Age of Science*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1977.
- Brereton, Virginia Lieson. *Training God's Army: The American Bible School, 1880-1940*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- Brookes, James H. *Bible Reading on the Second Coming of Christ*. Springfield, IL: Edwin A. Wilson, 1877.
- _____. *I Am Coming*, 7th ed. Edinburg: Pickering & Inglis, 1895.
- _____. "The 1878 Niagara Creed." *The Truth* 4 (1878).
- Brown, Ira V. "Watchers for the Second Coming: The Millenarian Tradition in America." *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 39 (Dec. 1952), 441-458.
- Brown, Jerry Wayne. *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969.
- Burton, Robert. *On Being Certain*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008.
- Bushnell, Horace. *A Discourse on the Moral Uses of the Sea* (New York: M.W. Dodd, 1845).
- Blaising, Craig A. and Darrell L. Bock, eds. *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.
- Camp, Eugene M. *Christ's Economy: Scientific Management of Men and Things in Relation to God and His Cause*. New York: The Seabury Society, 1916.
- Campbell, Jerry Dean. *Biblical Criticism in America, 1858-1892*. Ph.D. diss., University of Denver, 1982.
- Carter, Robert Lee. "The Message of the Higher Criticism': The Bible Renaissance and Popular Education in America, 1880-1925." Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1995.

- Case, Shirley Jackson. *The Christian Philosophy of History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943.
- _____. "The Premillennial Menace." *The Biblical World* 52 (July 1918).
- _____. "The Religious Meaning of the Past." *The Journal of Religion* 4:6 (Nov. 1924), 576-591.
- Chapman, J. Wilbur. *The Life and Work of Dwight Lyman Moody*. London: James Nisbet & Co., 1900.
- Cheever, George B. *Lectures on the Life, Genius, and Insanity of Cowper*. London: James Nisbet & Co., 1856.
- Church, R.A. "Nineteenth-Century Clock Technology in Britain, the United States, and Switzerland." *The Economic History Review* 28:4 (Nov. 1975).
- Cohen, Patricia Cline. *A Calculating People*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Cohn, Norman. *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, rev. ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Cope, Henry Frederick. *Efficiency in the Sunday School*. New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912.
- Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. *A Social History of American Technology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Crawford, Leonidas W. *The status and evaluation of extra-biblical material in the curriculum of religious education in the United States*. Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1922.
- Croskery, Thomas. "The Plymouth Brethren." *Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review* 1 (Jan, 1872).
- Crutchfield, Larry V. *The Origins of Dispensationalism: The Darby Factor*. New York: University Press of America, 1992.
- Curtis, Edward E. IV. *Islam in Black America: identity, liberation, and difference in African-American Islamic thought*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002.
- Daniell, David. *The Bible in English*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Darby, John Nelson. *The irrationalism of infidelity: Being a Reply to "Phases of Faith"*. London: Groombridge and Sons, 1853.
- Darnton, Robert. "Epistemological angst: From encyclopedism to advertising." In *The Structure of Knowledge: Classifications of Science and Learning Since the Renaissance*, ed. Tore Frangsmyr. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- Darwin, Charles. *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, 2nd ed. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1861.

- Davidson, James West. *The Logic of Millennial Thought*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977.
- Dewey, John and James A. McLellan. *The Psychology of Number; and its Application to Methods of Teaching Arithmetic*. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1895.
- Dickson, Neil T. R. *Brethren in Scotland, 1838-2000*. Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2002.
- Duke, James O. *Horace Bushnell on the Vitality of Biblical Language*. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984.
- Edwards, Jonathan. "Original Sin" [1758], in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 3, New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2008.
- Ehlert, Arnold D. *A Bibliographic History of Dispensationalism*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965.
- Eliot, Charles William. *Addresses at the Inauguration of Charles William Eliot, President of Harvard College*. Cambridge: Sever and Francis, 1869.
- Evans, Vyvyan. *The Structure of Time: Language, meaning, and temporal cognition*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003.
- Farmer, Fannie Merrit. *The Boston Cooking School Cook Book*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1896.
- Findlay, James. *Dwight L. Moody*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969.
- Firda, Richard Arthur. "German Philosophy of History and Literature in the North American Review, 1815-1860." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32:1 (Jan, 1971).
- Fischer, Roger A. "'Holy' John Wanamaker: Color Cartoon Centerfold." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 115:4 (Oct. 1991).
- Foucault, Michel. *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Origins and Development of Psychoanalysis." In *Lectures Delivered Before the Department of Psychology, September 1909*. Worchester, Mass: Clark University, 1910.
- _____. *The History of the Psychoanalytic Movement*. Translated by A.A. Brill. New York: The Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Company, 1917.
- Fulop, Timothy E. "'The Future Golden Day of the Race': Millennialism and Black Americans in the Nadir, 1877-1901." In *African-American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture*, ed. Timothy E. Fulop and Albert J. Raboteau. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Gaebelein, Arno C. *The Annotated Bible: The Holy Scriptures Analyzed and Annotated*. New York: Our Hope, 1921.

- _____. *Hope of the Ages*. New York: Our Hope, 1938.
- _____. *The History of the Scofield Reference Bible*. New York: Our Hope Publications, 1943.
- _____. *World Prospects: How Is It All Going to End?* New York: Our Hope, 1934.
- Gaebelein, Frank E. *The Story of the Scofield Reference Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1959.
- Gibbons, Herbert Adams. *John Wanamaker*. Port Washington, KY: Kennikat Press, 1926.
- Gibson, Charles. *The Spirit of Love, and other poems*. Boston: Self-published, 1906.
- Giddens, Anthony. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1990.
- Gilbreth, Frank B. *Primer of Scientific Management*. New York: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1914.
- Gilbreth, Lillian M. *The Psychology of Management*. New York: Sturgis & Walton Company, 1914.
- Gilbreth, Lillian M., Orpha Mae Thomas, and Eleanor Clymer. *Management in the Home: Happier Living Through Saving Time and Energy*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1954.
- Gitre, Edward J. "The 1904-05 Welsh Revival: Modernization, Technologies, and Techniques of the Self." *Church History* 73:4 (Dec. 2004).
- Gosse, Edmund. *Father and Son: a study of two temperaments*. London: William Heinemann, 1907.
- Graham, Laurel D. "Domesticating Efficiency: Lillian Gilbreth's Scientific Management of Homemakers, 1924-1930." *Signs* 24:3 (Spring 1999), 633-675.
- Grant, F. W. *The Numerical Bible: Being a Revised Translation of the Holy Scriptures with Expository Notes: Arranged, Divided, and Briefly Characterized According to the Principles of their Numerical Structure*, 4th ed. New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1903.
- Grant, Warren P. "Scientific Management and Sunday-School Superintendence." *The Biblical World* 47:3 (March 1916), 161-167.
- Graves, James Robinson. *The Work of Christ in the Covenant of Redemption; Developed in Seven Dispensations*. Texarkana, AR: Baptist Sunday School Committee, 1883.
- Gray, James M. *A Text-Book on Prophecy*. Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1918.
- Gutjahr, Paul C. *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

- Habermas, Jurgen. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Translated by Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1985.
- Hall, G. Stanley. "Evolution and Psychology." In *Fifty Years of Darwinism: Modern Aspects of Evolution*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1909.
- _____. *Educational Problems*. New York: D Appleton and Company, 1911.
- Haltunnen, Karen. *Confidence Men and Painted Women*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.
- Hamilton, Michael. "The Interdenominational Evangelicalism of D.L. Moody and the Problem of Fundamentalism." (Unpublished manuscript).
- Harper, William Rainey. "Scientific Biblical Knowledge." *The Hebrew Student* 2:3 (Nov. 1882).
- Hatch, Nathan. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.
- _____. "Millennialism and Popular Religion in the Early Republic." In *The Evangelical Tradition in America*, ed. Leonard I. Sweet. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984.
- Hatch, Nathan and Mark Noll, eds. *The Bible in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Hefley, James C. and Marti Hefley. *Uncle Cam: The Story of William Cameron Townsend, Founder of the Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics*. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1974.
- Higham, John. "The Matrix of Specialization." In *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860-1920*, ed. by Alexandra Oleson and John Voss. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979.
- Himes, Joshua V., ed. *Views of the Prophecies and Prophetic Chronology; Selected from the Manuscripts of William Miller*. Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1842.
- Hindmarsh, D. Bruce. *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England*. New York: Oxford, 2005.
- _____. "Reshaping Individualism: The private Christian, eighteenth-century religion and the Enlightenment." In *The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism*, ed. Deryck Lovegrove. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Hitchcock, Edward. "The Connection between Geology and the Mosaic History of the Creation." *The Biblical Repository and Quarterly Observer* 5:18 (1835).
- _____. "Remarks on Professor Stuart's Examination of Gen. 1. in reference to Geology." *Biblical Repository and Quarterly Review* (1936).

- Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*. New York: Scribner, Armstrong, & Co., 1873.
- _____. *What is Darwinism?* New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Company, 1874.
- Holifield, E. Brooks. *Theology in America*. New Haven: Yale, 2005.
- Hollinger, David. "The Knower and the Artificer." *American Quarterly* 39:1 (Spring 1987).
- Holly, James Theodore. "The Divine Plan of Human Redemption, In Its Ethnological Development." *AME Church Review* 1 (October 1884): 79-85.
- Holmes, Oliver Wendell, Jr. *The Essential Holmes: Selections From the Letters, Speeches, Judicial Opinions, and Other Writings of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.*, ed. by Richard A Posner. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Hughes, Thomas. *American Genesis*. New York: Penguin, 1989.
- Hunt, Lynn. *Measuring Time, Making History*. New York: Central European University Press, 2008.
- Hutchison, William. *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism*. Harvard University Press, 1976.
- Ironside, Harry A. *The great parenthesis: timely messages on the interval between the 69th and 70th weeks of Daniel's prophecy*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1943.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. New York: Verso, 2005.
- Jobes, Karen H. "Bible Translation as Bilingual Quotation." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (2007).
- Kamen, Michael. *The Science of the Bible in Nineteenth-Century America: From "Common Sense" to Controversy, 1820-1900*. Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2004.
- Kern, Stephen. *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Kraus, C. Norman. *Dispensationalism in America: Its Rise and Development*. Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1958.
- Krivoshey, Robert Martin. "Going through the Eye of the Needle": The Life of Oil Man Fundamentalist Lyman Stewart, 1840-1923." Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1973.
- Kuklick, Bruce. *A History of Philosophy in America*. New York: Clarendon, 2004.
- Landes, Richard. "Millennialism." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. (28 Oct., 2005).

- Larkin, Clarence. *Dispensational Truth: or God's Plan and Purpose in the Ages* (Philadelphia: Rev. Clarence Larkin Est., 1920), 3.
- _____. *The Spirit World*. Glenside, PA: Rev. Clarence Larkin Estate, 1921.
- Lawrence, Bruce. *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989.
- Leach, William. *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1993.
- Lears, T. J. Jackson. *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880 - 1920*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.
- Levine, Lawrence. *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Lewis, Pericles. *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism*. New York: Cambridge, 2007.
- Lundin, Roger. *From Nature to Experience*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.
- Lyell, Charles. *Principles of Geology*, 1st American ed. Philadelphia: James Kay, Jun. & Brother, 1837.
- Magnum, Todd, and Mark Sweetnam. *The Scofield Bible: Its History and Impact on the Evangelical Church*. Paternoster, 2010.
- Marsden, George. "The Collapse of Evangelical Academia." In *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, eds. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993.
- _____. *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980)
- _____. "Evangelicals and the scientific culture: an overview." In *Religion and Twentieth-Century American Intellectual Life*, ed. Michael Lacey. Cambridge: Cambridge, 1989.
- Mathews, Shailer. *The Faith of Modernism*. New York: Macmillan, 1924.
- May, Henry F. *The Enlightenment in America*. New York: Oxford, 1976.
- Mayali, Laurent. "For a Political Economy of Annotation." In *Annotation and Its Texts*, ed. Stephen A. Barney. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- McLoughlin, William. *Modern Revivalism*. New York: Ronald Press, Co, 1959.
- Menand, Louis. *The Metaphysical Club*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2001.

- Miller, Glenn T. *Piety and Profession: American Protestant Theological Education*. Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2007.
- Montgomery, David. *The Fall of the House of Labor*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Moody, Dwight L. "The Work of the Holy Spirit." In *Twelve Penny Addresses*. London: Morgan and Scott, 1884.
- Moody, William Revell. *The Life of Dwight L. Moody*. Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1900.
- Moorhead, James M. "The Erosion of Postmillennialism in American Religious Thought, 1865-1925." *Church History* 53:1 (Mar. 1984),
- Morgan, David. *Protestants and Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production*. New York: Oxford, 1999.
- Needham, George C., ed. *Prophetic Studies of the International Prophetic Conference*. Chicago: Fleming H. Revell: Chicago, 1886.
- _____. *Recollections of Henry Moorhouse, Evangelist*. Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1881.
- Newton, Isaac. *The Chronology of the Ancient Kingdoms Amended*. London: J. Tonson, 1728.
- _____. *Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John*. London: J. Darby and T. Brown, 1733.
- Noll, Mark. *America's God*. New York: Oxford, 2002.
- _____. *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals Scholarship and the Bible in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986.
- _____. "Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought," *American Quarterly* 37:2 (Summer, 1985), 216-238.
- _____. ed. *The Princeton Defense of Plenary Verbal Inspiration* (New York: Garland, 1988)
- Numbers, Ronald L., and Jonathan M. Butler, eds. *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Olbricht, Thomas H. "Intellectual Ferment and Instruction in the Scriptures: The Bible in Higher Education." In *The Bible in American Education: From Source Book to Textbook*, eds. David L. Barr and Nicholas Piediscalzi. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982.
- Oleson, Alexandra, and John Voss, eds. *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860-1920*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979.
- Painter, Nell Irvin. *Standing at Armageddon, The United States, 1877-1919*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987.

- Pattison, Mrs. Frank A. "Scientific Management in Home-Making." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 13 (June 1913).
- Patton, Francis. "Preaching." *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 1 (1890).
- Philpott, P. W. "Coming Events Cast Their Shadows Before," In *Light on Prophecy: The Proceedings and Addresses of the Philadelphia Prophetic Conference*. New York: The Christian Herald, 1918.
- Pierson, Arthur T. *Knowing the Scriptures: Rules and Methods of Bible Study*. New York: Gospel Publishing House, 1910.
- _____. "The Life Story, and the Dream as Interpreting the Man." In A.J. Gordon. *How Christ Came to Church: The Pastor's Dream: A Spiritual Autobiography*. Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1895.
- Pieters, Albertus. *A Candid Examination of the Scofield Bible*. Swengel, PA: Bible Truth Depot, 1938.
- Poovey, Mary. *A History of the Modern Fact*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Porter, Theodore. *Trust in Numbers*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Pursell, Carroll. *The Machine in America: A Social History of Technology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Rall, Harris Franklin. "Premillennialism: I. The Issue." *The Biblical World* 53:4 (Jul. 1919), 339-347.
- Reed, Alonzo, and Brainerd Kellogg. *Higher Lessons in English*, 2nd ed. New York: Maynard, Merrill, & Co., 1896.
- Reid, Thomas. *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*. London: T. Cadell, 1785.
- Rice, Edwin Wilbur. *The Sunday-School Movement and the American Sunday-School Union*. Philadelphia: The American Sunday-School Union, 1917.
- Ricoeur, Paul. "Narrative Time." *Critical Inquiry* 7:1 (Autumn, 1980).
- Robert, Dana. *Occupy until I Come: A.T. Pierson and the Evangelization of the World*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
- Ryrie, Charles C. *Dispensationalism*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1995.
- Sandeen, Ernest R. *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970.

- _____. "Millennialism." In *The Rise of Adventism*, ed. by Edwin S. Gaustad. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.
- Sanders, Carl E. II. "Dispensationalism or Dispensionalisms: A System or a Family?" Paper presented at Evangelical Theology Society Meeting, (2005).
- _____. *The Premillennial Faith of James Brookes: Reexamining the Roots of American Dispensationalism*. New York: University Press of America, 2001.
- Saunders, Ernest W. *Searching the Scriptures: a history of the Society of Biblical Literature, 1880-1980*. Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982.
- Schleifer, Ronald. *Modernism and Time: The Logic of Abundance in Literature, Science, and Culture, 1880-1930*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Scofield, Cyrus I. *Addresses on Prophecy*. Chicago: Bible Truth Depot, 1914.
- _____. "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth." Findlay, OH: Dunham Publishing Co., 1888.
- _____. *Scofield Reference Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1917.
- _____. "The Last World Empire and Armageddon." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 108:431 (July 1951).
- _____. "The Problem of Human Destiny in the Light of Prophecy." 1895. C.I. Scofield Sermon Notes, Moody Bible Institute Special Collections.
- _____. *The World's Approaching Crisis*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia School of the Bible. Moody Archives pamphlet collection, Moody Bible Institute Special Collections.
- _____. "Will, Cyrus Ingerson Scofield," Joseph Canfield Papers, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary Archives.
- Scofield, Cyrus I., and Wilbur M. Smith. *The Spirit and Method of Bible Study*. Philadelphia School of the Bible, 1915.
- Schwartz, Hillel. "Millenarianism." *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed. (1987), 6028-6038.
- Shils, Edward. "The Order of Learning in the United States: The Ascendancy of the University." In *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860-1920*, ed. by Alexandra Oleson and John Voss. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979.
- Simms, P. Marion. *The Bible in America*. New York: Wilson-Erikson, 1936.
- Smith, Andrew F. *Pure Ketchup: A History of America's National Condiment, with Recipes*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996.
- Smith, Jonathan Z. "A Matter of Class: Taxonomies of Religion." *The Harvard Theological Review* 89:4 (Oct. 1996).

- Smith, William Robertson. "Bible." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 9th ed. New York: Werner Company, 1901.
- _____. *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*. London: A & C Black, 1889.
- _____. *Lectures and Essays*. London: A & C Black, 1912.
- _____. *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, 2nd ed. London: A & C Black, 1908.
- Smyth, Egbert C., et. al. *Progressive Orthodoxy*. New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1885.
- Smyth, Newman. *Old Faiths in New Light*, rev. ed. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887.
- _____. *The Orthodox Theology of To-Day*. New York: Scribner, 1881.
- _____. *The Religious Feeling*. New York: Scribner, 1877.
- Stallard, Michael. *The early twentieth-century dispensationalism of Arno C. Gaebelein*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 2003.
- Stuart, Moses. "Critical Examination of Some Passages in Gen. 1.; with remarks on the difficulties that attends some of the present modes of Geological reasoning." *The Biblical Repository and Quarterly Observer* 7:21 (Jan. 1836).
- Sully, James. *Pessimism: a history and Criticism*. London: Henry S. King & Co., 1877.
- Sutcliffe, Peter. *The Oxford University Press: An Informal History*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1978.
- Sweet, Leonard. "Millennialism in America: Recent Studies." *Theological Studies* 40.30 (2004).
- Taylor, Frederick Winslow. *The Principles of Scientific Management*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1911.
- Tichi, Cecelia. *Shifting Gears: Technology, Literature, Culture in Modernist America*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1987.
- Tribble, Evelyn B. *Margins and Marginality: The Printed Page in Early Modern England*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993.
- Turner, James. "Understanding the Populists" *Journal of American History* 67 (September 1980).
- _____. *Without God, Without Creed*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1985.
- Tuveson, Ernest Lee. *Millennium and Utopia: A Study in the Background of the Idea of Progress*. New York: Harper & Row, 1949.
- _____. *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968)

- Unger, Walter. "Earnestly Contending for the Faith"; The Role of the Niagara Bible Conference in the Emergence of American Fundamentalism, 1875-1900." Ph.D. diss, Simon Fraser University, 1981.
- Veysey, Laurence R. *The emergence of the American university*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1965.
- _____. "The Plural Organized Worlds of the Humanities." In *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860-1920*, eds. Alexandra Oleson and John Voss. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979.
- Wacker, Grant. "The Holy Spirit and the Spirit of the Age in American Protestantism, 1880-1910." *The Journal of American History* 72:1 (June 1985).
- _____. "Present Tenses of the Everlasting Life: Pentecostal Visions of the Future." In *Visions of the Future in Germany and America*, ed. Norbert Finzsch and Hermann Wellenreuther. New York: Oxford, 2001.
- Wanamaker, John. "The International Sunday-School Work." *Eighth International Sunday School Convention*. Chicago: W.B. Jacobs, 1896.
- Watts, Isaac. *The Harmony of All the Religions Which God Ever Prescribed to Men and All His Dispensations Toward Them*. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1742.
- Weber, Timothy. *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1983.
- West, Nathaniel, ed. *Second Coming of Christ: Premillennial Essays of the Prophetic Conference*. Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1879.
- Wiebe, Robert. *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1967.
- Willett, Herbert L. "Activities and Menace of Millennialism." *Christian Century* (August 29, 1918).
- _____. "Millennial Hopes and the War Mood." *Christian Century* (March 14, 1918).
- Williams, David Riddle. *James Hall Brookes, a Memoir*. St. Louis: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1897.
- Williams, Rhys H., and N.J. Demerath III, "Cultural Power: How Underdog Religious and Nonreligious Movements Triumph Against Structural Odds." In *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organization*, ed. N.J. Demerath III, et al. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Wright, Conrad. "The Religion of Geology." *The New England Quarterly* 14:2 (Jun. 1941).
- Young, Davis A., and Ralph F. Stearly. *The Bible, Rocks and Time*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008.

Biography

Brendan Pietsch declines to provide biographical information.