The Senses of Fundamentalism: A Material History of Sensing Bodies in Early Twentieth-Century American Fundamentalism

by

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Graduate Program in Religion
Duke University

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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

2016
ABSTRACT

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The Senses of Fundamentalism: A Material History of Sensing Bodies in Early Twentieth-Century American Fundamentalism offers a new historical narrative about the rise of fundamentalism. I argue that sensing bodies laid the foundation of fundamentalism. New kinds of Christian sensory practices around the turn of the twentieth century established the shared frames of reference that allowed a broad fundamentalist coalition to emerge. Fundamentalists felt their faith in their guts.

Each chapter of this work explores the role of one of the senses in fundamentalist life: sight, hearing, touch, and the spiritual senses. Using visual and material evidence, I explore how fundamentalists trained their eyes to see truth from dispensationalist charts, how they taught their ears to hear the voice of God on radios and phonograph records, how they regulated and controlled contact between gendered bodies through clothing, and how they honed their bodies to sense spiritual presences.

Using the methods of visual and material culture studies of religion, I examine the how specific sensory practices structured the everyday realities of fundamentalist life. I examine the specifics of how sensation operated in fundamentalist religious practice. Current studies of fundamentalism tend to treat the movement as primarily concerned with intellectual matters. My material and visual history of fundamentalism intervenes in the historiography to show that efforts to describe fundamentalism as an
intellectual movement have excluded important bodies of data. By studying ideas and doctrines, scholars have too long presumed that fundamentalists forbade material forms of religious devotion or disregarded bodies altogether. My work materializes the study of early fundamentalism, exploring how material objects and sensory practices undergird traditional concepts like “belief,” “theology,” or “literalism.” This project recovers sensing bodies as the cornerstone of fundamentalism.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents because they always supported me.

And to Jamie, who read every word more carefully than I did and made me keep going when I was sure I couldn’t.
Contents

Abstract........................................................................................................................................iv

List of Figures ..................................................................................................................................iv

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................viii

Introduction: The Senses of Fundamentalism ..................................................................................10
  Material Bodies, Spiritual Conceptions .........................................................................................10
  A Brief Overview of the Cultural and Historical Formation of the Senses .........................15
  Senses of the Term “Fundamentalism”: Situating the Senses in Historiography .................. 24
  Sensing Fundamentalism: Major Arguments of the Dissertation ...................................... 45
  Plan of the Dissertation ............................................................................................................. 49

Chapter 1 – Visually Dividing the Word of Truth .........................................................................55
  Introduction: Fundamentalists and Pictures ........................................................................... 55
  Foregrounding Images in the History of Fundamentalism ..................................................... 60
  Visual Culture and the Study of Fundamentalist History ....................................................... 64
  Clarence Larkin in Context: Reach and Influence ................................................................. 70
  Clarence Larkin in Context: Biography .................................................................................... 73
  Clarence Larkin in Context: A Visual History of Prophecy Charts ..................................... 78
  The Look of Inerrancy: Images, Materiality, and the Authoritative Word of God ... 106
  Taking Literalism Literally: The Visual Practices of Literal Bible Reading ...................... 117
  Conclusions: The Blessed Hope Viewed through the Prophetscope .................................. 131

Chapter 2 – Faith Cometh by Hearing: Sound in Fundamentalist Life .......................................135
Sonic Revivals and The Organ of Spiritual Change ........................................ 135
Sonic Modernity and the Study of American Religion ........................................ 138
The Ensoniment ........................................................................................................ 143
(Give Me That) Old-Time Religion: Phonographs for the Canning and Consumption of Fundamentalist Sounds ....................................................................... 146
Old-Time Religion and Aunt Jemima: Nostalgic Brands for a New Consumerism 156
The Religious Significance of Sound Quality ....................................................... 159
Old-Time Christian Records in the New-Fashioned Fundamentalist Home .......... 170
Churches of the Air: Radio, Spirits, and the Materiality of Imagined Communities 178
Sending the Word over the Air: Radio as a Broadcast Medium ......................... 182
The Church of the Air: Radio and the Dematerialization of Christianity .......... 192
The Spiritual Powers of Radio .............................................................................. 205
Coda: Fundamentalism and the Miracles of Modern Sound ............................... 213

Chapter 3 – The Look and Feel of the Truth: The Tactility of Dress in Fundamentalist Life ........................................................................................................... 216
Of Baseballs and Salvation: The Sense of Touch and the Suit of Redemption .... 216
Theories of Contact and Contagion for the Study of Religion ............................ 219
The Changing Sense of Touch at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century ............. 224
Dress in Fundamentalist Life: Controlling the Skin ........................................... 230
“A Throbbing, Beautiful Young Woman, With Almost Half Her Body Exposed”: Transforming Sinful Skin ....................................................................................... 233
“She has Declared that Their Eyes May Touch Her”: Medical Justification for Modest Garb .................................................................................................................. 246
## List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Advertisement for Clarence Larkin’s Dispensational Truth. From Moody Monthly, Nov 1920</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.......................................................................................................................................</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.......................................................................................................................................</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Joshua Himes, A Pictorial Chart of Daniel’s Visions, 1842</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.......................................................................................................................................</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Clarence Larkin, The Book of Daniel, from Dispensational Truth, 1920, p146-147</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.......................................................................................................................................</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Arnold Henry Guyot, &quot;The Days of Creation,&quot; from his talk &quot;Cosmogony and the Bible.&quot; New</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>York, 1873</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.......................................................................................................................................</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>William E. Blackstone, chart of Christ’s return from <em>Jesus is Coming</em>, 3rd ed., 1908, p72</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.......................................................................................................................................</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>An unidentified teacher posed as if using a prophecy chart. Undated (1904-1914). Postcard,</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n.d. Courtesy of the Archives of the Billy Graham Center, Wheaton, IL. Postcard Collection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(CN 636)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>A.T. Pierson, The Earthly Walk of the Believer Identified with Christ, from *Knowing the</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scriptures* (1910), p429</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>William E. Blackstone, &quot;The Mystery,&quot; from <em>Jesus is Coming</em>, 1908, p93</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>J.H. Burridge, A Concise Chart of Time’s Course Arranged to Show Epochs, Dispensations, and</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prophetic Periods in Consecutive and Proportionate Order, from <em>God’s Prophetic Plan</em> (1909)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>argues this image of the Antichrist will be given the power of speech.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Clarence Larkin, &quot;A Birds-Eye View of the Life of Christ,&quot; 1895</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>horizontal line represents a prophet’s viewpoint, while the images in the middle depict the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>course of time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 14 - Clarence Larkin, “Vertical Section of the Great Pyramid (Looking East),” from Dispensational Truth, 1920

Figure 15 - Clarence Larkin, “The Dispensational Teaching of the Great Pyramid,” from Dispensational Truth, 1920. These images argue that the Great Pyramid stands in the literal “midst” of Egypt and the world. Diagram “B” suggests that the pyramid’s design solves the ancient problem of how to square the circle.

Figure 16 - Heinz foods advertisement, "The Heinz Ideal," in The Sunday School Times, March 25, 1905, p170

Figure 17 - Columbia Phonograph Company advertisement, in The Christian Herald, January 26, 1910, p79

Figure 18 - Victor Talking Machine Company Advertisement, in The Christian Herald, May 4, 1910, back cover

Figure 19 - Dietz Individual Communion Service Advertisement, in The Sunday School Times, 60.6, February 9, 1918, p88

Figure 20 - Edison Phonograph Company Advertisement, in The Presbyterian Standard, March 6, 1912, p22

Figure 21 - “Family Devotion-Morning,” in Godey’s Lady’s Book, Vol 24 (1842), p241

Figure 22 - Ludden and Bates Phonograph Club Advertisement, in The Presbyterian Standard, April 23, 1919, p31

Figure 23 - American Tract Society Certificate of Contribution. New York, signed March 16, 1849. Courtesy of the Billy Graham Center Museum, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL

Figure 24 - “The Church Service Comes to Grandma,” in Popular Radio (1.3), July 1922, p178

Figure 25 - WJBT, Cathedral of the Air, Chicago Gospel Tabernacle, Radio Relatives Family Tree. Worldwide Christian Courier, Vol. 3, No. 3, March 1928, p2

Figure 26 - “Farm Family Listening to Their Radio, 8/14/1926.” U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Extension Service. National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD
Figure 27 - E.J. Pace, "Tune In For Him." In The Sunday School Times, November 27, 1926, p723 .................................................................................................................. 211

Figure 28 - "Broadcasting the Gospel to America By Radio." Detail from Worldwide Christian Courier, October 1928, p8 ............................................................................................................. 212

Figure 29 - "Typical Flappers." Prescott Journal-Miner, May 2, 1922, p1 ............................................................................................................. 238

Figure 30 - "Jazz Band that Performed for Church. Women Dressed as Men!" From John Roach Straton, The Menace of Immorality in Church and State (New York: George H Doran Co, 1920), p153 ............................................................................................................. 246

Figure 31 - E.J. Pace, "Man Looketh on the Outward Appearance, but the Lord Looketh on the Heart," from Christian Cartoons, 1920, n.p ............................................................................................................. 254

Figure 32 - "She Worships Pleasure and Fashion," in Margaret Slattery, The Girl and Her Religion (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1913), p.68b ............................................................................................................. 261

Figure 33 - Picture of James M. Gray, President of Moody Bible Institute. "Renew Your Strength Through Bible Study." Moody Bible Institute Correspondence Courses Advertisement from Moody Monthly (22.12I), Aug 1922, p1153 ............................................................................................................. 266

Figure 34 - "Members of the Sunday Party," images from the article, "'Billy' Sunday Comes to Town," Christian Workers Magazine, May 1918, p.720-721 ............................................................................................................. 268

Figure 35 - Souvenir Storefront at a Billy Sunday Revival. c.1910-1915. Courtesy of the Archives of Grace College, Winona Lake, Indiana. Billy Sunday Collection ............................................................................. 270

Figure 36 - Souvenir Store Interior at a Billy Sunday Revival. c. 1915. Courtesy of the Archives of Grace College, Winona Lake, Indiana. Billy Sunday Collection ............................................................................. 273

Figure 37 - "Billy Sunday Standing on the Pulpit with the American Flag Imploring 10,000 Men to Get on the Water Wagon with Him, April 4, 1909, Springfield, Ill." Courtesy of the Archives of the Billy Graham Center, Wheaton, IL, Postcard Collection (CN 636) ............................................................................................................. 274

Figure 38 - "Beating the Devil. I'll Fight to the Last Ditch, the Hellish Traffic." Postcard by C.U. Williams, 1908. 4"x5". Courtesy of the Archives of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL. Postcard Collection (CN 636) ............................................................................................................. 276
Figure 39 - E.J. Pace, "Praying Through," from The Sunday School Times (69.2, January 8, 1927), p22.............................................................................................................................................. 280

Figure 40 - Clarence Larkin, "The Threefold Nature of Man," from The Spirit World (1921), p84. ................................................................................................................................................. 300

Figure 41 - Clarence Larkin, "The Heavens," from The Spirit World (Glenside, PA: Rev. Clarence Larkin Estate, 1921), p49............................................................................................................................................. 309

Figure 42 - E.J. Pace, "In the 'Snare of the Devil,"' from Christian Cartoons (Chicago: Sunday School Times Co., 1922), n.p. ............................................................................................................................................ 325

Figure 43 - E.J. Pace, "The Missionary Volunteer," From Christian Cartoons (Chicago: Sunday School Times Co, 1922), n.p. ............................................................................................................................................. 327

Figure 44 - E.J. Pace from Christian Cartoons (Chicago: Sunday School Times Co., 1922) ........................................................................................................................................................................ 355
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Introduction: The Senses of Fundamentalism

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” – James 2:26

Material Bodies, Spiritual Conceptions

Philip Mauro came to what he called a “saving knowledge” of Jesus Christ on May 24, 1903. Being the ripe old age of forty-five at the time, Mauro had served for over a decade as a lawyer to the United States Supreme Court. He specialized in patents, but carved a distinguished career in many fields of law. Eventually, he helped William Jennings Bryan prepare the case against John Scopes at the infamous “Monkey Trial.” After his conversion, Mauro became something like the Chuck Colson of his day. A writer with a knack for tugging at the heart strings of common folk despite his life of privilege, Mauro had attained the summit of worldly accomplishment and found it wanting. Fundamentalism offered more. Instead of striving for success in the world’s eyes, Mauro advocated faith in God’s inerrant Word, obedience to God’s will, and trust in God’s promise that Jesus would come again. He spoke from experience about the perils of evolution, the fruits of sin, the spiritual costs of success, and God’s awesome ability to transform a life. His books were perennial bestsellers in fundamentalist circles and he spoke often at fundamentalist conferences.¹

In his book *Life in the Word*, Mauro argued that the Bible is alive. For him, this was not just a metaphor. The Bible was alive in every way a person was. In fact, it was even more alive than mere humans, for it would never grow old, never lose its freshness, and never die. Mauro said the Bible possessed a “spiritual, an inexhaustible, an inextinguishable—in a word—a Divine life.”\(^2\) The Bible was not merely a book, but a living being infused with divine power. The written Word was the same, in principle and substance, as the incarnate Word (Jesus). Just as Jesus had lived in a body as God, so the material Bible lived a divine life as it passed through history.

The Bible was a living being in every sense of the word, which meant it could reproduce. Mauro declared that, just like other living creatures, the Bible possessed the ability to reproduce according to its own kind. Since it possessed a spiritual life force, its reproduction “after its kind” resulted in the birth of spiritual beings. Despite what we might assume about the spiritual reproduction of a sacred book, Mauro insisted that this process of “spiritual generation” operated through very material means. The Bible produced its spiritual offspring through material mechanisms. Spiritual generation, Mauro said, “is analogous (as might be expected) to natural generation, being effected by means of a seed, which, having been deposited in a prepared place, is quickened by the Spirit of God, and becomes itself ‘spirit.’”\(^3\) For Mauro, spiritual life began at spiritual

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\(^3\) Ibid., 76.
conception. This occurred in a human body, when a prepared person “truly ‘heard’” the Word of God. A person with the right kind of bodily preparation, a person with the right emotional state, a person who experienced the right kind of hearing, heard or read the Word of God. All of these bodily processes aligned, transforming the acoustic or visual experience of receiving the Word into spiritual conception. During such a moment, Mauro described, “that word becomes truly a seed, spiritual and incorruptible in nature, which, when quickened by the Spirit of God, becomes the life-germ of a new creature—a son of God.”

Mauro noted that the Bible often made the connection between belief and life. It did this because belief operated according to the same principles of reproduction as human life. Through material means located in the body, the living spirit of the Bible produced children of God out of human beings.

Spiritual conception might seem like a disembodied topic, the equivalent of asking how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. But for Mauro, it was not. Spiritual conception happened in bodies. Hearing was a key part of spiritual conception. God’s Word entered a human through the material mechanisms of the ear. The human body provided the fertile ground in which God’s seed germinated. The senses, rightly attuned, made the spiritual womb of the human body receptive to God’s spiritual seed. The seed entered a person’s body, birthing a new spiritual being. And the physical body remained with the person. The spiritual child of God remained a living human creature.

\[\text{Ibid., 79.}\]
with a body. In fact, Mauro argued the whole work of salvation happened in bodies in order to bring eternal life to bodies. According to Mauro, Jesus was born in a body, died in a body, and resurrected in a body. And he was coming back in a real, physical body. His actions in the body proved that God’s power of life had overcome death.\(^5\)

This dissertation turns attention to the neglected history of the senses in early twentieth-century American fundamentalism. It examines how fundamentalists understood the sensory mechanisms of their bodies to work. It explores the richly textured worlds their senses opened. Fundamentalists’ doctrinal stances and exegetical habits have long fascinated scholars, but we still have very little idea what it looked like, sounded like, smelled like, tasted like, or felt like to live in a world with the inerrant, authoritative Word at the center. We have practically no idea how fundamentalism registered on the body, how it emerged in the bodily techniques and sensations of ordinary experience. Nor do we have a firm grasp of how fundamentalist common sense, by which I mean shared sensations, operated in everyday life. We have almost no idea how gut feelings and spiritual presences made themselves known to people like Philip Mauro. By sweeping through the neglected corners of the fundamentalist archive, I have discovered a history of early fundamentalism in America that put sensing bodies at the center of the movement’s success in the twentieth century.

American Protestant bodies began sensing in new ways in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These new modes of sensation often emerged from technological and scientific discoveries associated with modernity. Those who would eventually be called “fundamentalists” embraced modernity in their bodies. New technologies of seeing, new techniques of hearing, new modes of touching, and new bodily methods of contacting the spirit world enabled them to practice a new kind of Christianity. Proponents often described this new Christianity as old-fashioned, traditional, and orthodox. Historians have often focused on this movement’s unusual, polysyllabic ideas like “dispensational premillennialism” or “biblical inerrancy.” We have come to know fundamentalists as the people who defended the “literal” Bible and who redefined Christian orthodoxy to fit their own theological dispositions. Instead of floating in the clouds of theological debates, I argue that we cannot understand fundamentalism if we presume to know what words like “belief” and “literal” mean before we enter the archive. I sit with these sorts of terms in the dirty, raucous, unpredictable detritus of history. My goal is to make fundamentalism surprising again by turning scholarly attention to the way its well-known terms actually worked in the bodies of ordinary people.

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Changing ways of sensing at the dawn of the twentieth century laid the foundation for the daily practices of fundamentalism. Though their writings sometimes gave the impression that fundamentalists lived in a world dominated by texts and doctrines, I argue that bodily sensations stood at the base of fundamentalist life. Shared kinds of sensations bound fundamentalists together into a powerful religious movement. They adopted new modes of sensation in the name of the old-fashioned faith, creating something altogether different. The new Christian practices they inaugurated still resonate in the gut feelings of many conservative evangelicals today.

**A Brief Overview of the Cultural and Historical Formation of the Senses**

For a contemporary westerner, it is common to assume that humans have five senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. These correspond to five sensory organs: eyes, ears, hands, nose, and mouth. It is also common to assume that sensation is primarily an individual affair. Sensation happens to me, the individual subject, in my body. My mind makes sense of it. Sensory input allows me to gain knowledge about the external world through five distinct channels.

This view has roots at least as far back as Aristotle. In his treatise *On the Soul*, Aristotle sought to discover the nature of sensation. He began by enumerating the unique capabilities of each of the five senses. For example, he observed that color is uniquely perceptible to the eyes. Hands have no knowledge of color. Through experiments and word problems, he arrived at the notion that sensation happens when
the external world acts on a body in specific ways relating to the capabilities of each particular sense. According to Aristotle, the world impressed itself on an individual’s mind in the same way “in which a piece of wax takes on the impress of a signet-ring without the iron or gold.” During sensation, the world impressed the body and the mind in very specific ways that left the original matter of the thing intact. An apple did not lose its redness simply by being seen. Redness was a natural quality of apples, just as the ability to receive the impression of redness from a thing was a natural capability of the human eye. Nature bestowed humans with five senses. Objects made impressions on the five sense organs, which created images in the mind through a process as natural and direct as pressing a seal into wax.

Enlightenment philosophers generally adopted Aristotle’s taxonomy of five senses, but were far more inquisitive about how sensation actually worked. Significantly for the study of fundamentalism, the Scottish Common Sense Realist thinker Thomas Reid did some of his most important work on the five senses and the nature of perception. In his Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man (1785), Reid made a very important distinction. He separated sensation from perception. “In perception,” wrote Reid, “there are impressions upon the organs of sense, the nerves, and brain, which, by the laws of our nature, are followed by certain operations of mind. These two

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8 Of course, many thinkers during the centuries between Aristotle and Reid also investigated sensation, including Augustine, Avicenna, Descartes, Locke, and others.
things are apt to be confounded; but ought most carefully to be distinguished.”

Following Aristotle, Isaac Newton, and others, Reid argued that humans had five senses, which came directly from God. Sensation occurred as objects made “impressions” on these organs, which resulted in signals that transmitted through the nerves to the brain. God gave humans five sensory organs and limited their capabilities. The five senses demonstrated that “by the will of God, our power of perceiving external objects is limited and circumscribed by our organs of sense; so that we perceive objects in a certain manner, and in certain circumstances, and in no other.”

God gave people five senses through which to engage specific kinds of objects. But this mechanical process of sensation was not identical with the “operations of mind” that constituted perception. Sensation happened externally through objects and nerves and bodies, but perception presumed an immaterial mind belonging to a thinking subject.

While he believed the organs of sensation had been arranged into five and limited by God, Reid also argued that sensation bore a complicated relationship to perception. Sensation occurred through objects which made impressions on the body’s five sensory organs. But that revealed nothing about how the mind perceived. Since the mind is immaterial, Reid argued, it would be ridiculous to suppose that objects

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10 Essay II, chapter 1. Ibid., 77.
11 Ibid.
impressed it directly.\textsuperscript{12} Reid rejected the ancient Greek notion of mental “images” that arose directly through sensation. Instead, he permitted some ambiguity and noted that perception contained three general features: perception involved “First, some conception or notion of the object perceived. Secondly, a strong and irresistible conviction and belief of its present existence. And, thirdly, that this conviction and belief are immediate, and not the effect of reasoning.”\textsuperscript{13} Of these features, the last was the most significant. Reid argued that because the notion of the perceived object and the conviction of its existence are immediate, perception creates a basic, shared frame of reference for all human beings. Reid considers perception a great leveler of human beings because, “the information of the senses is as perfect, and gives as full conviction to the most ignorant, as to the most learned.”\textsuperscript{14} A child is just as convinced that what it sees is real and accurate as any philosopher is. People share basic assumptions about the general reliability of the information they receive from their senses. They share roughly the same knowledge that touching a fire will hurt, and they do not reach this conclusion through complex deductions or sophisticated reasoning. Perception creates a human community united by common sense.

Later philosophers pried open the gap between sensation and perception, challenging the naturalness of the five senses and the process of perception. Karl Marx

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 96.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 106.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 112.
challenged the assumption that the five senses held mostly natural characteristics. As far as Marx was concerned, the history of capitalism had imprinted itself on every aspect of reality—including sensation. In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx argued, “the forming of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present.”¹⁵ For a starving person, the sense of taste was not as relevant as the nutritional value of food. Only a person of means could afford to develop a highly sophisticated palate. The unequal distribution of capital produced material effects on people’s sensory encounters and on their very ability to sense at all. A rich person could taste and smell and see and hear and feel things a poor person could not. Thus, Marx observed “established society produces […] the rich man profoundly endowed with all the senses—as its enduring reality.”¹⁶ Society stamped its inequalities on the sensing bodies of people, affecting both how they sensed and what they sensed. It was not just that a rich person could afford foods a poor person could not. Rather, according to Marx, the structure of society influenced the real sensory possibilities of people’s experiences. A rich person knew the difference in feel between merely good fabric and truly luxurious fabric, could articulate the subtle differences in flavors of grape varietals, or could identify an artist through the brushstrokes. A poor person knew only hunger or satiety, images that were helpful or not, clothes that were warm or not. For Marx, there

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¹⁶ Ibid.
was nothing natural about the senses. Culture, specifically capitalist culture, created the real sensory possibilities people encountered in daily life.

Recent works of anthropology have adopted Marx’s posture toward the cultural formation of the senses, if not necessarily his conclusions. Unlike Marx, these scholars have looked beyond economics for factors that create distinct kinds of sensation. Media, technology, cultural values, bodily modifications, traditions, and a host of other dynamics contribute to the startling varieties of sensation observed in global cultures.

Anthropologist David Howes notes that the western taxonomy of the five senses and five corresponding sense organs does not hold everywhere on earth. The Cashinahua people of Peru, for example, acknowledge six kinds of sensation and six corresponding sensory organs: the skin, the hands, the ears, the genitals, the liver, and the eyes. They consider “skin knowledge” the kind of information a person gathers by feeling the sun on the arm, living alongside animals, and walking daily through the forest. They consider “hand knowledge” to be the sort of information a person learns through practice, such as firing a bow, chopping down a tree, weaving, making pottery, or cooking. They believe knowledge of a person’s mortality and immortality resides in the genitals. They do not acknowledge the brain as a seat of knowledge.17 The case of the Cashinahua illustrates that similar human bodies can experience sensation very

differently. Bodies may have roughly the same physical capacities, but culture conditions people to perceive the world very differently. There is no reason to assume that our five senses set the standard for sensation around the world.

What applies to sensation around the globe also holds in history. It is not safe to assume that historical cultures experienced the same sensations we do today. This is true even when it comes to relatively recent western history. Unless someone has written down their sensory experiences in a work that has been preserved in the archive, historians have almost no way of determining what smelled foul or fragrant, what tasted good or terrible, what looked appealing or unappealing to people of the past. As a "prisoner of language," writes French historian Alain Corbin, "the historian must endeavor at least to identify what conditions the border of the said and the unsaid." Sensation usually occurred without serious thought about it. People went through their lives and things happened. Only in rare moments do historians find them actually ruminating on what, how, or why they have perceived something.

The historian of the senses has the responsibility to reside in the borderland between what people said and what they took for granted. Corbin observes that early twentieth-century descriptions of large cities almost always included observations about the noise of automobiles. Cities were noisy places, clanking and honking and whirring

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with the new sounds produced by loud metal machines. Today, we hardly even notice the sounds of cars. Corbin urges historians to ask ourselves if the sounds of automobiles have actually disappeared, if their “extreme banality” has rendered silence where once there was noise, or if the sounds of cars are now so omnipresent that we simply no longer bother to notice them. Whatever the case, cars have not disappeared from our modern urban landscape. But historians of the future might assume otherwise as they look back on our records, since we no longer talk and write about them. Corbin urges historians of the senses to probe this frontier between the spoken and the unspoken. Investigating the sensory landscapes of the past means paying attention to the omnipresent and the banal, the things people took for granted about their environments and experiences.

Early American fundamentalism seems closer to our present concerns than, say, the Oneida Perfectionists. Fundamentalism’s pioneers are only a generation or two from living memory. Much of its activity occurred in the United States, in familiar cities like Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and New York. Its practitioners spoke roughly the same language as most historians of American religion speak today. Their accounts of conversion, Christian formation, the struggle against the flesh, and the rapture of the church sometimes seem remarkably similar to the things I heard growing up in the 1990s at a dispensationalist church in western Canada. Exploring fundamentalist sensation means cracking through this thick veneer of familiarity. It means asking
critical questions about the kinds of things people often took for granted in their daily lives.

Studying the senses of fundamentalism makes fundamentalism usefully unfamiliar. Yes, fundamentalists cared about beliefs. Yes, they looked forward to the Second Coming. Yes, they read the Bible “literally.” But when they cared about beliefs and anticipated the Second Coming and read the Bible literally, they did so with their sensing bodies in sensory cultures quite unlike our own. As just one example of the difference between our worlds, we can observe that a fundamentalist never walked anywhere more than about ten steps away from the stench of horse manure. As becomes clear in chapter four, this smell conditioned certain aspects of their opposition to Spiritualism. The fundamentalist Heaven smelled not of horse feces; the Spiritualist Heaven did. For fundamentalists, the reek of manure offered strong confirmation of their appraisal of Spiritualism’s religious value. Both literally and figuratively, Spiritualism was redolent of horse shit. As far as fundamentalists were concerned, God would not make a good Christian live forever with such a terrible smell. Because it makes fundamentalism unfamiliar, studying the senses adds useful layers of complexity to our understanding of the past. Studying the senses of fundamentalism gives historians of American religion a much richer and more nuanced perspective on a

movement too often glossed as familiar. In some ways, fundamentalists may have looked and acted much like their conservative evangelical descendants. In other ways, their bodies interacted with an alien world in completely unfamiliar ways. Turning scholarly attention to the sensory landscapes of fundamentalism provides new ways for thinking about the movement’s social organization, its values, the experiences of its practitioners, and the exceptionally ordinary things about the world that gave it its unique shape.

Senses of the Term “Fundamentalism”: Situating the Senses in Historiography

By attending to the senses, this dissertation aims to reevaluate some of the deepest scholarly assumptions about fundamentalism. In order to do this, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the major trends in the literature on fundamentalism. The value of studying the fundamentalist senses will become clearer once I have outlined how the senses of the term “fundamentalism” have shifted over time.

While there were earlier works that considered the impact of fundamentalism on twentieth-century American history, one of the first significant treatments of fundamentalism by a scholar of religion came in Ernest Sandeen’s *The Roots of Fundamentalism* (1970).\(^{20}\) Sandeen considered fundamentalism as a unique system of

\(^{20}\) For example, Stewart Cole considered fundamentalism a dangerous “reactionary protest” movement. Stewart G. Cole, *The History of Fundamentalism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1963), 52; Richard Hofstadter
theology. Since it possessed its own intellectual trajectories and serious ideas, Sandeen argued that fundamentalist theology was worthy of study in its own right.

Fundamentalism was not merely reactionary, but a genuine contribution to theology. More particularly, Sandeen argued that American and British millenarian theology provided the primary driving force behind the development of fundamentalism.\(^\text{21}\) He showed how the idea that Jesus was returning soon first took root among Northern, urban elites, gradually spreading to a wider American audience.\(^\text{22}\) Sandeen also identified another significant contributor to the rise of fundamentalism in the “Princeton Theology” of biblical inerrancy. As outlined by figures like Alexander Hodge and B.B. Warfield, this was the belief that the original autographs of biblical manuscripts were without error in every way, and that the Bible itself testified to this understanding of its own authority.\(^\text{23}\) For Sandeen, Princeton Theology coupled with premillennialism to provide the necessary elements for the emergence of American fundamentalism. In short, Sandeen showed that fundamentalism contained a complex set of theological ideas. Those ideas had distinct histories that made fundamentalism what it became.

Fundamentalism was more than social reactionism or anti-intellectual sentiment. It was


\(^{22}\) Ibid., 163.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 114–131.
a serious religious movement with unique intellectual content worthy of scholarly examination.

Then along came George Marsden. *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (1980) still stands as the single most significant work about the history of fundamentalism. While he agreed with Sandeen that fundamentalism was more than just a reactionary movement, Marsden shifted the conversation about fundamentalism to include much more than theology. For Marsden, fundamentalism was a set of ideas, a way of thinking, and a style of Christianity. It was an approach to being Christian in the modern world. It was a way Christians engaged thoughtfully with their rapidly changing culture. As a movement, it never had a mailing address. Instead, fundamentalism was “a loose, diverse, and changing federation of co-belligerents united by their fierce opposition to modernist attempts to bring Christianity into line with modern thought.” Marsden awakened scholars to the diversity of influences that shaped the loose “federation of co-belligerents” called “fundamentalism.” Future studies of fundamentalism would have to contend both with its intellectual history and with the broader cultural influences that shaped its formation.

Marsden famously defined fundamentalism as “militantly anti-modernist Protestant evangelicalism.” The definition had three parts. First, fundamentalists were

25 Ibid.
evangelicals. They emerged from the rich stew of evangelical fervor that had cooked in the nineteenth century. They cared about conversion. They possessed strong predilections for emotional faith and revivalism. They distrusted established religious authority. Second, fundamentalists were militant. As much as anything, Marsden demonstrated that fundamentalism required passion. Angry passion. Militant commitment to one’s principles. Fundamentalists were never the sort to sit in leather armchairs and muse about the world’s problems. They wanted to put boots on the ground to solve the problems they perceived in American society. Third, Marsden identified a strong opposition to modernism as a key unifying feature of the fundamentalist movement. As far as fundamentalists were concerned, modernism was the enemy. However, it is important to note the “ism.” While Marsden did study a broad range of fundamentalist responses to American modernity, he argued that fundamentalists opposed religious modernism. Modernism referred to a specific movement among Protestant theologians that aimed to bring Christian thought into alignment with modern science, modern historical methods, and modern cultural values.

Marsden’s book still resonates because it broadened the possibilities for interpreting American fundamentalism. While he acknowledged the vital role of Princeton Theology and premillennialism in shaping what fundamentalism ultimately became, Marsden’s approach added a third necessary element to the pot: Scottish
Common Sense Realism. This epistemological outlook suggested that ordinary people using their common sense could apprehend solid truth just as well as trained experts. It aimed to organize all available facts into clear schemes rather than make inferences about hypothetical phenomena. It preferred deductive reasoning to inductive reasoning.

Marsden took a long view of Common Sense epistemology’s influence in America. While it was once the dominant outlook among scholars at American universities, its prestige began to crumble in the wake of Darwinism and other inductive approaches to the sciences. Those Christians who became fundamentalists were among the last intellectual defenders of Common Sense realist epistemology in the American academy. Marsden’s revolutionary approach looked beyond the theological declarations of fundamentalists to the underlying epistemological and cultural assumptions that made them possible.

During the 1990s, scholars took aspects of Marsden’s definition and used them as a baseline for the study of global fundamentalisms. Comparison became the name of the game, as scholars sought to discern family resemblances between such diverse phenomena as Hindu Nationalism in India, Catholic traditionalism in the United States, and Pentecostalism in Latin America. In the opening volume of the massive set The Fundamentalism Project, R. Scott Appleby and Martin Marty offered a capacious definition of the fundamentalist family. According to them, fundamentalism was:

Ibid., 7, 11–21.
a tendency, a habit of mind, found within religious communities [...] which manifests itself as a strategy, or set of strategies, by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their distinctive identity as a people or group. Feeling this identity to be at risk in the contemporary era, they fortify it by a selective retrieval of doctrines, beliefs, and practices from a sacred past. These retrieved ‘fundamentals’ are refined, modified, and sanctioned in a spirit of shrewd pragmatism: they are to serve as a bulwark against the encroachment of outsiders who threaten to draw the believers into a syncretistic, areligious, or irreligious cultural milieu.27

This comparative definition had much to commend it. It emphasized that fundamentalists were “selective” in their religious opposition to modernity. They were not completely opposed to modernity or completely traditional in their religious activity, but identified particular sets of beliefs and practices from their tradition’s past as definite, absolute, markers of genuine religion. Bruce Lawrence put it succinctly: fundamentalists “protest as moderns against the heresies of the modern age.”28

While it offered some important insights about fundamentalisms in general, the comparative approach to fundamentalism had major blind spots. First, it suggested that fundamentalism was a reactionary mindset at its core. While scholars since Sandeen had studied Protestant fundamentalism as an organic outgrowth of evangelicalism, the new perspective emphasized the militancy and “anti” of fundamentalist anti-modernism. It treated fundamentalism as a reactionary, negative, oppositional posture of the mind. In

Appleby and Marty’s definition, fundamentalism was “a tendency,” a “habit of mind,” a “strategy,” through which “beleaguered” people sought to “preserve their distinctive identity.” Most of fundamentalism’s action happened in the mind.29

Second, the comparative perspective by necessity treated “modernism” as a general term. Marsden did not. For Marsden, fundamentalists were militantly anti-modernist in the sense that they strongly opposed the particular perspective of the self-identified “modernist” Protestant theologians. Comparative studies, such as Bruce Lawrence’s Defenders of God, argued that fundamentalism was a reactionary “religious ideology” opposed to modernity in almost all ways. Created by the conditions of modernity itself, fundamentalism offered an alternative ideology to the modern. Where modernity offered skepticism and pluralism, fundamentalism demanded absolute truth and purity. Where modernity advocated secularism in public life, fundamentalism argued that religion should be the sole basis of society. Modernity offered one ideology, fundamentalism offered another. Instead of opposing a small, but influential, handful of Protestant theologians, fundamentalism became a reactionary ideology. Located within modernity, fundamentalism became the ideological antithesis to modernities around the world.30

29 For an example of the overemphasis on fundamentalist anti-modernism, see: Maurer, Susan A., “A Historical Overview of American Christian Fundamentalism in the Twentieth Century,” in Fundamentalisms and the Media, ed. Hoover, Stewart and Kaneva, Nadia (London: Continuum, 2009), 54.
30 Lawrence, Defenders of God, 97–101.
Because the comparative framework treated fundamentalisms as anti-modernist ideology located within the context of modernism, scholars began to puzzle over fundamentalism’s often sophisticated relationships to modern media. In the comparative model, fundamentalism was supposed to be the antithesis of modernism, down to the level of ideologies and dispositions and identities. And yet, fundamentalists all over the world seemed to be influential early adopters of new media in the twentieth century. When radio was new in the United States, fundamentalists were on it. In Egypt, fundamentalists seized upon the advent of the cassette tape to circulate sermons. Almost as soon as there was cable television, there were televangelists. To overcome the conundrum of why anti-modernist fundamentalists seemed so enamored with modern media, Stewart Hoover and Nadia Kaneva proposed a move beyond “instrumentalist” models of fundamentalisms and media. That is, fundamentalists did not just use new media. Media also represented fundamentalism. Media coverage defined fundamentalism. New media offered new possibilities for religious representation. According to Hoover and Kaneva, “media are instruments of meaning construction and dissemination and they are contexts within which competing sets of symbols are proposed, promoted, circulated, and consumed.”

31 Ibid., 243.
the ways fundamentalism used media, but also how media made fundamentalist anti-modernist practices possible.

Scholarly works about fundamentalism published since 2010 have chipped away at the “anti-modernist” part of the scholarly definition of fundamentalism in a surprising variety of ways. In his groundbreaking study *Dispensational Modernism*, B.M. Pietsch adopted the tactic of narrowing his focus from fundamentalism to dispensationalism. Examining everything from clocks and cookbooks to zoos and engineering textbooks, Pietsch demonstrated that the “taxonomical thinking” and “engineering values” of American modernity made dispensationalism possible. According to Pietsch, “dispensational modernism” referred to “the epistemic and methodological techniques that undergird dispensational thinking […] a pervasive system of attitudes, assumptions, and methods that gave prophecy belief its meaning, traction, and popularity.”33 Dispensationalists were deeply modernist in many of their ways of thinking, their core assumptions about how the world worked. It is important to note that Pietsch never talks about fundamentalism as a broader movement. He leaves his readers to make the leap from dispensationalism to fundamentalism, carefully separating the two himself. If fundamentalism was anti-modernism and dispensationalism was fundamentalism, dispensational modernism simply made no sense. By distinguishing dispensationalism from fundamentalism more broadly, Pietsch

could build his case about dispensational modernism. But by unpacking the modernist assumptions of dispensationalists, Pietsch bit to the quick of the whole anti-modernist debate. If dispensationalists were such committed modernists, what about other fundamentalists?  

Like Pietsch, other scholars after 2010 narrowed their focus considerably from Marsden’s broad coalition of co-belligerents or the global comparativism of Appleby and company. In Guaranteed Pure, an innovative study of the business practices that shaped much of American evangelicalism in the early twentieth century, Timothy Gloege took great pains to circumscribe his terms. Instead of tackling the “anti-modern” aspect of Marsden’s argument, Gloege demanded more careful examination of the “evangelical” part. Gloege went so far as to use the term “fundamentalism” to describe only “members of that coalition of conservative evangelicals who rallied around this label in the early 1910s and 1920s.”  

Fundamentalists were those who self-identified as such. Gloege preferred the term “corporate evangelicals” to describe the subjects of his study, namely Henry Parsons Crowell, Moody Bible Institute (MBI), and MBI sympathizers.

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34 Ibid., 7–9.
Challenging Bebbington’s traditional four-point definition of evangelicalism, Gloege argued that evangelicals were those who adopted an individualistic and consumptive faith. They believed the individual’s relationship with God was the primary site of religious activity. They believed God spoke personally to people in their readings of the Bible, through specific thoughts or feelings, and through unusual coincidences. They were also committed to the idea that faith produced “measureable outcomes.” This made them particularly eager to adopt the values of modern business. His “corporate evangelicals” were evangelicals of the early twentieth century who rebuilt their faith on the model of modern businesses. The president of MBI during its most influential epoch, Gloege observes, was the same man who built the Quaker Oats cereal empire. This was no coincidence. It spoke to the core values of a new kind of evangelicalism. “By exploiting techniques developed to control a rambunctious marketplace,” Gloege argues, “[corporate evangelicals at MBI] fabricated a ‘respectable’ evangelicalism that was compatible with professional middle-class norms in a modern consumer culture.” Corporate evangelicalism laid the foundation for later developments, particularly the rise of the Christian Right.

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36 Bebbington’s famous “quadrilateral” defined evangelicalism in terms of “the atoning work of Christ on the cross; the need for personal faith through conversion; the supreme value of the Bible; and the binding obligation of mission. What we can call crucicentrism, conversionism, biblicism, and activism formed the enduring priorities of the evangelical movement throughout the English-speaking world.” David W. Bebbington, The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 23.

37 Gloege, Guaranteed Pure: The Moody Bible Institute, Business, and the Making of Modern Evangelicalism, 6, 12.

38 Ibid., 9.
Matthew Avery Sutton’s outstanding 2014 book *American Apocalypse* offered yet another disruption of the traditional definitions of fundamentalism. Unlike Gloege or Pietsch, Sutton aimed to restore confidence in Sandeen’s theological definition of fundamentalism. Comparing Marsden and Sandeen, Sutton argued that Marsden’s approach was too negative in that it defined fundamentalism in terms of its opposition to theological modernism. Sandeen, Sutton stated, examined the positive, the creation of an “alternative” to liberalism. He concluded, “Marsden wisely noted that fundamentalism had deeper roots than Sandeen acknowledged; nevertheless, Sandeen correctly identified millennialism as the distinguishing feature of the fundamentalist movement.”

Acknowledging the oversights of Sandeen’s work, Sutton recovered the theological definition of fundamentalism for a new scholarly generation. His fundamentalists were, above all, premillennialists. They believed Jesus was coming back very soon. By focusing on premillennialism rather than anti-modernism and by incorporating the more recent scholarly insights of the new social history, Sutton developed an innovative periodization for fundamentalist history. He emphasized the significance of World War I in spurring conflict between radical evangelicals and their liberal co-religionists. He argued that the Scopes Trial was less significant than scholars made it out to be, having very little effect on the historical development of

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fundamentalism. Finally, he showed the strong continuity in the politics and beliefs of fundamentalists prior to World War II and their later “evangelical” descendants.  

Sutton offered careful definitions of the terms “evangelical” and “fundamentalist” to corral his theological approach. For Sutton, the term “evangelical” referred to “Christians situated broadly in the Reformed and Wesleyan traditions who […] have emphasized the centrality of the Bible, the death and resurrection of Jesus, the necessity of individual conversion, and spreading the faith through missions.” In short, Sutton defined evangelicalism according to denominational affiliation and theology, using Bebbington’s quadrilateral of beliefs. He also deployed the term “radical evangelical.” This referred to “those from both the Wesleyan holiness and Higher Life Reformed traditions who in the post-Civil War period aggressively integrated apocalyptic ideas into their faith.” He used the term “fundamentalist” to describe “the network of white, Anglo-American radical evangelicals who in the 1910s established a distinct, definable, interdenominational apocalyptic movement.” Sutton’s fundamentalists, like Sandeen’s, owed everything to their millennialist beliefs.

In style if not in substance, my own approach to fundamentalism most strongly resembles that outlined in Kathryn Lofton’s essay “Queering Fundamentalism.” Lofton studied a little-known but influential fundamentalist leader, John Balcom Shaw. Shaw

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40 Ibid., xiii–xiv.
41 Ibid., x.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
possessed as strong a fundamentalist pedigree as anyone, having served as an editor on *The Fundamentals* project. Just months after his career reached its apex with an appointment as president of a fundamentalist Bible institute, Shaw mysteriously resigned his post and disappeared from the annals of history. He had been accused of sodomy. In Lofton’s appraisal, Shaw’s fundamentalism bore little resemblance to the vitriolic, militant, isolationist “belligerent” movement found in other scholars’ histories. Shaw was a generous and gracious man of letters, interested in the beauty of the world, the language of the inerrant written text of the Bible, and the genderless Heaven of the Apostle Paul in which there would be “neither male nor female” (Gal. 3:28). Lofton argues that, for Shaw at least, “fundamentalism […] was not a consolidated creed espoused by an extremist social force but a language. It was a dialect that offered Shaw an argumentative vantage from which to build a revolutionary beyond, a set of words to build an androgynous world.”

For Lofton, fundamentalism was neither reactionary nor reducible to premillennialism. It was a highly refined, scholarly language that opened up new possibilities for ordinary people with complex lives. It was a way of being creative with words that generated radical alternatives to the harsh realities of life for people whose sexuality did not fit cultural norms. Fundamentalism was appealing to John Balcom

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Shaw because its emphasis on biblical inerrancy meant it was obsessed with words. As a movement obsessed with words, fundamentalism could be remarkably open to explorations of the full range of meaning contained in those words. For a “misfit” like Shaw, fundamentalism was a way of speaking and thinking about words that generated revolutionary possibilities for inclusion.

My own approach to the study of fundamentalism takes a step back even from Lofton to ask where the primary action of “faith” occurred in fundamentalist life. In general, scholars have presumed the main action of fundamentalism occurred in the mind. Fundamentalism was a movement opposed to the ideas of modernists. Or it was a firm belief in premillennialism. Or it emerged through certain ways of thinking. Or it was a refined scholarly language. Whatever the particulars of their approach, scholars have usually assumed that fundamentalism was a matter of faith. They have subsequently assumed that fundamentalists’ faith happened primarily in the mind. We have taken for granted that when fundamentalists did things, they did them because they believed something. We have assumed that faith was anterior to action. We have assumed that belief occurred in minds more than it did in bodies.45

My project adopts the methods of material culture studies to shed new light on fundamentalist history. By examining the fundamentalist senses, I do not for a moment

suggest that beliefs or theologies did not matter to fundamentalists. To the contrary, fundamentalists staked eternity on matters of belief. Rather than throw belief away, I aim to situate fundamentalism’s well-known beliefs, values, and ways of thinking into the changing cultural context of sensing bodies. Locating fundamentalism in the historical context of sensing bodies allows historians to craft useful new narratives of fundamentalism’s history. When fundamentalists believed, they believed with their whole bodies. When they did something as simple as “believe on Jesus” to receive salvation, they invoked complex networks of individual sensations, shared feelings, objects, and spiritual beings.

Scholars of the material cultures of religions have shown that “belief” is an embodied practice. It is embedded in the hard world of objects, behaviors, and sensations. Belief more often emerges from ordinary people’s everyday practices than it does from some ethereal fount of the mind. David Morgan has argued that “belief” is never just a mental action. Rather, when a religious person says “I believe X,” they usually refer to a vast complex of practices, assumptions, gut feelings, bodily habits, experiences, and emotions. “He says he believes,” Morgan notes, “but what he really does is feel, smell, hear, and see.” Morgan observes that the religious activities often subsumed under the rubric of “belief” do not appear as a lightning strike of sudden

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realization, but rather a “slowly sedimentary practice.” Over the course of a lifetime, a person learns the bodily practices, feels the feelings, educates the senses, handles the powerful objects that all come together under the term “belief.” According to Morgan, the term “belief” in religious contexts points to far more than just mental processes or linguistic assertions. Religious belief accretes slowly over a lifetime of practices, sensations, and habits. A material culture approach to the study of religion peels back the layers of the onion of “belief” one by one, unpacking the material practices, objects, feelings, and intellectual assumptions that constitute it.

My own understanding of the term “fundamentalism” breaks with some aspects of previous scholarship. In scope, I adopt Marsden’s broad sense of the term. I am looking at people who were part of a broad coalition, including churchly traditionalists and innovative revivalists. Their religious movement had no mailing address, but it had deep roots in America. Unlike Pietsch, Gloege, and Sutton, I do not think it necessary to limit the use of the term “fundamentalist” only to those who self-identified with it. If fundamentalism was something people did as opposed to something people joined, were, or believed, it is possible to identify broad patterns of behavior and thought as “fundamentalist” without disrespecting our subjects’ self-understandings.

In this dissertation, fundamentalism behaves more like an adverb than a noun. Some people sometimes did things fundamentalistically. Those same people did things

\[^{47}\text{Ibid., 4.}\]
that were not necessarily fundamentalist. Sometimes, fundamentalists felt tension between what their bodies took for granted and what their brains were telling them they ought to say or write. Human life is usually that way. In this study, fundamentalism was a fluid and open set of practices, a loose association of gut responses and experimental activities, rather than hard creedal affirmations, firm identities, or organizational affinities. The same person might do something that seemed very fundamentalist at one moment, then do something that seemed not very fundamentalist in the next. In real life, fundamentalism frequently operated at the level of assumptions, feelings, quick responses, and behaviors people did not think much about. The question “who is a fundamentalist” is less important to me than the question “how do you spot a fundamentalist?” Christians at the dawn of the twentieth century gave surprising answers to the second question. A fundamentalist was someone whose pictures looked right, who heard particular sounds in particular ways, who controlled their skin’s contact with the world according to biblical patterns, and who sensed the presence of spirits on earth. They knew each other, even if we do not know them with certainty.

Most of the people I write about as “fundamentalists” are those whom other scholars have cited as such. While I have swept many archives for the forgotten debris of anonymous individuals’ lives, I also turn to sources that others have considered squarely within the bounds of fundamentalism. I use published books from well-known thinkers and leaders like C.I. Scofield, Reuben A. Torrey, James M. Gray, and A.C.
Dixon. I study revivalists like Billy Sunday alongside missionaries and ministers like Arno Gaebelein and Isaac M. Haldeman. I draw evidence from journals like Moody Bible Institute’s *Moody Monthly, The Christian Workers Magazine, the Sunday School Times*, and the more “radical” premillennialist years of the *Christian Herald*. I give serious attention to the humble dispensationalist minister Clarence Larkin, whose charts have appeared as “illustrations” in countless scholarly books about fundamentalism. Most often, I read well-known sources for evidence scholars have ignored.

Nevertheless, new stories of fundamentalism also require new kinds of evidence. This project only looks occasionally at the sophisticated treatises of fundamentalism’s intellectual authorities such as J. Gresham Machen. My primary focus is always on material things, such as images, objects, recorded sounds, and physical artifacts. I use written sources to try to understand how fundamentalists engaged these material things in actual practice. I am usually less concerned with how an artist made an image than I am with how Christians discussed it at home and incorporated it in their daily lives. I am less concerned with the words to a hymn than I am with the ways people understood the significance of listening to Christian recordings. To discover these kinds of stories, I have made use of overlooked evidence like archival images, published images, charts, drawings, maps, audio recordings, personal photo albums, postcards, and a variety of curiosities and knickknacks.
Alongside images and objects, advertisements serve as significant sources of historical evidence in this dissertation. The rise of fundamentalism coincided with the rise of advertising in America. This was no coincidence. Fundamentalism needed the products of the new consumerist economy, but it also needed those fabulous products to have something more. Fundamentalists themselves were aware of their reliance on advertising. In 1916, the editors of the *Sunday School Times* addressed readers’ concerns about the significant increase in image-heavy advertising in the pages of their journal. The editors reassured readers:

*The Sunday School Times* wants its advertising columns to have a vital place in the life of its readers. It seeks with the utmost care to safeguard their interests there, as throughout the paper, and it unhesitatingly urges their careful, constant reading of its advertisements as often offering opportunities for the permanent enrichment of their life at every point, spiritual and temporal.48

The *Sunday School Times* took advertising seriously because it was a major source of revenue. As a Christian publication, however, the *Times* also took the religious well-being of its readers into account when choosing which advertisements to publish. They encouraged readers to comb ads carefully for “opportunities for the permanent enrichment of their life at every point, spiritual and temporal.” Their carefully curated advertisements presented products that made Christian lives better. Advertisements

thus provide valuable information about the kinds of products and objects that Christian editors believed to be important for living a Christian life.

Advertisements are obviously not impartial sources. Historian Alan Trachtenberg argued in a classic study that turn-of-the-century advertisements not only “aimed to make consumption of a particular product habitual,” but “also aimed to make habitual the identification of products with something else, with ideas, feelings, status.” Sellers tried to convince people to buy by every means imaginable, often vaunting a product’s benefits, exaggerating its effects, manipulating people’s emotions, or deceiving customers outright. For their part, consumers rarely—if ever—took advertising as absolute truth. They found innovative ways of using products that sellers never imagined. They made some wild ideas into household brand names that still resonate in America, like Welch’s grape juice, General Electric appliances, Quaker Oats, and Victor records. They relegated other crackpot schemes to the dustbins of history. The push and pull between sellers and customers over the use, misuse, and religious value of products forms an important part of the sensory history of fundamentalism. Advertising strategists carefully crafted the images of their brands and put their products in spiffy packages for religious consumers. Those consumers brought products into contact with their own physical environments, bodily routines, and predispositions.

The result was an unstable space where neither producers nor consumers had full control over the religious significance of objects and technologies.

**Sensing Fundamentalism: Major Arguments of the Dissertation**

Studying the senses opens new historical narratives about fundamentalist origins. Through the work of Marsden and others, we have learned a great deal about several major streams in fundamentalist history, such as Common Sense realism, premillennialism, evangelicalism, dispensational modernism, and corporatization. The senses reveal other significant tributaries that have heretofore remained hidden from view. Putting the senses at the center of fundamentalist history provides new ways of understanding the ebbs and flows of this significant twentieth century religious movement. By centering the senses of fundamentalism, this dissertation advances three major arguments about early history of the fundamentalist movement.

First, when it came to their understandings of the senses, fundamentalists were modernists of the highest order. Though opposed to theological modernism in their churches, fundamentalists usually adopted the latest and greatest innovations in sensation from American culture. Long before they “used” the radio to spread Christian messages, fundamentalists adopted ways of hearing that were completely unlike earlier varieties of the sensation. By the time radio preachers sent out their messages, fundamentalists took for granted that sounds should be isolated and recorded. They took for granted that auditory space could be personalized. When they debated about
the theological fine points of radio’s impact, they did so using modern understandings of hearing. The fundamentalists whose stories I tell in this dissertation were ordinary people who lived remarkable sensory lives. They experimented with new ways of feeling things, seeing things, and hearing things. They pushed modern understandings of bodies into bold new territories. They wondered about the spiritual possibilities and perils of the new sensations that American modernity enabled for them.

I sometimes use the term “sensory modernity” to describe this characteristic of fundamentalism. Fundamentalism’s “sensory modernity” describes its keen interest in new possibilities for bodies brought with the scientific discoveries, technological innovations, organizational developments, and cultural changes associated with American modernity. This is not to be confused with theological modernism or with modernism in general. Fundamentalists were sensory modernists in that they interpreted cultural changes and theological innovations through bodies with “modernized” senses. When it came to the senses, fundamentalists were thoroughgoing modernists. They did not advocate archaic ways of seeing. They did not try to cling to old sounds in favor of new sounds. They did not resist the concept of germs or refuse to adopt “sanitary” practices that protected them from contaminating forms of touch. They embraced the changes to bodies that developed as the nation moved to a consumer economy, a science and medicine-obsessed culture, and efficiency-governed
organizations. They used the new ways of sensing their culture provided to generate creative new ways of being Christians in a modern world.

Second, fundamentalists had their own special ways of sensing. They did not walk in lock-step with all the changes to the culture around them. They felt, saw, and heard things that their neighbors did not. Specific sensory practices and experiences marked fundamentalists as different from other Americans and from other Christians. Fundamentalists often established the boundaries of their communities through specific sensory experiences or approaches to the senses. The most famous of these came in their disputes with Pentecostals. Pentecostalism was a close sibling of fundamentalism when it came to theology, epistemology, and other traditional measures. Yet many fundamentalists insisted that Pentecostalism was not only wrong in some vague conceptual way; to them, it was demonic, a full-blown spiritual assault on everything real Christians held dear. The level of vitriol in fundamentalist statements against Pentecostalism suggests that more was at stake than the abstract rightness or wrongness of cessationism or continuationism. Fundamentalists responded at a gut level to the material qualities of Pentecostalism. It felt wrong. It certainly sounded wrong. It encouraged behaviors that seemed out of sync with what fundamentalists knew in their bones was right. While there were subtle differences in their beliefs, fundamentalists expressed much more concern about the differences of Pentecostals’ sensory
experiences. Fundamentalists understood specific sensory practices and experiences to be the hallmarks of genuine Christianity.

Because they marked the boundaries of their communities in sensory ways, fundamentalists could be surprisingly open-minded and inclusive. While they frequently spared no insults in their disavowals of perceived opponents, the reverse also held true. For them, the truth was the truth. You could feel it in your guts. Anyone could look at a dispensational chart and see biblical truth as well as an expert. A failed businessman who made a clear, visually pleasing illustration of the truth became one of the century’s most cited Bible teachers. Anyone who heard God’s powerful “Word” in their heart and accepted salvation became a child of God. Anyone with the right body knowledge might have an encounter with an angel. Christian fellowship extended to everyone who knew the difference between demonic activity and divine intervention. Anyone who advocated modest dress for the right reasons was welcomed as an ally of God’s truth. By rolling up his sleeves and throwing punches at the devil, a boy from rural Iowa with a foul mouth and a penchant for removing his suit jacket could become the most celebrated evangelist of a generation. Fundamentalists welcomed all those who shared their embodied knowledge of God’s truth and actions. They celebrated the work of anyone who advocated right ways of being Christian in the world.

Third, sensing bodies formed the foundation of fundamentalism. A generation ago, Marsden rightly traced the “Common Sense” epistemological base of
fundamentalism. More than thirty years have passed since then, but the basics of his argument still stand. Fundamentalists felt the world was crumbling. Everything they knew seemed threatened. They believed that ordinary people using their five senses could discover real, hard truth. They thought science need not engage in speculation or inference, but should arrange actual, perceived experience correctly. With the additional perspective of material culture approaches to the study of religion, Marsden’s argument can yield new insights. Fundamentalists not only “believed” in Common Sense philosophy—they shared common sensory experiences and approaches to sensation. They thought the Bible referred to real, perceptual events in history that aligned with the kinds of sensory experiences they had themselves. They believed ordinary people had all the necessary tools to perceive infinite truth because so many of them experienced such truth firsthand. For fundamentalists, common sense existed in the here and now. It referred to sensory realities shared among genuine Christians. With the right approach to the senses, everyone could experience God’s immediate truth for themselves. Fundamentalists’ common sense was shared sensation.

**Plan of the Dissertation**

Each chapter of this dissertation examines the operations of a particular sense in fundamentalist life. Chapter one, “Visually Dividing the Word of Truth,” explores how fundamentalists understood the sense of sight. Contrary to common assumptions about Protestants, fundamentalists accorded supreme authority to sight over the other senses.
They argued that pictures had the power to convey saving truth. The eye served as the gatekeeper of the soul. It discerned the differences between truth and falsity, good and evil, divine reality and physical illusion. Fundamentalists saw the truth.

Much of the first chapter focuses on the life and work of Clarence Larkin. Larkin was a dispensationalist chart maker whose work has been cited frequently in scholarly publications about fundamentalism. The chapter presents a scholarly biography of Larkin, situating his dispensational charts into a broader context of fundamentalist understandings of the religious work of sight and images. Larkin’s images themselves serve as a major source of primary evidence in this chapter. Rather than seeing them as “illustrations” of ideas, the chapter tries to understand the ways early twentieth-century fundamentalists would have looked at such images. The chapter unpacks the kinds of religious work these images performed. I argue that charts and images like them enabled very particular kinds of Bible reading practices. Particular images and understandings of vision made “literal” readings of the Bible possible.

Chapter two, “Faith Cometh by Hearing,” argues that hearing performed spiritual work in fundamentalist communities. Vision was the sense by which people discerned truth, but hearing enabled spiritual change. God used hearing to access individual hearts, to transform lives. Modern ways of hearing shaped the kinds of spiritual transformations that were possible. This chapter explores how modernity changed American hearing practices. In the nineteenth century, sound became an object
of study in its own right. People sought to capture individual sounds and reproduce them. Listening transformed from a generalized practice to a highly individualized, segmented practice. People came to believe they could own sounds. They came to believe they could choose which sounds to hear and which to ignore. Listening became a matter of individual moral responsibility. Creating a Christian home meant, in part, choosing the right kinds of sounds to fill it.

To tell the story of modern hearing’s influence on “old-fashioned Christianity,” this chapter examines fundamentalists’ adoption of two modern sound-reproduction technologies: the phonograph and the radio. While scholars have long studied the ways fundamentalists have “used” media effectively, this chapter takes a more material approach to the study of media. I examine how fundamentalists discussed the physical, sensory possibilities opened by these new media. I explore the sensory and cultural assumptions into which new technologies of hearing fit. I dissect how fundamentalists understood the concept of “broadcast” long before radio became a broadcast medium. The chapter explains how fundamentalists had to reinterpret the concept of “church” in the wake of radio’s success as a broadcast medium. The chapter describes how fundamentalists reacted to the commodification of Christian sounds at the height of the phonograph’s commercial success, how they bought and sold the sounds of salvation. Using archival images, advertisements, and extant sound recordings, I try to understand how fundamentalists actually positioned their bodies while they listened to the radio or
the phonograph and what they might actually have heard. Instead of a triumphant story of ministers loudly proclaiming God’s messages from broadcast towers, this chapter tells the story of housebound “invalids” desperate to experience “real” church again. This chapter tells of mothers and farmers, isolated on the plains of Saskatchewan or creating homes in noisy modern cities, who put “listening tubes” into their ears and entered a strange new world of buzzes, blips, hisses, and crackles in order to transform their lives.

Chapter three, “The Look and Feel of the Truth,” argues that the sense of touch formed the bedrock of fundamentalist understandings of sin and morality. Influenced by recent developments such as the germ theory of disease, fundamentalists came to believe that morality was contagious through physical contact. They believed their bodies were in constant danger of coming into contaminating contact with the germs of sin. Bodies physically bumped into each other, passing sin from person to person. Objects could be loaded with sin’s germs. But the fundamentalist sense of touch extended further than skin and hands. Fundamentalists were just as concerned about the harmful “touch” of eyes as they were about the touches between people in the dark.

Clothing formed the front lines of fundamentalist efforts to control moral contamination. They understood that clothing did far more than cover a body from the cold. Clothing transformed people into spiritual warriors. It guarded bodies against the contamination of sin. By shaping the surface of a person’s body, clothing changed people’s moral dispositions and predilections. Clothing protected Christians from the
infection of new sin and from spreading sins with which they already struggled.

Clothing also distinguished real Christians from pretenders, offering shared feelings of protection, certainty, and authenticity in communities. Clothing also provided a key site for the everyday construction of gender in fundamentalist communities.

Fundamentalists treated women’s bodies as dangerous sexual weapons that needed “taming” through modest dress. To avoid contaminating themselves and others with sinful kinds of bodily contact, they needed to consider their fashion choices carefully. Fundamentalists did not consider men’s bodies quite so sexually dangerous, but they did claim that clothing transformed men.

Chapter four, “The Spiritual Senses,” argues that many fundamentalists acknowledged the presence of a sixth “spiritual” sense along with their five physical senses. They used this sense to gain access to the spiritual realm, a parallel world populated with embodied spiritual beings capable of influencing events on earth. This chapter explores how fundamentalists applied their modern senses to careful dissections of the bodies of spiritual beings. Fundamentalists not only acknowledged that angels and demons had bodies, they used scripture to determine the exact physical and sensory capabilities of those bodies. They developed elaborate understandings of spiritual bodies and miraculous actions. They brought all of their senses to bear in order to apprehend the operations of the spiritual world.
This chapter contends that bodily contact with spiritual beings was one of the
defining features of fundamentalism. Many fundamentalist leaders insisted living
people could make contact with the spiritual realm through proper attunement of the
senses. Fundamentalists could see demons. They could hear angels. They could
recognize the actions of spiritual beings on earth. They could distinguish the sound of
God’s truth from the falsehoods voiced by demons. Fundamentalists regularly used
their senses to interact with embodied spiritual beings. This put fundamentalism into
direct conflict with Spiritualism. Like many fundamentalists, spiritualists insisted that
living people could contact spiritual beings. However, they disagreed with each other
about the proper means of making contact and also about the true source of spirit
communications. Fundamentalists insisted spiritualism was demonic. They took great
pains to demonstrate the sensory reasons why they believed this to be the case. The
spiritual senses proved to fundamentalists just how high the stakes of sensation really
were. Misinterpreting bodily experience meant the difference between listening to God’s
direction or conversing with demons.
Chapter 1 – Visually Dividing the Word of Truth

“Behold, He cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see Him” - Rev 1:7 (KJV)

Introduction: Fundamentalists and Pictures

In 1918, Clarence Larkin dedicated his book Dispensational Truth to “the Lord Jesus Christ.” Advertisements soon proclaimed the modest Baptist preacher’s project to
be “the greatest book on dispensational truth in the world” (Figure 1).\(^1\) Containing more than one hundred charts and drawings, Larkin’s book pored over scripture’s every jot and tittle, depicting biblical truth in striking visual detail. Timelines showed the world’s past, present, and future on a single page. On charts about abstruse prophecies, its lines and nodes made God’s operations look straightforward, purposeful, even obvious. The book’s illustrations revealed how everything in scripture connected. Every word of scripture held a plain meaning, and Larkin painstakingly arranged scripture’s words onto his charts. On his pages, salvation history looked like a schematic diagram for a phonograph—the newest of many newfangled machines in the early twentieth century. Everything fit together tightly and precisely in Larkin’s scripture schematics. To his eye, the parts of scripture arranged with all the precision of the wires and electrodes of a machine. These charts on dispensational truth were weighty, accurate, and precise.

But fantastical creatures also roamed through the pages of *Dispensational Truth*. Readers encountered dragons, angels, a beast with ten horns, a leopard with seven heads, a mighty Colossus standing on feet of clay. To clarify Bible prophecy’s seemingly unclear meanings, Larkin rendered them visually. He added nothing and omitted nothing. Using all the tricks of his training as a mechanical drafter, Larkin *drew* scripture. No more, no less. If John described a dragon in his apocalypse, Larkin drew a

dragon. His advertisements insisted *Dispensational Truth* “contains no speculative matter” (Figure 1). He made sure that all of his drawings remained faithful to the Bible, bearing the precise meanings God intended. Even in his advertisements, scripture and images worked hand-in-hand (see Bible references in Figure 1).

Larkin’s dedication of his books to Jesus was no act of hubris, but rather one of gratitude. He dedicated his book to Jesus because, in his own words, “through the Holy Spirit, [the Lord] has imparted to me the knowledge and mechanical skill to construct these Charts.” Larkin attributed the visual content of his charts to the inspiration of Jesus Christ—as revealed to him through the plain meaning of the Bible, of course. Others agreed. Larkin dedicated his illustrated commentary on Revelation to Jesus too, leading one contemporary reviewer to declare, “The spirit of the author is seen in the dedication […] Throughout the book we find the greatest reverence given for the ‘word of the Spirit.’” For this reviewer, as for Larkin himself, reverence for the Word meant more than just a nod to scripture’s plenary verbal inspiration or even a theological defense of inerrancy. Larkin’s images, his charts, set his book above others and demonstrated his respect for the Word of God. The reviewer claimed to have read “more than thirty volumes” on the book of Revelation, but said he had “never found one that has given more help than this one… with perhaps one exception, that of Seiss, though

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his work is deficient in not having helpful charts.” Works without charts proved deficient. Larkin’s images demonstrated his respect for the revealed Word of God and actually made his book better than its competitors.

Seeing mattered so much to the Baptist preacher Clarence Larkin that he thanked Jesus for teaching him how to draw. For fundamentalists like Larkin, pictures conveyed saving truth. Images offered direct truth from God. The eye served as the gateway to the soul, distinguishing truth from falsehood, good from evil, divine reality from mere appearance.

This chapter sketches the outlines of fundamentalist sight. It seeks to discover the contours and operations of seeing in fundamentalist communities from the early twentieth century. It conducts a historical ethnography of Clarence Larkin and his coreligionists, tracing the ways vision worked in their religious communities. To understand fundamentalist sight, I focus on images. Images can reveal far more than just what people saw. Images present scholars with the whole range of sensory, material, and cultural processes that enabled a particular way of seeing. Images can show us how people saw, why they saw in a particular way, what was or was not visible to certain

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4 David Morgan defines “ways of seeing” as “repeated procedures that organize elements of seeing into characteristic fields or gazes. [...] a way of seeing is the historical development of a visual routine that organizes a visual field, enacting within its structure the desire, fear, companionship or authority that shape visual experience.” David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (Berkeley: U California Press, 2012), 55.
eyes. The human eye transmits light to the brain, but people see. Images do not simply hang inert until people activate them, but flit across the sensory landscape performing a variety of actions with and on human bodies. Images can be made inert, harnessed and tamed for human purposes, but they often exert a power of their own. There is no necessary way that the sense of “vision” gets parceled out. Human cultures distribute sight differently. By studying images like prophecy charts and Bible maps, this chapter explores what the world might have looked like to fundamentalists from the early twentieth century. It tries to discover how they understood the place and significance of vision among the other senses. It attempts to uncover the special mechanisms of their vision. It reveals what images and eyes did for the people of the Word.

My chapter argues that vision presented the truth to fundamentalists. Of all the senses, sight held the most authority because it offered immediate access to the truth of God’s Word. Fundamentalist eyes went through difficult training. People learned how to see the truth through the actions of very particular kinds of images—charts. When fundamentalists read their Bibles, they engaged in visual practices. Seeing the Word and reading the Word worked together. Charts proved essential to these “literal” readings of the Bible. Reading the Bible relied on the cooperative efforts of spirits and bodies, God and people, words and pictures. Fundamentalists built their “literal” interpretations of the Bible through shared images. They also marked the boundaries of truth and orthodoxy visually, creating social and political realities through visual activities. The
sense of sight filled fundamentalists with hope. They anxiously awaited the day when
their own eyes would see the savior in a real body in the clouds.

**Foregrounding Images in the History of Fundamentalism**

In their writings, early fundamentalists rarely gave much explicit treatment to
their visual culture. This makes studying fundamentalist images a potentially dangerous
enterprise for historians of religion in America. While particular images may strike us as
jarring or significant, fundamentalists preferred to downplay the importance of images
for their religious life. To them, images were ordinary. They were just part of the
wallpaper of Christian life and didn't deserve much thought. In their world, images
almost always illustrated something else: spiritual truth, doctrine, or scripture. Studying
fundamentalist images involves looking carefully at things fundamentalists often left in
the background. It means giving attention to things they might rather we forget.

Almost any study of fundamentalist visual culture necessarily breaks with its
subjects’ self-descriptions. Anthropologist Susan Harding has identified a problem of
language as endemic to fundamentalist studies. She calls this “the problem of the
repugnant cultural other.” The word “fundamentalism,” she argues, invokes the
“Other” of academic modernity. Fundamentalists don’t really exist somewhere “out
there,” but emerge as an effect of modernist discourse—including scholarly discourse. A
small number of fundamentalists in the late twentieth century applied the term to
themselves as an honorific, but most “fundamentalists” never thought of themselves in
this way. Certainly, the people in this chapter did not. They usually just called themselves “Christians.” Modernists suppose themselves to be liberal, peaceful, progressive, and open-minded, which means that “fundamentalists” stand against all of that. By simple fact of language, fundamentalists become closed-minded, backward, and violently conservative, the Other of those who talk about them. By Harding’s reckoning, this makes fundamentalism an inextricable part of modernity. The two terms do not actually stand against each other, but mutually constitute each other. Modernity needs its fundamentalist villains in order to be modern itself. Fundamentalists do not actually reside outside modernity, but within it. For Harding, writing about fundamentalism in an academic setting leads inevitably to the problem of language and self-description. Scholars speaking from the ivory towers of modernity must not exclude fundamentalism from it, but must recognize the effects of the discourse.5

Language does not concern me so much as sensation does, but the problem persists in another form. Most fundamentalists would probably squirm at the attention I give to images. Catholics cared about images, so the argument went, and Catholics were heretics. Since my study of fundamentalist vision aims to bring lost images into the light, the fundamentalists in this study would probably question my motives or accuse me of papistry. This being the case, I can only hope that a fundamentalist from 1910 would

consider my descriptions and analyses fair. The judgments herein are my own. Seeing is a complex affair. What people don’t see—or don’t want others to see—is just as important as what they do see. I insist that we look carefully at fundamentalist images in order that we might better understand how fundamentalists managed to ignore them. Foregrounding images inevitably means doing some injustice to fundamentalist perspectives simply because fundamentalist themselves usually ignored images.6

Fundamentalists’ own disregard for images seems to have impacted the way historians write about fundamentalism. Whether intentionally or not, historians of fundamentalism have often retained the fundamentalists’ blind spot for images.7 Given the academic historian’s usual training, it is easy to see why this is the case. Generally speaking, historians of American religions are much better equipped to read texts than to engage with images and visual evidence. George Marsden’s *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (1980) stands as a classic example of this textualist tendency. Marsden works like an artist of the written word, a Rembrandt of fundamentalist ideas. Like few others before or since, he managed to discern the intellectual and cultural influences that

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6 Some probably wish to argue that fundamentalists simply have no images. David Freedberg has dealt with this issue in his important chapter “The Myth of Aniconism.” In short, Freedberg argues that the notion of aniconism is “untenable.” He writes, “Even in cultures (such as Islam and Judaism) with prevailing interdicts against anthropomorphic representation, and an apparent emphasizing of word over image, of the written over the figured, the will to image figuratively—even anthropomorphically—cannot be suppressed” (55). He points to Arabic calligraphy or Jewish micography as examples. David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 54–81.

7 For their part, fundamentalists have made it very difficult for historians to study their images. When they saved images at all, it was usually for some other purpose. As a frequenter of fundamentalist archives, I have often had the pleasure of rooting through boxes labeled “miscellaneous” or “visual materials—general.”
shaped the fundamentalist movement. His evidence comes from writing and moves into writing, with the connections between texts emerging in awesome detail. So it is at least a little surprising that the second edition of Marsden’s text contains images. A dozen images. Clarence Larkin drew three of these images, but his name appears nowhere in Marsden’s text. Images appear without comment in *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, dropped into the text to serve as illustrations of Marsden’s beautiful arguments. Present in the material book, the images are all but invisible to the analyst’s eye.

Historians need to study fundamentalist visual culture. We need to study it for more reasons than just its omission from the historiography. While fundamentalists might not have said much about images and even denied their significance sometimes, images still mattered in fundamentalist practice. Studying the ways people saw, as well as the work images did, helps us understand this community better.

Clarence Larkin spent most of his adult life preaching, thinking, and pastoring. But he also spent lots of time drawing. He took great care in his drawings, assuring readers that he had had thirty years’ experience as a pastor and had spent three years working on *Dispensational Truth*. The book, he guaranteed, had “not been hastily gotten up.” It contained more than just “the opinions of men” and instead offered “the teaching of the Word of God.” Until we learn how images operated in fundamentalist life, we cannot adequately understand a figure like Clarence Larkin. He wasn’t a particularly gifted intellectual, but he was a serious thinker. He cared about getting it right. He was a
man of his times, part of the first generation of fundamentalists. But his work continued to be popular for almost a century, making him one of the few figures who bridges early and late fundamentalism. Looking at the role of the sense of sight in Clarence Larkin’s life changes the stories we can tell about fundamentalism. In his books, charts conveyed the teaching of the Word of God. Bible prophecies made sense through drawings. Writings and pictures stood side-by-side. Larkin wanted to convey the dispensational truth about biblical prophecies to a world on the brink of disaster. So he drew.  

**Visual Culture and the Study of Fundamentalist History**

Fundamentalists produced countless images. To study these images, historians of fundamentalism do well to employ the methods of visual culture studies. The term “visual culture” emerged within the discipline of art history in the 1980s. Art historians like WJT Mitchell and Hans Belting developed the term to provide an analytical framework for the study of images and visual phenomena that fell outside traditional disciplinary boundaries of the study of “art.” Visual studies scholars turned their attention to propaganda, pornography, kitsch, advertising, and other kinds of images scorned by the art establishment. Visual culture abandoned the search for “rules of art” and dove into the nitty-gritty of everyday seeing.

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8 Larkin, *Dispensational Truth: Or God’s Plan and Purpose in the Ages*, foreword.
Visual culture shifted focus from “art” to images, from galleries to magazines and televisions, from disinterested formal contemplation to the embodied mechanisms of everyday seeing. The study of visual culture moved away from examinations of the artwork as a unique product of a singular genius and moved toward the study of visuality as a whole. According to Mitchell, visual culture “insists on problematizing, theorizing, critiquing and historicizing the visual process.”10 It neither fetishizes the artwork nor elevates the human subject, but studies “the relationality of image and beholder” in the process of worldmaking.11 Visual culture scholars realize that seeing does not happen in a straightforward, consistent way across time and space. Cultures train the human eye. Seeing happens in complex, multisensory, gendered bodies. Seeing is a set of learned visual practices, which are themselves culturally and historically determined.12 We do not see all images the same way and we do not all see the same things as images.

Key terms like “image” and “seeing” need careful theorization based on specific case studies.13 What one culture considers an image might not be one to another. Mental

13 Hans Belting points to the difficulties in defining “images,” which seem to exist both within us (in the mind) and outside us (on the screen/wall/canvas/etc.). Belting writes, “An ‘image’ is more than a product of perception. It is created as the result of personal or collective knowledge and intention. We live with images, we comprehend the world in images. And this living repertory of our internal images connects with the physical production of external pictures that we stage in the social realm. [...] we are not the masters of our
images, Van Gogh paintings, Google maps, and pictures of grandma might all be “images” in American society, but they work in very different ways. More still, images can do a variety of things. Some religious images speak and move. They make demands. They want to be touched, they want sacrifices, they want to convey information. Images have power.¹⁴ In short, visual culture offers useful tools for the study of visuality. By studying “visuality,” this approach aims to unpack the entire cultural complex of seeing. From dreams to pictures on the wall, from the artwork in the gallery to the photo of a naked person in a dirty magazine, from the miraculous tears of the Madonna to the commercial artist painting on the assembly line, visual culture studies how visuality operates in particular cultures.

Visual culture has steadily gained significance in the field of religious studies. Scholars like Sally Promey, David Morgan, Birgit Meyer, S. Brent Plate and others have demonstrated that visual culture often stands at the center of religious life in America.¹⁵ Their work reveals that images belong to American religious history just as much as images, but rather in a sense at their mercy; they colonize our bodies (our brains), so that even if it seems that we are in charge of generating them, and even though society attempts unceasingly to control them, it is in fact the images that are in control.” Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 9–10.


¹⁵ This growing body of work has led some to declare a “materialist turn” in religious studies. I think such pronouncements are premature at best. The work of materializing the study of religions remains an ongoing project. Throwing a picture or two into a theory of religion does not offer much insight into the history of movements, people, or things. Manuel A. Vasquez, *More Than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3.
sermons, diaries, or books of theology do. One of the most enduring ideas to emerge from this scholarship is Morgan’s concept of “visual piety.” Visual piety describes “the set of practices, attitudes, and ideas invested in images that structure the experience of the sacred.” Looking, Morgan contends, can constitute a “powerful practice of belief.”

Religious formation involves learning specific visual practices. Seeing helps people structure their religious worlds. Looking at images contributes actively to the process of religious world-making. This means that the images people see—even and especially the ones deemed popular, vulgar, or kitschy—tell us much about a religious tradition.

According to Morgan, images can reveal the structures of religious experiences, the processes of religious education, the social rules of religious worlds. Studying religious visual culture uncovers the sensory and social operations undergirding the mysterious realms of religious experiences, devotional activities, religious formation, and theological ideas.

Visual culture investigates seeing and also not seeing. Contrary to popular belief, iconoclasm almost never consists of the complete, wholesale destruction of images. This

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is true of Protestant, Muslim, Jewish, and even the Byzantine iconoclasm that gives the concept its name. Rather than the complete destruction of images, scholars of religious visual culture argue that iconoclasm might best be understood as “a strategy of replacement.”¹⁸ Purifiers tear down one kind of image and replace it with something acceptable, some other material form that they do not consider idolatrous. New images emerge to take the place of old ones. Attacks on images strike at the jugular of a particular way of seeing but introduce new visual regimes. Visual culture finds opportunity, not tragedy, in iconoclasm. It searches for the rules of seeing that iconoclasts seek to institute. Such studies use the destruction of images to investigate what kinds of material objects or sensory practices replace the old “idolatry.”¹⁹

The study of iconoclasm offers many useful tactics for studying fundamentalism. Fundamentalists have a reputation for destroying culture’s idols with special aplomb. As Marsden so famously declared, fundamentalists might well be described as militantly anti-modernist Protestant evangelicals.²⁰ Violence toward cherished cultural objects seems like the bread and butter of fundamentalist anti-modernism—away with the flapper’s

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short dresses and the nickelodeons, damn the liberals’ vestments and stained glass, to
hell with the Wellhausen books! A visual culture approach demands greater nuance in
our understanding of fundamentalist rejections of modern American culture. It will no
longer suffice to argue that fundamentalists delighted in the wholesale destruction of
modern religious and cultural objects. They did not. American fundamentalists of the
early twentieth century certainly sought to tear down some idols, but scholars must give
greater attention to the new material objects and visual practices they sought to
authorize in place of the old. The fundamentalists never tore down without building
something else up. When we attend to their strategies of replacement and creation, a
new picture of fundamentalism emerges. Despite its rejection of some modern cultural
forms, it also pushed modernity in new directions. It demanded that society embrace its
vision as part of the modern world. Fundamentalists indeed tore down the modernist
gods, but they replaced them with new things for modern people to see. They invented
new kinds of religious visual practices to engage with a reimagined modern world.

Visual culture offers many useful analytical tools for the study of fundamentalist
images and visuality. This is especially the case because visual culture demands
particularized studies of seeing. Fundamentalist images rarely fell into the category of
high art, so traditional art historical methods fall short for analyses of this community.
Visual culture requires that we examine the processes by which seeing happened in
fundamentalist communities without imposing our own prejudices or expectations on
them. My analysis does not evaluate fundamentalist works for their artistic merits or formal execution, but tries to understand how the sense of sight got distributed in fundamentalist communities. It asks where images came from, where they went, what they did along the way. It asks how people made images, how they used images, how they saw. It asks about the relationships of power that made it possible for some to see the truth. Fundamentalists saw things their own way. They tore down idols for their own reasons and upraised new kinds of images in their own style. This chapter does not offer general theories about seeing. Instead, it engages visual culture theory to illumine particular aspects of the visual history of fundamentalism. On paper, fundamentalists seem not to care about images. They seem to disregard the eye and elevate the rational theological mind. The reality of their practice is much more complicated.

**Clarence Larkin in Context: Reach and Influence**

Clarence Larkin is probably the most famous fundamentalist most people have never heard of. His work litters academic works on the subject of fundamentalism, including Marsden’s classic *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. If a book discusses dispensationalism at any length, there is a strong chance that one of Clarence Larkin’s charts appears somewhere in it. In his sweeping transatlantic history of evangelical millennialism from 1500-2000 CE, Crawford Gibben accords Larkin’s “monumental” charts a full half-paragraph of attention, which is rather significant in a work covering
500 years of history.\textsuperscript{21} However, almost nobody includes more than an image credit to Larkin.\textsuperscript{22} His presence peppers academic books, but full treatments of Larkin’s work and its significance for early twentieth-century fundamentalist life remain scant.\textsuperscript{23}

Larkin’s dispensational charts held the most influence outside academic circles. Though self-published, his breakthrough book \textit{Dispensational Truth} has remained in print for almost a century since its first edition of 1918 (expanded in 1920). It has been translated into many languages, including French, Dutch, Polish, Czech, Korean, Chinese, Tibetan, Paite, and Telugu. Tim LaHaye, famous for his \textit{Left Behind} novel series, voiced a lofty opinion of Larkin. He dedicated his own book of dispensational charts \textit{Charting the End Times} (1999) to Clarence Larkin. The dedication reads: “In Memory of Clarence Larkin… who in 1920 published the seminal chart book of the twentieth century, \textit{Dispensational Truth}. It has helped more ministers, Bible teachers, and earnest students who desire to rightly divide the Word of truth than any book of its kind.”


\textsuperscript{23} A major exception to this dearth of scholarship comes in Brendan Pietsch’s dissertation and forthcoming book \textit{Dispensational Modernism}. Pietsch offers careful readings of Larkin’s charts, examining their significance for the establishment of a dispensational mind. My own work owes much to Pietsch’s ideas about dispensationalism, but differs in its visual culture approach. For Pietsch, Larkin’s images speak to broader trends in the history of dispensationalist ideas, such as their understanding of time, their desire to classify scripture into parts, etc. I focus less on the ideas expressed in images and more on the role of images themselves. I take Larkin as a case study in how fundamentalists saw their images, what they thought images capable of doing, how they used images in religious life. For me, practice trumps thinking and material reality trumps theology.
Elsewhere, LaHaye calls Larkin’s work “masterful.” And in a tradition known for its creative borrowing from authoritative sources, he footnotes Larkin generously and often.

Though he receives precious little attention from academic historians, Clarence Larkin’s significance lingers among conservative American Protestants. His work stands out in fundamentalist memory. While he was no artistic “genius” or innovator as some would say Rembrandt or Picasso were, his work made a difference in the lives of fundamentalists in the twentieth century. Within just a few years of his publication of Dispensational Truth, other premillennialists were citing him as an authority on the same level as C.I. Scofield, William Blackstone, and James Gray. We should not imagine that he stands above fundamentalist history as a lofty virtuoso. Clarence Larkin produced work that mattered in his own time and that still holds an important place in dispensationalist communities. His work mattered in its own right. His charts became popular at the very height of the fundamentalist movement, the period from 1914-1925. He provides significant historical information about the role of the eye in early fundamentalist life.

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24 Tim LaHaye, Revelation Unveiled (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 337.
Clarence Larkin in Context: Biography

Hard biographical data about Larkin remains somewhat thin, but enough information exists to piece together a story.\textsuperscript{26} Clarence Larkin was born in 1850 in the town of Chester, Pennsylvania. He lived in the Philadelphia area for most of his life. After having a conversion experience in his teens, Larkin joined an episcopal church. He later attended college and graduated as a mechanical engineer. His training in architectural/mechanical drafting would serve him well in later life, forming the bedrock of his drawing style: straight bold lines, precise scales and measurements, consistent shorthand symbols. He bounced around jobs in his twenties, working as an architectural drafter, a bank officer, a manufacturer, and, somewhat ironically given his famous charts, as a teacher for the blind. Nothing seemed to satisfy. In his mid twenties, he married a woman named Emma Hinkson, whom history has all but forgotten.

At thirty-two years old, Larkin became a committed Baptist. Not long later, he was ordained as a minister and began pastoring a Baptist church outside Philadelphia. Sometime in the mid-1880s, he caught wind of a new current coursing through

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{26} Information about Larkin’s life comes only in pieces from sources difficult to verify. The most detailed account appears online from Larkin’s longtime publisher, The Clarence Larkin Estate. They seem reluctant to speak with historians, as my repeated requests for information remained unanswered. See: http://www.larkinestate.com/biography.htm accessed 8 July 2014. Larkin’s former church also maintains a website that fills in important details about his life. See: http://www.bethanyfoxchase.com/bethany-history/ accessed 8 July 2014. Pastor Daniel Price of Bethany Baptist Church in Fox Chase, PA believes most of the extant Larkin manuscripts and correspondence remain in possession of the family. Email correspondence with the author, 25 June 2014.}
America’s evangelical churches called “dispensationalism.” He was hooked.

Dispensationalism offered a comprehensive system for understanding the Bible as a whole. It unlocked the mysteries of humanity’s past and future. The Bible needed some dissection and rearrangement to understand correctly, but the dispensationalist system made sense of it all. Like the Bible, dispensationalists thought that human history needed chopping up too. Only by dividing history could one understand how events related to each other on the grand timescales of biblical prophecy. The dispensational hermeneutic was essentially this: divide the Bible into parts, figure out the rules of God’s dealings with humanity at that particular time, and let the meaning of every word of scripture clarify itself. *Rightly divide* scripture and history into their dispensational parts, and their meaning as a whole becomes clear. The meaning dispensationalists found in the Bible and history, though remembered for its intricate details, was simple at its core.

We are living in the last days. Jesus is coming soon to take away the people of his church. Trials and tribulations will follow, and the millennial kingdom of Christ will follow after that. Larkin immediately began preaching his new dispensationalist convictions, drawing large charts to accompany his sermons. He called these charts “Prophetic Truth.”

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Larkin saw his charts as a crucial tool for Christian education. In the early 1890s, he partnered with another Baptist pastor, Isaac Newton Earle of Lewistown, PA, on a series of "Birds-Eye" charts about the Bible, the life of Christ, and biblical prophecy.29 These charts aimed to compress information into visually striking forms. The charts, along with his background as an educator, made Larkin popular among Philadelphia’s emerging Bible institute crowd. Aided by his charts, Larkin lectured on Bible prophecy at the nearby Bible Institute of Pennsylvania, which later merged with C.I. Scofield’s Philadelphia School of the Bible.30 Independent Christian educational centers, Bible institutes hardwired the kinds of international, cross-denominational alliances essential to the success of fundamentalism. These schools brought together people who were interested in Bible prophecy, dispensationalism, and the authority of the Bible, offering a place to share new ideas and to sell new material products for use in Christian life. Far from just credentialing ministers, Joel Carpenter argues that Bible institutes “provided educational and other religious services, a support structure for fellowship and inspiration, and opportunities to participate in such ‘Christian work’ as evangelism and foreign missions.”31 When Clarence Larkin published his charts, he plugged into the

31 Joel A. Carpenter, Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism (Oxford University Press, USA, 1997), 17; See also: Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, 61–62.
publicity and distribution networks established by the great Bible institutes like Moody Bible Institute of Chicago and the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. People might not have been familiar with the name “Clarence Larkin” at first, but they could trust his products because he advertised in Moody Monthly. Larkin aimed to clarify the Bible’s meaning through his charts, educating as many people as possible about its dispensational contents.

In 1900, Larkin moved to Fox Chase, Pennsylvania and settled into a twenty-year stint as pastor of Bethany Baptist Church. By 2014, parishioners at Bethany Baptist still remembered his tenure as a time of exciting growth. He drew architectural plans himself for an addition to the church. He implemented innovative programs to entice people into the church, which included illustrated evening sermons, decorative calendars to give away, and magic lantern slideshows about Bible prophecy. He decorated the new baptistery with a large painting of an angel over water. In a movement remembered for its stridency and militancy, Larkin had a reputation for kindness, humility, and generosity toward his theological opponents. His illustrated sermons often advertised with the tagline, “everybody welcome” or “always free of charge.” He was the kind of person who wrote a book called Why I am a Baptist that began with the line, “This work is not a personal history.”

Though charitable in demeanor, Larkin could also be firm in matters of Christian practice. He refused to share communion with anyone except fellow Baptists—in fact, anyone who had not been baptized by immersion as an adult. He was a strict teetotaler, a self-described “temperance man.” During the First World War, he joined several local ministers seeking a court injunction to stop military personnel from charging admission to the baseball games they played on Sundays. A local news article tells the tale: “the complainants declare they have ‘no objection to the simple act of enlisted men playing baseball on Sunday,’ but aver that the method of conducting the games and the attendant noise and disturbance are in violation of a law protecting the sanctity of the Sabbath.” For Larkin, the sanctity of the Sabbath could not abide boisterous soldiers at the local ballpark.

Toward the end of his life, demand for Larkin’s charts skyrocketed. The outbreak of the Great War stoked American interest in Bible prophecies and the fortunes of the Bible institutes rose. Larkin’s moment had finally come. In 1918, he assembled a large collection of his Bible charts into a book called Dispensational Truth. It became an overnight hit, far and away his bestselling title. He advertised it in internationally circulating fundamentalist publications like the Bible Institute of Los Angeles’s journal The King’s Business, the Chicago-based Moody Bible Institute Monthly, and even the

33 Ibid., 41.
34 Ibid., 44.
35 “Philadelphia,” The Christian Advocate, August 8, 1918, 1005.
granddaddy of them all The Sunday-School Times. Clarence Larkin died in 1924, his
tombstone stating, “Here lies Rev. Clarence Larkin awaiting the first resurrection.” The
tombstone also includes a shorthand reference to 1 Thess 4:13-18, “the dead in Christ
shall rise first and we that remain alive shall meet him in the air.” Larkin’s family
continued to publish his books through the end of the twentieth century.

**Clarence Larkin in Context: A Visual History of Prophecy Charts**

Clarence Larkin did not invent the prophecy chart. His work drew from several
deep wells in the history of American religious visual culture. The most significant
visual predecessor for Larkin’s work comes from a group he almost certainly considered
heretical: the Millerite movement of the 1830s-40s. American religious historians best
remember the apocalyptic preacher William Miller (1782-1849) for his failures. Once a
deist, Miller remained a committed rationalist his entire life. He fervently believed that
scripture’s inconsistencies and opaqueness could be resolved with the right
interpretation. He became convinced that the Bible held a single meaning, a consistent
message that right arrangement of verses and calculation of prophetic timeframes could
uncover. After careful study of Bible prophecies in Daniel and Revelation, he figured it
out. Miller concluded that the Bible’s single message was this: Jesus would return
sometime in 1843. When Jesus dragged his feet, Miller returned to scripture and

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36 Morgan points to Larkin as part of the continuing legacy of Millerite/Adventist visual culture in the
Production, 265.
recalculated, eventually settling on October 22, 1844 as the probable date of Christ’s return. As Jesus still had not appeared as of October 23, most of Miller’s followers became disillusioned, resulting in an event still called “The Great Disappointment.” Many former Millerites regrouped under the leadership of Ellen G. White, eventually forming the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.

Though short-lived and claiming no more than fifty thousand followers at its peak, the Millerite movement made a lasting impact on the visual landscape of religions in America through its mass-produced prophecy charts. Before the Millerites, postmillennialists ruled the Protestant presses in America. Great benevolent societies like the American Tract Society, the American Bible Society, and the American Sunday-School Union harnessed the power of images in their mass printed materials. They thought images could teach important moral truths and sway consciences. They built massive production and distribution networks to disseminate their materials and reform the new nation. They envisioned an ever more Christianized America, one in which the images from their righteous materials would spread moral influence across the land. They believed their interdenominational actions primed conditions for the triumphant return of Jesus at the end of a “millennium” of peace and harmony. Once everyone
joined the Christian empire trumpeted by and depicted in their prints, the savior would appear.\textsuperscript{37}

Premillennialist groups like the Millerites, the Shakers, and the Mormons wanted none of the postmillennialist dream. They insisted that the world was hurtling at a railroad pace toward hell, not toward a millennial utopia of civilization’s making. Jesus was coming soon. Very soon. Before your grandchildren grew up. Soon. They insisted that Jesus would return in the flesh, appearing to all living people. They declared that Jesus would rule over his millennial kingdom after he returned to earth. Human effort, civilization’s effort, could do nothing to usher in this kingdom. Faithful Christians concerned about the fate of the world could only share the truth of Christ’s coming with as many people as possible. Mass-produced prophecy charts proved a crucial religious technology for Millerite premillennialists of the 1840s.\textsuperscript{38} They got the message out in a compressed, highly visual format. David Morgan states, “the Millerite chart amounted to a counterappropriation of the Enlightenment’s visual pedagogy in the attempt to signal the end of the world rather than its culmination in a progressive utopia or millennial bliss.”\textsuperscript{39} Using the very same means, lithographs printed by the steam-powered industrial press, Millerites exploded the postmillennialist dream of a

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 29–34.

\textsuperscript{38} I have in mind the kind of “religious technology” described by Jeremy Stolow, where the boundary between the “religion” and the “technology” is impossible to locate. Jeremy Stolow, Deus in Machina: Religion, Technology, and the Things in between, 1st ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 2–3.

\textsuperscript{39} Morgan, Protestants and Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production, 125.
Christian empire in America. They harnessed the power of images to convey information, but not in an effort to influence the character of Americans. They wanted to spread truth across the land before the clock ran out.⁴⁰

![Image of the Himes chart]

**Figure 2 - Joshua V. Himes, A Chronological Chart of the Visions of Daniel and John. 1843**

Millerite charts, like the famous 1843 chart by Joshua Himes, carried salvific information to the eye (Figure 2). They deployed coded pictures, precise mathematical calculations, and careful arrangements of text to create a schematic of biblical interpretation. The Himes chart draws out difficult images from biblical prophecies, like

the Beast of Revelation 13, and sets it next to scripture verses, historical dates, and prophetic calculations. According to Morgan, it creates a scriptural “gestalt… best understood as a visual system of graphic, alphabetic, and numeric signs.” Despite its difficult subject matter, the chart looks symmetrical, ordered, logical, clear, and organized. It creates a visual chain of scripture references whose meaning appears unified and coherent. People could read this picture, not just look at it. Every image corresponds with a specific prophecy, which corresponds with a specific historical event, which corresponds with a specific period of time, which can be arranged correctly on a visual field, which reveals the truth that Jesus is returning in 1843. Charts rendered Millerite Bible reading as beautiful and harmonious, a simple and logical system of interpretation in which disparate parts of scripture fit together seamlessly. In so doing, the charts occluded the hermeneutic acrobatics behind them and naturalized their “literal” interpretations of prophecy. Pictures made Millerite readings seem straightforward, despite their complex use of Bible texts and of history. Morgan writes, “The Millerites sought to make their argument by visualizing the coherence of their interpretation as a system, in other words, by displaying the ‘beauty and harmony’ of the Bible properly interpreted.” He argues that Millerites used charts to convey a “coherence theory of truth,” in which their Bible readings were made to look truthful

through the correspondence of visual elements. Because the chart looked so orderly and its elements fit so perfectly with one another, the logic went, the Bible readings it displayed must be true. The chart tries to persuade viewers of the truthfulness of Miller’s scriptural interpretation, bringing the salvific information of Christ’s imminent return to those who see it.

Figure 3 - Joshua Himes, A Pictorial Chart of Daniel’s Visions, 1842

Clarence Larkin’s dispensational charts and Joshua Himes’s Millerite charts share many visual features. Larkin’s iconography, organization, and style show traces of Millerite influence. We might say these premillennialist works bear a strong family resemblance. Their qualities overlap and reveal significant relationships, but no essential
set of characteristics unites them. The family resemblance becomes especially apparent in works on the same subject, such as Himes’s 1842 Pictorial Chart of Daniel’s Vision (Figure 3) and Larkin’s 1916 Book of Daniel (Figure 4). Both use circles and lines to show connections between the parts of the prophet’s vision. These connections, as well as the symmetry and balance between elements on the charts, displays the certainty of these interpretations. Both look neat and clean, nothing falls out of place. Both share iconographical elements, including images of the colossus from Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, the beast with ten horns, the lion, the bear, the winged leopard, a smattering of sheep and goats. Each chart explains the specific historical referent of these images. Both use the horizontal axis to establish chronology, showing how the Bible relates to human history. Visually, the charts argue that dispensational or Millerite readings of the Bible cohere internally, making perfect sense of the prophet’s difficult vision and its relation to history. Both weave shorthand references to Bible verses into the charts, suggesting that the chart merely reveals the plain meaning of scripture.

Despite the clear family resemblance, one must tread lightly when comparing Larkin to Himes. While similar theological motivations might have impelled these premillennialists to make similar-looking charts, and while it is also significant that both chose to work in the medium of mass-printed charts, nearly eighty years of history separates their products. Larkin himself seemed acutely aware of the comparisons his work might garner and tried to distance himself from the likes of Himes. His advertisements, introductions, and explanatory text all attempted to differentiate his efforts from previous premillennialist products of the Millerite strain. Advertisements for *Dispensational Truth* insisted: “The Book is sane; not a ‘time setter’; contains no speculative matter.” From his earliest days as a dispensationalist, Larkin saw Millerism as a problem. He considered Miller an aberration, not properly a part of the premillennialist movement. “Pre-Millennialism is not Millerism,” he once said, “William

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Miller... was not a Pre-Millennialist in the sense in which the word is now commonly used.”

He distinguished between Miller’s “historicist” readings of prophecy and his own “futurist” readings. Miller fixed the dates of prophecies in the past to calculate the date of Christ’s return, whereas Larkin believed most prophecies would find fulfillment in the future. He considered the biggest difference to be that his own brand of premillennialism was open to revision, while Miller’s aimed for certainty. Larkin wanted to make it clear that dispensational premillennialists did not fit the pattern established by Miller. He did not set a date for the end of the world. He claimed not to engage in “speculation,” but said he read Bible prophecies as straightforward descriptions of future events. He was not looking for certainty about the date of Christ’s return. The Millerite connection seems undeniable to visual culture scholars. Certainly, we know that Larkin was aware of Millerism in some capacity. However probable, we do not know that Larkin ever saw a Millerite chart. The only influence Larkin ever formally acknowledged was that of the Bible and “its author, Jesus Christ.”

Larkin’s charts entered a fundamentalist world already saturated with images. Charts had been such an important part of fundamentalist life for so long that nobody blinked or stood aghast when Larkin made his. As early as the 1870s, long before the publication of The Fundamentals, conservative Christians were using charts to practice

45 Larkin, “Testimony to the Power of the Pre-Millennial Advent of Christ,” 111.
their religion. As debates about the nature of science and the religious significance of scientific discoveries (like Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection) increased, charts emerged as a medium of rational truthfulness to settle all discussion.

Fundamentalist charts piggybacked on science’s increasing cultural authority in the late nineteenth century. Charts arrayed the facts. That was all. In 1873, the Evangelical Alliance met in New York City to discuss issues facing the Christian community. George Marsden identifies this meeting as a key moment in early fundamentalist history, revealing an evangelical tradition divided between proto-fundamentalists and proto-liberals. At the conference, a Princeton professor named Arnold Henry Guyot presented a talk on the harmony of biblical creation and modern science. He belonged firmly to the proto-fundamentalist side of the evangelical tradition. The purpose of the first chapter of Genesis, he stated, was not to provide a thorough explanation of the astronomical or geological processes of creation. Instead, Genesis aimed “by a few authoritative statements, to put in a strong light the relations of this finite, visible world to the supernatural, invisible world above—to God himself.” The visible world had its own lessons to teach, but owed its origins to God’s supernatural actions. Therefore, according to Guyot, only “faithful study of God’s visible works, sound deductions from the facts” counted as true science.

67 Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, 19.
68 Henry Arnold Guyot, “Cosmogony and the Bible: Or, The Biblical Account of Creation in the Light of Modern Science,” in History, Essays, Orations, and Other Documents of the Sixth General Conference of the
of creation in Genesis and the visible realities of the material world, Guyot showed two large charts to the assembly. These originals are now lost, but the charts were reproduced in the official conference proceedings (Figure 5).

![Chart of the Days of Creation](image)

Figure 5 - Arnold Henry Guyot, "The Days of Creation," from his talk "Cosmogony and the Bible." New York, 1873

The charts demonstrated that the Bible and the material world stood in absolute harmony. Genesis offered a strong framework for scientific thinking because scriptural revelation and the physical world accorded perfectly. This harmony could be captured

by parallel columns on a chart. The chart aligns cutting-edge scientific research (right column) with the text of the Bible (left column). The biblical days of creation matched scientifically known occurrences in the early history of the universe. So, for example, on the left column showing the third day of creation in Genesis, Guyot reproduces the text in which God says, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together, and let dry land appear.” On the right column, Guyot shows what this meant in scientific terms. Namely, the terse biblical phrase actually described the concentration of matter out of chemical elements in the early universe, which meant that “the nebulous masses concentrate[d] into stars” and the earth’s crust formed the first “azoic” rocks. Though the Guyot charts bear far less visual similarity to Larkin’s work than the Millerite charts do, they reveal how early fundamentalists were carving out a distinct role for sight. Through charts, the eye was capable of perceiving God’s actions in the world. It could apprehend the harmony between the Bible and the world of flesh and matter. Very early in fundamentalist history, charts were making religious truth into visible reality. The emerging people of the Word were people who made charts and used images to stake their claims in the modern world.

Once a minority among American Protestants, premillennialism gained a massive following in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Eventually, it became the majority position among American evangelicals. The dispensational variety of premillennialism also rose to prominence in American evangelicalism during the latter
half of the nineteenth century. Recent studies suggest that it gained widespread acceptance as the prestige of engineering and science increased in American society. In the late the nineteenth century, technical drawings, charts, tables, and maps became the preferred means of conveying information to Americans. People became enamored with new scientific instruments and techniques. As just one example of the new scientific culture, the Philadelphia Zoo, America’s first, opened in 1874. Its organization reflected the new scientific values of American culture. The zoo aimed to organize and classify, to separate animals by species and arrange them by genus, family, order, class, phylum and kingdom. Precision was the order of the day in this scientific culture. Everything became subject to calculation and quantification. Cookbooks gained popularity, insisting that home bakers use a half-teaspoon of salt instead of a pinch, a cup of flour instead of a fistful. Making dinner became a scientific exercise, so reading the Bible followed suit. Dispensationalism’s systematic, careful, scientific approach to the Bible gave it credibility in a scientific culture. Through their clarity of classification and quantification, charts in particular appealed to the “taxonomic mind” that

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49 Sandeen’s classic book argues that although Americans had developed indigenous strains of millenarianism in the Millerite and Mormon movements of the early 19th century, the variety that led to fundamentalism came as a British import. British millenarianism gave the American version four characteristics: i) zeal for interpreting biblical prophecies, ii) special interest in Jews and Zionism iii) the doctrine of the premillennial advent, and iv) a futurist stance toward the book of Revelation. He traces this influence to the evangelistic activities of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). According to Sandeen, fundamentalism emerged as a union between dispensationalism and the famous Princeton theology of inerrancy associated with the likes of B.B. Warfield. Ernest Robert Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (London; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 8-9, 12, 36-37, 172.
dispensationalists brought to bear on scripture. Unlike the Millerite charts, dispensational charts aimed to measure only what was measurable, to arrange the Bible’s contents precisely, to classify history and Bible prophecies correctly. They didn’t aim for certainty, rather for precision and accuracy. Dispensationalist charts offered a detailed set of plans that guided readers through the technical sections of scripture, conveying lots of information in a visually compressed form.

Dispensationalism made heroes out of unlikely ideas and people. A former businessman from Illinois, William E. Blackstone’s book *Jesus is Coming* (1878) sold hundreds of thousands of copies in the 1880s-90s. The book convinced many Americans that Jesus was, in fact, returning soon. It became an important sourcebook for a generation of American dispensationalists, making once-unknown concepts like Zionism and the rapture of the church part of everyday Christian vocabulary. Several charts appear in Blackstone’s book, offering strong precedent within the dispensationalist tradition for Larkin’s later work. One chart shows the sequence of events surrounding Jesus’ premillennial return to earth (Figure 6). Blackstone imagined the chart as a concise visual representation of the Bible’s account of human history, “merely … an outline of the order of events, in connection with the Lord’s return.” He
suggested the chart should be used as an “object lesson,” and that it would help readers understand the Bible’s teachings about the Lord’s return.\textsuperscript{50}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chart.png}
\caption{Figure 6 - William E. Blackstone, chart of Christ’s return from \textit{Jesus is Coming}, 3rd ed., 1908, p72}
\end{figure}

Though it looks sparse compared to Larkin’s work, the Blackstone chart is actually a highly compressed visual teaching tool. Much like the Millerite charts, Blackstone used symbolic visual elements in a densely coded way. Nothing on the chart appeared haphazardly. Blackstone offered two and a half pages of careful explanation about the chart’s visual symbols. For example, the letter “A” in the top left corner represents the ascension of Christ into heaven as described in Acts 1:9. The letter “T” near the center of the chart represents the “period of unequaled tribulation to the

\textsuperscript{50} William E. Blackstone, \textit{Jesus Is Coming}, Third (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1908), 72.
world.” For this idea, Blackstone provided fourteen Bible verse references and brief explanations of the tribulation’s significance for the nation of Israel. According to Blackstone, the chart compacts information to make it memorable and easier to teach. The image, in other words, serves a didactic function and a memory function. It helps teach a difficult concept and make it easier to recall later. It also creates a kind of sacred memory, in which the dispensationalist Christian could use this image to construct a personal or communal understanding about Christ’s premillennial return. Once this chart became part of one’s own memories, it helped make sense of life. It showed people their place in God’s plan of history.

The Blackstone chart also creates a complete, unified picture of biblical history. It finds a clear and logical order in the messy connections between scripture and history. As Brendan Pietsch has argued in a recent study on the origins of dispensationalist ideas, this chart divides all of time with an engineer’s precision, offering a precise and efficient account of God’s interactions with humanity. Its horizontal axis depicts “universal time” and its vertical show encounters between the divine and human realms. This creates a distinctly dispensationalist calendar, which is both universal and measurable by modern instruments like clocks, but also ruptured by supernatural

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51 Ibid., 73.
52 David Elsewhere, Morgan argues that Millerite charts created a kind of sacred memory. For this community, memory became a “visual chain of references, a hermeneutical construction of prophecy and history.” People constructed personal and communal identities out of the biblical past as they remembered it visualized on the charts. Morgan, Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images, 189.
intervention. Pietsch claims, “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.”53 Blackstone’s little chart did very complex work. Already in 1878, charts like Blackstone’s were performing several distinct functions in dispensationalist life, from pedagogy to hermeneutics, from concisely telling the Bible’s contents to creating a distinctly modern understanding of sacred time.

Early dispensationalist charts aimed to convey information economically. Despite longstanding Protestant wariness toward images, dispensationalists prized charts for their pedagogical value. Visual evidence for the didactic uses of images is not as strong as one might like, but records do exist to suggest that charts played an important didactic role in conservative Christian communities. A surviving postcard from c.1904-1914 shows a minister teaching with a large wall chart (Figure 7). The minister’s name and denominational affiliation remain uncertain, but he may be a Church of God evangelist.54 The postcard photograph seems staged, since there is no one listening to this talk. Nevertheless, the chart is what this postcard is all about.55 It is

53 Pietsch, “Dispensational Modernism,” 247, see 244.
54 The postcard tells us almost nothing about speaker. There is no inscription, no description of the content, and no postmark. On the back, it reads “Vancouver, WA,” a mark added later by archivists at the Billy Graham Center in Wheaton, IL. David Morgan has done work on the visual culture of the Church of God, and suggests that the chart bears some similarity to their works.
55 The chart contains Millerite imagery, but does not seem to bear any discernible Millerite/Adventist content. The speaker is possibly a Church of God evangelist, probably not a dispensationalist. While not
massive—at least eight feet wide and four feet high. It uses Millerite imagery along the top, but also contains circular illustrations along the bottom of “that was,” “that is,” and “to come.” The image in the bottom right corner, to which the preacher points, shows the wilderness Tabernacle. Text banners along the side explain “The Soul, What is It?” and “The Spirit in Man, What is it?”

Figure 7 - An unidentified teacher posed as if using a prophecy chart. Undated (1904-1914). Postcard, n.d. Courtesy of the Archives of the Billy Graham Center, Wheaton, IL. Postcard Collection (CN 636)

While it is not perfect evidence, since the preacher is probably not a dispensationalist, this postcard offers a rare glimpse at the way turn-of-the-century perfect, the image offers rare evidence of how people used prophecy charts. It provides strong evidence for the didactic use of charts in turn-of-the-century conservative Protestantism.
fundamentalists used charts to teach. Postcards were meant for quick reading. This
suggests that its original owner/recipient would have known immediately what this
postcard image showed. Conservative preachers used charts with enough consistency
that a postcard reader could be expected to understand the image at a glance, without
explanatory comment. The image also suggests some important features of didactic
chart use in actual religious practice. The large size of prophecy charts helped convey
the seriousness of their message even as it made it easy for everyone in a congregation to
see their visual content. Large dispensationalist charts (up to fifteen feet long and five
feet high) survive from later in the twentieth century, so it is reasonable to assume that
they also used big-format charts around the turn of the century.56

The preacher with a massive wall chart became an expert, one who interpreted
visual information for an audience. His authority derived from his ability to make sense
of complex visual evidence in light of scripture, to stitch the chart’s visual complexity
with the “plain sense” teaching of the Word. People didn’t just sit in their private studies
and absorb the truth of scripture with their minds. They felt it in their bodies. They
learned while surrounded by other Christians in a classroom or lecture hall. The truth
they learned was visually impressive, hung right before them on a grand scale. An
expert teacher interpreted this large chart’s complex visual codes, weaving Bible texts,

56 Many of these large, handmade dispensationalist charts, c.1940-70, remain in the archives of Dallas
Theological Seminary. Most are undated and sorted by size, with some up to fifteen feet long. Content and
style suggest that the majority of this collection postdates Clarence Larkin’s work from the 1920s.
spoken words, and images together. People experienced the truth while part of an audience. They knew God’s truth with their senses.

Dispensationalists loved to teach using charts, since they believed that a chart presented dense information in digestible bites. Arthur T. Pierson (1837-1911), who served as an editor on both the Scofield Reference Bible and The Fundamentals, believed strongly in the didactic value of charts. In Knowing the Scriptures (1910), he compared the senses with streams of water entering the mind. When one stream gets blocked, the water gains volume in another. “Hence,” he declared, “appeals to the eye help impressions through the ear, and both stimulate the imagination. [. . . .] Visible form or representation addressed to the eye is found greatly helpful in both the impression and retention of ideas.” Images, he argued, are especially useful for teaching children. In the Pierson model, images impressed data onto the mind. Seeing an idea made it more interesting, convincing, and memorable. Seeing an idea illustrated also helped people, particularly children, recall it later. Pierson believed a single picture was worth a thousand words of text.58

Though he imagined charts as a way to convey information, Pierson also tested the limits of visual representation within a fundamentalist framework. For fundamentalists, pictures could never just be pictures. “Art for art’s sake” never sufficed

in fundamentalist communities. Pictures had to have a purpose. They had to teach something, explain something, or convey useful information. Nonetheless, we miss the significance of images for this community if we imagine that pictures merely illustrated theological or biblical content like a scientific chart illustrates a set of experimental results. Pierson, committed to the value of images for teaching truths about the Bible, also produced images to “explain” ideas like sin, dispensational history, and Christian life. Under the protective auspices of didacticism, Pierson’s images themselves created new theological concepts and established ideals for Christian practice. One image suggests that every significant experience in Christian life corresponds to an event in the life of Jesus (Figure 8). Pierson imagined this image as didactic, saying he hoped it would “impress on the mind the truth addressed to the eye.”59 Pierson went to great length to explain exactly what truths this image presented to the eye. The horizontal line along the bottom, he explains, represents the “daily earthly walk of the believer as essentially one with the Christ-life, which spans it from beginning to end like a rainbow.”60 The vertical arc represents the interactions between Heaven and earth manifest through Christ. The lines running diagonally as radii on the semi-circle represent significant moments in Christian life, which correspond with events in the life

59 Pierson, Knowing the Scriptures, 429.
60 Ibid.
of Christ. Thus, the “cross” in Christ’s life corresponds to the individual Christian’s experience of self-surrender.

Figure 8 - A.T. Pierson, The Earthly Walk of the Believer Identified with Christ, from Knowing the Scriptures (1910), p429

It is important to remember that this is not a medieval allegorist reading the life of Jesus. This is a “chart” from a key spokesman of fundamentalism. This image retains the highly symbolic, schematic character of a chart. Unlike the Blackstone chart, however, it eschews specific biblical verse references for general concepts like “heavenly privilege.” It creates a visual similarity between the ideal of a believer’s life and the life of Jesus. This “chart” suggests that, for Pierson at least, images themselves could generate truthful information. Images shaped the way a person lived the Christian life. The image does not just array the facts of scripture, but rather creates a world in which “Christian life” resonates with Christ’s life at every event. The image trained the believer’s body to live in accordance with the life of Christ. The image created a pattern
for Christian living. It stated unequivocally that trials will come, but glory will come too. There is logic and order behind the struggles of Christian life. The chart showed how Christians develop over time according to the specific prototype established by Jesus. Though it appeals explicitly to the mind, the image invites emotional response. Knowing the truth about their journey, believers could feel assured.

Often scientific in appearance and aim, charts allowed dispensationalists to imagine relationships between the words of scripture in innovative ways. The Bible lived in dispensationalist communities. Charts gave it surprising new visual forms. Often, early dispensationalist charts blurred the line between image and text, between scripture and its exposition in the image.\textsuperscript{61} WJT Mitchell coined the term “imagetext” to describe the way words and images mutually implicate each other. Words are never just words, images are never just images. According to Mitchell, images and texts always rely on each other to create meaning. The distinction between words and images is always subject to cultural construction and maintenance.\textsuperscript{62} Early dispensationalist charts leveraged the word/image connection to create distinctly image-like word arrangements.

\textsuperscript{61} In a recent book, David Morgan reflects on the word-image connection in Protestant visual culture: “In Protestant visual and material culture, images often serve to underscore the iconicity of texts; bodies are disciplined to attune the ears to the prevailing soundscape and to predispose feelings to arise as if separate from the body; and spaces host sound and allow light to lift the eyes from objects and to illuminate the spaces and plain walls that reverberate with sound.” Morgan, The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling, 167.

When compared to Larkin, pictorial figures seem notably absent from Blackstone’s dispensational chart (Figure 6). There is no antichrist or winged leopard here—just letters and numbers, a star and a cross, lines and words. The other charts in Blackstone’s book look even less imagistic than does the one about Jesus’ return. Most contained only words, albeit words arranged creatively. Sometimes, the words on Blackstone’s charts/tables intersected vertically and horizontally (Figure 9). This chart, which appears in the text of Blackstone’s book, shows the flow of time from the current church age through the End Times. Much like the more complex chart, it uses horizontal and vertical axes to create a distinctly dispensationalist view of time. The words “the rapture” appear vertically, marking a divine intervention in human history between the Church age and the Great Tribulation. The reference to the bigger chart at the bottom of this image reveals the complex relations that could emerge between dispensationalist visual works. This image refers to the large chart of Figure 6, the arrangement of words on this chart clarifies a small part of that more elaborate chart, and that chart in turn

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63 Blackstone, Jesus Is Coming, 93, 101, 183–195, with the exception of 225.
explains the dispensational meaning of the Bible, which explains all of human history. These charts, together with their accompanying Bible verse references, created a complex visual code that the dispensationalist had to interpret. Under the guise of conveying information more effectively, these charts actually created a new kind of Bible. Far from just explaining textual content, these charts make scriptural words part of images. Those images retained all the authority of the Bible, but were free to move out of their original scriptural contexts. Words like “Kingdom” came to stand for an entire theological concept as well as a specific event in salvation history. That event occupied a particular place on a prophecy chart, represented equally well by the word “kingdom” or by a circle. It could move to different charts and appear in contexts outside its immediate biblical ones. Charts freed the words of scripture from the confines of immediate context.

By the 1910s, charts had become commonplace in fundamentalist religious practice. Firmly committed to the authority of scripture, charts leveraged the word/image connection to take increasingly pictorial forms. Where Blackstone’s early charts contained mostly wordy image-texts, representational figures began to assume prominence. As highly compressed vehicles for transporting information visually, the figures on charts engaged in a complex hermeneutical enterprise. A single image might “refer” to dozens of passages of scripture, as well as past and future historical events, simultaneously. The interpreter drew the image to explain scripture, but the image in
turn pointed to more scripture, more historical events, more images, more explanatory
notes.

As charts became brighter and more lavishly pictorial, authors attempted to rein
the interpretation of their images with written explanations. If charts simply conveyed
biblical information, they could not be mistaken for mere art. Joseph Henry Burridge’s
1909 chart, *A Concise Chart of Time’s Course Arranged to Show Epochs, Dispensations, and
Prophetic Periods in Consecutive and Proportionate Order* (Figure 10), comes with a detailed
explanation of its meaning. As in Blackstone’s chart, nothing fell to the viewer’s own
choices or to interpretive chance. Burridge wanted everything, even the colors on the
chart, to convey specific information. In the main body of his text, he used parenthetical
notes to “refer the reader to the chart.” The chart and book worked together to explain
scripture’s dispensational contents. Details mattered. Burridge took obvious pride in the
fact that his chart showed dispensations proportionally. Bigger circles represented longer
spans of time. This made his chart more accurate than others, he believed. Likewise,
symbolic colors set this chart apart. “The star (1),” he writes, “indicates the Church in the
purpose of God—chosen in Christ—before the world was. It is composed of BLUE AND
GOLD, which colors signify heavenly relationship and divine righteousness.” Like
Blackstone and Pierson, Burridge imagined himself as condensing information into

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65 Ibid., xvi.
visual form. Every visual element on his chart had a specific didactic purpose, a
carefully delimited range of meanings it was intended to teach. Individual experience or
interpretation had little significance here. The image presented the truth, and Burridge’s
text trained viewers to see the truth correctly. Using complex symbolism, the chart
presented time’s entire course on a single page. Its colors, clouds, and plumes of smoke
would not have seemed remarkable or artistic to fundamentalist eyes. They simply told
the truth about God’s actions in time.
In just forty years, dispensational charts went from sparse arrangements of text to colorful images packed with information. Long before Clarence Larkin arrived, charts were compressing information into visual form and reimagining history along dispensational lines. Influential theologians, like A.T. Pierson, valued charts as teaching tools.
tools, but also considered images to be capable of revealing truths not immediately contained within the Bible. Fundamentalism made demands on images, insisting that they teach the truth or do something useful for Christian life. However, fundamentalism’s rigid rules opened avenues for visual creativity. When Clarence Larkin published *Dispensational Truth* in 1918, the fundamentalist world already gave important roles to images in religious life. Images taught truth. They also showed people how to live. They could reveal God’s hidden operations, truths that were not immediately apparent from a cursory reading of scripture. They explained how history really worked and offered a roadmap of the future. The eye had become the organ that absorbed information and distinguished truth from falsehood. In a tradition that believed in the salvific power of information, the eye had become the gatekeeper of the soul.

*The Look of Inerrancy: Images, Materiality, and the Authoritative Word of God*

Charts gave the idea of biblical authority a firm bodily foundation. When Hodge and Warfield outlined the doctrine of inerrancy in 1881, they wrote, as theologians have always tended to do. In uncompromising tone, they declared that God’s inspiration extended to the very words of scripture: “in all the affirmations of Scripture of every kind, there is no more error in the words of the original autographs than in the thoughts...
they were chosen to express.” God does not make errors in thought, so the words of the Bible in which God chose to express his thoughts do not contain errors either.

Influential as the concept of inerrancy became, it did not come with a guidebook to its application in Christian communities. People who shared Hodge and Warfield’s commitment to scripture’s authority had to decide how to convey the idea to others, how to apply it to their own ministries, what it might actually mean in their daily lives. If biblical inerrancy were to mean anything for Christian life, it had to stand on a much stronger foundation than just logical writing. Inerrancy needed a sensory foundation. It needed to feel like something authoritative, something different than its modernist alternatives. Though Hodge and Warfield dealt with technical matters concerning the written words of scripture in the “original autographs,” the broader concept of biblical authority stood on the sensory foundation of the eye. Images presented truths as self-evident visible realities. For fundamentalists, the best images were “realistic.” They made complex concepts or events seem clear and obvious. Fundamentalist images aimed to present reality itself. When rightly controlled by the words of scripture,

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67 Hodge and Warfield coined the technical term “original autographs” to describe the handwritten manuscripts of the books of the Bible—those sheets of paper that touched the pen of the prophet Isaiah or the apostle John. All of these “original autographs” having been lost to history, any apparent logical or factual errors in the biblical text could be attributed to human error from the process of copying or oral transmission.
fundamentalists reasoned, images themselves might even approach inerrancy. Images simply illustrated biblical content. The inerrant referent adhered to the image.\textsuperscript{68}

At least in theory, fundamentalists saw images as subject to the authority of texts. Stripped of any independent power they might have had (as they did for, say, Roman Catholic or Russian Orthodox Christians), images became inert puppets of the words that animated them. In this way, fundamentalists adroitly sidestepped the longstanding Protestant suspicion toward images. Images contained no intrinsic power, but instead “illustrated” the powerful words of the Bible. In official discourse, images became all about education. Images conveyed information, made ideas more memorable, explained difficult truths. In short, fundamentalists prized images because they helped people apprehend the true meaning of scripture. Images themselves had no intrinsic power.\textsuperscript{69}

Anthropologist Webb Keane has developed the term “semiotic ideology” to describe a group of people’s background assumptions about words, things, and agency. A semiotic

\textsuperscript{68} Roland Barthes made this argument about photography, arguing that the special power of photographs lies in their ability to express a “having-been-there.” When he looks at a photograph of his dead mother, he does not experience a mere representation of her. The photograph is her, back from the dead. The representation shares the ontology of its referent. Roland Barthes, \textit{Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography}, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 6; André Bazin makes a similar argument when he proclaims photography to be the culmination of the plastic arts’ “mummy complex.” That is, images sought to stave off death by achieving ontological identity with the people they represented. Photography, Bazin writes, forces us “to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually re-presented, set before us, that is to say, in time and space” (8). André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” trans. Hugh Gray, \textit{Film Quarterly} 13, no. 4 (Summer 1960): 4–6 It would be a mistake to assume that fundamentalist images operated according to the same rules as photography. Nonetheless, theories of photography offer useful frameworks for thinking through the complex ontology of fundamentalist images.\textsuperscript{69} Art historian Joseph Leo Koerner has usefully traced the origins of Protestantism to debates about the power of images. Protestants, he argues, shifted the locus of religious activity from sacred objects to “the language-based activity of understanding and being understood.” Koerner, \textit{The Reformation of the Image}, 152.
ideology informs what people think a word is, what a thing is, what words or things can do, what it means to be an agent or object. It captures the distinct set of cultural practices that express the possibilities, roles, and responsibilities of representation. This can’t act, that can. In some cultures, people use words. For the Sumbanese traditions Keane studied, words use people. The term “semiotic ideology” aims to capture the ways representation and agency manifest in material practice.¹⁰ In fundamentalist practice, scripture’s inerrant words exhibited God’s supreme agency over the world. Proper pictures sat lifeless until words animated them. Pictures did what they were told. The Word of God, however, was living and active. Fundamentalists worked hard to keep their images from gaining any independent power. They did so to avoid the problem of idolatry.

In the fundamentalist understanding, not all images were inert. Only the good ones were. Idolatrous images possessed dangerous power. Clarence Larkin described the dangerous power of just such an image in his commentary on the Book of Revelation. In dense apocalyptic language, Revelation 13:11-18 describes “the Beast from the Earth.” This is the famous “mark of the beast” passage, which tells of a “beast” who deceives the whole world by his miraculous actions and demands that all people receive a “666” mark on their hand or forehead. In Larkin’s reading, the beast is the Antichrist.

and a character called “The False Prophet” assists him in his quest for global domination. The False Prophet creates an image of the Antichrist and demands that people worship it, under penalty of death. For Larkin, this is no metaphor: Revelation 13 describes an actual image from the future, a great statue of the Antichrist that will be built and displayed on earth. He drew this image for his readers to see (Figure 11). Not only will the False Prophet create this image, Larkin contends, he will also animate it. This image of the Antichrist “will be a living, speaking, AUTOMATON.”\(^1\) Larkin here associates “living” with the power of speech, a power usually forbidden to images. When an image receives this power, it proves its idolatrous nature. Pictures with their own power are more than dangerous. They are demonic. For someone to whom images mattered so much, Larkin remained wary of the power of images. Some images were just plain idolatrous. “It is a strange weakness of mankind,” he wrote, “that they must have some VISIBLE God to worship.”\(^2\) In Larkin’s estimation, the future image of the Antichrist will prey on the human weakness to make visible gods, to attribute autonomous power to images. This one image is the exception that proves the rule. For fundamentalists like Larkin, images were not supposed to bear any independent power.

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\(^2\) Ibid.
They were definitely not supposed to speak, claim worship for themselves, or act independently. If they did so, they revealed the demonic powers behind them.\textsuperscript{23}

Figure 11 - Clarence Larkin, "Image of the Beast," from The Book of Revelation, 1919, p.128. Larkin argues this image of the Antichrist will be given the power of speech.

Scriptural words had power of their own, but the best images didn’t. This gave images an unusual status in fundamentalist religious life. Fundamentalists often

\textsuperscript{23} Though they might seem worlds apart, the Friday Apostolics of contemporary Zimbabwe offer an interesting point of comparison to Clarence Larkin. Anthropologist Matthew Engelke notes that the Friday Apostles declare themselves to be “Christians who don’t read the Bible” (2-3). As the Friday Apostles understand it, their faith is immediate and does not depend on material things like books. Things don’t matter, and in fact they create a barrier to genuine, “live and direct” faith. For the Friday Apostles, books are just too thingy to mediate God’s “live and direct” Word. Engelke describes their religion as having a “problem of presence,” namely, how to make an immaterial faith manifest in the real world of bodies and things. For the Friday Apostles, spoken words, white robes, or a curative substance called “healing honey” are considered not quite so material as books, making them better suited to religious purposes. Engelke’s book teaches us that materiality isn’t an all-or-nothing affair. Often, it operates on a sliding scale: groups can categorize things as being more or less “material,” and they might understand purely material things as being more or less useful to the practice of their religion. For Larkin and other fundamentalists, charts did not pose material barriers to God’s truth. They offered direct access to it. Certain kinds of images, however, did pose a problem and could be “distracting” from the truth. See: Matthew Engelke, A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an African Church, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2007), 9ff, 224–243.
described their images as visual *translators* of biblical text. Behind its formal and often obscure language, the Bible contained a plain sense meaning that images translated for people. Through the image, the “plain sense” meaning of the Bible became clear for the viewer. While not quite inspired like scripture was, images nonetheless conveyed information very effectively from the mind of God to the mind of humans. Like a good interpreter, they remained practically invisible in themselves—ideas and words took center stage. But this left biblical images in an ontological grey zone. While they almost never considered their visual products infallible, fundamentalists considered images superb translators of scripture’s intended meaning. Images walked a tightrope between dangerous power and total inertness, between idolatry and inefficacy.

Charts occupied a special place on the fundamentalists’ material-spiritual continuum. They were not quite divinely inspired, but they were not idolatrous either. Wary about images generally, one Baptist Sunday school manual from 1901 cautioned against overreliance on images in the classroom: “Pictorial illustrations and special objects should be used sparingly in teaching, lest by them you produce distraction of the mind rather than illumination.”74 This statement implies that images can and do illuminate the mind, when understood and used correctly. In and of themselves, however, images are potentially distracting and dangerous. This same author muddied

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the waters even further. He stated, “teaching [topics like biblical content or history]... may be aided very greatly by various charts.”75 For this author, who specifically mentions a work by Clarence Larkin as helpful, charts seemed not to qualify as dangerous or distracting images.76

Charts merely illustrated the Bible’s meaning. They translated scripture’s content into visual form, made its history easier to understand, contextualized specific utterances in the grand scheme of salvation history. Ironically, the charts’ lack of independent power gave them an ambiguous status: charts were not scripture, but, since they merely illustrated the Bible’s contents, they almost were. Drawn by human hands, they were susceptible to error. Nonetheless, chart makers like Clarence Larkin invited viewers to compare their charts with scripture on all points. It was practically a dare: mistakes in this chart cannot exist because it simply recapitulates scripture. The charts either accorded with scripture or not. They were either useless images of falsehood or very helpful translations of scripture’s powerful words. For the analyst of fundamentalist material culture, this means that charts held unique powers. Their materiality was never an obstacle to their transmission of the immaterial God’s ideas.

The complex relationship between absolute biblical authority and the inertness of biblical charts manifested early in Clarence Larkin’s career. In 1895, Larkin teamed with

75 Ibid., 39.
76 Blackall mentions Larkin’s co-authored work “A Birds-Eye View of the Bible” as a helpful resource. Ibid., 47.

Larkin drew the foldout chart and Earle penned the text (Figure 12). The chart proclaims itself to be a "chronological, geographical, and harmonical" view of the life of Christ. It attempts to show the entire life of Jesus in a single image. Combining material from all four gospels, it creates a unified timeline of the life of Christ from his birth to his ascension. Color-coded by region, it shows where Jesus travelled in Israel as he progressed through his life. It arranges the life of Christ into periods, showing which gospel passages provide information about each major epoch. It includes a map of Jerusalem, showing where Jesus traipsed during his final week on earth. Interweaving Bible verse references, maps, and tables, the chart presents itself as an explanation of the Gospels' combined contents. With no false modesty, the authors proclaimed the chart to be "the completest and most realistic representation of the Life of Jesus ever given on a single page." More, they called it, "as near perfection as a chart can be made[…] a lifelong instrument of power to any Pastor in teaching the Life of Christ." The didactic utility of charts here reaches new heights. Bible charts had become *instruments* of power in the hands of the Bible teacher.

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77 According to Earle, the final design of the chart was a revision of an 1891 chart by Larkin. This confirms that Larkin was producing charts almost as soon as he became a dispensationalist. See: I.N. Earle, *Key to the Birds-Eye View of the Life of Christ (To Accompany Larkin’s Chart)* (Wilmington, DE: Earle Publishing Co., 1895), 2.

78 Ibid.
Larkin and Earle believed their chart created a sensory connection between the viewer and the contents of the Bible. When people looked at the chart, they saw more
than particular theological ideas displayed in visible form. The chart made viewers 
*eyewitnesses* to the life of Jesus. The Gospels, Earle explained, are “photographs, not 
original creations” of the life of Christ. They are not opinions or artistic renditions, but 
documentary snapshots of what actually happened. Because Larkin’s chart merely 
reproduced the content of the Gospels, it too took on a documentary, photographic 
character. The chart showed what happened. The serpentine black line that runs through 
the image shows Jesus’s pathway as he traversed the Levant throughout his life. It 
reveals the geographical location of major events from an amalgamated Gospel 
narrative, creating a temporal-spatial map of Jesus’ every utterance and action. Earle 
called this single line “the crowning feature of the chart.” The line gave the chart’s 
viewer the ability to see Christ as he actually was, where and when he was in a place 
and what he did there. By following the line with the eye, Earle said, “we are in the 
footsteps of Jesus and may accompany him from place to place, reviving the various 
scenes, reproducing the circumstances, and thus making his course seem very vivid and 
real.” By looking at the chart, a viewer becomes an eyewitness to the life of Jesus.

Biblical scenes “revive” through the chart, entering contemporary life. Travelling 
along the line visually, a viewer gets immersed in the world of the Bible and actually 
follows the footsteps of Christ. On the chart, events described in the gospels become

79 Ibid., 5.
80 Ibid., 7.
more real than they can be on the pages of the Gospels themselves. The line, maps, and colors of the chart work in harmony with the “photographs” from the Gospel text. The authority of scripture is no abstract theological notion here. The chart’s viewer becomes certain of the Bible’s authority, just as an eyewitness is certain of what happened at an event. The chart functions as a powerful teaching tool because it generates firsthand knowledge about the Bible’s contents. Reading about Jesus does not teach as effectively as travelling alongside him, which is exactly what the chart allowed. The eye enabled viewers of the chart to see and feel the truth of scripture for themselves, to walk beside Jesus and experience history firsthand.

**Taking Literalism Literally: The Visual Practices of Literal Bible Reading**

Literalism remains one of the least understood aspects of fundamentalist life. According to Bible scholar James Barr, fundamentalists were not actually literalists. Or, at least, they were not as literalistic in their Bible readings as they might have led others to believe. To defend his own theological position, Barr attacks contemporary fundamentalist readings (from the 1970s-80s) as completely unfaithful to the text of the Bible itself. Fundamentalists, he argues, do great injustice to the text of the Bible in their efforts to defend the principle of biblical inerrancy. If something in the Bible seems like error, they use complex interpretive apparatuses to explain how it is really inerrant. Fundamentalist “literalism,” in other words, holds little concern for what scripture literally says. Fundamentalists find what they want to find in the Bible, namely
inerrancy, and go to great interpretive lengths to make their ideas work with what the text actually says.\textsuperscript{81} Barr, and many others, see this as a laughable lack of literalism among the supposed literalists, a reason to mock or dismiss fundamentalist readings.\textsuperscript{82}

The complexity of fundamentalist “literalism” presents an opportunity to understand the sensory life of this community better. Just because their “literalism” does not look like what we might expect, we ought not dismiss fundamentalists as silly or hardheaded Bible readers. While it might not seem like literalism to a textualist like James Barr, fundamentalist “literalism” works for its practitioners. It behooves the scholar of fundamentalism to ignore the polemics of this debate and ask instead how fundamentalist Bible reading worked in practice. Whatever its fidelity or infidelity to the text of the Bible, “literal” Bible reading operated through the eyes. The “literal” Bible of the early twentieth-century fundamentalists overflowed with images. People like Clarence Larkin rendered the Bible’s images accurately. Sometimes, the images themselves demonstrated what the Bible’s words really meant.

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\textsuperscript{82} Commenting on the cold reception to Darren Aronofsky’s film Noah among conservative Protestants, David Morgan makes a similar argument about fundamentalism’s supposed “literalism.” For Morgan, “literalism” uses modern devices to make the original text of the Bible say things it was never meant to say. He writes, “‘Literalism’ is a contrived ideal of faithfulness to a text by means of interpretive and technological devices that go far beyond it, replacing the text’s original circumstances and strange otherness with the presumption of what it ought to mean. Modern cinema in the form of Bible epic helps literalism accomplish that act of faith, but betrays the artifice of literalist interpretation in doing so. Literalism presses words uttered in an ancient setting into service in a radically different world. […] literalism is a practice of determining what a scripture means in order to extract from it the meaning one wants.” David Morgan, “Noah: Story and Medium,” \textit{The Revealer}, April 17, 2014, http://therevealer.org/archives/19252.
\end{flushright}
Despite its apparently obvious meaning, literalism defies easy definition. A person who runs for a fire extinguisher when I say “my ears are burning” is a literalist, but so is someone who believes the earth is six thousand years old based on their reading of Genesis, and so is Justice Antonin Scalia of the U.S. Supreme Court. In *Serving the Word*, anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano studied the broad phenomenon of literalism in American religion and American law. While it might seem like fanatical humbuggery to liberal textual scholars, he argues that literalism still holds sway in large segments of American society. Religious conservatives apply it to their readings of the Bible; political conservatives often apply it to their readings of American law or founding documents. According to Crapanzano, legal literalism and biblical literalism are related in complex ways. He identifies ten major characteristics of literalist interpretation in modern America:

1) Literalism focuses on the semantic/referential dimension of language, rather than contextual/pragmatic.
2) Literalism posits a “simple, unambiguous correlation of word and thing.”
3) Literalism asserts that word meanings are commonsense, plain, ordinary, and unambiguous.
4) Literalism argues that all texts have a clear, decidable meaning.
5) Literalism considers all figurative interpretation to be “distortion” of a text.
6) Original/authorial intention is clear and determines meaning.
7) Certain authoritative texts should ground the interpretation of other texts.
8) Practitioners quote authoritative texts frequently and out of context.
9) Writing, not speech, holds primary authority.
10) Texts must be interpreted on their own terms before they can be applied to a particular situation.\textsuperscript{83}

One should not consider Crapanzano’s list exhaustive or authoritative. While it helps fence in the unruly notion of literalism, the criteria need rethinking in order to provide analytical insight into early twentieth-century fundamentalism. Most glaringly for the purposes of my aesthetic analysis, this list lacks any account of the role of senses in interpretation. Crapanzano’s list takes literalism to be a textual phenomenon. While it certainly is that, early fundamentalist literalism involved much more than the reading mind (and, to be fair, many of Crapanzano’s anecdotes account for material practices in his literalist communities).\textsuperscript{84}

Crapanzano’s assertion that literalism posits a simple correlation of word and thing deserves fleshing out in the early twentieth-century fundamentalist context. Words and things are often material, and there is nothing necessary or obvious about the ways cultures distribute the roles and responsibilities of each. The “simple, unambiguous correlation” between word and thing might seem simple when presented in fundamentalist arguments, but a lot of cultural work goes into making it so. For early twentieth century fundamentalists, the correlation between words and things was not easy when it came to words like “the Beast” or “little horn.” The connection between such words and real things in the world was something people had to work out. These


\textsuperscript{84} See: ibid., 56.
were signifiers in search of a signified. For early fundamentalists, working out these word/thing connections inspired new readings of the Bible’s relation to history. Images made it possible to bridge between text and world, spirit and flesh, past and future. Rooted in the material world of the seen, images gave real referents to “literal” readings of prophecy. Reading the Bible “literally” meant understanding its images and, often, making them visible to others. Fundamentalists saw the Bible’s “literal” meaning.

The fundamentalists’ sense of sight created the “literal” meaning of the Bible. Particularly when it came to the Bible’s hard-to-understand prophetic sections, images made it possible to grasp the Bible’s “literal” meaning with ease. In his contribution to The Fundamentals, “Fulfilled Prophecy a Potent Argument for the Bible,” Arno C. Gaebelein offers an example of how the visual construction of the literal worked even when fundamentalists weren’t actually producing charts or images. Reading Daniel chapter eight, Gaebelein explains what the prophet meant when he described a “he-goat” coming from the west in a great rush. For Gaebelein, the answer is clear: “In 334 B.C. the notable horn, Alexander, in goat-like fashion, leaped across the Hellespont and fought successful battles.”

Gaebelein here demonstrates the importance of vision for fundamentalist “literal” reading in his description of Alexander’s “goat-like” qualities. The only way to understand the prophecy’s “literal” meaning is to describe how a goat

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looks when it charges. Comparing a charging goat to things that happened in history, Gaebelein arrives at the prophecy’s “literal” sense, which is that Daniel predicted the coming of Alexander the Great. More likely, he needed Alexander to be the he-goat of Daniel, so he used the qualities of a charging goat to explain Alexander’s military success. The image, though here only a mental image, makes sense of the prophecy. Such readings suggest that the eye revealed the true meaning of scripture for people like Arno Gaebelein. God showed prophets the future and the past. By seeing the same things the prophets saw, readers could understand the plain-sense meaning of their prophetic statements. The prophet Daniel saw a goat. It matters that the prophet Daniel saw a goat because of Alexander’s “goat-like” qualities as a leader. Readers who know details about the appearance of goats can understand the book of Daniel literally.

Clarence Larkin operated with a simple principle of interpretation. He just tried to “let the Scriptures say what they want to say.” He thought most of the Bible’s language was “literal,” by which he meant something like straightforward. He insisted that the Bible’s symbolic and figurative language made itself clear from context, so people should assume biblical language was literal unless context demanded otherwise. When Jesus said the kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed, he was using figurative language. Clearly figurative. In most other passages, the Bible used “literal” language. Understanding literal language required no special hermeneutic devices, only “the

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86 From the “Foreword” of Larkin, *Dispensational Truth: Or God’s Plan and Purpose in the Ages*, n.p.
customary rules of grammar and rhetoric.” In short, Larkin said, “we are to read the Bible as we would read any other book, letting it say what it wants to say, and not allegorize or spiritualize its meaning... this false method of interpreting... has led us to the origin of so many religious sects and denominations.” Larkin suggests that if people would just let the Bible say what it wanted to say, everyone would arrive at the same interpretive place. There would be no denominations, no debates about doctrine, no spiritualized hooey masquerading as biblical truth. Rather than explaining the way charging goats look, he drew charts to help people see these plain sense, “literal” meanings for themselves.

Larkin did not tell people how to interpret the Bible, but instead revealed its dispensational truth before their eyes. His images offered only the truth—whatever textual wrangling they required remained less important than the images of the charts themselves. The Bible literally meant exactly what Larkin showed on his charts. His discussions of the Bible verses referenced by the charts merely proved how good the charts were. The charts “fit” with what scripture said, so they presented pure

87 Ibid., 1.
88 Ibid.
89 The concepts of “revelation” and “concealment” are important for the anthropological understanding of magic. Magicians practice the “skilled revelation of skilled concealment.” Watch as I pull a white rabbit from my hat. You never see the trick, but you see the result. Modernity, Pels and Meyer argue, practices its own form of revelation and concealment. It reveals the magician’s trick as base superstition, while it conceals the political apparatuses that declare THIS to be magic and THAT to be science, THIS to be true and THAT to be illusion, THIS to be modern and THAT to be superstition. Birgit Meyer and Peter Pels, Magic and Modernity: Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 1–38.
dispensational truth. His charts stripped the Bible to its most significant details, translated those details into visual form, and put them in proper relation to each other. Fantastical or complex though they might seem to outsiders, Larkin always maintained that his charts did nothing but show people biblical truth. The charts offered clarity about the meaning of the Bible, making its dispensational contents an incontestable visual reality. The eye perceived the truth of scripture’s meaning.

Charts made it possible to understand scripture’s mysteries. One of Larkin’s charts, “The Perspective of Prophecy,” explained why biblical prophets seemed unable to foresee some events even as they predicted others accurately (Figure 13). For Larkin, it was a simple matter of perspective. Visual perspective. Literal perspective. The prophet’s perspective in relation to God’s plan of history determined exactly what each saw or failed to see. Each prophet saw only part of the whole of history. Larkin represented their perspectives with straight lines. From his perspective in the Babylonian exile, for example, the prophet Daniel could see all the way to the Second Coming of Jesus in the future. While it might seem like he was describing events surrounding the exile in Babylon, he actually, literally saw the future. Each prophet’s visual perspective explains the written contents of the Bible. Daniel saw the Second Coming of Christ. Nahum didn’t see anything beyond his own time. Isaiah saw all the way into the distant future, catching a glimpse of the New Jerusalem that will be built after Jesus returns. Future events are absolutely certain because they have been seen and
recorded in advance. “Prophecy,” writes Larkin, “is not a haphazard guess, like our weather probabilities, it is History Written in Advance. The moment we grasp this idea of prophecy… the Bible becomes a new book.”\(^9\) For Larkin, the prophets meant what they said. However, readers would find it impossible to understand what the prophets said until they understand exactly what the prophets saw (and didn’t see). The prophets’ unusual visions were not cryptic or symbolic turns of phrase, but real visual experiences put to paper. Readers needed the chart to show how the prophets’ individual perspectives fit within the grand scope of dispensational history. Readers also needed the chart to show exactly what each prophet did and did not see. The chart brings the “literal” visual meaning of many prophecies into a single view. The prophets just wrote down what they saw, and Larkin’s chart shows exactly how the prophets’ visions relate to each other. The chart takes their individual visual experiences and creates a new, unified visual experience out of them. It places the viewer in the position of a Bible expert, knowing precisely how the prophets’ visions fit together. Taking in all of these perspectives at a glance, the viewer of Larkin’s chart knows God’s plans better than the individual prophets themselves did.

Figure 13 - Clarence Larkin, "The Perspective of Prophecy," from *Dispensational Truth*, 1920. Each horizontal line represents a prophet’s viewpoint, while the images in the middle depict the course of time.
Without charts to show the visual events described in scripture, literalism did not work. Fundamentalist literalism, in other words, relied on the sense of sight for its sensibility. Charts proved so important to the practice of literalism that, in some cases, the images seemed to reveal far more than just the contents of the Bible. Charts established connections between scripture’s words, readers’ bodies, and artifacts of human history in creative ways. They helped infuse the viewer’s everyday visual world with religious significance. The visible world contained coded information that spoke to the power and authority of God. Properly trained eyes could perceive this truth.

Toward the end of *Dispensational Truth*, Larkin discussed what he calls the “dispensational teaching of the great pyramid.” He produced several large charts for this section, carefully showing the dimensions, internal passageways, geographical location and overall visual appearance of the Great Pyramid at Giza (Figure 14). With his drafter’s eye, Larkin marveled at the pyramid’s complex design and striking architecture. He noted that the building’s outer slope is 10:9, ten feet of rise for nine feet of run. This is significant, he says, because “if you multiply the altitude of the Pyramid by ten raised to the ninth power, you have 91, 840, 000, which in miles, gives the exact distance of the sun from the earth.”91 This precise astronomical calculation revealed just one of many divine secrets Larkin found coded into the pyramid’s design. Practically every detail of its physical appearance conveyed some tidbit of sacred information. The

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91 Ibid., 167.
length of the Grand Gallery in inches (1885), for example, corresponds roughly to the number of years in the current dispensation, which extends from the birth of the church to the soon-coming rapture. Larkin carefully avoids using this length to set a date for Christ’s return, but he says all signs point to an imminent return. A long, low passageway represents the coming difficulties of the Great Tribulation. Larkin concludes, “[The Great Pyramid] must have come from source not Egyptian. Why? Because there was purpose in its building. It was built to record mathematical, astronomical, and Scriptural knowledge.”

Figure 14 - Clarence Larkin, "Vertical Section of the Great Pyramid (Looking East)," from Dispensational Truth, 1920

If all of this information about the pyramid seems to stray far from the “literal” meaning of the text of Bible, Larkin soon explains the connection. Isaiah 19:19-20 reads “In that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the Land of Egypt… And it

92 Ibid., 170.
shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the Lord of Hosts.” According to Larkin, the Great Pyramid of Giza is the altar “in the midst of Egypt” that Isaiah described. Isaiah saw the pyramid, and Larkin translated the prophet’s vision onto his pages. The chart takes Isaiah literally, explaining that the Great Pyramid stands in the midst, precisely in the middle, of Egypt (Figure 15). More than that, Larkin shows, it stands in the midst of the whole earth.

According to Larkin’s drawings, this “altar of the Lord” stands as a sign and witness of God’s truth to the whole world, resting at the geographic center of human civilization. The pyramid’s details contribute to the power of its “witness.” The fact that it displays the distance from the earth to the sun, for example, suggests that the Bible contains precise information about the universe. The details and precision of the pyramid’s construction, Larkin argues, testify to the inerrant truth of the Bible. His chart showed why details of the pyramid’s construction mattered. The Pyramid’s firm foundation, precise measurements, straight lines, complex passageways, number of stones, and even the length of its galleries all point to the dispensational truth of the Bible. As Larkin says, every architectural detail of the pyramid “bear[s] witness to the inspiration of the Scriptures in these last days.”\textsuperscript{93} Charts were able to reproduce these details to the finest point—the slope of the pyramid, its scale, its global position, etc. Larkin’s charts transcribed the pyramid’s most significant details into an easily

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 170.
comprehensible visual form. The chart shows viewers the literal meaning of Isa 19:19-20. The details of Larkin’s image make the literal truth clear: through all its visible details, the pyramid bears a testimony to the Bible’s dispensational message during the Last Days.

Figure 15 - Clarence Larkin, "The Dispensational Teaching of the Great Pyramid," from Dispensational Truth, 1920. These images argue that the Great Pyramid stands in the literal “midst” of Egypt and the world. Diagram “B” suggests that the pyramid’s design solves the ancient problem of how to square the circle.

For modern textual and archaeological scholars, Larkin’s reading of the pyramid might seem like a stretch. Admittedly, scriptural text seems to have relatively little to do with this particular literal reading. For Clarence Larkin, textual scholarship did not have much to contribute to the discussion of Isaiah 19:19-20. What the Bible really said needed a visual explanation. Fancy scholarship couldn’t do better. Without the chart, Larkin’s “literal” reading of Isaiah makes little sense. With the chart, a world of insight opens.
His image of the Great Pyramid revealed the hidden truth of scripture, conveying to his viewers exactly what the prophet Isaiah saw. The pyramid, in all its architectural detail, stands as a witness to the level of detail with which God reveals his plans in scripture. Surely, if God could make the slope of the pyramid convey sacred information, he could be trusted to convey accurate information about humanity’s future in the Bible. Larkin’s literalism required the eye to perceive truthful information. His chart revealed the Bible’s hidden meaning, allowing viewers to sense its truth for themselves. The chart empowered viewers to evaluate Larkin’s dispensational readings against the Bible and hard, visible reality. Either the pyramid looked like Larkin’s drawing, or it did not. The chart was either accurate or it was not. Isaiah literally referred to the pyramid in his prophecy, literally showed its dispensational significance, or he did not. As far as Larkin was concerned, scripture meant what he showed on his chart. A viewer’s eyes could discern the truth of it.

**Conclusions: The Blessed Hope Viewed through the Prophetscope**

Fundamentalists saw biblical truth in the world around them. They saw what God was doing. They saw what God really said in the Bible. Of all the senses, sight held the most authority for fundamentalists because the eyes provided direct access to the truth. For many people, this vision was empowering. Anybody, not just Bible professors or ordained ministers, could see the truth for themselves. A relatively obscure pastor from outside Philadelphia, Clarence Larkin saw the truth when he let the scriptures “say
what they wanted to say.” He drew what he discovered on charts so that others might
see it too. The “literal” meaning of the Bible emerged through the sense of sight, as
charts and images revealed what the Word really meant. Anyone who could see
scripture’s images had direct access to the Word of God. The eye, rightly attuned to the
difference between truth and falsehood, held the highest place among the senses.

By implication, some people couldn’t see the truth.94 William Blackstone, a
champion of Christian Zionism, reportedly hid hundreds of Hebrew copies of Jesus is
Coming in the rock city of Petra. The charts remained inside. Believing that many Jews
would take refuge there during the Great Tribulation, he wanted them to be able to see
the truth and accept salvation. Fundamentalist vision could not abide any haze or
difference of perspective. Truth was clear for all to see.95

Clarence Larkin’s eyes gave him hope. He longed for the day when he would see
his savior coming in the clouds in a physical body. He was absolutely certain that the
Second Coming was going to be a visual encounter. In 1 Cor 13:12, Paul wrote, “For now

94 Of course, some people really could not see the truth because they were physically blind. Fundamentalists
wrote relatively little about the implications of physical blindness for their optically guided faith. That said,
the blind man cured by Christ was one of their favorite tropes to describe Christian conversion. E.g. E.Y.
(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1917), 85.
95 Even seeing the truth did not guarantee political equality. Black men and women who saw the truth could
not attend the “whites only” Billy Sunday revival in Atlanta. They could not use charts to overcome
structural poverty or make the justice system just. White women who saw the truth did not get elected
president. In most cases, they were forbidden from preaching even after they had visions of the truth. Poor
people who saw the truth remained poor. Those who did not abide by heterosexual norms still faced
imprisonment with their Bible maps in hand. My chapter has offered an initial effort to understand the
distributions of fundamentalist vision, but considerable work remains to be done about the ways race,
gender, class, and sexuality made people see differently.
we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.” Fundamentalists took this as a literal description of things to come. They would see Jesus face-to-face. They would look him square in the eye and be confirmed about the truth they knew already.

In his contribution to *The Fundamentals*, Charles Erdman made clear that the Second Coming of Christ was going to be a visual, embodied activity and not just a spiritual activity. He contrasted Christ’s ongoing “spiritual presence” in a Christian’s life with his future coming, which would be “visible, bodily, local.” “Christ will some day literally appear again in bodily form,” Erdman wrote, “and ‘we shall see Him’ and shall then ‘be like Him,’ when we ‘see Him as He is.’” For most fundamentalists, the Second Coming was to be the ultimate visual encounter. Seeing Jesus with their own eyes would be the ultimate visual experience of the truth.

Larkin believed lucky Christians might actually get to see Christ in their lifetimes. This filled him with tremendous optimism. Christian sight made it possible to have hope for the future in a world determined to persist in evil. Very early in his career, Larkin gave a talk at a Brooklyn prophecy conference about the power of the Second Coming. The New York Tribune described, “His address was illustrated by the chart to which he referred in setting forth his ideas.” That chart is now lost, but Larkin’s speech survives. Toward the end of the address he said, “Looking down the ‘prophetscope’ of

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97 Ibid., 302.
the Scriptures, I see that that all things are working together for good, and are working out a purpose that [...] will some day make this world a fairer Eden than the Paradise Lost.” Larkin had to invent a modern-sounding name like “prophetscope” to describe the visual technology he found in the Scriptures. The Bible let him see into the future. Literally. When he read the scriptures dispensationally, they showed him images of things to come. In the future, Jesus would return in the clouds. The modern world might offer trials, but Jesus was going to appear in the flesh. He was coming soon. Like many others, Larkin called this expected encounter the “Blessed Hope.” On a day in the near future, all would see the truth when they laid eyes upon Christ’s returning body.

100 Clarence Larkin ended *Dispensational Truth* with a poem (see 176). Written by an anonymous author circa 1865, its appearance in Larkin’s book underscored the tremendous significance of sight to everyday fundamentalist life. Most of the poem is written in Jesus’s voice, telling the reader that he might return at any time of the day or night. But it ends in the voice of a Christian, who expects to see the Blessed Hope at any moment.

And when a shadow falls across the window
Of my room,
Where I am working my appointed task,
I lift my head to watch the door and ask
If He is come!
And the Spirit answers softly
In my home,
“Only a few more shadows,
And He will come.”

The poem encourages Larkin’s readers to look at the world around them for signs of Christ’s return. Their eyes would let them discover Christ’s presence. When Jesus returned, it would be in a visible form.
Chapter 2 – Faith Cometh by Hearing: Sound in Fundamentalist Life

“Faith Cometh by Hearing, and Hearing by the Word of God.” – Rom. 10:17 (KJV)

Sonic Revivals and The Organ of Spiritual Change

In April of 1926, an unnamed farmer from the rural municipality of Khedive, Saskatchewan, Canada sent a letter to evangelist Paul Rader. A former heavyweight prizefighter and promoter, Rader brought a rough-and-ready enthusiasm to the fundamentalist pulpit. His Sunday radio program had quickly become one of the most popular shows in the Midwest, even extending its reach north to the Canadian prairies. Started just a year earlier, the show combined old-fashioned revival preaching, choral singing, special programming for “invalids and shut-ins,” and dramatic skits for boys and girls. Based at Rader’s semi-permanent Chicago Gospel Tabernacle, the broadcast lasted all day every Sunday—about fourteen hours. Rader’s program was unabashedly fundamentalist and unabashedly tech-savvy. He insisted on nothing but the highest quality radio production values and the firmest commitment to gospel ministry. He thought the two inseparable. A good gospel radio production required attention to the quality of microphones, the signal strength of broadcast towers, the clarity and timbre of voices, the tuning of pianos, the harmony and enunciation of choirs. Every little aspect of the sound mattered.
As Aprils go, those in southern Saskatchewan can be as cold as winter. Usually, some snow still clings at the dark corners of buildings and the ankles of trees. The ground often remains frozen, so planting has not begun. But the man’s letter said little about the hardness of farm life. He mentioned its isolation in passing, noting that his family could not “get out to church very often.” That is why they enjoyed Rader’s program so much, he said. More than just entertainment, the program did spiritual work for them. His letter described a small miracle that resulted from listening to one Sunday broadcast: “The Spirit of God was so real that we could feel His very presence through the air into our room.” In response to the Spirit’s presence, he said, “my wife, my family, myself, and the hired boy all got so blessed that we had a little revival meeting right here in our home. . . . we can feel the Spirit of God moving through your meetings.”

Listening to a radio show brought the Spirit of God into this farmer’s home. Without fanciness or exaggeration, he described the event and expressed gratitude to Rader for the program. The Spirit moved among his family, and he could feel that it moved in Rader’s congregation too. The radio made it possible for God’s Spirit to travel from Chicago to Saskatchewan in an instant. Through their ears, the family obtained all the proof they needed that the Holy Spirit moved among them.

Spiritual change materialized in fundamentalist ears. Fundamentalists’ eyes discerned truth, but God often used their ears for spiritual action. Ears gave God access

to individual hearts, opening the door for spiritual transformation in human beings.

Fundamentalist ears experienced many miracles. Given their Protestant heritage, it is not altogether surprising that fundamentalists placed a premium on aurality, on hearing “the Word.” But it would be a mistake to assume that sermons alone did the heavy spiritual lifting in fundamentalist auditory life. In fact, they rarely did. When the Spirit moved, it moved because testimonies, sermons, dramatic narratives, tones of voice, music, and technology worked together to create spiritual experiences. For the farmer in Saskatchewan, practices of listening brought a “little revival” into his home and materialized the Holy Spirit. Whatever they heard on Paul Rader’s program that particular Sunday, it worked. God entered the room. The fundamentalism they were a part of spread across the American continent as countless “little revivals” happened in the living rooms of isolated farms, in tents in noisy industrial cities, and in the quiet of individual hearts. More than the messages and ideas leaders propounded, shared bodily practices of listening connected individuals to each other.²

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² Anthropologist Charles Hirschkind has studied the role of cassette sermons in the Islamic revival in contemporary Egypt. He argues that these recorded sermons, often derided by western media as part of radical Islamic fundamentalism, form an important part of the revival for ordinary people. Especially important for my own study of Protestant fundamentalism is his argument that “the contribution of this aural medium to shaping the contemporary moral and political landscape of the Middle East lies not simply in its capacity to disseminate ideas or instill religious ideologies but in its effect on the human sensorium, on the affects, sensibilities, and perceptual habits of its cast audience. The soundscape produced through the circulation of this medium animates and sustains the substrate of sensory knowledges and embodied aptitudes undergirding a broad revival movement within contemporary Islam.” In other words, the tapes are not just about transmitting messages or ideas. They establish a sensory way of knowing that allows ordinary people to participate in the revival movement’s ethical and political projects. Charles Hirschkind,
Sonic Modernity and the Study of American Religion

Material culture studies of religion in American history have usually emphasized the visual over the auditory. Sound, hearing, and listening remain comparatively understudied in works about the material cultures of religion, even when it comes to traditions like conservative Protestantism that tend to give more official theological weight to the spoken and heard. Nonetheless, a robust literature on the study of sound in American religious history has developed. Hearing, like the other senses I examine in fundamentalist life, has been shaped by its American history, and a growing number of authors offer insightful treatments of the topic. Unlike some in sound studies, this chapter says very little about what sound is in general. I am not interested in contrasting vision in the abstract with hearing in the abstract, commenting grandly about conservative Protestant aurality vs. modern visuality, or entering the complex philosophical debates about orality and textuality. I am much more interested in how sound and listening worked in the historical particularity of fundamentalists’ lives. To

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3 Walter Ong’s work, for example, suggests that sound is inherently “interior” while vision is “exterior.” Sound is evanescent while the visual aims at permanence. Sound is subjective, vision objective. Sound immerses, vision dissects. Sound connects communities to the sacred, vision isolates and remains secondary to the oral in religious contexts. Jacques Derrida, by contrast, suggests that writing/visuality tries to offer certainty and permanence but ultimately produces instability and movement. He asserts the primacy of the written over the oral, the surface over the interior. Walter J. Ong, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (London: Routledge, 2002), 31–56; 69; Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).
do this, I trace the social, cultural, material, and technological conditions that made certain kinds of sounds and listening possible for particular communities. Throughout this chapter, I use the phrase “ways of listening” to describe the sets of learned bodily techniques, social structures, and cultural processes that made certain sounds perceptible and meaningful.

Sounds reverberate social realities. They intone the relationships of power and social structures that condition everyday life in a particular place at a particular time. In a groundbreaking work in the field, Historian Alain Corbin studied the sound of church bells in nineteenth-century French villages. Church bells marked the boundaries of a rural community. That is, the audible range of a bell’s peals determined the inside and outside of a village. Corbin writes, “The radius of a bell’s sound, […] marked out a territory haunted by the notion of boundaries and the threat of their transgression. Alarm and preservation constituted the two essential functions of the bell tower.”

Those living outside a particular bell’s audible range could not necessarily be guaranteed the civil and spiritual protections the village afforded. They would miss alarms about inclement weather or imminent attack. They would not learn about local news like marriages, births, or funerals. Bells were even thought to have spiritual benefits. As one of the only available technological means of producing sound from above, bells were

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said to have the power to drive demons from the air where they usually skulked. More than that, bells formed a path between Heaven and earth that good angels could traverse, allowing them to add their prayers to the prayers of the faithful. In short, Corbin found that hearing the sound of the local bell formed a central part of belonging to a local religious culture. He also found that civil and religious authorities often disputed over who ought to control the bell, which bells in the tower ought to ring, when they ought to ring, and what ringing ought to mean.

One of the most significant discoveries scholars have made through the study of sound and religion is that sound’s nature and the practices used to harness it have constantly changed over time. “The ear” does not offer a nostalgic retreat into more primitive religious cultures that have escaped the modern ascendancy of the eye. Sound has its own history in modernity, just like sight and touch and taste and other kinds of sensation. Our presuppositions about how sound works in general, and how sound works in relation to religion, do not necessarily hold in earlier eras or distant places. Even in modern American culture, there is no stable metaphysics of “the ear” or “the oral/aural.” Listening, sounds, and the sense of hearing have been shaped by modernity.

Modernity might be “ocularcentric” in some ways, but privileging the sense of sight does not erase the other senses or stop them from changing over time. American

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5 Ibid., 104.
religious historian Leigh Schmidt calls for “a cultural history which allows the ear an unromanticized place alongside the eye and which realizes that hearing (as much as seeing) was implicated in the various enterprises of the Enlightenment, including its ventures in demystification.”7 Studying sound does not harken back to an earlier aural era, nor does religious practitioners’ “enchanted hearing” represent a survival of a bygone way of life. Ears were subjected to the same kinds of historical forces as eyes and minds were.8 Some American Christians heard holy things, while others tried to convince them that they weren’t hearing anything but a rustling or an auditory hallucination.

When early nineteenth-century evangelicals practiced what Schmidt calls “holy listening,” they heard in the complex and contradictory ways America’s nascent

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8 As an example of how sound has a modern history, we can look at the radio (and will look at it in greater detail later). Radios cemented certain understandings of sound and specific listening practices, making them seem obvious and natural. Though primarily an “oral/aural” medium, its very technological possibility relies on modern understandings of sound with particular genealogies. A radio is totally impossible without modern ideas about sound waves and acoustics. Transducers and amplifiers grew out of nineteenth-century experiments with the human ear and vocal cords, which themselves built upon prior understandings of where sound comes from. Likewise, the radio didn’t just drop out of the sky, announce how people should ought to listen to it, and start working miracles. Its usefulness to fundamentalist religious practice emerged from particular social, religious, and cultural trajectories. Radios began their lives on U.S. naval ships, fostering communication between vessels at sea. That is a long way from the landlocked living room revival in Khedive, Saskatchewan. Radio’s commercial success as a broadcast medium, and its utility for religious life, grew out of listening practices that developed over the course of the nineteenth century. Over time, the idea of a family sitting around their radio set and listening to religious programs did not seem unusual at all. A radio is historically conditioned in every respect, from its basic mechanical functions to the specific bodily practices with which people engaged it.
modernity enabled them to hear. They heard holy things even as the skeptics of the Enlightenment tried to erode their faith in what their senses told them. Schmidt argues that evangelicals’ listening practices offer an important counterpoint to the usual stories about the Enlightenment’s taming of the senses. Sounds mattered tremendously to evangelicals. Practically every evangelical minister described hearing “the call” of God. While the ministerial “call” had traditionally been associated with the will of a community to confer an office upon someone, the evangelicals’ call often came directly from God as an auditory experience. Everyone from John Wesley to Charles Finney to Jarena Lee experienced auditory encounters with God or Jesus that marked them for ministry. Sometimes, evangelicals even conversed with the divine interlocutor, carrying on real discussions.

Beyond just the dramatic experience of the call, Schmidt observes that auditory experience proved a crucial part of evangelicalism in almost every respect. Evangelicals sometimes heard the sounds of angels or, almost as frequently, of demons or the Devil himself. They not only expected to hear the last trumpet on Judgment Day, but blasted trumpets early in the morning at camp meetings. And they sang praises with gusto. Not

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9 See ibid., 246.
10 This practice continues to the present and has been well studied by anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann. Luhrmann notes that the reciprocal relationships contemporary evangelicals form with God are as real as the ones they form with other human beings. Relationships with God take sensory work to cultivate. Evangelicals, she argues, learn to adopt a particular “theory of mind” that opens the possibility of such a relationship. See: T. M. Luhrmann, When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God (New York: Vintage, 2012), xxi–xxii, 41.
only did they sing and preach loudly, but they clapped, cried, and shouted during revivals. Sound was paramount to the early evangelicals’ spiritual lives—so important that it gave fuel to their enemies’ fire. Schmidt notes, “The very audacity of pietistic ways of hearing only gave added gravity to the Enlightenment campaign to discipline the senses, silence the oracular, tone down hearsay, and retrain the ear.”\(^{11}\) Evangelicals kept hearing things, but skeptics kept trying to convince them they were delusional.

**The Ensoniment**

Fundamentalism arrived toward the end of a sea change in sound and ways of listening that occurred during the long nineteenth century. Historian Jonathan Sterne has suggested that these changes parallel the changes to the eye and vision often associated with the American Enlightenment. He proposes the term “Ensoniment” to describe how sound and hearing modernized from 1750-1925. During this period, sound itself became an object of scientific investigation, a discrete domain of experience that required rational explanation. Listening became a physiology, a set of mechanical and/or bodily processes that people could reproduce with technology. The vibrating diaphragm of the telephone, for example, grew out of new understandings of how the tympanic membrane worked inside the ear. Through new ways of listening, people put sound in the service of rational thinking. Sounds, which had once been simply “music” or “voices,” became discrete objects to be dissected, theorized, reproduced, and even

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\(^{11}\) Schmidt, *Hearing Things*, 75.
commodified. In short, Sterne argues, “In modern life, sound becomes a problem: an object to be contemplated, reconstructed, manipulated, something that can be fragmented, industrialized, and bought and sold.” Sound-reproduction technologies, like the radio and the phonograph, did not produce sound’s modernity. In fact, they arrived late to the party. Phonograph and radio listening owed much to the developments in listening techniques that occurred with the invention of the telegraph, and, even earlier, the stethoscope. While they produced their own interesting effects, to be sure, Sterne notes that they were “shot through with the tensions, tendencies, and currents of the culture from which they emerged, right on down to their most basic mechanical functions.” The very notion that a fundamentalist in 1925 should or could listen to things alone while tuning out all other sounds, that sound could be private property, shows the historical arc of sound in American modernity.

In the nineteenth century, America began to individuate listeners and imagine auditory fields as personal spaces. This ultimately meant that sound could become private property and, therefore, bought or sold. In a more basic sense, however, individuated listeners started making particular demands on sounds and sonic space. Sound itself, and the quality or fidelity of its reproduction, started to matter. People started wanting to separate sound from the other senses in order to appreciate its

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13 Ibid., 8.
reproduced properties better. They developed techniques of listening that encouraged
the separation of sound into its own immersive realm. In order for a telephone
conversation to be audible, for instance, people had to hold the transmitter as close as
possible to their mouths and the receiver directly over an ear. They had to learn how to
ignore the other sounds that filled a room, divorcing the sounds of the conversation
from the sounds of the immediate environment in which it happened. Sounds that were
not part of the conversation became unwanted noise, something an individual had to
tune out. The electronic sounds of the telephone became valued in their own right, and
the best way to experience sound in itself was to become immersed in it alone without
“distraction.” Shortly after the invention of the telephone, companies began selling
telephone booths for indoor and outdoor use. Now largely forgotten, the telephone booth
once occupied a prominent place in the material culture of American sound. Holding a
receiver to one’s ear was not enough in the expanding culture of individuated sound:
communication between individuals needed to be isolated from all noise in order to be
effective.

Fundamentalists’ ways of hearing developed amid the rapidly changing modern
soundscapes of the Ensoniment. Religious sounds often had to fight to make themselves
heard over the everyday sounds of life in American modernity. Industrial cities were

noisy places; so were modern farms, particularly after the invention of the tractor in the 1890s. Though they occasionally turned up the volume on their new electric amplifiers, fundamentalists did not just shout from soapboxes or deafen others with the volume of their preaching. They developed uniquely modern ways of listening to and creating holy sounds. Fundamentalists managed to hear the voice of God through the clanging of streetcars, the bark of automobiles, the hiss of record needles, and the static of the airwaves. They developed their own ways of listening that distinguished sacred sounds from noise, God’s reality from worldly distraction. They almost never protested to the modernization of sound happening around them. In fact, they embraced it with special gusto and pushed it in daring directions. They used all the modern techniques of listening at their disposal to hear and broadcast what God was doing. They proved themselves to be sonic modernists of the highest order, lively experimentalists with the religious possibilities of modern sound.

*(Give Me That) Old-Time Religion: Phonographs for the Canning and Consumption of Fundamentalist Sounds*

Give me that old-time religion, that old-time religion, that old-time religion, it’s good enough for me.

Despite the lyrics of this well-known hymn, the soundscape of the old-time religion contained almost nothing old. The phonograph’s arrival into American life ushered in a bold new era of Christian aural culture. Sounds that once came into religious practice only from revivalists’ pianos or voices could be heard through the
phonograph in a variety of institutional and domestic settings. By the 1890s phonographs had become primarily a medium for musical entertainment. Christians sought to capitalize on the possibilities of the medium, turning their sacred sounds into commodities. People listened because they wanted to listen. They spent their money on commodities that helped them express their “values.” Forward-looking fundamentalists recognized the possibilities of sound recordings and sought to create records that would stand the test of time. Faced with the twin possibilities of audible permanence and infinite repetition of sounds, they set about inventing an “old time” aural culture that they thought people would want to hear again and again. In so doing, fundamentalists inscribed race and gender into the new old-fashioned Christianity’s soundscape. The old-time religion did not belong to everyone, but only to those who recognized its sounds as their own, bought them, and filled their homes with them. Fundamentalists held individuals more and more morally responsible for the contents of their auditory environments. Personal faith gave aural responsibilities to individual consumers, who sought to fill their record collections with the right kinds of recordings.

People almost immediately recognized the phonograph’s religious possibilities. The “talking machine” did not simply reproduce sounds, but rather offered the exciting promise of immortality and infinite repetition. An article announcing the invention in

16 Media theorist Lisa Gitelman argues that early accounts of the phonograph reveal people’s concerns about speech and writing. The tinfoil of the phonograph cylinder served as a foil to print media, making “visible the ways in which new media emerge as local anomalies that are also deeply embedded within the ongoing
Scientific American trumpeted it as little shy of miraculous. The phonograph allowed the dead to speak, the author claimed. He promised that whoever’s voice the machine records “has the assurance that his speech may be reproduced audibly in his own tones long after he himself has turned to dust. [...] Speech has become, as it were, immortal.”

More than just allowing the dead to speak, the article’s author celebrated the new possibility of “indefinite repetition.” The phonograph’s replay capabilities meant that people could hear exactly the same sounds, speeches, or music over and over again. Though the wax cylinders used in the earliest recordings degraded after just one replay, this didn’t seem to matter. Edison’s invention opened new possibilities for sound. The author speculated that letter writing might become a thing of the past, as messages would be easier to transmit through recordings. He imagined that people would take inspiring sounds and “in the quiet of our own apartments listen again, and as often as we will.” From the very outset, people thought the phonograph meant two things: 1) sounds could last forever. The machine kept sounds fresh, letting them live immortal lives beyond their immediate context of recording. 2) Recordings ushered in the discursive formations of their day, within the what, who, how, and why of public memory, public knowledge, and public life.” (287) Lisa Gitelman, “The Phonograph’s New Media Publics,” in The Sound Studies Reader, ed. Jonathan Sterne (New York: Routledge, 2012), 283–303.

18 Jonathan Sterne argues there was a major disjunction between theory and practice in early sound recording. Discussing the tendency of wax cylinder recordings to degrade, he writes, “permanence was less a description of the power of the medium than a program for its development.” Sterne, The Audible Past, 289.
possibility of the infinite replay of particular sounds. People could choose to listen to
whatever they wanted, as many times as they wanted. One was no longer obliged to
listen to whatever the local presenter happened to be speaking about that evening, what
the local band happened to be playing at the moment they fell within earshot. The
burden fell upon individual listeners to choose what they wanted to hear.\textsuperscript{19}

The urge to preserve sounds in the form of phonograph recordings came from
the same cultural impulse that led nineteenth-century Americans to can food products.\textsuperscript{20}
The Pittsburgh pickle kingpin Henry J. Heinz went into business in the 1870s as a
horseradish salesman. By the time he incorporated his company in 1905, Heinz was the
one of the largest food processors in the country, selling far more than the “57 varieties”
of canned products he used as an advertising slogan. Heinz sold canned beans, relish,
horseradish, pickles, ketchup, and more. The company’s advertisements heralded its
cleanliness standards and scientific preservation processes as the hallmarks of good
food. At a time when food-borne illnesses were a common cause of death, Heinz
promised that canned food was safe food.\textsuperscript{21} An advertisement in the Sunday School
times emphasized the care that went into the canning process, assuring readers of the
company’s rigorous standards of hygiene. It proudly proclaimed “anything that’s Heinz
is safe to buy” (Figure 16).

\textsuperscript{19} “A Wonderful Invention,” 304.
As with canned foods, people wanted the phonograph to be able to record sounds and keep them pure. They put tremendous faith in the idea that mechanical, scientific, and industrial processes could preserve voices and music faithfully, just as similar industrial processes preserved pickles safely. The great emblem of the desire for “fidelity” in recordings was Nipper, the Jack Russel Terrier used as a logo by Victor Records. Nipper responded with perked ears when he heard “his master’s voice” from the phonograph, assuring human customers that the phonograph reproduced voices with enough fidelity for a dog’s demanding ears. In reality, however, phonograph recordings did not preserve sounds perfectly. Edison’s original phonograph used very fragile wax cylinders that degraded after just a few replays. Emile Berliner’s gramophone, which appeared in America in 1894, used somewhat more durable discs.
made of hard rubber. Later, Berliner switched to a shellac compound that became the industry standard. By the 1920s, the Columbia record company used a completely automatic, electrical press that could churn out one hundred and twenty perfect copies per hour onto the hard shellac. Just as canners refined their processes to allow food to last longer, record companies were constantly trying to improve the durability and quality of their records.22

Record companies had to persuade customers that their cylinders, discs, or processes were the most effective at preserving sounds for posterity. Just as Nipper was making his debut for the Victor Company, Columbia Phonograph Company ran a series of advertisements for their “indestructible” cylinders. These cylinders used a hard celluloid material wrapped around a thick cardboard core with metal ends. Some of their ads mocked the Edison wax cylinders as cheap and flimsy. Others emphasized the practicality of the new indestructible model (Figure 17). A 1910 ad in the Christian Herald showed a little girl playing phonographs for her dolls and teddy bear. She plays the hostess of the party, entertaining her guests with the phonograph. The ad’s visual content drove home the point that the new phonograph cylinders were safe enough for regular home use. Even a child at play could not destroy this type of cylinder. “Lend it to the youngsters,” the ad’s copy dared readers, “Toss it on the table. Drop it on the

floor. Kick it across the room. Leave it in the sun. Then play it and hear a finer, clearer, purer, stronger reproduction—better music in every way—than your machine ever gave out before.”23 What had been a wish for the Edison phonograph—namely, immortality—became an industry obsession. Consumers were not content with the promise of sound’s indefinite repeatability. They wanted it in actuality. They wanted sounds that they could integrate into their everyday environments. They wanted records they could play over and over again. Adults wanted their children to be able to play with the phonograph just as much as they wanted to be able to use it alone. The indestructible cylinder ads marked one skirmish of an ongoing battle in which phonograph companies did whatever they could to make their products better and better at preserving sounds.

Of course, not everyone thought the phonograph ought to keep improving the sound preservation process. John Philip Sousa, composer of “The Stars and Stripes Forever,” hated the phonograph. He derided recordings as “canned music.” Sousa thought listening to a record instead of hearing a performance was like eating a can of salmon while fishing for fresh trout. He thought the mechanical processes of canning
music would destroy American music’s true spirit and essence. He also lamented that he received no royalties from phonograph recordings of his compositions. Most other Americans disagreed with his grim appraisal. They liked canned music and other canned sounds as much as they liked Heinz ketchup.

The phonograph turned Christian sounds into standardized commodities, prepackaged and ready for consumption like auditory cans of baked beans. According to Marx’s classic definition, a commodity is something that has both a “use-value” and an “exchange-value.” Use-value refers to a thing’s usefulness for particular human needs. A can of beans gives nutrients the body needs to survive. Exchange-value is something else entirely. It refers to the potential value a thing holds for the market. A can’s exchange-value might be $1, one sock, or anything else it might trade for in the market. Under capitalism, the particular history and thinginess of the thing gets hidden. It doesn’t matter which farmer planted the beans, how they traveled from farm to cannery, how these particular beans entered the can, and how they made it to the

25 In a deeply ambivalent essay, Adorno described the phonograph as “the first means of musical presentation that can be possessed as a thing.” For him, this commodification of music meant that phonographs became part of daily needs and not artistic expression. In fact, he said phonograph records were “the very antithesis of the humane and artistic” (58). However, he also acknowledged that the “dead art” of the phonograph, its capacity for preservation, made performance seem more alive, just as the dead letters of writing made speech more alive. He concludes in a theological vein, reckoning with the phonograph’s implications for life after death. He writes, “Ultimately the phonograph records are not artworks but the black seals on the missives that are rushing towards us from all sides in the traffic with technology; missives whose formulations capture the sounds of creation, the first and the last sounds, judgment upon life and message about that which may come thereafter” (61). Theodor W. Adorno, “The Form of the Phonograph Record,” trans. Thomas Y. Levin, *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 56–61.
shelves of a local store. The commodity’s objective qualities seem only to express its exchange value. These are beans in a can, which makes them worth a certain amount. Commodities get infused with a life of their own, appearing before us as values that have clear relations to other values. Capitalism invests non-material qualities in material things. 100 cans might get you a warm coat. The beans in this can might be “quality,” while those are “cheap.” Marx refers to this cultural process as the “fetishism” of commodities. Capitalism invests commodities with almost magical qualities, “values” that have nothing to do with the material characteristics or histories of things themselves. A nice can of beans not only keeps you nourished, it makes you a conscientious consumer, it gives you confidence in your healthy eating habits, it marks your social location as its owner because you bought the fancy beans, etc.26

As things whose individual histories had been stripped away by the process of commodification, phonographs acquired whatever values people attributed to them. The grooved shellac discs and the sounds put on them in blistering factories became bearers of Christianess.27 In a culture enamored with preservation, phonographs became a means to preserve Christian sounds of lasting value. For fundamentalists, worthwhile sounds often became associated with the fuzzy concept of “the old-time

27 Lerone Martin has demonstrated how phonographs became significant for establishing expected standards of preaching in black Christianity. Martin, Preaching on Wax.
Religious history: everybody knows what it means, but almost nobody will come out and say what it is. George Marsden came close to defining it, citing a William Jennings Bryan speech called “The Old Time Religion.” The speech outlines some constituent beliefs of “the old-time religion,” including creation by God, the Bible as God’s word, the deity of Christ, and the saving work of Christ’s death. But for Bryan the “old-time religion” was primarily about pragmatism. It got things done. It let Christians ignore their differences and focus on preserving the Bible’s status as the word of God in an America bent on dismantling Christian civilization. For Bryan, it did not matter exactly what the old-time
religion was, but what it did. And what it did was preserve the core of Christianity from the flux of turn-of-the-century life.28

“Old-time religion” was a calculated, nostalgic brand name given to new Christian ideas and practices. Historian Timothy Gloege considers “old-time religion” to be a new form of evangelicalism “that was not only compatible with modern consumer capitalism but also uniquely depended on it.”29 Old-time religion proclaimed itself the champion of traditional Christianity, but in fact it pushed new doctrines and practices to the forefront while de-emphasizing traditional Christian sticking points. As just one example, old-time religion elevated biblical inerrancy to the status of core doctrine, while it insisted traditional Christian debate-points like predestination versus free will were non-essential. Despite its innovations, old-time religion insisted it was also old-fashioned religion. Gloege compares The Fundamentals to nostalgic brand logos like Aunt Jemima on a syrup bottle or the smiling Quaker of Quaker Oats oatmeal. Like these iconic images, The Fundamentals created a feeling of old-fashionedness and quality for the new product contained within its packaging. Instead of offering “a substantive creedal formula for ‘old-time religion,’” The Fundamentals enacted old-time religion in modern times. Gloege continues, “Fundamentalism was […] an empty reference for an ‘orthodoxy’ that followed the contours of a conservative evangelical orientation, a

theological vessel that individuals could fill with their own doctrinal particulars.” Just as a happy Quaker in a strange hat made prepackaged oatmeal seem old-fashioned and trustworthy, *The Fundamentals* gave an old-time feeling to a new consumeristic faith that was always fresh and always pure.

The phonograph was the perfect accomplice for the old-time religion. On the one side, phonographs commodified the sounds of the old time religion, giving the abstract notion a material presence in Christians’ lives. Listening to certain records marked you as a good Christian, a genuine and committed practitioner of the “old-time” religion. Knowing the words and melodies of the right hymns proved you belonged. On the other side, through the magic of commodity fetishism, certain phonographs became associated with “timeless” Christian values like the authority of the Bible. Spending money on a phonograph of a hymn, instead of a recording of a vaudeville comedy act, proved that a person commitment to Christianity ran deep. Though listening to phonographs was a comparatively new practice in Christian history, the medium’s insistent emphasis on fidelity and preservation helped lend Christian recordings an air of antiquity. The spinning shellac discs and shiny amplifying horns might have been wrought of industrial processes and electricity, but, for fundamentalists, the sounds they produced belonged to the old-time religion. Ironically, this put the old-time religion into the ferociously competitive and capricious realm of record sales, where popular artists

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30 Ibid., 192.
came and went in a matter of months. People acquired a recording of *The Old Rugged Cross* in the same way and at the same place as the latest Jelly Roll Morton piano lick.

**The Religious Significance of Sound Quality**

The national distribution of phonographs helped standardize the sounds of fundamentalism. Department stores in large cities, like Presbyterian lay minister John Wanamaker’s in Philadelphia, had phonograph counters where people could sample the latest offerings and test the latest devices. Arrayed before them, the sounds of Christian recordings appeared as one choice among many other consumer products. A concerned Christian could purchase a recording of William Jennings Bryan’s “Cross of Gold Speech” on the same day as she purchased a new pair of socks and a sofa. As the U.S. postal service expanded its delivery capabilities into rural areas, Christians outside cities gained access to these goods through mail order catalogues. Congress had instituted nationwide delivery in 1898, and by 1930, the USPS had ballooned from about twelve hundred routes to over forty-five thousand. Sears and Roebuck promised consumers an entire department store’s worth of goods in the pages of their catalogues. Fundamentalists across the country could purchase the exact same recordings, hearing exactly the same things from the same sources. This created national celebrities out of preachers and choir leaders. William Jennings Bryan was not just a name in a newspaper
anymore, but a speaking presence in Christians’ homes and churches he had never personally visited.\textsuperscript{31}

The advent of the phonograph’s standardized sounds in Christian life, which made sounds and their “quality” matter more than they ever had before. The Victor Talking Machine Company took to the offense in declaring their phonograph players and records the best in terms of sound quality. Lavishly illustrated advertisements in the \textit{Christian Herald} announced the Victor as the gold standard of sound quality. A shade hyperbolically, one insisted that the Victor player produced “the sweetest, clearest tone ever heard in any musical instrument.” The various mechanisms and features of the Victor, particularly its “goose-neck” horn, made it the world’s best instrument.\textsuperscript{32} Another, probably to John Philip Sousa’s chagrin, proclaimed the Victor Victrola to be “as martial as Sousa.” Not only was it as martial as Sousa, it “gives you the actual tones of the renowned singers and instrumentalists of the world. It is the genius, the power, the beauty of every voice and every instrument. It is the supreme musical instrument of all time.”\textsuperscript{33} Yet another advertisement made the point even clearer (Figure 18). The ad pictured two Victrola machines on the right half of its full-page spread, an expensive walnut cabinet model and a slightly cheaper mahogany tabletop model. Nipper appeared in the top right corner, assuring the records’ fidelity. The ad’s big, bold tagline

\textsuperscript{31} Martin, \textit{Preaching on Wax}, 82–83.
contained a single word: “Tone.” The ad copy went on to explain that the “same indescribable ‘something’ which makes the Stradivarius supreme among violins […] gives the Victrola such a wonderfully sweet, clear and mellow tone as was never known before.” According to the advertisements, Victor talking machines possessed the same magic properties of “sound quality” as the world’s greatest instruments. This created a need among consumers. Christian customers were supposed to want quality in their sounds.

![Victrola Advertisement](image)

**Figure 18 - Victor Talking Machine Company Advertisement, in The Christian Herald, May 4, 1910, back cover**

Since the phonograph was preserving the sounds of genuine Christianity forever, local churches started worrying whether their sounds were up to the standard set by phonograph recordings. While it was once enough to sing hymns, it now mattered that
they were the right hymns. While it was once enough to have an organ or piano in church, it now had to be a good piano or a quality organ. Advertisements in the *Sunday School Times* bemoaned the fate of churches that purchased a “cheap” organ: “A cheap organ? Oh no, don’t! You’ll be sorry when you have to get another so soon.”34 Not only did a church’s instruments have to be capable of producing satisfactory sound quality, the sound quality of churches themselves became a matter of concern. Wallace C. Sabine, a pioneer of architectural acoustics, encouraged churches planning expansions to consider carefully the shape of their auditorium, its size, and the materials they would use to build it. Architectural acoustics was a science, he assured readers, “there need not be the slightest doubt when the plans of a church are drawn as to whether it will or will not have good acoustics.”35 He insisted that churches could make the necessary acoustic changes to their expansion plans without affecting the appearance of the building. Good acoustics were as important as the number of pews. The fact that anyone cared about church acoustics enough to publish such an article in the *Sunday School Times* demonstrates the changing attitudes toward sound in fundamentalist life. Europeans, Sabine said, did not pay enough attention to architectural acoustics and therefore produced deficient sounds. American Christians had new sonic opportunities open to them.

35 Wallace C. Sabine, “Our Progress in Church Acoustics,” *The Sunday School Times* 60, no. 6 (February 9, 1918): 82.
As the phonograph became ubiquitous in middle-class white homes, the variety and quality of sounds at church suddenly mattered.\textsuperscript{36} People could listen to their phonographs and compare local offerings to the standardized and commoditized sounds of the national record companies. A phonograph industry trade journal, \textit{The Talking Machine World}, practically threatened churches even as it touted the usefulness of its machines for ministry. One article suggested that churches were already using it “not only to replace, but augment the choir, inasmuch as an extensive program of records of solos by eminent singers is provided.” If a choir lacked the musical skill to pull off a tough section in tune and in rhythm, the phonograph provided a substitute that was musically perfect. Pastors too felt the heat from phonographs. The article continued, “there can be no question but that a sermon by an eminent divine, delivered through the ‘talker’ is far more enjoyable than listening to a mediocre speaker in the flesh.” While it ratcheted up the competition, the journal encouraged phonograph salespeople to remind clients of the benefits phonographs held for churches. Namely, people would hear only the best sounds. In the era of the phonograph, the journal argued, Christians need not suffer through a service of bad preaching or bad singing.\textsuperscript{37}

Companies quickly arose to correct the problem of bad voices in churches. The “Perfect Voice Institute” of Chicago advertised aggressively for several years in the

\textsuperscript{36} Martin points out that by 1925, more than half of white American homes owned a phonograph. At their peak in the 1920s, the Edison, Columbia, and Victor phonograph companies had combined annual profits of $125 million (equal to about $25 billion per year today). Martin, \textit{Preaching on Wax}, 14–19.

Sunday School Times. The company used the purportedly scientific training methods of an “internationally famous voice teacher” named Professor Feuchtinger. To improve vocal quality and tone, the ads claimed, one needed to train the hyoglossus muscle vigorously. The ads frequently included a cross-section of the human throat to show exactly where the hyoglossus muscle sat in relation to the vocal cords. Using the Perfect Voice Institute’s methods, an ordinary chorister could learn to sing like a famous soprano, a pastor could develop a louder and more melodious preaching voice. They guaranteed results. One of their ads made the spiritual stakes of sound quality especially clear: “Choir Singers! Ministers! Is Your Voice Worthy of the Message?” The gospel message was all well and good, but it needed fitting instruments. One might also win personal advancement with a better voice. The ad copy continued, “It is your solemn duty to cultivate your voice so that you can give praise to the Lord in fitting harmony and beauty. […] You should have a beautiful voice to do your best work—to take your proper place in your community.”38 Bad voices came from bad leaders. Responsible ministers and singers would provide their congregations with the sounds they wanted.

Noise in churches came under scrutiny as individual auditory consumers placed strict demands on their shared sonic environments. In phonograph culture, each individual Christian consumer had the right to occupy a private soundscape filled with the sounds of his or her choosing. If churches could not provide this, the private

listening tubes of the phonograph waited for parishioners at home. One of the most unusual side effects of the drive to tame noise in churches came through the marketing of individual communion cups (Figure 19). Besides proclaiming them to be more “sanitary” than the traditional communal cup, advertisers also noted how their particular models fought the plague of noise. Many suggested the individual cups produced a “silent” and “reverent” communion service. Manufacturers claimed their use of short cups, celluloid linings to hold the cups, or special spouts on the cups made a particular model “noiseless.” William H. Dietz, who called himself “The Church Supply Man” in advertisements like figure 13, bragged that his service tray with its short glasses was “absolutely noiseless.” Evidently, there had been complaints about noise when churches switched from the communal cup to the individual ones. At present, the exact source of this noise remains a mystery. Perhaps people were slurping. Perhaps the little cups clattered in the trays as they circulated through the congregation. Regardless of the source, “noise” during communion presented a big enough problem that manufacturers sought to solve it. The phonograph alone did not cause this problem to arise, but the issue of communion cup “noise” fits into the same cultural matrix. As the phonograph provided high quality Christian sounds ready for individual consumption, fundamentalists used technological means to control sound in churches. They attempted to use every means at their disposal to create satisfying auditory environments for demanding religious consumers.
Competition between hymnal publishers grew ferocious as various versions promised the “right” type and quality of sounds for fundamentalist listeners. By the end of the First World War, it was common to find a whole column of advertising in the *Sunday School Times* devoted to new hymnals. At peak times of year like Christmas and Easter, the advertising wars grew even more intense. Publishers offered special “service” books that spelled out every aspect of a Christmas or Easter service for a congregation. The Heidelberg Press company of Philadelphia offered a hymnbook called “Easter Music for discriminators.” One of its advertisements asked readers, “Why be satisfied with the mediocre when the best is so easily obtainable?”39 If we believe a word the advertisers said, phonographs put the best and purest sounds on a platter for Christians. People offered new and better hymnals so the other sounds of Christian life, the homemade and live sounds, could keep apace.

Billy Sunday’s music director, Homer Rodeheaver (1880-1955), touted the sound quality of the songs in his own songbook *Songs for Service*. His third collection, Rodeheaver assured readers that any new songs had been tested “by actual use in the largest choruses and congregations ever assembled in religious work.” Potential customers should evaluate the quality of the hymns by their usefulness for ministry. Surely, bad sounding hymns could not satisfy the demands of thousands of congregants at a Billy Sunday campaign. Every song underwent rigorous, almost scientific testing to prove its quality. Promotional postcards from a Sunday campaign called the songbook “a topnotcher as to both quality and usefulness.” The BIOLA book room sold Rodeheaver’s hymnals as “leaders” in the hymnal industry. The books attempted to control every word and note of performances, making them adhere to Rodeheaver’s high musical standards. He eventually took to promoting his phonograph recordings alongside the songbooks. That way, people could compare their musical output with Rodeheaver’s canned originals.

Apart from publishing hymns, Rodeheaver pioneered the concept of a Christian recording industry. Though well-known revivalist musicians like Ira Sankey and Gipsy Smith had recorded hymns onto phonographs as early as the 1890s, Rodeheaver helped

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41 *Songs for Service* Postcard ca.1916, Box 1, Folder 2, Collection 130, Ephemera of Homer Rodeheaver. Archives of the Billy Graham Center, Wheaton, IL.
42 “BIOLA Book Room Advertisement ‘The Three Leaders,’” *The King’s Business*, July 1919.
turn Christian recordings into big business. He made recordings for the three biggest players in the phonograph game: Edison, Columbia, and Victor. Everywhere Rodeheaver and Sunday held a campaign, record companies reported a major boost in sales.44 Through his hymnals and phonograph records, Rodeheaver popularized such brand-new hymns as In the Garden and The Old Rugged Cross. Stylish, rich from copyrights he owned, good-looking, Southern, charming, and blessed with a sonorous baritone, the lifelong bachelor Rodeheaver held lots of appeal for Christian audiences.45 Avoiding the dreary and sentimental hymns of other band leaders, Rodeheaver preferred “upbeat” and happy Christian music. One of his biggest hits was Brighten the Corner Where You Are, a standard of the Billy Sunday campaigns. Rodheaver’s happy recordings proved so popular and so lucrative that he eventually formed his own record company, Rainbow Records. Rainbow Records produced only “gospel songs and messages.”46 Early records included musical performances by Rodeheaver and soprano


45 Rodeheaver’s sexuality remains a mystery. Officially, he was a lifelong bachelor. A few postcards from Rodeheaver’s personal collection seem to suggest he had female admirers, though these may have been family members kidding around. One that said, “To My Affinity” contained an inscription from “Liddie” to her “darling Homie.” Another showed a picture of a cow licking a woman’s face with a caption “Now you stop, Charlie.” The sender crossed out “Charlie” and wrote, “Homer.” The postcard included a note that read, “I wonder how many young ladies have said that to you?” See: Undated Postcards, Homer Rodeheaver Collection, Billy Sunday Museum, Grace College, Warsaw, Indiana.

Virginia Asher (another veteran of the Billy Sunday campaigns), and sermons by the likes of W.E. Biederwolf. By focusing on gospel music and sermons, Rainbow Records avoided competing directly with the likes of Victor and Columbia, carving out a Christian market niche. More than that, Rainbow Records claimed it brought the best fundamentalist sounds to the farthest reaches of the country. Because it produced both music and sermons, one trade article claimed, “little churches in out-of-the-way sections which do not have a preacher can take a half-dozen of the Rainbow records and conduct an entire service with the best music and the best preaching possible to secure.”

Rodeheaver aimed to bring the successful sounds of Sunday’s world-famous revivals to Christians all across the country.

While he innovatively coupled Christian sounds with the business practices of the record industry, Rodeheaver championed the old-time religion. In 1913, he even recorded a song about it for Victor records called The Old-Fashioned Faith. The lyrics spelled out his “old-fashioned” fundamentalist convictions in a medium that was just hitting its commercial stride. Through the hiss of the phonograph needle, Rodeheaver’s believing baritone rang clear: I believe that the Bible is true,/ Tho’ the critics have torn it apart;/ All its warnings and miracles, too,/ I do wholly accept with my heart. The song

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48 The song proved popular enough that Rodeheaver re-recorded it for other labels, including Edison Phonograph Company.
proclaims its singer to be old-fashioned about “religion and God,” clinging to the ideas of repentance, judgment, salvation by faith, evangelism, and a personal relationship with Jesus. In the face of imagined opposition to this old-fashioned faith, the singer thanks Jesus for salvation. He wears the “old-fashionedness” of his faith as a badge of honor. The tensions of the old-time religion reverberate in this song. For one thing, the singer imagines himself as the object of others’ mockery for his old-fashioned Christianity. The song speaks to a perceived threat to Christianity from new-fashioned forces, presenting practitioners as a beleaguered minority in American society. Yet, the song came from one of the country’s most popular musicians. One of the country’s most successful record labels produced and distributed it. New and old, besieged and powerful, the old-time religion was never as simple as people claimed it to be. But it made for catchy records. Catchy records sold.\(^50\)

**Old-Time Christian Records in the New-Fashioned Fundamentalist Home**

Fundamentalists sought to fill their domestic spaces with the catchy strains of the old-time religion and phonograph advertisers tried to present playing records in the home as a Christian duty. A good Christian home was one that played the right recordings on a high fidelity machine. A Columbia Phonograph Company ad insisted that “Home Music Crowns Home Life.” It explained, “Nothing adds more to the

\(^{50}\) The Phono-Bretto: The Indispensible Companion of the Phonograph, and Faithful Interpreter of About Seven Hundred Sung and Spoken Phonograph Selections (New York: The Phono-Bretto Company, 1919), 129.
refining influences and the full enjoyment of the home circle than the inspiriting power of music.” Music had power, so Christian consumers were responsible for ensuring that it was the right power that occupied their homes. The ad copy assured people that the Columbia device reproduced music “without a trace of mechanical effort.” Theirs was pure music, pure sound. It was not just music in general. The Columbia machine, the ad proclaimed, was especially suited to the playing of hymns like Nearer My God to Thee. “Think of your own favorite hymn,” the advertisement urged Christian readers, “[…] and then hear it pouring from the reproducer of the Columbia Graphophone. It will be the living voice—flawless, full, rich and beautifully clear in tone and enunciation.” It even went so far as to suggest that the difference between hearing a Columbia recording and hearing one of the world’s largest church choirs perform live “is merely a difference of surroundings.” The phonograph (or graphophone) brought the most important sounds of the church into the home.51

Advertisers focused much of their energy on Christian mothers as those responsible for a home’s sounds. As they touted the phonograph’s benefits to children, they showed images of family togetherness (Figure 20). “The Edison Phonograph,” declared a 1912 advertisement in the Presbyterian Standard, “besides bringing the whole world of music and other entertainment to your home and family, is a great educator for your children.” The advertisement included a picture of a mother playing the

phonograph for her young son and daughter. The tagline above them read, “Play this next, Mother!” The advertisement suggested that Christian mothers could cultivate their children’s religious sensibilities by purchasing a phonograph and playing it at home. The words, “Play this next!,” suggest the child’s exuberance for the device. The phonograph was an educational tool that might actually hold the child’s interest. It inspired delight in children, and the ad’s copy promised that “every laugh and every thrill is a deposit in the bank of happiness.” The ad also subtly suggests that each child must develop her or his own listening habits. Responsible mothers should, therefore, encourage their children to listen to the right kinds of phonograph records. The phonograph would shape a child’s individual listening tastes properly, until each finally achieved the innate desire to hear only the right sounds. Every mother would know exactly which record the “this” ought to refer to—possibly one of Homer Rodeheaver’s hymns.52

Historians have long identified “parlor piety” as a defining feature of American evangelicalism in the nineteenth century. Victorian evangelicals thought of the family parlor as a major locus of religious activity, almost the equivalent of the church. Families conducted devotions in the parlor, a pillar of daily religious life. The parlor also served as a schoolroom, where children learned to read the Bible and to pray. Religious
authority shifted between mother and father in the religious practices of parlor piety. Typically, fathers led prayers and formal scripture readings. Mothers did most of the heavy lifting, being responsible for decoration, spiritual training, primary education, and moral influence. An 1842 illustration from *Godey’s Lady’s Book* showed the hierarchical, highly formal ideal of parlor piety (Figure 21). Here, father reads from the Bible as the family gathers around to listen. His voice is the only source of sound in the room, apart perhaps from the crackling of the fire. Mother has decorated the parlor carefully, making it the perfect space for this sacred activity. Women stuffed their parlors with suitable Christian decorations, including Bible needlework, religious lithographs, and massive family Bibles meant primarily for display. The more things, the better. The parlor’s religious images and objects exerted a sacred influence in the home, assisting in the process of children’s religious education. Essential to the family’s religious practice, the parlor also communicated their middle-class status and Christian faith to the outside world. Highly gendered spaces, social relationships in parlors were formal and structured. The parlor showed the family’s public face to guests. The right decorations assured the neighbors of a family’s Protestant convictions, as well as their social status.53

In the wake of the First World War, parlor piety began to evaporate. Furniture became functional. Religious decorations moved to the attic. The informal “living room” replaced the highly structured social space of the parlor. The telephone disrupted the need for parlors as sites of social interaction. If you wanted to talk to the neighbors, there was no longer a need to put on gloves and hat and wait in the parlor. You could just pick up the phone and talk to them. Americans began advocating a sparse decorating style called the “honest home.” In the honest home decorating philosophy, one historian notes, a room “did not have to display publicly religious objects produced a generation
before—objects with the rich patterns, bright colors, complex designs, and visual detail that modern designers detested.”

Things and images no longer held the kind of influencing power they used to. The living room represented what people believed the parlor no longer held: sincerity. People imagined the informal living room as a space for sincere social interactions, sincere family relationships, and sincere religious practices. In the midst of these changes to their domestic spaces, fundamentalists still clung to the idea of the home as a sacred space. They thought gender relations should remain hierarchical, that the patriarchal home was exactly as God intended. They insisted that the middle-class Victorian home was the solid foundation on which the church rested, even though that home was quickly disappearing around them. They idealized the Victorian family of a bygone era and continued to advocate for domestic religious practices. But their homes looked very different than they had a generation before.

The phonograph helped fundamentalists keep the Christian home sacred. In the true spirit of the old-time religion, the phonograph allowed fundamentalists to practice new varieties of the old Victorian parlor piety in the new domestic space of the living room. Advertisements for phonographs in Christian periodicals often invoked ideas and images of family harmony. In so doing, they ironically underlined the individuation of


listening and consumerist values that had taken hold in American Christian auditory culture. The National Phonograph Company proclaimed its Edison phonograph to be “the best Christmas gift,” as it “makes home happy because it pleases every member of the family, from baby to grandmother.” Such a statement implies that baby and grandmother usually do not want to listen to the same things, but the Edison phonograph surmounts the difficulty. Each has her own consumer tastes, but the wide selection of records made it possible to please everyone.

Figure 22 - Ludden and Bates Phonograph Club Advertisement, in *The Presbyterian Standard*, April 23, 1919, p31

An advertisement from a mail-order phonograph “club” made a similar claim. A large banner image showed a mother, father, and their three children gathered together around the phonograph (Figure 22). The image demonstrates the shift in domestic piety that had occurred since the days of *Godey’s Lady’s Book* (Figure 21). Father is no longer the center of attention, though he is present and clearly important in his high collared collar.

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shirt and black oxfords. The family Bible is gone. The decorations are gone. A single picture, a portrait, hangs on the wall. Large windows show this as an open space for anyone to see, an honest view of a family’s honest room. Father’s voice is no longer commands the auditory space. The phonograph now controls sound. One of the family’s daughters dances joyfully at the music coming from the phonograph. She is playing, happy and sincere in her exuberance. Mother, father, and older sister enjoy the phonograph too. The phonograph sits in the window of the living room, visible to all neighbors who walk past. This is no cheap tabletop player, but a handsome cabinet phonograph that conveys the family’s economic status. They convey their good, Christian taste in sounds to the neighbors by putting the phonograph in such a publicly visible, and audible, place. Most importantly, the baby sits on the floor playing with blocks that spell out the name of the mail-order phonograph company. Even the youngest member of the family is developing her own Christian auditory tastes. When she grows up, she will know where to buy the Christian phonographs she needs to build herself a happy home. The future of domestic sound is hers to control.

Churches of the Air: Radio, Spirits, and the Materiality of Imagined Communities

The phonograph represents the pinnacle of sound’s privatization in the early twentieth century. Sounds became commodities, and individuals chose between them like cans of beans on the store shelf. Every individual was supposed to cultivate distinct listening tastes that reflected Christian commitments. The development of Christian
commercial radio in the 1920s sought to bring individual listeners back together into communities. But listening had changed so much that the communities they created looked more like raspberries than cantaloupes. Shared listening practices forged imagined fundamentalist communities out of individual consumers, drawing them together while speaking to each person directly. These communities were said to transcend geographic space, linking individuals from opposite sides of the country. Fundamentalists seized the opportunities afforded by radio’s development as a broadcast medium. They insisted that its great power lay in bringing individuals together.

Before radio arrived as the primary medium of broadcast, Protestants were doing everything they could to spread the Word far and wide. In other words, the cultural frameworks of Protestant broadcasting long predated radio technology. Print media, especially the printing press, has occupied a central position in Protestant life as long as there have been Protestants. Protestants valued print’s reproducibility and its capacity to travel. Ministers preached about the power of print. Parishioners felt a religious duty to disseminate “the Word,” which meant printed materials, far and wide. In the young American republic, they formed powerful “benevolent societies” to spread their printed materials. Antebellum Protestants loved their new steam-powered industrial printing presses, which allowed them to reproduce religious literature on an unprecedented scale. Groups like the American Tract Society and American Bible Society operated
according to a simple principle: flood the market with cheap Protestant print. Images from the period practically sacralized the powers of the printing press (Figure 23). One American Tract Society certificate of contribution showed a printing press standing in place of Jesus at the Sermon on the Mount. The press stands in for Jesus, spreading the good news to the multitudes. David Morgan argues that this is a quintessentially Protestant image, one that “conflates inspiration, production, and dissemination into a single moment that defies time and tradition in order to place in the hands of everyone the changeless truths of divinity.”

The image shows the tremendous optimism of benevolent societies toward mass print. The ATS sought to carry the good news to the whole nation via the printing press, to get printed material into as many hands as possible. They thought print would do its own work once it was out there.

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In his landmark work on nationalism, Benedict Anderson showed how mass print contributed to the development of the modern nation. Nations, he argued, are “imagined communities.” They rely on imaginative leaps to connect the members of the group. Most of a nation’s citizens have never met, will never meet, will never even know about each other’s existence, and yet feel themselves to be part of a single group that moves as a unit across time. Mass print helped forge these connections by establishing shared vernaculars, simultaneous experiences, and clear group boundaries. As the Lutheran presses churned out printed materials in vernacular German, people began to think of all Germans as connected. Books were once the preserve of the handful of highly educated Latin readers, but folks in Wittenberg’s pubs sat around discussing Luther’s 95 Theses. Anderson used the example of reading the daily newspaper, once a
daily ritual in most American homes, to demonstrate the connective power of mass print. A person reading the newspaper does it in the privacy of their own home, often in the sanctuary of their own head. For the most part, paper reading is private and silent. Yet every reader of the newspaper knows countless others within the sphere of the paper’s circulation are reading the same things at roughly the same time. Certainly nobody would be reading today’s news tomorrow night. While walking around town, the paper reader “observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbors, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life.”58 A person reading the newspaper knew she was not alone. Countless other Americans were reading the news along with her, learning about the daily happenings in their imagined community.

Sending the Word over the Air: Radio as a Broadcast Medium

By the time sound-reproduction technologies arrived, their longstanding relationship with mass print had primed American Protestants to use the new media in ways that resembled broadcasting. The key was to get the Word out as far and wide as possible. Once it was out, it would do its own work. Presenting a few thoughts on how radio worked, the program director at Paul Rader’s station offered biblical justifications for Christian radio. Almost every one of them emphasized radio’s ability to spread “the


For conservative Protestants, the technological reproduction of sound meant new possibilities for disseminating “the Word.” For the first time in human history, technology made it possible for sounds to travel as swiftly and widely as print.

Radio did not emerge fully formed as a broadcast medium. Like other sound-reproduction technologies, it had a winding history before being permanently fused to the ideas and practices we now call broadcasting. At first, people called the technology “wireless telegraphy,” since most transmissions were just the dots and dashes of Morse code. Once transmissions included human voices, people started calling the medium “wireless telephony.” Debuted in 1896, by 1899 wireless telegraph signals were crossing the thirty-two miles of the English Channel. By 1901, radio telegraph signals traversed the Atlantic ocean. Professional operators on ships constituted the primary “audience” for radio’s earliest transmissions. Donning headphones, they entered a strange world of clicks, buzzes, whirrs, and disembodied voices. Ships used “the wireless” to keep passengers updated about news and business telegraphs from home, and to communicate the position of icebergs and other vital information to other ships. In 1912, radio hit the front pages of the newspapers when a wireless operator transmitted the

new universal distress signal, “S-O-S,” from a doomed passenger liner: the *HMS Titanic*. His actions allowed other vessels to find survivors floating in the vast North Atlantic. Afterward, people stopped on the streets of New York to thank Guglielmo Marconi, the inventor of wireless technology, for saving so many lives in the disaster. Though it was proving very useful for ships at sea, radio still had another decade to go before it cemented itself as a broadcasting medium for home entertainment.60

Radio may not have been ready to be a broadcast medium, but fundamentalists desperately wanted one. They were ready to seize the moment when sound reproduction entered American life, but not in the ways we might expect. In or around May of 1912, a revivalist named D.L. Coale rolled into the little town of Anson, Texas. He planned to hold a series of revivals in the local Methodist church. Nestled about twenty-five miles northwest of Abilene, Anson was cattle country. Local churches drew congregations mostly from the farms and ranches in the surrounding area. When a bad thunderstorm broke on the revival’s opening night, attendance plummeted toward zero.

Weather never kept a good revivalist down, so Coale and his supporters invented a way to bring their revival to the people stuck at home. Anson had a telephone line. In 1912, that meant Anson had a “party line” telephone system, through which a human telephone operator could connect many people to a single conversation.

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Coale and his associates started broadcasting their revival by telephone. Attaching a megaphone horn backwards onto the receiver of the church’s telephone, the phone was able to pick up all the sounds of the room, from the music and the sermon to the small crowd’s “amens.” By the last night of the revival, more than five hundred people connected to the party line to listen. They knew it was a novel use of media and thought it a real kick to hear the revival in their homes. Attendance at the church remained low; people wanted to listen through the telephone.

Not only did the telephone broadcast surmount the immediate problem of low attendance, it actually produced spiritual results. Coale got reports of several conversions from the at-home listeners. A telephone trade journal prognosticated, “the time is not far distant when this method of preaching will be in general practice not only in the smaller cities and towns but also in the rural districts.”61 Despite the telephone company’s optimistic prediction, telephone church broadcasts never really caught on. However, Coale’s experiment demonstrates the kind of robust experimentation with sound reproduction that drove fundamentalism toward commercial radio a decade later. Broadcasting ran deep in their veins.62

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62 Historian Daniel Woods has made connections between the telephone and early Southern Pentecostal practices of prayer. Imagining prayer as a telephone, people expected immediate auditory contact with God. When they prayed, God talked back. Interesting as this argument is, it says almost nothing about how people used actual telephones in their homes or churches. The telephone serves mostly as a metaphor in his analysis of “average” Pentecostals’ prayer practices. Daniel Woods, “The Royal Telephone,” in *Religion in the*
Commercial radio broadcasting began in the early 1920s. Some of its milestone moments still reverberate through the annals of American religious history. When Chicago’s WGN broadcast the Scopes “Monkey” Trial from the courthouse in Dayton, TN in 1925, it was the first court trial ever heard on radio. Certainly, this was important. People in Chicago thought the events in Dayton were worth hearing. The very fact that anyone bothered to broadcast a misdemeanor trial demonstrates what a media circus it was. People thought the trial had high stakes. God stood trial against modern science, the voice of the people stood against domineering experts. For those who heard the broadcasts, the Scopes Trial was a landmark public event, a powerful moment in national history. They had powerful experiences of the trial’s twists, such as William Jennings Bryan’s cross-examination by Clarence Darrow. Anti-evolutionism, the new cause célèbre among fundamentalists, ran through its first major legal test under the spotlight of public attention. Many conclude it ended in shame for the fundamentalists. Certainly, the trial shaped the destiny of the fundamentalist movement. After Scopes,

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fundamentalism refocused its energies from national legislation to institution building and leadership training.64

Though historians like to trumpet broadcasting firsts as watersheds, such milestone moments do not always tell the whole story of a medium’s rise. During the sweltering Southern July of the Scopes Trial, an average radio set cost $83 (about $1,100 in 2015 dollars). In other words, a radio was an expensive luxury item in 1925. Only about 10% of American homes actually owned one. This situation changed rapidly. By 1930, around 40% of American homes contained a radio. By 1940, ownership rates climbed to almost 80%. By 1950, the market reached near-total saturation, with over 95% of Americans owning at least one radio. Using these national figures, we can say that radio adoption increased dramatically in the generation from 1920-1950, with radio eventually becoming the primary broadcast medium in the country. But these national figures can also mislead. Radio adoption varied greatly by region and race. Among white families in the cities of the Northeast and Midwest, people were quick to jump on the radio bandwagon—almost 60% of families owned a radio by 1930. For African Americans living in the same cities, the situation was very different, with only about 25-30% of families having access to radio in that same year. Radio adoption lagged in the South among both white and black families. African Americans living in the rural South

had especially low rates of radio adoption, sitting at a meager 2.2% by 1930. These statistics show that radios were cost prohibitive items. Far too expensive for those living under the burden of systematic racism and poverty, the people who “tuned in” to the earliest fundamentalist broadcasts represented a narrow, privileged segment of the American population. Despite our fantasies about religious broadcasting’s birth, early fundamentalist programming only reached very specific groups of people. Even if they had wanted to, many people simply couldn’t afford to hear fundamentalist broadcasts in the 1920s. Any analysis of fundamentalist radio audiences must take into account their northern, urban, and white makeup.65

Despite its regional and racial variations in adoption rates, radio, it turned out, was actually better than print for imagined communities. In particular, it excelled at establishing vernacular language communities and producing simultaneous experiences in the ways Anderson thought necessary for national survival. Regional and ethnic dialects characterized the actual speech of Americans in the 1920s. Protestants reared in Connecticut did not sound like those reared in Texas, and their speech sounded different from the English-speaking children of Polish immigrants living in Milwaukee or those of Jewish immigrants living in Brooklyn. Radio held up “unaccented” English as the national prestige language, which in practice meant something like the easygoing, slang-

filled dialect of white, Protestant, urban Midwesterners. By learning to speak English like radio announcers, the children of immigrants earned a ticket to the middle class. As the new national radio networks (first NBC, then CBS) emerged in the late 20s, the nation’s spoken language homogenized.66

With the development of broadcasting, radio also produced powerful simultaneous experiences across large geographic areas. While newspapers and telegraphs gave roughly simultaneous experiences, radio gave listeners exactly simultaneous experiences. No delay. No telegraph operator interpreting dots and dashes. Listeners experienced national events as they happened.67 In 1921, French war hero Georges Carpentier challenged Jack Dempsey’s world heavyweight boxing title at a bout in Jersey City dubbed “The Battle of the Century.” It was the first sporting event broadcast live on the radio. While the crowd of 90,000 in Jersey contained celebrities and luminaries, an estimated 300,000 people from as far away as Maine listened to the radio broadcast. The event marked a triumph for the nascent idea that radio could be a commercially successful broadcast medium. A journal for radio enthusiasts told of the powerful simultaneous experience generated by the broadcast: “while the eyes of the world were awaiting the issuance of the time-honored descriptive printed word to tell the story—radio told it by voice! Instantly, through the ears of an expectant public, a

67 Ibid., 352.
world event had been ‘pictured’ in all its thrilling details.” While radio took a few decades to gain the same widespread accessibility as print, those who could afford a radio in 1921 believed broadcasting had changed the world. Voice travelled instantly and produced thrilling shared experiences. They heard the bell ring live as Dempsey won by knockout.

Radio broadcasting supported fundamentalism in similar ways as it supported the nation. First, radio broadcasting helped fundamentalism establish its own peculiar language as a Christian norm. Broadcasting outward from a few key places, the movement began to speak with one authoritative voice. Developing a shared language, religious broadcast pioneers also produced powerful simultaneous experiences that united far-flung people into a community. Shared practices of radio listening and shared experiences of radio broadcasts formed connective tissue between isolated individuals. Radio allowed fundamentalism, a cohesive and bounded community, to have material presence in everyday life. Audiences could hear what fundamentalism was all about and learn to speak its language. They could experience the power of revivals in real time, precisely as they happened. The fundamentalist community forged by radio

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spanned vast geographic spaces. One article from 1922 speculated that if Billy Sunday started a radio broadcast he would have “the United States for his congregation.”

More than just transcending geographic borders, radio broke through the walls of homes and brought the power of the church into domestic space. Since it worked “over the air,” radio could even break into the private world of individual hearts. Most fundamentalists saw this potential immediately. Unlike they did with film, they put up very little resistance to the arrival of broadcast radio. In fact, there is scant evidence that any but a handful of fundamentalists ever opposed the use of radio for religious purposes. Their longstanding relationship to print culture made them believe in the new broadcast medium’s potential to bring their community together. More than just quietly accepting its presence, one historian suggests that fundamentalists actually delighted in radio. Radio took their sounds out beyond the normal range, into spaces where people didn’t know the Word of God. Radio also allowed them to hear God in an increasingly mechanical, technologically complex world. God’s voice was as close as the radio dial, which was exactly where they needed it to be.

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69 Homer Croy, “Is the Radio Hurting or Helping the Church?,” *Popular Radio* 1, no. 3 (July 1922): 180.
70 Joel Carpenter shows how a rare case of opposition to radio happened when BIOLA was thinking of starting their own station in 1923. An aging R.A. Torrey and school president T.C. Horton objected to the station on the grounds that Satan was the “prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2). However, the school decided to go ahead with the radio station anyway. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 129.
71 Tona J. Hangen, *Redeeming the Dial: Radio, Religion, and Popular Culture in America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 7. Hangen makes three significant arguments about radio’s place in fundamentalist history. First, radio gave the fundamentalist movement institutional and tangible form. Second, radio evangelism was a kind of “American folk art,” an important part of the national identity being
The Church of the Air: Radio and the Dematerialization of Christianity

At first, fundamentalists were rather modest in their praise of radio, celebrating its ability to extend traditional church activities to bigger audiences. In particular, the journal published by Paul Rader’s program loved to publish letters from invalids, sick children, shut-ins, and lonely old ladies (to use their language). People described how the radio brought the long-missed or long-forgotten sounds of church back into their isolated lives. A welfare superintendent from Benton Harbor, Michigan told the story of radio’s impact on a forty-five-year-old man from the town who had been “confined to his wheelchair over fourteen years, and had been totally blind for nine years.” In the official’s words, “a more twisted, helpless body one seldom sees.” Racked with pain and lying on his deathbed, the man’s face brightened when Rader’s program played his song request one Sunday night. He died the next day. The superintendent commented, “Mr. Rader’s sermons were bright spots in his completely shut in life.” The letter suggests that, for a man without access to many other forms of sensory engagement, listening to the radio brought church back into his life.

Countless other letters told similar stories. They subtly asserted that radio was not doing anything new or unusual, but simply using technology to surmount bodily

formed by radio. Third, radio gave cultural authority back to evangelists. This at least helped them feel like they were “guardians of the nation’s values.” (17-19).

difficulties, bringing old-fashioned church those who would otherwise have missed it. A twelve-year-old girl from West Allis, Wisconsin wrote to the program, “I have tuberculosis, and I have to lie on a screen porch, day and night. I enjoy listening to your Sunshine Hour on Sunday, for I miss my Sunday School so much.” The sick little girl wanted to attend Sunday school, and radio made it so. Such letters reassured readers that the radio was not wholly disruptive to Christian life. It overcame physical difficulties in order to bring individuals back into the church fold. Others agreed. One woman, sick with tuberculosis and caring for her paralyzed mother, put it succinctly: “the radio is a most wonderful invention for us. It brings the church right into our very room.”

By reaching out to individuals who wanted to attend church but were unable, the radio served a prosthetic function. Christians wary of the new technology’s implications needed only to think of it as an assistance mechanism for people with particular physical difficulties. Radio was not disrupting church activity with scary new realities, but was bringing eager Christians back into the church. One of radio technology’s earliest Christian uses actually happened inside churches and made this prosthetic function especially clear. As early as 1916, a small device called the “acousticon” made its appearance in the advertising columns of *The Sunday School Times*.

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73 “Hi-Ways and Bi-Ways,” *National Radio Chapel Announcer* 1, no. 2 (February 1926): 27.
Roughly equivalent to today’s hearing aid, the device used sound-reproduction technology to make it easier for parishioners to hear sermons. Often, this came in the form of a personal receiving box with headphones that could be used to increase the volume of a preacher’s sermon. By the 1920s, the acousticon started capitalizing on the radio boom, adopting radio technology in its devices and marketing them as miracle machines for individuals with hearing loss. One ad asserted, “Deafness Conquered by NEW Radio Idea. […] Radio science has wrought another miracle. […] giving good hearing at once to poor ears and ending the discomfort and embarrassment of deafness.”

This ad demonstrates how early radio fit into the broader arc of Christian auditory culture. By the 1920s, sound had long been privatized. Individual listeners made demands on their sonic environments. Now, technology was offering ways to increase the number of individual listeners who could access the church’s sounds. If churches wanted to reach people with hearing loss, they need not change the overall volume of the church service, incorporate more images, or do anything else that would change the experience for others. They needed simply to encourage individual parishioners to augment their own hearing with the radio acousticon. In its earliest forms, radio served as a prosthetic device that allowed sheep with hearing loss to hear the shepherd’s voice again, remaining in the fold.

While fundamentalists welcomed radio as a way to increase people’s access to church, they quickly realized that the technology was also forming utterly new kinds of Christian communities. Radio brought “church” to places where it could not formerly have gone, but it looked very different from anything resembling traditional church. A rare photograph of early radio listening shows just how unusual these communities looked from the outside (Figure 24). The image in Figure 24 actually predates Paul Rader’s broadcast. Its original caption read, “The Church Service Comes to Grandma: no longer need the shut-in be deprived of the privilege of listening to the country’s best preachers. The radio is beginning to bring his voice even into the remote rural districts.”\footnote{Croy, “Is the Radio Hurting or Helping the Church?,” 178.}

The image shows an elderly woman and a young woman who is, presumably, her granddaughter and caretaker. Both women sit together on a loveseat, facing the radio in a dark room. Their tiny radio sits atop a small table. Sporting earphones, they are “listening in” to a radiophone church broadcast—one of the first in the country on Pittsburgh’s KDKA. The earphones allow each woman to isolate herself completely in the sounds of the radio. Attending “church” in this way emphasizes how strongly the privatization of sound had taken hold. They sit together, but isolated, participating in a church service that has no knowledge of their presence. The women join an imagined community of other listeners. Each knows the other on the couch.
experiences the same private sounds at the same time as she does, but she also imagines countless others doing the same thing.\textsuperscript{77}

\textbf{Figure 24 - “The Church Service Comes to Grandma,” in \textit{Popular Radio} (1.3), July 1922, p178}

Debates swirled over whether or not the communities formed by radio were real churches or not. Rader and his marketers set to work affirming the authenticity of their radio parish. Very early on, they called the broadcast the “National Radio Chapel.” Not long after, it became the “Cathedral of the Air.” They performed specific programs for particular groups, such as lessons for children and young people, just as traditional churches did. They described their ministerial activities in terms of a traditional church. They called listeners “parishioners” of the National Radio Chapel. One article even imagined what it would be like if the radio church occupied a single physical church

\textsuperscript{77} Croy, “Is the Radio Hurting or Helping the Church?”

196
space. Seating the vast radio audience, Rader’s announcer mused, would require a building “several blocks long and a number of blocks wide. Within such a building would have to be installed an equipment of amplifiers capable of carrying the voices to all parts of the auditorium from the speaker’s platform.” In the station’s earliest self-descriptions, it was nothing less than a real church performing real church work. Paul Rader himself described his radio ministry in the traditional terms of revivalism, saying “the microphone has never been a cold little piece of metal to me, but just a glorious open door to the hearts of countless thousands.” Radio preaching opened hearts for Christ, just as traditional revival preaching had always done. Radio was a new way to perform real, old-fashioned church work.

Rader and his radio team developed a fascinating method of proving their radio community was real. They called it the “Radio Relatives Family Tree.” In the lobby of their studio, they put up an artificial tree made by a neighborhood florist. Standing about eight feet high, the tree had green foliage and colorful paper flowers. The first night of each month, the radio team conducted a little service around the tree. Listeners who made monetary donations to the program had their names read aloud at this service, and a radio official tied a paper “blossom” bearing the contributor’s name to the tree. The donor then officially became a “radio relative,” a member of the radio family.

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In paper and plastic, the tree materialized the radio community. One official commented, “the radio has proven to be one of the greatest agencies for the carrying of the Gospel of Jesus into the very places were it is most needed.” People who “never darkened the door of any kind of a church” had joined the radio family. Though unfamiliar in some ways, Rader’s associates insisted radio communities were real, Christian communities. They were Christian extended families with a tangible presence in the world. They reached lost sinners in ways traditional churches could not.80

Images of the Radio Relatives Family Tree emphasized its rootedness in traditional church activities. To comply with the new Federal Radio Commission’s restrictions on wavelengths, Rader and company switched frequencies in 1927. Their broadcast license effectively created a once-a-week radio station all day on Sundays, for which they adopted the call sign WJBT, short for “Where Jesus Blesses Thousands.” Their monthly newsletter soon splashed the new name all over images of the Radio Relatives Family Tree, often accompanying letters to listeners from Paul Rader. One such image showed a tree actually growing out of Rader’s Chicago Gospel Tabernacle, the church out of which WJBT broadcast (Figure 25). The tabernacle constitutes the tree’s trunk, while the radio occupies its upper branches and leaves. This implies that the radio ministry of WJBT grows out of the activities of the Chicago Gospel Tabernacle. Its roots spread down across the page, merging with the parishioners entering through the

tabernacle’s doors. Such overlap suggests that the radio ministry draws its strength from its audience, that it speaks to real people’s real concerns. Likewise, becoming part of the radio family tree is equated visually with entering the church doors. Images like this pervaded Rader’s newsletter, arguing that the new radio community fit nicely into the existing frameworks of Christian life.


Though associating the radio listening community with traditional church work helped justify it to skeptics for a time, the plan ultimately backfired. The popularity of the broadcasts soon led traditional brick-and-mortar churches to perceive the radio family tree as a threat to their very existence. Radio families might be all well and good, but radio churches threatened the status quo. Not long after Rader’s program began, *The Literary Digest* ran a story called simply “A Radio Church.” It described how traditional
churches were using radio to extend the reach of their ministry, and how much good these broadcasts were doing for people with “infirmities” that prevented them from attending conventional church services. Buried in its center, however, the article stirred up a hornet’s nest, “whether the system is calculated to encourage the army of deliberate absentees and produce a further marked diminution of regular church attendance seems a question open to debate.” Here, in a general readership magazine, people wondered if radio actually encouraged absenteeism. If listening to a radio service was just as good as attending a church service in person, the local church had its days numbered. The article went on to argue for radio’s shortcomings as a substitute for traditional church, but the question of whether radio could replace local churches lingered.81

Rader addressed the question of a “radio church” head-on in an article called “What about a Radio Church? Can There Be Such a Thing as a Radio Church?” He actually cited the story from Literary Digest, showing how bothersome the question of radio’s status was. While it might seem like Rader would be keen to defend the churchly status of his radio community, he actually said otherwise. His article stated in no uncertain terms that radio could not take the place of traditional churches. According to the Bible, Rader said, a church consists of “Christians who gather for worship, baptism, communion, marriage, funerals, […] song and Christian fellowship, bearing of sorrows, joys and burdens. None of this can be done well by Radio. Most of it cannot be done at

81 “A Radio Church,” The Literary Digest 89, no. 7 (May 15, 1926): 30.
all.” It was impossible for radio to perform the kinds of ritual activities that depended on a physically present group of Christians.

That being said, Rader thought radio was especially good at carrying “the message” of Christianity to large numbers of people. Once they heard that Gospel message, people would be more likely to attend a local church. He thought there was no threat to churches from radio broadcasting, and actually believed the broadcasts would be a boon: “no gospel preaching church can be emptied by any radio, but rather an increase in membership and church attendance [happen] wherever gospel broadcasting is heard.” He reminded readers that radio was doing its best work among “shut-ins, lame, blind, mothers with small children, the aged, those attending children and the sick, storm-bound families.” These people depended on radio for spiritual nourishment, as their lives were isolated from church by physical circumstances. “Once they are out of doors,” he insisted, “they make a bee-line for the church which has broadcasted to them, or to the closest church, if the message of the pulpit has been the gospel of Jesus Christ backed up by the Bible as the Word of God.” Even as Rader described how radio oozed into spaces where traditional church ministries could not, he maintained that churches had nothing to fear from radio.82

Rader’s distinction between “the message” and “the church” made a powerful claim about Christianity that would have been unthinkable before sound-reproduction technology. In effect, he isolates the “gospel” of Christianity from the practices of the church. The Gospel, in his reckoning, consists only of the spiritual content of spoken words and music, the *message* of Christianity. While one could not transmit a baptism by radio, the Gospel message traveled well. Sound alone was enough. In Rader’s reckoning, the Gospel is not the total work of the church, not a way of transforming society, but particular spiritual content contained sounds. It’s the kind of thing one can broadcast over the radio. Sound had to be isolated from other aspects of life in order to be recorded, amplified, and transmitted. This isolation actually helped creative revivalists like Paul Rader, since it allowed him to separate the message of Christianity (contained in sounds) from the rest of Christianity. Sound-reproduction technology conditioned him to think of the Gospel as a message, a particular set of sounds that Christians could reproduce, amplify, transmit. As a message, the Gospel could go anywhere. Local churches had nothing to fear from it, since it could never replace them on its own. Radio communities consisted of people committed to the message of the Gospel, those who liked hearing it and so tuned their dials to WJBT instead of the local jazz channel.

Rader’s distinction between the Christian message and Christianity points to one of the defining features of fundamentalist broadcasting: the dematerialization of radio. To harness radio’s full spiritual potential, fundamentalists first made it not material.
While we tend to think of radio listening as an easy push of a button, the act of listening to a radio in the 1920s was far more physically involved than it is today. That is to say, there is no necessary reason why radio would be considered less material than looking at a picture, sewing a shirt, or performing a baptism.

A radio was a large piece of furniture. Even a “small” tabletop set took up most of the table it sat on. Photographic evidence from the Department of Agriculture suggests that families gathered around the radio, much as they gathered around the television a generation later (Figure 26). In Figure 26, a farm family near Lansing, Michigan gathers around their tabletop radio on a Saturday in August of 1926.83 Mother, father, and daughter sit in rocking chairs, listening to the radio. Theirs is a large cabinet model radio. It is just slightly wider than their phonograph. The phonograph sits in a corner of the living room, next to a window and a chair that faces away from it. The radio occupies a much more central location in the home. It takes up part of the entryway between rooms, its speaker pointing into the dining room. The family does not look at each other; they look at the radio. Even the barefoot youngster, holding her mother’s hand, looks at the radio set from her miniature rocker. The radio holds their attention and shapes their living space. Written records indicate that such practices remained consistent wherever people listened to the radio. A listener from Morrison, 83 “A Farm Family Listening to Their Radio,” 8/14/1926. U.S. Department of Agriculture Extension Service; Series: Photographs of Extension Service Activities and Personnel, compiled 1928-1943; Record Group 33, Records of the Extension Service, 1888-2000; National Archives and Records Administration, National Archives at College Park (College Park, MD).
Illinois wrote to Paul Rader: “I wish you could see us Sunday evenings as we come home from church […] We tip-toe around the radio […] then quietly, one by one, each takes a chair until we are lined up on all four sides of the room.” Sitting on all four sides of the room, the family looked toward the center of the room. The letter does not say where in the room the radio was exactly, but it is clear that family and neighbors gathered around it. The radio constituted the focal point of the room and the evening’s activity. It took serious work to remove the physicality of radio and make it a medium of spiritual messages.

![Image](image_url)

Figure 26 - "Farm Family Listening to Their Radio, 8/14/1926." U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Extension Service. National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD

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84 “Hi-Ways and Bi-Ways,” February 1926.
The Spiritual Powers of Radio

Fundamentalists did not invent the idea of radio’s spiritual power out of thin air. Many others, including their religious competitors, had similar notions. Sir Oliver Lodge was a pioneering physicist who helped develop the ideas behind radio tuning. A contemporary of Marconi, his work was vital to the commercial success of radio as a broadcast medium. He also believed strongly in the concept of “ether,” a mysterious and all-pervasive substance through which radio waves allegedly moved. He conducted scientific experiments to determine its physical qualities. As a committed spiritualist, he thought ether might also be the medium through which the dead contacted the living. In other words, by donning their headphones and listening to the whirrs, buzzes, and otherworldly crackles of the radiophone, enthusiasts might actually be able to hear messages from the beyond. At the very least, they heard disembodied voices from distant places.

Since radio was regularly bringing voices of the unseen into people’s homes, it was not such a leap to think that voices from beyond the threshold of death might materialize through the fabulous new device as well. Lodge made both implicit and explicit connections between radio technology and spiritualism at popular speaking engagements around the United States. In one breath, he deployed the physicists’ technical language of the radio spectrum, its kilocycles and syntonic tuning. In the next, he talked about how the physical properties of radio waves might allow the dead to
carry messages from the beyond. He likened mediums to radio receivers, saying they tuned in to the ether in much the same way as a radio did. It was all very complicated and technical, but also mysterious, magical, alluring. Lodge made his arguments at the height of the spiritualist boom following World War I, which also happened to be the period of radio’s increasing accessibility for the American public. He helped create a media sensation out of the new technology and its spiritual possibilities.85

Many spiritualists insisted that empirical proof of the spirit world lay just around the corner. Their argument was simple: if modern science could detect imperceptible radio waves, we should be able to detect other kinds of messages and forces too. Machines had become powerful enough that they could harness the unseen and unfelt forces of the universe. Scientific instruments should, in due course, become finely tuned enough to establish contact with the other world. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, one of the most popular writers of the 1910s-20s, expected to hear radio messages from the spirit world within three or four years: “They have transmitters in the line of ether and all we have to have is the receiver.” Others reinforced his idea. After outlining the properties of subtle energies and how waves moved through ether, psychical researcher Dr. Hereward Carrington argued contact with the spiritual world “may some day be established by means of highly sensitive radio apparatus that may record impulses too

delicate to register on machines that have so far been devised.” Machines would bring tangible proof of the afterlife. Radio, or some similar technology, would prove the presence of a spiritual world.

For every spiritualist who thought the radio could transmit messages from the beyond, there was someone else who thought spiritualism to be nonsense. One of the most famous skeptics of spiritualism was none other than Harry Houdini himself. He set out to debunk their claims about radio and the supernatural. “Magicians have used the radio telephone in their performances for several years,” he said, “long before radio was generally known to the public. I am not at all surprised that the radio is being used by fraudulent mediums.” He used all the tricks in his magician’s arsenal to offer point-by-point explanations of how he thought mediums used radio to spread false hopes. Some, for example, would claim to know intimate details about a séance guest before the person arrived. Greeting them by name without introduction, the medium would whisper some secret to the person. Suitably amazed at this “psychic” knowledge, the guest would be primed to fall for any of the unscrupulous medium’s tricks. Houdini explained how a radio hidden in a wig might allow an accomplice to transmit the information from another room. He confessed to using such tricks in his own act—and to people insisting he had supernatural powers. He also explained how he made his

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86 Hereward Carrington, “Are the Dead Trying to Reach Us by Radio,” *Popular Radio* 1, no. 3 (July 1922): 188–93.
own haunted teapot with a radio and a tin kettle. While he expressed intense anger at mediums who deceived the public, Houdini actually thought Lodge and Doyle’s speculations might have merit. If it were possible to contact the dead, he wanted to make sure crooked tricksters would not ruin it. He wrote, “I hope that spirits will talk to us through radio instruments some day, but I will prefer to hear such messages in a scientist’s laboratory rather than through the presentations of unscrupulous mediums.”

Fundamentalist engagement with radio simmered in the same cultural broth as spiritualism. People were fascinated with the possibilities and impossibilities of the medium of radio. Americans were carving out radio’s space in society, and most seemed convinced that it was especially good for religious purposes. Though they generally thought spiritualism to be the work of the devil, fundamentalists agreed with the basic premise that radio presented unique spiritual possibilities, that it was a uniquely spiritual technology. Rader’s program director put it clearly. Writing in 1929, he recalled that a few years earlier folks challenged Rader’s radio ministry as kowtowing to a passing fad. Now, they were proven wrong. “Today,” he remarked, “though the radio is still in its infancy, it has proven beyond a doubt to be the greatest single agent of evangelism ever given to God’s messengers.” Radio was not just a passing fad, not just another gizmo that fancy churches installed for no reason. Radio was the most powerful evangelist of the new century. Radio was an “agent” of evangelism, meaning it went out

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and did work on its own. Those of God’s messengers who refused to use it were depriving themselves of a great new spiritual force. When fundamentalists claimed the spirit of God traveled by radio, they verged into spiritualist territory. When they claimed saving Gospel messages moved over the airwaves, they staked a claim in a much broader cultural question about radio’s spiritual possibilities.88

Paul Rader went so far as to say that the Old Testament actually predicted the coming of the radio. God specially selected the technology, etching it into inspired prophecy. In Job 38:35, God challenges Job by saying, ‘Canst thou send lightnings that they may go, and say unto thee: Here we are?’ Rader, pointing out the ambiguity of the Hebrew word translated as “lightnings,” thought this passage referred specifically to the radio. He said, the word “lightnings” here “surely means nothing more than the radio waves which today carry the messages of men to all corners of the earth.” He found two other verses that predicted the coming of the radio, including Psalm 65:8, “Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice.” Rader interpreted this verse as a clear prediction of the vacuum tube and its ability to harness “the molecular and vibrational structure of matter.” For people who considered biblical prophecy a complex code, Rader’s interpretations demonstrated how the radio fit into God’s spiritual action. Radio harnessed the elemental powers God controlled, the “lightnings” and the “outgoings” of the universe. Surely God operated through these imperceptible but

powerful forces. Any technology that engaged them brought the might of the universe’s creator.89

The Bible may have taught about radio, but the radio also taught fundamentalists about their spiritual relationship with God. God’s voice pervaded fundamentalists’ reality like radio waves. It was simply a matter of finding the right way to hear it. God’s voice was everywhere, but people often missed it. More than just a metaphor, radio conditioned the way fundamentalists thought about messages from God. God was sending messages all the time; people just needed the right “receiver” to pick them up. Sometimes, this was literally a radio receiver—like when Rader broadcast the Gospel. At other times, picking up God’s voice required more of a metaphorical receiver. One E.J. Pace cartoon, called “Tune in for Him,” illustrated how the radio reinvented the way people heard God’s voice in everyday life (Figure 27). The cartoon showed a little boy wearing a radio headset. He gazes out of the image, directly toward the viewer. He wears a blank expression, focused intensely on the sounds he hears through the spiritual technology of the radio. Above his head, jagged lines represent the radio waves he is listening to. Marked “the voice of God,” the message says, “My son, give me thine heart.” The boy’s headset bears the label “parental training.” In other words, his parents’ Christian nurturing has provided him with the technology he needs to hear God’s voice.

In a more general sense, radio changed the way fundamentalists understood God’s voice. God’s voice was out there, traveling with the elemental forces of the universe. Technology now allowed people to access it.⁹⁰

Figure 27 - E.J. Pace, "Tune In For Him." In The Sunday School Times, November 27, 1926, p723

Fundamentalists delighted in the spiritual qualities of radio. They celebrated its ability to perform spiritual work. As mentioned, Rader and his associates described their service as a “cathedral of the air.” They struggled to visualize radio’s spiritual qualities in promotional images, to depict the airiness of the “cathedral of the air” they were making with sounds and radio equipment. They often used clouds and other celestial images to associate their radio station with spiritual power. One image from 1928 showed a large church sitting between two radio towers (Figure 28). The towers show the name of the station, WJBT, along with the radio frequency where listeners could find it. Between the

⁹⁰ E.J. Pace, “Tune in For Him,” The Sunday School Times 68, no. 48 (November 27, 1926): 723.
two towers, floating about the church, appeared fluffy clouds. Inside the clouds were pictures of a farm and a city, somewhat sketchy and distant, but clear. Spanning everything were the words, “Broadcasting the Gospel to America by Radio.” In other words, the Gospel traveled on the air thanks to the radio. It went all across the country, floating like the clouds. Fundamentalists believed in radio’s spiritual power. They did not draw detailed diagrams of receiving sets or amplifiers, but illustrated radio with billowing clouds. They worked hard to make it spiritual and otherworldly in a way that accorded with their own religious outlook. Using the air itself, God sent his messages out to the whole nation.

Figure 28 - "Broadcasting the Gospel to America By Radio." Detail from Worldwide Christian Courier, October 1928, p8

WJBT eventually earned the moniker, “The All Saints and Sinners Cathedral of the Air.” Though quite a mouthful, the name emphasized the spirituality of radio, its spirituality, over its materiality. The cathedral radio made reached all saints and sinners. It spread all across the sinful world, welcoming anyone with a receiver set. It moved with the elements, harnessing mysterious and unseen forces for Christianity. Radio
brought the Gospel to America through the air. It literally surrounded people with God’s message of salvation. They just needed the right equipment to pick up the signal.

**Coda: Fundamentalism and the Miracles of Modern Sound**

By 1930, most fundamentalists gathered around their radios to listen to some preacher or another. From an electric machine of vacuum tubes, antennae, and amplifiers, they heard truly miraculous sounds. They heard sounds that could save their souls. They heard the Holy Spirit moving among a group of Christians far away, people they would probably never meet. Listening together in groups of two or three, the Holy Spirit sometimes traveled through the airwaves to reach them in their own homes. Many listeners reported to Paul Rader that they had their hearts changed by listening to his program. They found Jesus because radio technology let them hear the Good News. One listener from Old Orchard, Maine wrote:

> words are inadequate to convey to you just what your services mean to me. Have been given both physical and spiritual strength through listening in to WJBT, and I know it is Where Jesus Blesses Thousands. You have the spirit of God and it travels through the air and reaches the hearts of men and women. Surely, God is there with you people in the Gospel Tabernacle or else ‘listeners’ hundreds of miles away could not feel the spirit of God blessing them. Your services bring happiness to me. I use head phones during the Back Home hour and do not remove them until I hear: “Goodnight and God bless you.”

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This letter expressed the sentiments of countless listeners. They loved Paul Rader’s radio ministry because it gave physical and spiritual strength. More than just kilocycles and amperes, the radio put people’s ears in tune with the spirit of God. Whether listening with a group of others or listening alone through headphones, people felt themselves to be part of a much larger Christian community, one that spanned the American continent.

Fundamentalism took shape just as sound was inalterably changing in American life. Separated from other kinds of physical experience into its own discrete category, sound became an object of investigation in the nineteenth century. Sound became a sense apart. Scientists catalogued its parts and unpacked its mechanics. Eventually, they learned how to use transistors to turn sound into something else, manipulate it, copy it, enlarge it, send it thousands of miles, sell it, and then turn it back into “pure sound.” People started using headphones. They separated themselves from the sounds of others, trying to immerse themselves in a private world of sounds they chose to listen to. They learned to ignore the hiss and crackles of electrical machines and find only the sounds worth hearing.

Fundamentalists welcomed the changes to sound. Their ideas and practices depended on the new modern sound and its machines. As a thing apart, the saving sounds of the Gospel traveled to new places. They broke through the walls of homes and opened needy hearts for Christ. Pressed onto a phonograph, Christian sounds
immersed families in the sounds of the Good News. They preserved the sounds of Christianity forever, ensuring that the old-fashioned faith would stay fresh forever.

Broadcast from a radio tower, Christian sounds established new kinds of communities that spanned immense geographic spaces, that seemed built on the air itself.
Chapter 3 – The Look and Feel of the Truth: The Tactility of Dress in Fundamentalist Life

“...that women should adorn themselves modestly and sensibly in seemly apparel, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly attire but by good deeds, as befits women who profess religion.” – 1 Timothy 2:8a, 9-10 (RSV)

Of Baseballs and Salvation: The Sense of Touch and the Suit of Redemption

According to the official rulebook of the 1886 baseball season, a ball in the National League was to remain in play until it became “out of shape, or cut or ripped so as to expose the [inner] yarn.” Unlike today’s crisp white and red baseballs that get cleaned or replaced whenever they touch the dirt, professional baseballs used to stay in a major league game as rough blocks of iron-hard, grayish leather. Batters had a hard time seeing these balls, especially if the pitcher wore gray sleeves or painted his arms with dirt, which many did. This meant long hits rarely happened. The league’s leader finished the 1886 season with just eleven home runs. Since few long hits occurred, enterprising owners increased revenues by putting benches for fans in the outfield grass. Bored outfielders often talked, joked, and even smoked cigarettes with those around them. Many fielders did not even wear a glove—those who did sported a thin leather

one with the fingertips cut off. This combination of factors set the stage for an important fundamentalist story about tactility.

Shortly after his conversion to Christianity in 1886, a Chicago White Stockings outfielder found himself chasing one of those rare long hits from Detroit’s Charlie Bennett. Chicago’s player was a mediocre outfielder known mostly for stealing bases and having a mouthy temperament. His name was Billy Sunday. Sunday would go on to become the most famous evangelist of his generation. For the moment, however, he was just a twenty-four-year-old outfielder trying to catch a charcoal-colored baseball in an outfield where fans blocked his path to a catch.

As in all good baseball stories, Sunday’s attempt to catch the long hit happened in the bottom of the ninth with two outs. His team was up by two runs, but two runners stood in scoring position. If Sunday caught the ball, his team won. Bennett had managed to hit the ball so hard that it was flying over the heads of the fans who sat in the outfield benches. Scrambling, Sunday yelled at them, “Get out of the way!” As the crowd parted like the Red Sea before Moses, the new convert silently prayed, “Lord, if you ever helped a mortal man, help me get that ball.” In a final desperate act, Sunday used one of the benches to catapult himself into the air. He reached out his bare hand, stretched, stretched, and—smack!—caught the ball. Chicago won the game. Afterward, an heir to the DuPont industrial fortune gave Sunday a stack of cash and told him, “Here is $10,
Bill. Buy yourself the best hat in Chicago. That catch won me $1,500. Tomorrow go and buy yourself the best suit of clothes you can find in Chicago.”

God answered Sunday’s prayer with a sore hand and a new suit. Sunday later claimed God actually helped him catch the ball. Almost twenty years after the fact, the evangelist recalled, “I am sure the Lord helped me catch that ball. This deduction may not be according to theology, but it’s according to experience.” For Sunday, theology mattered less than his experience in the outfield. Billy Sunday did not just catch a baseball in a game against Detroit. The baseball that hit his hand that day imparted sacred knowledge. The baseball in his hand convinced him of the inerrant truth of God’s Word, of salvation by faith, of Christ’s atoning death. The new suit gave evidence that he was a new man. Sunday remembered “an old Methodist minister” approaching him years after the event, asking with disapproval if he had really accepted the ten dollars from the gambler. “You bet your life I did,” Sunday replied. The mature evangelist retold the tale to underscore the awesome reality of his conversion. The slap of hard gray leather on the palm of his hand infused sacred truth into the new convert. Tactile experience convinced him of the absolute truth of his salvation. Touch gave an


3 “Billy Sunday Tells of His Conversion.”

immediate, irrefutable experience of divine power and sacred truth. His new suit was the fruit of his conversion, and proved he was a new man.

Theories of Contact and Contagion for the Study of Religion

Touch formed a central preoccupation of Emile Durkheim’s influential work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912). He insisted that the touch prohibitions of aboriginal peoples in the Australian backcountry revealed deep laws of human civilization. Durkheim began with the premise that the Australian aboriginals’ society was the most elementary of all known human societies. Thus, their lives revealed the most basic forms of social organization. Society in general depended upon the kinds of organizational forms revealed in aboriginal societies. Durkheim noticed that the aboriginals closely regulated the sense of touch. The “totem” was something members of a particular social group must not touch under normal circumstances, for it was a special thing or animal with dangerous power. From this observation, he extrapolated to a general principle of social organization, defining “the sacred” as “that which the profane must not and cannot touch with impunity.” Sacred things were things set apart from the everyday through prohibitions on touch. Profane things were accessible to everyone’s touch, all the time. All religions, in all their varieties, built upon this tactile foundation. The sacred and the profane do not come into contact. Beliefs, myths, and theologies explained “the nature of sacred things and the relations they have with other sacred things or with profane things.” All religious rituals and rites were simply “rules of
conduct that prescribe how man must conduct himself with sacred things.”

For Durkheim, the distinction between “touch” and “do not touch” formed the bedrock of all religious activity.

Durkheim also understood contagion as a key feature of experiencing the sacred. For Durkheim, the profane was harmless and inert. People experienced it, then moved on. By contrast, the sacred spread and spilled between bodies. It passed from person to person with alarming, surprising, sometimes scary intensity. Durkheim used the term “collective effervescence” to describe the contagious quality of the sacred. When experiencing the sacred, he suggested, “the effervescence often becomes so intense that it leads to outlandish behavior: the passions unleashed are so torrential that nothing can hold them.”

People in the throes of sacred experience felt such intense feelings in their bodies that others present began to feel them too. Standards of normal conduct dissolved. The sacred spread rapidly through an entire group of people, jostling between their bodies, passing from person to person until everyone experienced the same thing. The sacred spread like a virus. People in close contact were especially susceptible to it.

Since Durkheim, studies of American religious history have also examined the sense of touch as a significant aspect of religious life. According to David Chidester,

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6 Ibid., 218.
ordinary forms of contact have shaped American religious history just as much as the intentional work of hands in reaching out. Chidester argues that analyses of religious tactility should pay attention to the whole body’s interactions with the world. American religions have taken shape through activities like caressing, hitting, manipulating, moving, and even “the kind of acute awareness of the environment that can only be gained by bumping into sharp and solid objects in the dark.” Chidester identifies four major modalities of religious tactility in American history: 1) binding, 2) burning, 3) moving, and 4) handling. For Chidester, touch is both the physical act of touching and a powerful metaphor for the ways American bodies have related to the world around them. Touch speaks to people’s resiliency, their ability to deploy religious resources under life’s pressures.7

Chidester’s understanding of touch does not go far enough to explain the material culture of fundamentalism. His framework is useful because it brings attention to neglected modes of touch that shaped daily life in profound ways. But his essay treats touch mainly as a metaphor. My examination of fundamentalist tactility tries to avoid

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7 Binding refers to the ways touching has brought communities together, forging a common sense of “us.” It also describes the physical ties that bound enslaved Africans to their masters and the metaphor of the covenantal bond with God that led colonists to take land from Native Americans. Burning refers to the energy, enthusiasm, or sacred powers that could only be engaged through touch, such as laying on hands to ordain a Baptist minister. Moving describes the motion of religions in America, from the expansion westward, to the social mobility brought by economic good times, to the jostling of crowds at a Billy Graham rally. Handling refers to the ways Americans have managed to live in a world animated by unseen forces, whether the force be a God who touches individual hearts or the “invisible hand” of the capitalist economy. David Chidester, “Haptics of the Heart: The Sense of Touch in American Religion and Culture,” *Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1, no. 1 (2000): 63, 76–78.
considering touch as a metaphor because fundamentalists did not understand the sense to work in a metaphorical way. Their assumptions about touch were very different from our own. For them, it was not just the sacred that was contagious. Sin was contagious. Fundamentalists accepted moral contagion as a reality of modern life. Sin spread through everyday contacts between bodies. This was a new way of understanding touch and of understanding sin. They believed the infecting contact did not have to occur through handshakes or kisses or other acts we consider to be forms of touching. For them, sin could spread through the touch of eyes on bodies, the touch of things on skin, as well as the touch of hands on surfaces. Touching objects transformed bodies and made them more or less morally contagious.

This chapter suggests that four distinct, but related, modes of touch operated in fundamentalist communities. First was what I will call “knowing touch.” As in the Billy Sunday story and Machen section mentioned above, this mode of touch provided immediate experiences of sacred knowledge. A person felt the truth of salvation through contact with certain things. This kind of touch provided evidence of conversion or convinced a person of the reality of God’s truth. As in the story of “Doubting Thomas” in the New Testament, this mode of touch involved reaching out in order to know. Sometimes, God reached toward a person through hard objects and physical miracles.
Other times, a person felt God’s truth surging through an object they held. This mode of touch convinced people of the absolute truth of God’s Word.8

A second mode of touch was “communal touch.” This mode of touch cultivated feelings of authenticity within fundamentalist communities. It often involved adorning the body with specific objects or manipulating physical things in order to convince others, or oneself, of the genuineness of one’s Christian convictions. This intersubjective mode of touch worked because fundamentalists had complex understandings of the interactions between bodies and objects in groups. Through this kind of touch, fundamentalists experienced feelings of comfort, genuineness, honesty, and transparency in their communities. This was the mode of touch through which fundamentalists identified each other in public spaces and made their communities feel just right.9

A third mode of touch was “transforming touch.” This occurred when contact with specific objects transformed the moral or spiritual characteristics of an individual body. It often arose in matters of dress. Clothing transformed a dangerously sinful body into a less dangerous body, a “pure” body that did not exert the same harmful effects on others it might otherwise have. Through transforming touch, clothing made a normal

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8 This mode of touch accords with Marleen de Witte’s observation, “Of all the senses, we take touch to be the one least prone to trickery, the most direct of all the senses, providing us with unmediated access to the real.” Marleen de Witte, “Touch,” Material Religion 7, no. 1 (2011): 149.
body into a spiritual weapon. It placed their bodies at the forefront of the war against sin.10

Finally, fundamentalists encountered a “contagious touch.” Whereas Durkheim considered only the sacred to be contagious and the profane to be innocuous, fundamentalists acknowledged the contagiousness of both good and evil. In particular, they saw sin as easily spread through apparently harmless daily contact. A look in the wrong direction, a bump against the wrong surface, or a close encounter with the wrong kind of object infected a Christian body with sin. Transforming that sin into purity took scrupulous attention to the way one’s body interacted with the world. It took years of training to avoid the contagious contact of sin.11

The Changing Sense of Touch at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century

Nineteenth-century American Protestants located sacred activity in the reaching hands of the autonomous individual subject. In 1863, the American Tract Society included two chapters about the significance of touch in a book called The Senses: With Numerous Illustrations. Aimed at evangelical children, the chapters described in scientific

10 Yi-Fu Tuan notes that touch is the only sense that “modifies its object.” For fundamentalists, this worked in both directions. The sensor could manipulate objects, but objects also transformed the sensor. Yi-Fu Tuan, “The Pleasures of Touch,” in The Book of Touch, ed. Constance Classen (New York: Berg, 2005), 78–79.
11 Constance Classen provides a rich analysis of the changing modes of touch that operated in Medieval Christianity. She argues that touch lost much of its sacred power during the Reformation, since Protestants no longer acknowledged touch as the means for transferring holiness from sacred images and objects. Classen’s history short-changes Protestantism. While it is certainly true that the modes of religious touch changed during the Reformation, it is not fair to say that it lost all its sacred power. See: Constance Classen, The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 151–152; 167–171.
terms how touch functioned in the animal world and in human life. The first chapter detailed how the bones, skin, and nerves of creatures ranging from lampreys to elephants provided these creatures with knowledge. An animal’s sense of touch suited its environment perfectly, the book argued. Elephants used their trunks to learn elephanty things. Sea anemones used a basic sense of touch to find food. But an animal’s touch provided only limited kinds of knowledge. According to the authors, the human hand set us apart from animals. God designed this instrument to give humans mastery over the world. Through the roughness of our hands, we performed useful work like farming or building. Through the nerves of our hands, we obtained knowledge of the physical world, such as texture, number, and size. Through the delicacy of our hands, we wrote works of literature, painted beautiful pictures, and performed sublime works of music. Without the sense of touch, and without God’s blessing of the hand in particular, “Our condition would indeed be comparatively helpless—that, indeed, of abject barbarism.” God blessed the creatures who reached out and touched. Humans’ hands gave people the kind of higher reasoning necessary to obtain salvific knowledge.12

By the end of the 1920s, touch had lost some of its sacred patina. With the advent of the theory of germs, Americans had come to regard touch as the primary sense through which the contagion of diseases occurred. Bad things happened through seemingly innocent kinds of contact. Prior to the late 1870s, it had been largely a mystery

why some people contracted diseases like smallpox and others did not. Medical experts considered many common diseases to be “constitutional,” a confluence of unlucky heredity, poor moral choices, and an environment that was either too hot, too cold, too dry, or too moist. The disease known as “consumption” (tuberculosis) fell into this constitutional category of illness. Before the discovery of germ theory, doctors suspected tuberculosis arose from inherited weak lungs, an environment that was too humid, and excessive consumption of alcohol. But they really did not know. Despite a person’s best efforts to avoid alcohol and other aggravating factors, consumption still struck. Some estimates suggest that consumption caused as many as one in four American deaths prior to the Civil War, making it the leading cause of death at the time. Diseases like consumption attacked seemingly without warning and killed people in their prime. Some tried to assign blame for the disease on an individual’s moral choices, but most Americans simply accepted illness and young death as unfortunate realities of life in a sinful world.\(^\text{13}\)

In the early years of the germ theory, public health officials advocated major changes to people’s daily activities with almost no readily accessible evidence. Their claims might have had the backing of scientists, but ordinary people took serious convincing before they would change their ways. Scientists peering into microscopes

had strong confirmation that germs were real, but most people had no such privilege.

For the general public, accepting the germ theory of disease meant believing unseen and unfelt particles clung to common objects and made them unsafe to touch. Hidden forces of doom supposedly adhered to everything, including seemingly innocuous objects like the chamber pot. Formerly benign activities or social contacts became dangerous sources of disease, such as spitting into one’s hand when shaking to seal an agreement or drinking from the common dipper at a public school. In retrospect, it is nothing short of amazing that sanitation crusaders managed to change the daily habits of nearly the whole American population so quickly.\(^{14}\)

Fundamentalists realized that sin was itself a disease.\(^{15}\) It spread through unremarkable bodily contacts between people, just like diseases did. Reuben Torrey once lamented, “It is appalling to think of the endless chain of sin and misery to which a single act, ay, a word even, may give rise.”\(^{16}\) By a “chain of sin,” Torrey referred to the way sin spread over time. Every single moment of contact with sin formed a link in the chain. One link at a time, sin grew and reproduced. Just as a disease entered the body through a single germ, so a single contact with sin allowed sin to multiply over time. He elaborated:

\[^{14}\text{Ibid., 7.}\]
\[^{15}\text{One fundamentalist minister wrote, “sin is disease. It is not merely weakness or immaturity, but disease.” William Ralph Inge, “The Decaying Sense of Sin,” Record of Christian Work 32, no. 8 (August 1913): 496.}\]
\[^{16}\text{Reuben A. Torrey, Letters from Hell: Or, A Message from a Lost Soul (Philadelphia: Universal Book and Bible House, 1906), 122.}\]
it is a frightful truth that the evil effect does not always spring from the seed as a single stupendous birth [...] but there is a demon power inherent in it of begetting and conceiving, wrong bringing forth wrong in endless succession. It is by its consequences, its capability of engulfing others, that the worst potency of sin becomes apparent.\textsuperscript{17}

Later, he explained how something as seemingly harmless as a kiss between a young man and a housemaid “poisoned the very life-blood of the girl.”\textsuperscript{18} Once the sin of sexual desire had made contact with this young woman through a kiss, it grew, multiplied, and spread to others. In Torrey’s story, the housemaid eventually became a penniless courtesan. Her sin then spread to her other lovers. She also trained more young women to become courtesans. A single incident of contagious touch led to a major outbreak of sin. By the time Torrey wrote in the 1910s, touch was no longer just the sense through which a person gained access to sacred knowledge. For fundamentalists, it was also the sense through which the disease of sin spread.

Many American Protestants in the early decades of the twentieth century were concerned about the state of Christianity in modern society. Touch helped them make sense of these changes. The modernist champion Shailer Mathews argued that Christianity needed to adapt its principles to have more impact on the changed physical conditions of modern American life. Modernism, wrote Mathews, “distinguishes permanent Christian convictions from their doctrinal expression; it uses these

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 127.
convictions in meeting the actual needs of our modern world.”¹⁹ Mathews considered Christian doctrines to be changeable. The “actual needs” of the modern world required Christians to remake their religion anew in every generation. Mathews defined Christianity as “the attempt of men to rely upon Christian principles in meeting the needs of their actual life-situations.”²⁰ Mathews saw Christianity as an ever-changing response to varying social conditions. Christianity was only true insofar as it helped to build a better society. Christians had an obligation to build a better world, which meant actually building. For Mathews, touch’s primary work in Christian life consisted of building better homes, better food distribution systems, better social institutions. The hands of Christians reshaped American society for the better.

Fundamentalists understood Christianity’s core very differently, in part because they operated with a different understanding of the sense of touch. J. Gresham Machen was probably the least typical fundamentalist person who ever lived, even if he was its most powerful theological writer. Machen considered Christianity a matter of individuals accepting the gift of salvation through faith. But even he understood this faith to be constituted in tangible ways. Machen observed, “although faith is intellectual, it is not only intellectual. You cannot have faith without having knowledge; but you will not have faith if you have only knowledge. Faith is the acceptance of a gift at the hands

²⁰ Ibid., 17.
of Christ.” For Machen, knowledge did not save a person. A tangible experience of receiving the gift of salvation did. Once an individual received salvation, purity—not perfection—emerged as the appropriate response. Purity became the watchword of Machen’s, and other fundamentalists’, understandings of tactile culture. Pure communities were not just abstractly honest and unselfish or helpful to society, but were constituted in material ways that prevented sin from spreading through the sense of touch. Machen reasoned that sin had no place in Christian life. It was a truly faithful person’s joyful duty to abolish sin. “Although sin is actually found in Christians,” Machen argued, “it does not belong there; it is never to be acquiesced in for one single moment, but is to be treated as a terrible anomaly that simply ought not to be.” When fundamentalists spoke about abolishing sin and living pure lives, they meant it in tactile terms. This chapter explores how changes to the sense of touch in the early twentieth century shaped fundamentalist concerns about purity, sin, and contact between bodies.

**Dress in Fundamentalist Life: Controlling the Skin**

Clothing was the front line of fundamentalists’ struggle against sinful contact. Clothing mediates, regulates, and restricts the body’s contact with the world. In a classic essay, anthropologist Terence Turner described clothing as “social skin.” Strict social rules govern how our skin should appear before others, how it must be altered or

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22 Ibid., 207.
adorned, and how it should come into contact with the outside world. All around the world, clothing marks people’s gender, class, age, race, ethnic or group affiliations, social ranks and roles. It determines who we are, enabling social life through its transformation of the body. Fundamentals wanted people’s clothing to make it harder for sin to spread. Clothing could transform bodies and minds, keeping them pure for the service of God. It could also transform bodies into more potent carriers of sin. Clothing made a person a real Christian or a pretender. Clothing created feelings of belonging and authenticity in fundamentalist communities. Clothing controlled the public presentation of fundamentalist skin, guarding against sin and establishing powerful shared feelings. Clothing offers insight into each of the modes of touch that operated in fundamentalist life.

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23 Turner called the surface of the body “the symbolic stage upon which the drama of socialization is enacted” and bodily adornment “the language through which it is expressed.” Terence Turner, “The Social Skin,” *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2, no. 2 (2012): 486–504.

24 Martha Finch argues that American Protestantism has a long history of treating the surface of the body, especially clothing, as the bellweather of truth. A person’s appearance shows the real truth of their soul. Martha Finch, “Outward Adornment: Dressing Bodies, Addressing Souls Among North American Protestants” (Material Religion: Tenth Anniversary Conference, Duke University, Durham, NC., 2015).

25 Anna-Karina Hermkens argues that clothing “not only signifies or communicates cosmologies, but actually embodies belief as something that a person does or performs as the body that cloth bestows.” Anna-Karina Hermkens, “Clothing as Embodied Experience of Belief,” in *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*, ed. David Morgan (New York: Routledge, 2010), 232.

26 Clothing navigates between the personal and the collective. Clothing locates people in social categories. Kate Bowler has discussed the significance of dress in megachurches as an indication of personal wealth. For predominantly white megachurches, people demonstrated their blessings through a casual approach to dress—khakis, polos shirts, comfortable shoes. Predominantly black megachurches expressed a similar concept in a completely different way. Men wore monogrammed shirts, women carried designer purses. Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 103, see also p.279 n.66.

27 For a general overview of the social significance of clothing, see Jane Schneider, “Cloth and Clothing,” in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Christopher Tilley et al. (London: Sage, 2006), 203–20; see also: Sandra
Dress also offers a useful entrée into the everyday operations of gender in fundamentalist life. Fundamentalists usually targeted their advice about fashion toward women. They saw women as especially vulnerable to sin without proper clothing to protect them. Advice literature considered women’s skin dangerously sexual, and thus, sinful. Leaders sought to tame women’s bodies with strict rules of modest dress. Fundamentalist women were told to consider the moral implications of their clothed bodies, both for their own virtue and piety and for the well-being of Christian men. By examining a woman’s dress, fundamentalists could know her virtues and sins immediately. To fundamentalists, it was obvious who was a modest woman and who


28 Judith Butler’s classic study “Gender Trouble” pointed to drag performances as an illustration of clothing’s significance for gender. Gender, for Butler, is performative. It is inherently unstable, relying more on the social conventions regarding certain kinds of garb than any inherent properties of the body. She writes, “The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance. As much as drag creates a unified picture of ‘woman’ (what its critics often oppose), it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency.” Judith Butler, Gender Trouble (New York: Routledge, 1990), 187.


Clothing also worked to control the moral bodies of men. Although advice literature did not consider their bodies to bear the same dangerous sexual powers as women’s bodies, clothing transformed the bodies of Christian men into spiritual warriors, respectable ministers, or wise consumers. Men received far more leeway in matters of dress. Clothing dampened the dangerous, immoral sexual power of women’s bare skin. Clothing, even removing certain articles of it, made men more manly, more effective spiritual warriors.

“**A Throbbing, Beautiful Young Woman, With Almost Half Her Body Exposed**: Transforming Sinful Skin

As champions of respectable Christian consumption, fundamentalists considered themselves to be at war with a sly enemy known as the “professing Christian.” Christian consumption was great when it worked. A Christian owned the right books, used the right charts, listened to the right music, behaved the right way in public and private, and said only the things that were really in her or his heart. But fundamentalists knew that the system was open to manipulation. The professing Christian, or Christian professor, knew all the right things to say. This person claimed to be saved. This person attended church regularly, went to Sunday school, and even prayed publicly. However, as far as

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31 Margaret Bendroth considers fundamentalist attitudes about dress examples of the movement’s ambivalence towards women. Fundamentalists depended on women’s support for their movement to thrive, but they also “kept women at a distance” from leadership. Bendroth, Margaret L., *Fundamentalism and Gender, 1875 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 68–72; Betty DeBerg sees no such ambivalence in fundamentalist approaches to women’s dress. For her, fundamentalist ideas about women’s dress bolstered their defense of Victorian gender norms. Betty A. DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 122.
fundamentalists were concerned, their so-called “Christianity” was all about appearances and not about the hard reality of a life transformed by Christ. Words did not necessarily reflect the condition of the soul. Dress did.

Professing Christians dressed according to the dictates of “worldly” fashion. Generally speaking, fundamentalist advice literature suggested a person should not dress too fashionably, for to do so was to place the changing opinions of society above the timeless truths of God’s Word. Most of this literature treated fashion as frivolous and distracting. But it also acknowledged that clothing held the potential to be spiritually ruinous. In May of 1921, Moody Monthly ran a very short article that captured the sentiment most fundamentalists had toward fashionable attire. The article told the probably apocryphal story of a minister from Aberdeen, Scotland who preached about fashion to his congregation. He harangued his parishioners, “Ye people of Aberdeen get your fashions from Glasgow, and Glasgow from Edinburgh, and Edinburgh from London, and London from Paris, and Paris from the Devil!” Jibes at the French aside, this brief article left no room for debate on the subject of fashion. Even if it adorned the bodies of supposedly Christian people, much of the day’s fashion came straight from the Devil. Christians had to be discerning consumers when it came to clothing.

Fundamentalists advice literature directed most of its appeals against fashion toward women. In a sermon called “Costume and Morals” from 1886, premillennialist

Presbyterian evangelist T. DeWitt Talmage found fashion advice for women written in the invectives of the prophet Isaiah. In Isaiah chapter 3, the prophet warned of the Lord’s coming wrath against Jerusalem because the “daughters of Zion” were “haughty, and walk with stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet.” For Talmage, this passage clearly cautioned modern Christian women to dress “modestly” or face the ire of God. As it ruined Jerusalem in Isaiah’s day, women’s immodest dressing was ruining America today. For Talmage, dressing modestly did not necessarily mean dressing frumpily. It was perfectly acceptable to wear nice things, but there were limits. It was excessively fashionable dress that led to moral ruin.

According to Talmage, “modern” fashions went to unholy extremes of sexual titillation. He expressed particular disgust at the way performers dressed on stage at the theater. He quoted a theater expert who claimed, “in regard to the female performers… it is not a question whether they can sing but just how little they will consent to wear.” He called it disgraceful for women to be shown so uncovered in a civilized society. Playing off his audience’s racial anxieties, he chided, “The Hindoo would turn with disgust at such exhibitions, which are sought after and applauded on the stage of this country.” Permitting women to dress immodestly on the stage was a mark of American

33 Talmage later became the editor of *The Christian Herald and Signs of Our Times.*
culture’s lack of sophistication, not its progressiveness. While Talmage said he did not actually go to the theater, he railed against the “spectacular nudity” he saw advertised on theater posters around Manhattan. Taking their inspiration from stage costumes, Talmage declared, modern women’s fashions were rapidly turning the parlor into a peep show.\(^{35}\)

Christian disapproval of “fashion” aimed at a moving target. Fashion changed almost by the season, and what appalled Christians in 1886 seemed hardly problematic in the next. Society was always crumbling. Women were always dressing dangerously. By the 1920s, a new figure called the “flapper” drew the disapprobation of fundamentalists by flaunting all the old rules of modest dress.\(^{36}\) The low cuts, bare arms, and exposed necks that caused a stir a generation earlier were small potatoes for flappers.

The Journal-Miner of Prescott, Arizona showed a picture of a “100 per cent from head to foot” flapper on its front page in 1922 (Figure 29). The picture listed thirteen characteristics of a flapper’s appearance. These included “knee-length fringed skirt” and “exposed, bare knees,” along with visible “rolled hose with fancy garter.” Flappers wore their hair short in the “bobbed” cut, often with a “flapper curl” dangling on the

\(^{35}\) Ibid.

\(^{36}\) Much of the material on fundamentalist responses to flapperism has been covered extensively by Betty DeBerg. DeBerg, Ungodly Women, 99–117.
Flappers pushed against convention with their style of dress, but also in their personal conduct. They danced the Charleston to jazz played by African Americans in underground nightclubs. They drove fast cars and hung off the sides. Most of all, they became known for their embrace of their own sexuality. They bragged about wearing makeup. They smoked and drank and flirted casually in public. They talked openly about their premarital sexual relationships with multiple partners. A newspaper article from Tulsa, Oklahoma described how sexuality seeped from every pore of a flapper who worked at a bank. She showed her bare legs and wore a low-cut dress to work. According to the article’s author, “Even in the way she checked the deposit slips was an insouciance suggestive of a new age and new ideas.”

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Fundamentalists took issue with flapperism’s casual approach to women’s dress and sexuality. Fundamentalists encouraged Christian women to regard their bodies as dangerous sexual weapons that needed taming through “modest” dress. A good Christian woman, in contrast to a mere professing Christian, would recognize the sexual danger her body posed for men and dress to minimize it. Clothing tamed a woman’s dangerous sexuality. Flappers let women’s sexuality roam free. The fundamentalist Rev. A.R. Funderburk, from Bushy Creek, Texas, based his argument about women’s dress on 1 Timothy 2:9, “I will that women adorn themselves in modest apparel with shamefacedness and sobriety.” He argued that this passage practically commanded
women to “avoid these late day styles of immodest and indecent dress.” In particular, he took issue with dresses that had low necklines and showed any hosiery above the knees. Citing another minister, he suggested that every man in the world carried a “quantity of dynamite” within himself. With deft circumlocution, he states that a man’s “dynamite” is ready to “explode” at the slightest provocation from women, whose bare skin is like a “match.” By the way they dress, women can lead men into the moral ruin of premarital or extramarital sex. Likewise, they themselves can be destroyed by their immodest dressing. He pleads with Christian mothers to guard their daughters from the dangers their own bodies possess, “Beware that your own precious child is not consumed by the flame she will kindle by that match she carries.” He continues with a warning to women of the dangers their “unclothed” bodies pose to men, “Many men are made to commit sin in their hearts by the unclothed bodies of women who may be professed Christians and ignorant of the evil they are doing in causing a brother to stumble and become weak.” 39 Fundamentalist ministers regarded women’s bodies as dangerously sexual. Adhering to “modest” dress would mitigate the risk they posed to themselves and to men.

New York’s “fundamentalist pope,” John Roach Straton of Calvary Baptist Church in Manhattan, lambasted the flagrant sexuality of modern women’s fashion in

the flapper era. In a none-too-subtly titled chapter “Slaves of Fashion: The Connection between Women’s Dress and Social Vice” in his none-too-subtly titled book *The Menace of Immorality in Church and State*, Straton urged real Christian women to dress differently than their fashionable, professedly Christian neighbors. Though he took issue with the money wasted on keeping up with fashion, his directive to choose modest dress was rooted in fashion’s dangerous relationship to women’s sexuality. Women who dressed according to the dictates of modern fashion invited sexual harm on themselves and imperiled the sexual morality of their male friends.

Straton cited a letter by a young Christian “college man,” who wished to remain sexually chaste. The young man fretted, “I have kept myself as clean physically as any girl who has ever lived. Mentally I am unclean. Why? Because the women I know will not let me be clean.” Without necessarily doing it on purpose, women dressed in such a way that this young man developed “unclean” sexual thoughts about them. Sometimes, their dresses offered too much sexual temptation. Women drew his eye, he said, because of their “short skirts and bare upper bodies and gauzy transparencies.” Worse still, when a woman “miscalculated the capacity of her skirts,” the “western sun” sometimes

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42 Ibid., 44.
silhouetted her lower body. The young man could not help himself. Dresses made him think about sex. Silhouettes made him think about sex. Dresses that showed skin, gave the illusion of skin, or outlined the form of a woman’s body produced sexual desire. It was all too much for the conscientious young Christian man, who attended a coeducational college. He blamed his women friends for sullying his mind. He claimed he could not help himself from thinking sexual thoughts about them, citing a psychology textbook that suggested he was thinking things that men had been biologically hardwired to think. Straton pitied the young man, and supported the idea that he was not to blame for his own sexual corruption. Women, specifically their fashion choices, led his mind astray.

Straton suggested women who dressed according to the demands of modern fashion instead of biblical morality were responsible for the moral corruption of young men like the letter writer. Their dresses made him think about sex in inappropriate ways. Looking was just as bad as touching. Immodest dresses acted directly on the mind. “The greatest evil in modern styles,” Straton declared, “is the fact that the present tendency toward undress is so obviously for the purpose of directing attention to the sex idea.” By baring their skin in the interests of fashion, women often unintentionally directed men’s thoughts toward sex. This happened through a kind of tactile sight. The

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43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., 46.
mere sight of women’s clothing pushed men’s minds in impure sexual directions.

Straton elaborated. He said that in modern culture, “the sex idea […] is fired at us from the magazines, both the pictures in them and the stories. It is literally rubbed all over us in the moving picture show and the modern theater.”

The mere sight of a woman dressed in a particular way pushed men’s minds.

Dresses made men think about “the sex idea.” Men could not help themselves. Straton continued:

A fossilized octogenarian, or a self-complacent mollycoddle, with ice water in his veins, may be able to look at the sights which any man can see in modern society to-day, and in the dance hold in his arms a throbbing, beautiful young woman, with almost half her body exposed, and the other half clothed largely with good intentions—such a man, I say, under these circumstances may maintain a philosophical calm, but any young fellow with red blood in his veins and the elemental forces of nature operating in him, cannot so easily do so.

In this example, the “sights which any man can see in modern society” went hand-in-hand with holding “a throbbing, beautiful young woman, with almost half her body exposed” at a dance. Seeing and touching worked together to cause improper sexual thinking in men’s minds. Despite their best intentions, the sights and feelings of modern society made it nearly impossible for men to avoid thinking about illicit sex. “Elemental forces” deep in their biology impelled men to think sexual thoughts when confronted with the sights and tactile sensations of modern life. The real responsibility for this

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45 Ibid. emphasis added.
46 Ibid., 47.
rested with women. Women’s clothing acted directly on the minds of men. Immodest dresses pushed men’s minds in unwholesome sexual directions. Straton implied that righteous clothing, modest clothing, did not push the mind in this same way. Instead of pushing men’s minds toward lustful thinking, modest dress dampened the hazardous sexual force of women’s bodies.

Straton saved his harshest critiques for the fashions of flappers. He proclaimed “the most sinister and menacing figure of our modern life” is “the cigarette smoking, cocktail drinking, pug dog nursing, half-dressed, painted woman, who frequents the theaters, giggles at the cabarets, gambles in our drawing-rooms or sits around our hotels, with her dress cut ‘C’ in front and ‘V’ behind!”

Clothing and behavior blurred in his description. Flappers wore the wrong dresses. Specifically, they wore dresses cut too low in the front, revealing the chest. They wore dresses cut too low in the back, revealing the figure. These women wore the wrong things, but also did the wrong things by smoking, drinking, going to the theater, wearing makeup, and gambling. Straton even suggested they thought the wrong thoughts, giggling vapidly and obsessively caring about stupid, wheezing designer dogs. According to Straton, a flapper’s clothing and behavior made her “a living invitation to lust.” Flappers dressed in such a way that they incited men to think inappropriate sexual thoughts. Implicitly, he blamed

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47 Ibid., 49.
48 Ibid.
women for any acts of sexual violence committed against them. Men could not help themselves. Immodest clothing caused bad thoughts, bad behaviors, and heralded the downfall of American society. To combat the dangerous sexual tendencies of modern women’s dress, Straton proposed a radical solution. He argued that Americans should develop “a distinct and beautiful national costume,” just as the ancient Greeks and the modern Japanese had done, one that was “wholesome and attractive.” By adopting a national uniform, women’s sexuality would no longer pose immediate danger to men’s morality.

In a stark demonstration of some fundamentalists’ double-standards about women’s dress and sexuality, Straton also expressed disapproval of women who dressed in overly “masculine” ways. In a later chapter of The Menace of Immorality, Straton chided women who participated in “rag-time religion.” He used this term as a shorthand for any contemporary efforts to make church more interesting through the adoption of vaudeville-influenced styles of music and performance. He saw such practices as “worldliness” seeping into the church. In New York, he noted, some foolish Protestant ministers had invited jazz musicians to perform in their churches. As far as he was concerned, jazz was the music of speakeasies, flappers, and black dances. It had no place in church. To prove himself correct about the horrors of jazz, Straton produced an image of one of these church jazz bands alongside his text (Figure 30). The “Rag-a-dor

* Ibid., 50.
Jazz Band” was composed entirely of white women. They ensemble included a piano, drum kit, violin, banjo, and saxophone. What looked like wholesome fun for Christians was anything but wholesome as far as Straton was concerned. His caption exclaimed with shock that these were “Young women dressed as men!” The women in the photograph are “dressed as men” because they wear pants instead of skirts or dresses. They also wear loose-fitting robe shirts with sleeves only to the elbows, to allow themselves a full range of motion to play their instruments. The pianist’s sleeves are made of chiffon or other sheer fabric, rendering her whole arm visible to the shoulder. Women dressed as men, playing jazz in church represented to Straton “a shameless surrender to the worst tendencies of the times.” Such directives put women in a double bind. They were not supposed to dress in such a way that they provoked “the sex idea.” But neither could they dress in comfortable, “masculine” styles. Christian women had to dress according according to a strict, shifting, and sometimes contradictory set of norms. Their clothing had to tame their sexuality, but also keep their femininity intact.

50 Ibid., 153.
51 Ibid., 156.
“She has Declared that Their Eyes May Touch Her”: Medical Justification for Modest Garb

In 1917, the Sunday School Times advertised a series of medical advice books with the tantalizing tagline “The Mystery of Sex Explained.” Written in the second-person familiar, this book series offered easily comprehensible medical information about bodies at every stage of life. There were separate books for boys and girls, broken down further with age-appropriate titles for young children, teens, and young married people. The books also gave frank, practical advice for men and women about how to use their bodies to live Christian lives. Topics included everything from when and how to bathe, how to eat, when to evacuate one’s bowels, and what sex was all about. The Sunday
School Times editors praised the books as being, “Delicate and chaste; clear and direct; [...] warning against the worst and pointing the way to the best [...] and above all, rooted in the conviction that truth is found only in Christ and His Word.”52 Other fundamentalist publishers agreed. The editors of Moody Bible Institute’s Institute Tie gave the books a rousing endorsement, advertising them as “Pure Books on Avoided Subjects—Unrivalled.”53 Medical facts and Christian advice about clothing swirled in these manuals.

The book for teenage girls, What a Young Woman Ought to Know, sought to curb young women’s excesses of fashion before it was too late. The book’s author was a physician named Dr. Mary Wood-Allen. In addition to being a physician, Wood-Allen was a prominent lecturer with the Women’s Christian Temperance Union’s Department of Heredity and Hygiene. Given her Methodist education and close association with Frances Willard and the WCTU leadership, it seems unlikely she was herself a fundamentalist.54 Nevertheless, prominent fundamentalist publications like the Sunday School Times and Moody Bible Institute’s Institute Tie advertised her books extensively and recommended them to their readers. Her books set the standard for conservative evangelical texts about women’s bodies.

Wood-Allen rooted her guide to Christian dress in the medical realities of a young woman’s changing body. “The external appearance will indicate to a great extent our character,” she warned in the early pages. A woman’s body bore the marks of its owner’s spiritual conduct and character, so young women who wished to look good did best to follow the author’s advice. Her advice ran the gamut from how to make a menstrual pad and how to bathe in a sanitary fashion, to how to choose a suitable husband and how to avoid “the alcohol habit.” The book also included an oft-repeated refrain about the bodily and spiritual dangers of immodest dress.55

According to Dr. Wood-Allen, dressing immodestly could cause skin problems, ugliness, stupidity, and a host of bodily ailments. It all started with the breathing. A woman needed to breathe deeply to purify her blood from the “actual poisons created by the vital processes.” Those who did not breathe deeply would accumulate poisons in the brain and bodily tissues “until you feel overpoweringly weary and stupid.”56 Through years of medical observation, the doctor had discovered one of the worst and most common impediments to deep breathing came from wearing dresses that were too tight. Tight dresses made it impossible for a woman to breathe well. Corsets formed a

55 The companion title “What a Young Man Ought to Know” contained no advice whatsoever about the medical or spiritual dangers of a man’s clothing. In fact, it reiterated arguments about the dangers of immodest dress for women in a chapter about how to choose a suitable Christian wife. Sylvanus Stall, What a Young Man Ought to Know (Philadelphia: Vir Publishing Company, 1897), 187.
big part of the problem, but “tight bands or waists” produced the same noxious effects.\textsuperscript{57}

Tight dresses prevented the heart from pumping blood properly. They compressed the stomach and prevented proper digestion. They restricted the bowels and caused constipation, which caused waste to build up in the skin and foul odors to emit from the pores. Tight dresses displaced the pelvis, the uterus, and the ovaries, leading to “female diseases” such as painful menstruation. The doctor stated confidently, “‘female diseases,’ in the great majority of cases, are the results of wrong habits of dress and life.”\textsuperscript{58} Even worse were the dresses’ deleterious effects on the internal organs. Tight dresses caused kidney problems. They could even slice a liver in half. The doctor noted, “corset liver is well known in the dissecting room. Sometimes, where corsets are not worn and tight skirts are worn, supported by the hips, the liver has almost been cut in two, the pieces being only held together by a sufficient band of tissue to keep them from dying.”\textsuperscript{59} The body suffered physical harm from a young woman’s decision to wear tight, revealing clothing. It was only the start of the problem with immodest dress.

In addition to the physical harm they caused, Dr. Mary Wood-Allen insisted immodest dresses contributed to a variety of spiritual problems. One of the worst was masturbation, which she called “self-abuse” or “solitary vice.” Tight dresses restricted the pelvic region. Either directly by impeding blood flow or indirectly by compacting

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 135.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 63.
the bowels and internal organs, this put pressure on the sexual organs. A young woman would pull at her dress to relieve the pressure. Such pulling could awaken her to the pleasurable sensations of her sexual organs, which could then cause her to develop the habit of solitary vice. This was a most disastrous condition, the doctor concluded, since it “destroys mental power and memory, […] blotches the complexion, dulls the eye, takes away the strength, and may even cause insanity.”

A young woman could even pass the habit to her children through the unfortunate rules of heredity. Solitary vice was a spiritual disease with physical causes and effects. To those who had already developed the habit, Dr. Wood-Allen recommended a two-step process to eliminate it. First, a young woman should start thinking of sex only as the sacred duty of procreation. There was nothing wrong with enjoying sex within marriage for procreative purposes, but any other sexual pleasure was base. Second, a young woman wishing to break the habit of solitary vice should “go to work to establish correct habits of living in dress, diet, exercise, etc. See to it that there are no such causes of pelvic congestions as prolapsed bowels, caused by tight clothing or constipation.” Wearing modest dresses helped tame the body’s sexual appetites.

Wood-Allen suggested a young woman who wished to break the habit of solitary vice needed to reeducate her senses, particularly the sense of touch. Wood-Allen

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60 Ibid., 152.
61 Ibid., 157–158.
explained the effects of masturbation on the brain, “the victim of self-abuse has, through the frequent repetition of the habit, built up an undue amount of brain that is sensitive to local irritation of the sex-organs or to mental pictures of sex-pleasure.” To curb the habit, this overactive sexual-sensory pleasure region needed to atrophy. Instead of demanding total sensory deprivation, Wood-Allen suggested that a young woman should train her body and brain to appreciate other kinds of sensory pleasures as much as it appreciated solitary vice. A young woman could train her eyes to appreciate the artistic qualities of “form, color, size, and location.” She could train her sense of hearing “in the study of different qualities of sound, tone, pitch, intensity, duration, timbre.” And she could even retrain her sense of touch “by learning to judge with closed eyes of different materials, of quality of fiber, of the different degrees of temperature, of roughness or smoothness, of density.” In short, a young woman wishing to break the habit of solitary vice needed to become a connoisseur of the nonsexual senses. Wood-Allen implied that a good Christian could tame the sense of touch. A young woman who overindulged in the pleasurable touch of solitary vice could break the habit by learning to feel the difference between satin and muslin, burlap and canvas.

Modest dresses prevented a young women’s sexuality from causing spiritual harm to herself and others. When young people held hands or kissed for fun, Dr. Wood-
Allen asserted, they were “playing with the fire of physical passion.”62 Harmless fun could soon lead to “unbecoming familiarity,” which could then cause the moral ruin of a companion. Even if a young woman refused to participate in “criminal deeds” with a young man, he might well leave her presence and seek the company of “dissolute women, and thus lose his honor and purity because a girl who called herself virtuous tempted him.”63 A man had no control over his sexual appetites, so it was a Christian woman’s responsibility to keep him from harm. Dr. Wood-Allen continued, “the self-respecting girl will guard herself not only from the contamination of touch, but from an undue freedom of thought.”64 Wearing modest clothing could prevent a man from having even “an impure impulse” in a woman’s presence:

Do you say she cannot govern the thoughts of men? I reply, she can to a great extent. By a dress that exposes her person to public gaze, or even more seductively hides it under a film of suggestive lace, she has given a direction to the thoughts of those who look at her. She has declared that their eyes may touch her, that their thoughts may be occupied with an inventory of her physical charms.65

According to Dr. Wood-Allen, women served as the moral, spiritual, and physical protectors of men. By not wearing anything alluring like tight dresses, skin-revealing dresses, or lace, a woman could ensure her own virtue and that of the men who looked at her. Inappropriate touching contaminated a woman’s soul with sexual

62 Ibid., 162.
63 Ibid., 165.
64 Ibid., 166.
65 Ibid.
sin. Thought worked in a similar manner, contaminating by the contact of the eyes. A woman who wore the wrong clothing “has declared that [men’s] eyes may touch her.” Modest dress prevented the moral contamination of actual sexual touching or the touch of leering eyes.

“*She Worships Pleasure and Fashion*: Fundamentalists and the Fetish of Fashion

Fundamentalist women navigated a minefield every time they put on an outfit. On the one hand, they had to abide by very specific rules of what to wear and what not to wear. A woman who wanted to dress like a Christian had to make sure she put on a dress that was not too short, or too tight, or too transparent, or too masculine, or too titillating to her male friends. On the other hand, advice literature also suggested good Christian women should not pay too much attention to fashion. Clothing was something necessary, but not something worthy of a person’s serious attention. Real Christian women were supposed to think of higher things, not trifling matters like what to wear. Advice literature told them God would judge their hearts, not their appearance. In short, fundamentalist women had to pay scrupulous attention to their clothing without becoming too concerned with what they wore. Advice literature set them up for failure.
E.J. Pace once drew a cartoon about women’s fashion. He was illustrating a Bible lesson about 1 Samuel 16:7, which says “man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (Figure 31). In context, the passage described how God instructed Samuel to choose the next king of Israel (David, the smallest of Jesse’s children). However, Pace visualized this passage as being modern advice about women’s appearance and dress.

In the cartoon, a young woman sat at a vanity, looking into a mirror. She wore a short-sleeved, low-cut dress and a long string of pearls. Her long dark hair was pulled back, styled in such a way that it covered her ears. She held a small canister in one hand and applied something to her face with the other, probably makeup. Atomizers, powders, and other cosmetic items sat within her reach. The mirror held the label “the
world’s approval.” A speech caption at the bottom of the image gave the young woman’s perspective. “You see,” she said, “I must make myself attractive to the world.” The cartoon suggested this attractive young woman was willing to do whatever it took to make herself obtain “the world’s approval.” She wanted to look good in the eyes of others, no matter the cost.

Pace’s image drew on the long tradition in art history of depicting women looking into mirrors as a warning against vanity. Renaissance painters frequently showed beautiful women, such as Venus or Bathsheba, in the same act as Pace’s subject. The standard scene of such images rendered the beautiful woman in the act of getting dressed, frequently nude, looking in the mirror at her toilette. Art historian Anne Hollander argues that such images of women looking into mirrors served a moral function. While the trappings of the toilette are plain for all to see, the mirror almost exclusively shows the woman’s face. Frequently in the case of Venuses and Bathshebas, the woman actually looked at the viewer through the image. Mirrors were not just about reflecting the objective truth of a woman’s appearance, but instead showed women in the process of creating and discovering their own self-image. Women were determined to be vain if they accepted the visual fiction of the public self as the true self or imagined they were as beautiful as Venus. Frequently, Renaissance artists played with the reflection in the mirror to give the lie to the fiction that the mirror represented the true self. Instead of showing a reflection of a beautiful woman’s face, the mirror often
contained a monkey, devil, or memento mori. Hollander explains that the trope of the beautiful woman looking into a mirror held up a double standard. Impossibly beautiful women like Venus were permitted to look into the mirror without judgment, since the mirror merely confirmed their objective beauty. Ordinary women who looked into mirrors, however, were “thought to be in danger of seeing their own faces and out of vanity taking them for Venus’s.” In short, artistic renderings of women looking into mirrors never simply conveyed objective realities. They were laden with moral judgment and cultural values about proper public presentation for women.

Pace’s mirror reflects nothing at all. It presents no image of the woman’s face. Instead, in the top left corner of the image, Pace went further than any mere mirror could. He indicated exactly what the spiritual cost of this woman’s fashionable appearance was. Inside a heart-shaped balloon, he showed the condition of the woman’s heart. The candle of “her first love,” probably her love for Jesus, has burned out. The candle has been cold so long that it has collected cobwebs. In her pursuit of fashion and seeking the approval of “the world” instead of God, the woman allowed her soul’s light to extinguish. She may look good on the outside, but her soul has become cold and dead. The image offered an uncompromising moral lesson for young Christian woman. A woman who sought the world’s approval rather than God’s approval would end up

pretty on the outside, but rotten at the core. Dressing in such a way as to obtain the world’s approval could cost a girl her soul. God cared about the heart.

As a veteran Sunday school teacher who specialized in the education of young women, Margaret Slattery knew that all sorts of people fell victim to fashion’s excesses. She aimed to convince young women to worship God instead of fashion, but she believed she faced an uphill struggle. Slattery was a Congregationalist. In the 1910s, she published extensively with *The Sunday School Times*. Describing an address she gave at the World’s Sunday School Convention in 1921, one newspaper called her “America’s queen of women platform speakers.”67 Her books about the Christian education of young women received widespread recognition in fundamentalist circles. The influential journal *The King’s Business*, published by the fundamentalist Bible Institute of Los Angeles, listed Slattery’s work on its “best books” lists.68 This gave her work the stamp of approval from fundamentalist authorities. Her inclusion on these lists suggests a strong alignment between her positions and those of fundamentalist leaders like Reuben Torrey, editor of *The King’s Business*.

In *The Girl and Her Religion*, Slattery warned young women to avoid the fetishism of fashion. She described fashion as one of the “twin idols” that “accept with the complacency of an ancient Buddha the devotion of more worshipers than any church or

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67 “Miss Slattery to Speak at Convention,” *The Scarsdale Inquirer* 2, no. 47 (October 1, 1921): 2.
68 “Best Books on Sunday Schools and Christian Endeavor,” *The King’s Business* 4, no. 7 (July 1913): 373.
The other idol was pleasure. Slattery said many young women became devotees of the twin idols during their teen years. She told vivid, true-to-life stories about girls of all social statuses who lost their Christian faith when they began worshiping at the feet of the idol of fashion. Social climbers, society girls, immigrant shoemaker’s daughters, young women married to up-and-coming salesmen, and ordinary middle-class teenagers, all sacrificed everything in service to the idol of fashion. The moral of her stories was simple: young Christian women had to be careful what they wore, lest they fall into worship of fashion.

Slattery illustrated the ruinous effects of the fetishism of fashion using the story of Ellen Gregg. At the age of fourteen, Slattery explained, Ellen had been “a frank, contented, happy girl, simple in her tastes and able to have a good time in most inexpensive ways.” By the time she turned eighteen, however, Ellen had lost her way. She had become a worshiper of fashion, giving all her earnings and time to worship of the fashion idol. Her story took place in early winter. Ellen needed new some clothes. According to Slattery, she needed “plain becoming dresses, plenty of shirt waists, sensible, pretty shoes, rubbers, a rain-coat, a suit, [and] two becoming hats.” Instead, Ellen bought what the idol of fashion commanded her to buy. This included “a thin silk gown of palest blue draped with fragile chiffon, trimmed and caught up with crystal

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70 Ibid., 69.
71 Ibid.
drops and tiny rosebuds.” It also included “a spotless white outing coat, rough, and to quote the words of the clerk who helped her select it, ‘exceedingly modish’” as well as “pale blue stockings and pumps.”  

She had also adopted a new hairstyle to go with her fashionable getup, which “was very uncomfortable” and completely hid her ears. After a night on the town, Ellen hung up her new skirt in dismay. It looked threadbare and tattered. Slattery explained the problem, “she had paid for the style in it, not for the material.”  

Ellen spent her money on flashy, cheaply made clothing that did not meet her real needs. The idol of fashion covered her in gaudy glamor that quickly wore out.

Slattery’s fictional “Ellen” revealed the complex rules that fundamentalist women had to negotiate when it came to clothing. Slattery acknowledged that Ellen needed new clothing. With winter coming, she needed shirts, dresses, a raincoat, two hats, and galoshes. Slattery even suggested that these could and should be attractive articles, such as “sensible, pretty shoes” and “becoming” hats. The ideal was practicality and prettiness, not dowdiness. A woman needed to find attractive clothing that met her physical needs. Yet, behind the description of Ellen’s fashionable, immoral outfit lay a new kind of concern that faced middle-class Christian women. All of Ellen’s “fashionable” clothing looked good, but was cheaply made. It was the kind of mass-produced, pre-sized, cheap, ready-to-wear clothing that was becoming more and more

\[ \text{Ibid., 70.} \]
\[ \text{Ibid., 71.} \]
\[ \text{Ibid.} \]
available in the early twentieth century. Inundated with commodified clothing, Christian women were supposed to look beyond the promises of prettiness, beyond the allure of style. Instead, they were supposed to choose garments based on the quality of materials and construction. They needed to know how to choose a well-made, practical outfit over a cheaply made, fashionable one. They had to ask themselves if a particular garment served a specific need in their lives and looked good, or if it just looked good. Young women had to become experts about clothing so they could avoid worshipping the idol of fashion.⁷⁵

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Despite all the attention they were supposed to pay to their clothing, Slattery suggested that women ought to be able to know at a glance if another woman worshipped fashion. Paying too much attention to fashion was dangerously superficial and imperiled a woman’s soul. At the same time, not paying enough attention to correct, modest dressing made a woman *look* like a worshipper of fashion. Slattery’s chapter about the “twin idols” of fashion and pleasure contained a photograph of an alleged idol worshipper (Figure 32). The caption bore the indictment, “She Worships Pleasure and Fashion.” The image showed a young woman, probably in her late teens or early twenties. She stands before a full-length mirror in a sumptuous bedroom. The viewer sees merely the back of her in reality, with her face and most of her body visible only in...
The mirror image contains all we are supposed to know about her. She is adjusting her hair, her concentration completely fixed on the image of her own reflection. Her hair is cut long, but she has styled it up so it appears short. It completely covers her ears. She is wearing a small hat covered in flowers. She also wears a short string of pearls around her neck and two bracelets on her arm. Her dress is white or another light color. It is short in the sleeves and tight at the waist. She has thrown an embroidered cape over her shoulders. The room has a luxurious paisley wallpaper. The four-post bed is draped with lace. While she might appear to be any well-to-do young person of the era preparing for a day out, she is not. She is an idol worshiper.

Slattery’s caption demands that viewers treat this image as a negative example. The young woman in the photograph is doing something wrong. She worships pleasure and fashion. She is fixated on her own reflection: her stylish hair, her fancy clothes, her makeup. Slattery’s readers must have known how to interpret the subtle cues of dress and mise en scène in this photograph. For historians, the features of dress and bodily habit that set this young woman apart from others are no longer so clear. Her hairstyle might indicate that it was expensive. Her dress might have had sleeves that were shorter than average. Her wallpaper might have been the latest fad pattern. She might be subject to judgment because she, like the woman in Pace’s cartoon, is spending too much time

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26 Hollander suggests that such images of women looking at themselves in full-length mirrors became a feature of art in the nineteenth century. “The mirror,” she suggests of these full-length depictions, “is shown and obviously felt to be both menacing and degrading.” Hollander, Seeing through Clothes, 406.
looking in the mirror. Slattery does not elaborate. She expects her readers to see this image, read its caption, and know in their guts that her evaluation is correct. This young woman worships pleasure and fashion. Young readers were supposed to recognize her behaviors and tendencies in themselves, then change them. In order to live their best Christian lives, they were not supposed to be like her. They were not supposed to spend their days looking in the mirror, thinking about their hair or clothing. But they did have to think carefully about every garment they put on. No matter how hard it was, they had to make dressing like a Christian seem effortless. After all, God looked at the heart.

Dressing Men: Clothing Fundamentalism in Respectability and The Suits of Spiritual Warriors

Fundamentalists gave moral significance to the new kinds of fashion choices brought by consumer capitalism. They assigned personal moral responsibility to individual consumers for the clothing they chose to buy. Earlier generations of evangelicals, such as Dwight L. Moody and his associates, imagined the economics of faith as being a matter of performing Christian service in response to salvation. Christians were workers in a production-based religious economy. A person did Christian work because she had been redeemed. By contrast, fundamentalists saw themselves as Christian consumers rather than Christian workers. Theirs was a religious economy of consumption rather than production. Timothy Gloege has argued that fundamentalists reimagined the ideal Christian as a “savvy consumer—a believer who rightly judged and appropriated correct belief and practice from the options in the
religious marketplace." The savvy Christian consumer would not only “buy” the right kinds of theological arguments and pious practices, but would also purchase the right kinds of consumer goods to support a Christian life. Fundamentalists understood clothing as one of the most morally and spiritually charged consumer commodities.

Clothing formed an essential part of the rise and success of Billy Sunday. Clothing enabled his transformation from orphaned ex-ballplayer to the most exciting traveling evangelist of his day. At times, clothing transformed him into a respectable minister. At other times, Sunday’s dress flaunted norms of respectability, creating new ideals for Christian masculinity. Sunday was brash, boisterous, and frequently accused of living lavishly. He was a polarizing figure, loved and hated. He had grown up in several orphanages in Iowa. His athleticism earned him a place on one of Chicago’s new professional baseball teams, where he became known mostly for his swift running, mediocre defense, and poor hitting. After retiring from baseball, he had charmed his way to the top of the traveling preacher industry after a brief stint as the advance man for Gypsy Smith. By the 1910s, Sunday’s crusades boasted attendance in the tens of thousands. His pulpit style was famously dynamic and athletic. Always the subject of headlines and op-eds, Sunday got people in the pews and, by every measure, furthered the cause of local Christian work. The success of his crusades depended on a rigorous,

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modern organization that stood behind him. Led by his wife Helen “Ma” Sunday, the organization could muster an army of hundreds of volunteers to staff crusades.

As one might expect of an orphaned ex-ballplayer from Iowa, Sunday’s dress and pulpit conduct sometimes crossed the line of middle-class respectability that other fundamentalists prized. Among the button-down crowd at Moody Bible Institute, Sunday was considered both a beloved champion of the modern old-time faith and a traveling salesman gone wild. As far as they were concerned, Sunday needed some image control to come in line with the fundamentalist brand’s middle-class values.78

James M. Gray embodied all the characteristics of the respectable fundamentalist minister that Sunday lacked. Gray was an educated teacher and theologian in the Reformed Episcopal church. He became president of Moody Bible Institute in 1904, after earning a strong reputation as a Bible teacher among Boston’s professional class. An advertisement for Moody Bible Institute’s Correspondence Courses from a 1922 edition of *Moody Monthly* pictured Gray as a man of maximum respectability (Figure 33). With his pince-nez eyeglasses, neatly trimmed goatee, and visible balding crown, Gray possessed all the natural characteristics of a gentleman scholar. His clothing completed his transformation into an authoritative Christian teacher. Most important of all was his collar. In this three-quarter bust photograph, Gray is wearing a very high starched collar. It was probably made of bonded linen and detachable from his shirt, which

78 Ibid., 208.
allowed it to be washed separately to prolong the life of the shirt. It is stark white and accompanied by a dark necktie. Only the privileged could enjoy a collar that restricted the neck’s movement so much. Manual laborers needed short, soft collars. And only the privileged could keep a white collar so clean. The advertising image suggested Gray’s Bible study course was trustworthy because it came from a distinguished, professional minister. This was not a man who had dirty hands, dirty shirts, or sloppy ideas.\textsuperscript{79}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Figure 33 - Picture of James M. Gray, President of Moody Bible Institute. "Renew Your Strength Through Bible Study." Moody Bible Institute Correspondence Courses Advertisement from Moody Monthly (22.12I), Aug 1922, p1153}
\end{figure}

With James M. Gray as their model of male dress, it is no surprise that many “respectable” fundamentalists took issue with Billy Sunday. When Sunday conducted a revival in Chicago in 1918, MBI’s \textit{Christian Workers Magazine} ran an article that captured

\textsuperscript{79} “Renew Your Strength Through Bible Study: Moody Bible Institute Correspondence Course Advertisement,” \textit{Moody Monthly} 22, no. 12 (August 1922): 1153.
fundamentalism’s efforts to remake the evangelist’s appearance so he would be more suitable for respectable middle-class consumption. The author, S.A. Woodruff, expressed wholehearted rapture for the scale and businesslike organization of Sunday’s revival. Woodruff noted Sunday’s group had amassed 1,300 local volunteers, or three percent of the membership of participating churches. In a matter of days, this organization had managed to construct a huge tabernacle on Lake Shore drive capable of holding precisely 12,363 people. Not only that, Woodruff observed, but there were exactly “43 doors in the building, which embodies every necessary convenience, including a hospital and post office.” The revival itself was clothed in respectability, bearing all the organization and conveniences of a professional, efficient modern business.

Nevertheless, Woodruff warned that respectable middle-class folks might find some aspects of Sunday’s revival objectionable. While he asserted “not a false note has been uttered with regard to the fundamental teachings of Scripture,” Woodruff thought people also needed to know that “[Sunday’s] platform methods may not please all.” Sunday’s physically expressive pulpit methods needed to be placed in the proper context. Whatever the excesses, Woodruff announced, Sunday’s performances helped the preacher “grip the audience.” Woodruff argued that jumping, hollering, and shouting while preaching fundamentalist truth were calculated aspects of Sunday’s

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brand: “It would not be ‘Billy Sunday’ [...] if it were presented in any other way.”

Likewise, Woodruff argued that Sunday’s use of slang in the pulpit fit within the market strategies of his unique religious brand. “When it is read in the newspapers it looks objectionable,” Woodruff noted, “but it is a rare thing to find a person who sits through a service who condemns the use of it.” Woodruff explained that Sunday used slang because he possessed an “uncanny” knowledge of “the psychology of the crowd.” Slang stirred the emotions of a group. It got people fired up for the truth. Sunday knew such language would produce quantifiable results for his revival in the form of conversions, so he employed it effectively.81

Figure 34 - "Members of the Sunday Party," images from the article, "'Billy' Sunday Comes to Town," Christian Workers Magazine, May 1918, p.720-721

81 Ibid.
In a final effort to make Sunday’s revival seem respectable, Woodruff’s article included pictures of six members of Sunday’s organization (Figure 34). Billy Sunday and Homer Rodeheaver appeared first, followed by Helen Sunday (Billy’s wife and unofficial COO of the Sunday organization), Alice Gamlin (youth ministry), Grace Saxe (head of Bible study), and Virginia Healy Asher (music and women’s evangelism). Each appears in the respectable three-quarter bust style of classical portraiture. The men wear tailored suits and black ties. Uncharacteristically, Sunday is motionless and looking straight into the camera with little but a smirk to convey his ebullient character. In contrast with James Gray, Sunday wears a semi-spread collar that is at least an inch shorter than Gray’s and does not look starched. Rodeheaver shows considerably more fashionable flair in a high, formal wingtip collar. The women are all wearing loose-fitting dresses. Each dress covers to the neck, which made these modest garb even by 1910s standards. These portraits conveyed the middle-class respectability of their subjects and the genuine Christianity of their revival work. In a final nod to middle-class tastes, Helen Sunday and Virginia Asher’s pictures appear captioned only with their married names: “Mrs. William A. Sunday” and “Mrs. William Asher.” The images reinforced the idea that, whatever its rumored excesses, Billy Sunday’s revival was safe for white, middle-class consumers. Newspapers might exaggerate the tasteless aspects of Sunday’s activity, but the Christian press told the real story. Sunday might seem like a
wild man, but he was in fact a respectable evangelistic entrepreneur. His clothing proved it in this image.\textsuperscript{82}

Figure 35 - Souvenir Storefront at a Billy Sunday Revival. c.1910-1915. Courtesy of the Archives of Grace College, Winona Lake, Indiana. Billy Sunday Collection.

A few rare images from Helen Sunday’s personal collection of Billy Sunday mementos demonstrate how clothing created shared feelings of respectability among groups of fundamentalists. One photograph depicted a street view of a modestly sized Billy Sunday tabernacle in an undisclosed city (Figure 35). A throng of smartly dressed men and women wait in a messy queue to enter the main sanctuary. Every man wears a suit, tie, and hat. Every woman wears a long coat and a hat. These are respectable looking people, middle-class people. They are dressed as if going to church. Directly

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.

270
adjacent to the tabernacle entrance stands a souvenir shop of approximately four hundred square feet. Signs on its exterior direct middle-class visitors toward the amazing Christian consumer products within. “Books, Text Cards, Post Cards, Bibles” reads a bold-lettered sign spanning the entire storefront. Another sign, a small one on the door only visible through digital zoom technology, reads, “Billy Sunday Postcards and Buttons.” Through the store’s front window, one can just barely make out the rows of identical post cards and books bearing Billy Sunday’s image on them. Clothing brought conversion and consumption together as respectable religious acts. People in nice suits and modest dresses heard Billy Sunday’s wild preaching inside the tabernacle. Then, in those same garments, they went next door and bought souvenirs. In both places, they dressed as if attending church even though they were not. Dressing this way made all the aspects of a Billy Sunday revival feel like respectable Christian activities, whether listening to a rousing sermon or buying a pamphlet. Seeing other people in their church clothes buying a pennant made consuming Christian goods feel appropriate, wholesome, and the kind of thing a real Christian ought to do.

A second photograph that accompanied the first offered a rare glimpse inside a fundamentalist souvenir store (Figure 36). A smiling, nicely dressed shopkeeper sits behind the store counter, greeting the viewer of the photograph as if she or he is a customer. He is wearing respectable but not extravagant clothing, sporting a three-piece suit, necktie held in place with a tie pin, and a high starched collar. Packed to the rafters
with merchandise, his shop sells books, tracts, pamphlets, sheet music, pictures, postcards, hymnals, and Y.M.C.A. pennants. A row of respectable, three-quarter bust portraits of Billy Sunday stand like soldiers above the counter, adorning the cover of one of the evangelist’s pamphlets. Electric bulbs illuminate the interior. Paper doilies cling to the front of the shelves. Three humble ferns grace the space with a domestic feel. Everything—from the shopkeeper’s suit to the ferns and doilies—exudes middle-class respectability and tastefulness. The products on the shelves were more than just fabulous souvenirs. They were the sorts of commodities that made a respectable fundamentalist life possible.83

83 Both images come from the Billy Sunday Collection, Courtesy of the Archives of Grace College, Winona Lake, Indiana. They were undated and loose in a box of other Sunday materials.
Throughout the evangelist’s career, Billy Sunday’s marketing machine carefully exploited his appearance and ways of dressing to generate interest in his revivals. He could look suitably ministerial when circumstances demanded, but Sunday seemed most in his element when toeing the line of middle-class disrespectability. Sunday’s organization produced hundreds of different promotional images, many of which have been lost to history. Some of the most widely distributed images appeared on postcards, which the organization sold in shops like the one seen above. Many of these postcards survive.
Postcards and promotional images of Billy Sunday played with people’s assumptions about respectable dress and behavior (Figure 37). This was an essential part of the traveling evangelist’s appeal. He did not look like other ministers. He certainly did not act like other ministers. His faith was exciting, daring, and edgy. In a postcard depicting Sunday’s Springfield, IL revival of 1909, the camera captures the perfect incongruity of a Billy Sunday revival. On the one hand, the interior view of the tabernacle shows order and decorum. The audience is almost entirely men and nearly ten thousand strong. All of them are wearing suits and have removed their hats. Seated on slapdash wooden pews, they are so neatly aligned that they almost look like they have individual seats. Everyone can see the speaker’s platform. Strings of incandescent
bulbs cast a glow over the interior. American flags and patriotic bunting hug every exposed surface of the tabernacle and even festoon Sunday’s pulpit itself. Everything looks organized, patriotic, and respectable.

In this photograph, however, Billy Sunday himself is another story. The postcard’s caption explains the image, “Billy Sunday standing on the pulpit with the American flag, imploring 10,000 men to get on the water wagon with him.” A careful look at the image reveals this to be the case. With a long shutter speed, the photographer has managed to capture Sunday in motion. In the image, he appears as a barely visible blur. The dark color of his pants and the white color where Sunday’s torso ought to be suggests he has removed his suit coat to perform this stunt. Sunday has leapt from beside his pulpit to the top of it. He delivers his plea for prohibition while balancing on the pulpit. This was not the sort of thing a person would usually see at a fundamentalist church. Initially, he would have looked the part of a respectable minister in his dark suit. By taking off his coat and leaping onto the pulpit, however, Sunday offered something more exciting than a button-down Christianity. Good.

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84 This postcard comes from an unsorted notebook in the Postcard Collection (CN 636) at the Archives of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL. Photograph by C.U. Williams, 1909.
Dress transformed Billy Sunday from normal minister into spiritual warrior. One popular postcard depicted Sunday wearing the standard three-piece suit and tie of a Protestant minister (Figure 38). Unlike other ministers, however, this particular image showed Sunday using his suit jacket like a bullwhip. The image captured the very moment he snapped the coat over his head. A caption explained that this image showed Sunday “beating the Devil.” This was a fight scene between Billy Sunday and his spiritual enemy. The minister had removed his suit coat in order to take on his spiritual enemy in a physical scuffle. In his white-collared shirt and dark suit, a respectable minister had no business having a rumble with the Devil. By removing his coat and swinging it over his head, Sunday transforms. He does not conduct an abstract or
disembodied fight against his spiritual enemy. The suit jacket swinging over his head transforms him into a warrior, fighting the Devil face to face. He takes the fight to the Devil literally, prepared for real fisticuffs with a spiritual foe. A suit jacket might have been a necessary accessory at Moody Bible Institute, but it had no place in a spiritual street fight. Swung over his head, it transformed Sunday into a spiritual brawler.

Sunday’s dance between middle-class respectability and disrepute earned him many admirers. An unnamed young woman sent the postcard of Sunday fighting the Devil to her friend Mae Clark of Fenton, Michigan in 1908. Her note explained all the allure Sunday held for his admirers, “How does Bill look to you? Does he look like a dignified preacher? He isn’t a bit afraid to say just what he thinks. […] Don’t fall in love with Bill for he’s married.” Mae Clark’s friend thought Billy Sunday did not look like a dignified preacher. He had no starched collar. He took off his coat, rolled his sleeves, and threw punches at the Devil. He said exactly what he thought and used the slangy language of a ballplayer. These qualities made him an irresistible attraction whenever his crusade rolled into town. He looked like a preacher on paper, but subverted norms of respectability through his wild, lowbrow conduct. The note on the postcard also suggests such wanton disregard for middle-class norms of ministerial respectability gave him sex appeal. The postcard writer warned her friend not to fall in love with
Sunday, because he was already married. Sunday’s sex appeal was part of his charm. He used it to advance his cause.\footnote{William Ashley Sunday Photo File. Archives of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL.}

Sunday was able to play with norms of dress and enjoy the benefits of clothing’s transforming touch because he was a man. Though he courted disrepute by doing so, he was free to remove his suit jacket, roll up his sleeves, and throw punches at the Devil. He was free to woo women’s souls with his charisma and sex appeal. Everything was fair in the war for souls.
Chapter 4 – The Spiritual Senses: Sensing Spiritual Presences in Fundamentalist Life

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” – Ephesians 6:12 (KJV)

“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” – 1 Corinthians 2:9 (KJV)

Introduction: The Spiritual Senses

In 1927, E.J. Pace published a cartoon about Ephesians 6:12 in the Sunday School Times (Figure 39). The image showed a tiny Christian kneeling in prayer, visible from the back. Clothed in a white robe, the Christian’s prayers cast a beam of light into a very dark background. In its posing of the figure and lighting, the image strongly resembles Heinrich Hofmann’s painting “Christ in Gethsemane” (1890), suggesting the minute figure may be Jesus himself. The image caption reads, “praying through.” This lonely, besieged figure is praying through the darkness. And what darkness it is. Surrounding the miniscule, prayerful body stand enormous, shadowy figures. Barely distinguishable from the gloom around them, they possess powerful bodies. Though they have no skin, they have muscles of shade that convey their awful capabilities. Their faces show malicious intent. Some are trying to strike the prayerful figure. Others look poised to hurl something at him from the blackness. Two seem to have combined their efforts and
are trying to pull a shade over the prayerful person, exerting their great strength to do so. Prayer keeps them at bay, but only barely. The image portrayed fundamentalists’ feelings about life in the world. Humble and prayerful, they imagined they faced impossible odds. Enormous powers of darkness circled like hungry sharks, waiting to devour every believer’s hope. Just beyond immediate sensory perception, a battle of titans raged. Christians lived between worlds, pawns in the battle for control of the universe.¹

Figure 39 - E.J. Pace, “Praying Through,” from The Sunday School Times (69.2, January 8, 1927), p22

¹ E.J. Pace, “Praying Through,” The Sunday School Times 69, no. 2 (January 8, 1927): 22.
Pace’s cartoon pulled back the veil dividing the ordinary world from the spirit world. This was no metaphoric treatment of an abstract principle. Evil had real presence in the world. For Pace and others like him, Christians really did face powerful spiritual enemies. These enemies had physical capabilities and definite forms. They occupied a spiritual realm that existed alongside the realm of ordinary experience. This was a real place with real inhabitants. It took spiritual eyes to see the spirits. The spirit world remained invisible to those without the eyes of faith. But the rulers of the darkness were most certainly there, waiting for their opportunity to destroy a person’s faith. Cartoons like this one showed the real truth of the human condition. Though it might seem like humans were the rulers of creation, they were vulnerable to attacks from the world beyond. Humans needed to understand the spiritual enemies they faced. They needed to learn the real truth of how the world worked. Images like this, informed by the truth of “literal” Bible readings, made it possible to see with spiritual eyes.

This chapter turns attention to the spiritual presences and forces that operated in the sensory lives of fundamentalists. While demonic activity and spiritual senses were not usually the stuff of boilerplate Sunday morning sermons, a significant number of influential fundamentalists addressed the topic of spiritual presences in their published works. They penned articles about demons for *The Fundamentals*, published manuals for dealing with spirits through fundamentalist-leaning presses like Fleming H. Revell and the Bible Institute Colportage Association, and created images of spirits for
fundamentalist publications like *The Sunday School Times*. Figures as theologically diverse as cartoonist E.J. Pace, radical holiness evangelist Jessie Penn-Lewis, dispensationalist chart maker Clarence Larkin, faith healer Reuben A. Torrey, and recognized theologian James M. Gray all published on the topic of spiritual presences. According to these fundamentalists, demons, angels, the Devil, and even the Holy Spirit himself influenced daily affairs. God revealed signs to bolster people’s faith in these Last Days. The Devil spoke with the voice of God to lure Christians away from the truth. Demons nipped the heels of Christians who neglected prayer.

**Presences in the Study of Conservative Protestantism**

Probably unintentionally, scholars have stripped early Protestant fundamentalism of its spirits. We have come to know fundamentalists as the people who believed in the inerrant Word of God, who used dispensationalist frameworks to understand history, who articulated the dangers of evolution, who laid the foundations for the rise of the Religious Right, who believed in the imminent return of Jesus. We are far less familiar with the ways these sober, rational, respectable, modern Protestants interacted with spiritual presences.

Robert Orsi’s book *History and Presence* calls for a return of the gods in the study of religion. He observes that most theoretical approaches to the study of religion have an implicit Protestant bias that excludes spiritual presences from scholarly analysis. Rooted in Reformation debates about the “real presence” of Christ in the Eucharist, modern
theories of religion sought to strip religion of its spiritual presences and supernatural personalities. The reasoning was that presences were too “Catholic” to be acceptably “modern.” In modernity, religion was permitted to have signs, symbols, and metaphors, but not unpredictable gods and really present spirits. Exorcised of “the disruptive, dirty, smelly, raucous, irrelevant, and otiose presence of the gods,” religions could be controlled and put to use for the modern tasks of statecraft and colonialism. While practitioners continued to encounter the spirits as really present in their lives, modern theorists of religion saw the gods as social order in abstract form, wish fulfillment fleshed out, or imaginative justifications for economic realities. The Protestant biases of modern theories of religion have conditioned scholars to ignore practitioners’ accounts of the really present gods or spirits, to put the gods to use in justifying one’s own theory of religious politics, or science, or economics, etc.

Fundamentalism might seem like the last place a person ought to look for the real presence of spiritual beings. But the spirits lived among fundamentalists. This chapter assumes that fundamentalists understood spiritual forces to be present in their lives because many of them repeatedly claimed so. Rather than puzzling about the “real” meaning of these claims, I aim to unpack the sensory mechanisms by which

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fundamentalists recognized the presence of the spirits. Fundamentalists knew the spirits by sensory means. They possessed spiritual senses in addition to their five senses.\(^3\)

Scholarly works about evangelicalism after 1970 abound with spirits. In *Religion of Fear*, Jason Bivins isolated key practices and politics of the demons that harried conservative evangelicals from 1970-2000. He demonstrated how an “erotics of fear” and “demonology within” destabilized the holy fearmongering of Jack Chick tracts, anti-rock preachers, and hell houses.\(^4\) Tanya Luhrmann described the real social relationships contemporary evangelicals formed with a God whom they treated like a close friend. Some even had coffee dates with God.\(^5\) Amy DeRogatis examined how evangelicals understood demons to work through illicit sex, sex toys, and pornographic magazines.\(^6\) Sean McCloud argued that “Third Wave” evangelical literature about demon possession exhibited the major concerns of late twentieth-century American religion. He noted that demon possession literature “may seem far removed from what many religion scholars view as the ‘American mainline’ of religious practice […] but the movement registers

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\(^3\) We must be careful not to conflate the “sixth sense” with ESP or psychic feelings. These are certainly significant in contemporary American culture, but they have little bearing on fundamentalism. I am not suggesting fundamentalists had psychic abilities. Rather, I am suggesting that the way they divided up the sensorium permitted the input of spiritual senses. David Howes observes that “sixth” senses are actually quite common in global and historical cultures. The Cashinahua of Peru, for example, consider there to be six sensory organs capable of generating knowledge: the skin, the hands, the ears, the genitals, the liver, and the eyes. David Howes, “Introduction: The Revolving Sensorium,” in *The Sixth Sense Reader*, ed. David Howes (New York: Berg, 2009), 2.


some of the most prescient themes in contemporary American religion."7 Namely, evangelical demon possession literature exhibited themes of consumerism, haunting, and the therapeutic that resonated with broader cultural features of post-1980 American religions.

In contrast to studies of contemporary evangelicalism, academic literature on the history of fundamentalism before the 1980s generally downplays the significance of spiritual presences. When the spirits appear at all, they usually mark the boundary between fundamentalism and Pentecostalism: Pentecostals had the Spirit(s), but fundamentalists did not. Timothy Gloege identifies faith healing and other “modern miracles” as major sources of disagreement in evangelical circles. Those who wanted a “respectable” faith, like Henry Parsons Crowell and the Moody Bible Institute cohort, disavowed most modern miracles. By this analysis, only proto-Pentecostal “radical evangelicals,” like Reuben A. Torrey, insisted on the reality of miraculous signs. Gloege points to James M. Gray as the kind of theologian who appealed to the mainstream, respectable fundamentalists. According to Gray, “most miraculous claims were counterfeits.” Conversion was the real miracle; all others were superfluous.8 By Gloege’s reckoning, those who eventually identified themselves with the term “fundamentalist” aimed for a staid, respectable, businesslike faith. Such a faith cared deeply about

marketing and accounting, but had little tolerance for modern miracles and unruly spiritual presences.

The volume level of internecine debates about miraculous gifts sometimes distracts from the presence of spirits in the historical record of fundamentalism. Establishing a hard distinction between “radical” Pentecostalism and “mainstream” fundamentalism encourages scholars to ignore the significant role spiritual presences played in “mainstream” fundamentalist life. They may not have encouraged speaking in tongues, but many fundamentalists heard the voices of evil spirits. They may have considered most faith healers to be charlatans, but they also saw the Devil’s handiwork with their own eyes. Even the sober theologian James Gray acknowledged the sensory presence of spirits. He believed “not only that Satan is a person, but one with very great power.” He thought Satan could personally affect the weather, harm human bodies, attack individuals’ thoughts and moods, and even control the actions of entire nations. Respectable, mainstream fundamentalism did indeed raise its eyebrows at faith healing and the gift of tongues. But it never banished spiritual presences from its communities.

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9 Downplaying the presence of spirits in fundamentalist life also marginalizes Pentecostals, who usually drew from the same deep cultural and theological wells as their more businesslike counterparts. Grant Wacker identified “pragmatism,” a results-oriented entrepreneurialism, as a key impulse of early Pentecostals. Grant Wacker, Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 10–17.

Many fundamentalists argued that spiritual beings affected everything about daily life. At least, they had the potential to affect everything. A.T. Pierson once wrote, “This unseen realm is infinitely more important, and potential for good or evil, than the realm of the material and visible.” The spiritual world, with God in charge, was supreme over the world of matter and senses. Ultimately, this meant God ruled over sensation according to the rules set out in the Bible. It also meant Christians had a lot of work to do to understand and explain the bizarre sensations that poked at them from the spirit world. Spirits lurked in the dark corners of fundamentalist life. They served as “bodyguards” for imperiled Christians. They affected Christian life in profound and perceptible ways.

“Life in the Spirit-Sphere”: An Overview of the Fundamentalist Spiritual Senses

In her contribution to The Fundamentals, Welsh evangelist Jessie Penn-Lewis expressed serious concerns about evil forces. At every moment, she said, Satan worked against Christians. New converts had to be especially vigilant against the devil’s guiles. Their lack of familiarity with Christian truth made them easy targets for the ruthless enemy. Penn-Lewis wrote, “The wiles of the adversary are the most subtle, and likely to succeed, in the early days of life in the Spirit-sphere.” The devil would sow strife among

Christians, use professedly Christian friends to present false faith to believers, and would even pretend to speak with God’s own voice in personal revelations. Christians needed to learn how to live in accordance with God’s wishes and to resist Satan’s lies. But it took time to learn. Over the course of a lifetime, Christians could attune their bodies to the operations of spiritual forces, just as music connoisseurs learned to distinguish a true “C” from one slightly flat or sharp. As an ordinary part of Christian development, Penn-Lewis said God taught the individual “how to use his spiritual senses, discerning good and evil.”

Many fundamentalists acknowledged the material presence of spirits in the human world. Thoroughly modern in their sensory culture, these fundamentalists lived in an enchanted world. Some, like Jessie Penn-Lewis, suggested people should cultivate their “spiritual senses” in order to ferret out spiritual presences. This involved training the senses in very specific ways to recognize the activity of spiritual actors. The rest of this chapter examines the modern sensory mechanisms by which fundamentalists recognized spiritual activity and made contact with the spirit world.

Some fundamentalists suggested they developed a sixth sense, a “spiritual sense,” that supplemented the ordinary senses and enabled people to discern spiritual

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activity.\textsuperscript{14} Writing for Moody Bible Institute’s \textit{Christian Workers Magazine}, one fundamentalist called this sixth sense the “inner sensorium, by which the human soul becomes directly cognizant of spiritual realities.”\textsuperscript{15} Modern articulations of the senses enabled fundamentalists to cultivate their spiritual senses. Technologically sophisticated eyes, ears focused on sounds, skin attuned to infections, all enabled fundamentalists to make contact with the spirit world.\textsuperscript{16} But spiritual sensation did not stop with human bodies. Spiritual beings themselves sensed and interacted with the physical world. Fundamentalists used the Bible to determine the precise capabilities of spiritual beings. They developed extremely specific understandings of spiritual bodies, the experiences of the afterlife, and miracles. They trained their bodies to perceive a hidden spirit world that lay just beyond the ordinary buzz of life.

Examining the spiritual senses reveals the networked character of fundamentalist sensation. Sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste never operated in isolation. No such

\textsuperscript{14} Constance Classen has observed that medieval Catholic theologians “often asserted that there were two sets of senses: an external physical set and an internal, spiritual one.” By separating the senses, theologians made sense of how extreme ascetics could live rich spiritual sensory lives. Constance Classen, \textit{The Color of Angels: Cosmology, Gender, and the Aesthetic Imagination} (New York: Routledge, 1998), 14.

\textsuperscript{15} Hiller, “Reality of Good and Evil Spirits,” 355.

\textsuperscript{16} Leigh Schmidt has described similar sorts of sensory rationalism in the work of Emanuel Swedenborg. Swedenborg began his intellectual journey as a natural philosopher, who later attuned his senses such that he regularly conversed with angels. Schmidt obseres the harmony in Swedenborg’s thought between his commitment to scrutiny of the senses on one hand and his efforts to achieve direct enlightenment from Heaven on the other. In short, Swedenborg was both mystical and rational, interested in dissecting the sensory mechanisms that enabled spiritual experiences. Schmidt argues, “Throughout all his vast experiences, Swedenborg tested a mystical sensorium--Christian, kabbalistic, and Hermetic--in the crucible of the Enlightenment. By exhaustively exploring the spiritual senses in anatomical terms, he ushered a mystical strand of Christian devotionalism through the age of reason.” Leigh Eric Schmidt, “Swedenborg’s Celestial Sensorium: Angelic Authenticity, Religious Authority, and the American New Church Movement,” in \textit{The Sixth Sense Reader}, ed. David Howes (New York: Berg, 2009), 166.
thing as “the eye” or “the ear” or “the hand” dominated the fundamentalist sensorium. Touch and sight, smell and hearing, taste and gut-level feelings worked together and enabled Christians to sense the presence of good or evil presences. Objects, individuals, places, and feelings manifested the activity of spiritual actors. Demons spoke with audible voices, inhabited tangible things, and moved along clearly defined paths. Likewise, uttering the name of Jesus aloud drove the Devil from a place. Speaking a prayer cleansed an object of its harmful potential. Viewing certain images made it clear how demons attacked a Christian’s soul. Fundamentalists encountered the spirits in what they understood as the hard truths of complex, connected, and material sensations.\(^{17}\)

The material presence of spirits convinced fundamentalists the real drama of their faith happened in another world. The spirits with whom fundamentalists interacted lived in a reality beyond mere sights, sounds, feelings, tastes, and smells. Modern science and modern machines helped harness the powers of the beyond, but they never fully contained it. The full truth of the other world always lay just beyond the horizon of perceptibility. Supernatural actions, although they occurred in this world, provided fundamentalists with confirmation that the real action of faith took place beyond sensory life.

\(^{17}\) Describing religious experience, David Howes argues, “religious experience is not trans-sensory, as is commonly thought, but inter-sensory. Consider the way in which peak religious experiences are often expressed in synaesthetic terms. Synaesthesia, the union or crossing of the senses, is a prime example of intersensory perception.” David Howes, “Sensation,” Material Religion 7, no. 1 (2011): 97.
As God’s only supernaturally bestowed revelation, fundamentalists took the Bible as the single reliable guide to interactions with the spiritual realm.

Fundamentalists considered their faith “old-fashioned” because they accepted the Bible’s accounts of the material presence of spirits at face value. As I explain below, fundamentalists took issue with the modernists’ insistence that the Bible described spiritual beings only allegorically. Instead, they defended the more traditional American view of spiritual beings that considered Heaven a material place and spiritual beings regular visitors to earth.\textsuperscript{18} Where modernists allegorized, fundamentalists’ “literal” readings of the Bible explained who the spirits were, why they did what they did, and described how people should interact with them. One of the most important characteristics of “literal” readings of the Bible was that they acknowledged the embodied presence of spiritual beings on earth. Modernist readings did not.

Despite the penchant to describe their positions as “old-fashioned,” fundamentalists also considered their defense of spiritual beings to be scientific. As far

\textsuperscript{18} Nineteenth century Americans considered angels to be frequent visitors to earth. Among other things, they were understood to have bodily presence at the deathbed, accompanying the soul of the departed on its way to Heaven. As just one example of this widespread understanding, the cover of the American Tract Society’s “Death-bed of a Free-Thinker” (no. 142, c.1827-1832), showed a robed angel turning away in sadness at the death of freethinker Francis Newport. She was not able to bring him back to Heaven with her. For a study of angelic bodies in the nineteenth century, see: Elizabeth Reis, “Immortal Messengers: Angels, Gender, and Power in Early America,” in \textit{Mortal Remains: Death in Early America}, ed. Nancy Isenberg and Andrew Burstein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 163–75. Early in their history, Baptists and Methodists had even more boisterous encounters with spiritual beings. Christine Heyrman tells the story of how evangelicals in the South were known for “treeing” the devil, which involved chasing an embodied form of the devil up a tree with hunting dogs and beating him to death. Christine Leigh Heyrman, \textit{Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 55–56.
as they were concerned, the Bible contained everything a person needed to know about spiritual beings. And as far as they were concerned, their own methods of reading the Bible were more scientific than those of modernists.¹⁹ By reading the Bible in their own “scientific” ways, fundamentalists hoped to defend the rational, objective reality of spiritual beings. They considered it a scientific strength of their hermeneutic schemes that they did not allegorize or explain away spiritual beings. Their hermeneutics accounted for all the available physical and textual evidence. They provided clear readings that showed every supernatural being had a clear mission and clear physical capabilities outlined in the Bible. They thought work of spiritual beings helped explain the scientific reality of miracles. They discounted other understandings of science as merely materialistic, as unable and unwilling to account for the spiritual, physical, and textual evidence of the reality of spiritual beings.

The sensory modernity of early fundamentalism set the spirits free. Precise diagrams explained the actions of spirits. Modern hearing made it possible to pinpoint the sources of spiritual communication. The spirits’ material presence provided strong evidence for the supernatural truth of the rightly divided Word. Scientific, rationalistic approaches to the senses convinced many fundamentalists that they could make contact with the spiritual realm. Using the kinds of modern sensory methods outlined in the previous chapters, they aimed to understand everything about the spirit world. They

dissected its specific material makeup, its possibilities, its limitations. They aimed to
train their senses so they could experience the spirit world. They came to believe their
true Christian destiny lay in this realm. As supreme ruler of the spiritual world, the God
of fundamentalism was awe-inspiringly powerful. Their God was a big God, more
complex than even modern science could ever imagine. Christians required new kinds
of scientific methods just to piece together the logic of what He told humanity about His
plans in the Bible. Sensory contact with the spiritual realm proved it was better to trust
God than try to judge His actions by human standards. He performed miracles. He
turned ordinary sensation on its head. He promised to resurrect human bodies into
glorified forms.

**The Metaphorization of Spirits in American Protestantism: A Brief History**

The presence of embodied spiritual actors on earth presented a major bone of
contention among American Protestants in the early twentieth century. During the
nineteenth century, many—perhaps most—American Protestants had acknowledged the
immanence of the spirit world. Some made contact with embodied spirits, usually in the
form of conversations with angels or Jesus. Tracts and devotional literature frequently
described conversations between Christians and the spirits. They imagined Heaven as a
real place populated with real people who had real bodies. Heaven and earth stood close
together in nineteenth-century Protestantism, with embodied spiritual beings understood to have real presence on earth and in the hereafter.  

Protestant modernists radically departed from traditional American Protestant understandings of spiritual beings and the afterlife. By the turn of the twentieth century, Protestant modernists began to consider the Bible’s accounts of angels, demons, and the Devil to be metaphorical or allegorical. They aimed to strip Protestantism of its spiritual presences in the name of modernization, rationalization, and progress. Such Christians thought biblical mentions of angels and demons made for lively stories about good and evil, but nothing more. They found the idea of an embodied Devil and an afterlife of embodied people in real places to be stuffy, old-fashioned, unempirical nonsense. Social Gospel theologian Shailer Mathews described the New Testament idea of a real, embodied Satan as “that element of the gospel that seems so remote to our age.” He believed evil was an “impersonal force,” and Satan was simply “one of the sturdiest attempts ever made by human reason to solve the great enigma as to how there can be a good God at the head of things and yet there be suffering throughout His world.” Mathews considered all biblical descriptions of angels and demons to be outdated survivals of the superstitious ancient mind. He stated bluntly that ancient people used demons to explain the cause of diseases and so “devils might be said to have been the

22 Ibid., 140–141.
bacilli of the ancient world.” He thought the idea of angels, demons, and an embodied Satan to be remnants of a society that still believed in a flat earth and other outdated notions. Likewise, he snickered at the idea that Jesus would come back in a body and all Christians would see him in the clouds at the Second Coming. “Such a united vision of an appearance in the heavens is physically unthinkable,” he stately smugly, “except on the part of those theologians who give us to understand that at the second coming of Christ, God will probably enable men to have a new method of sight.”

In contrast, many fundamentalists insisted spiritual beings had real, physical presence in daily life. This was one of the few ways in which fundamentalism could justifiably claim the title of “old-fashioned,” as such an understanding of spiritual beings retained many characteristics of nineteenth-century evangelicalism. Many fundamentalists thought angels’ and demons’ spiritual activities intersected with the material lives of human beings. Spiritual beings influenced people to do good or evil. They shaped the course of history in this material world. They spoke, ate, walked, zipped around outer space, disappeared, reappeared, and even had sex. Angels and demons were not allegories or metaphors, but embodied beings with wills of their own. Clarence Larkin once proclaimed, “If our spiritual eyes were opened we would see spirit beings about us, […] as Nebuchadnezzar saw one like unto the Son of God walking in

Ibid., 37.
Ibid., 36–37.
the midst of the Burning Fiery Furnace." Spiritual beings darted everywhere around us. A person just needed spiritual eyes to see them. Images permitted artists to use their own spiritual eyes to render normally invisible realities. These images opened the eyes of the spiritual body, providing a glimpse of the spirit world. By making the invisible visible, images demonstrated precise ways that spiritual realities affected physical realities. They allowed humans to investigate the mechanical laws of the spirit world. Images explained the characteristics of spiritual beings and the powers of spiritual bodies.

Most fundamentalists considered the supernatural and the natural worlds to be very proximate to each other. The supernatural world overlapped with and influenced the natural. The natural made no sense without the supernatural. Fundamentalist leader John Balcom Shaw found strong evidence for this idea in Revelation 19:17, in which the prophet says, "I saw an angel standing in the sun." For Shaw, this was both a literal vision of an angel and a powerful metaphor for the relationship between natural and supernatural bodies. The angel represented the supernatural. The sun represented the natural. The angel "standing in the sun" demonstrated the condition of life on earth. He

26 Shaw’s life and thought have come under the expert gaze of Kathryn Lofton. For Lofton, the passage about the angel in the sun, along with Shaw’s other writings, demonstrate the queerness of early fundamentalism—its ambivalent gender discourse, its openness, its categorical fluidity. She contends Shaw’s type of fundamentalism was not about “manly warriors or flinty-eyed gunmen,” but rather “was an androgynous submission and an unsexed suffering.” Angels stood in the sun because science and religion had open borders. Kathryn Lofton, “Queering Fundamentalism: John Balcom Shaw and the Sexuality of a Protestant Orthodoxy,” Journal of the History of Sexuality 17, no. 3 (2008): 450.
mused, “the natural and the supernatural everywhere exist together in the universe, and are immediately interrelated, the supernatural ever following in the train of the natural and the natural giving the supernatural its background and setting.” Shaw recognized that humans did not usually perceive supernatural activity, that the supernatural was usually beyond the senses. He attributed this to human sinfulness. “If we were not so sordid and materialistic in our sensibilities,” Shaw asserted, “we should see at every turn an angel standing in the sun; we should behold in the midst of the material, everywhere, the supernatural.” With the right training of the body, a person peer beyond the veil, perceiving supernatural wonders in the material world.

**Spirit Bodies: “The ‘Spirit World’ is Just as Much Material as the ‘Natural World’”**

Much of the dispensationalist literature about spirit beings advocated what theologians call “tripartite anthropology.” This theology of the human being held that each individual consisted of three parts: a body, a soul, and a spirit. Each part had specific capabilities and responsibilities, but all operated together. Body, soul, and spirit constituted a trinity. Just as God was a trinity, so human beings made “in the image of God” also consisted of a trinity. C.I. Scofield considered tripartite anthropology an antidote to the present “psychological age.” He chided the emerging field of psychology,

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28 Ibid.
writing, “Science will fail because it leaves out the supernatural, and the new science of psychology is in utter confusion because it leaves out the Biblical account of man.” Scofield considered tripartite anthropology the only system that made sense of the human condition. Psychologists overvalued spirit and soul to the neglect of the body. For Scofield, the soul and spirit “are so connected with the body that they are never to be permanently separated.” He continued, “Man may and does exist out of the body,—but the divine purpose is to unite again in resurrection all human souls and spirits and their mortal bodies.” As a threefold being, the human needed a body. God set his entire plan of salvation in motion so a person’s soul and spirit could reunite with a body “purified from all that makes it often a burden and always a care.” Just as Jesus died and came back in a glorified body, so too would every redeemed human being.

In his book *The Spirit World*, Clarence Larkin depicted the tripartite human constitution in a chart called “The Threefold Nature of Man” (Figure 40). Larkin figured the relations between body, soul, and spirit as concentric circles. The largest circle represented the body. Through the senses, it remained in constant contact with the external world. Each sense represented a “gate” from the external world to the inner

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30 Ibid., 52.
31 Ibid.
32 Scofield used a colorful, if historically misinformed, analogy to stress the significance of the body in Christian life. He took Jesus as his example of a model human being. Jesus, Scofield declared, “was the precise antithesis of a Puritan. All that a Puritan was, except reverence and morality, He was not. All that a Puritan was not, He was.” Ibid., 58.
sanctum of the individual’s body. Sight was the “eye-gate.” Hearing operated through the “ear-gate.” Touch was the “feel-gate.” These gates allowed material things to make impressions on the body and gain access to the soul. The second largest circle represented the soul. It had its own “gates” through which impressions entered from the body. The soul’s gates were imagination, conscience, reason, affections, and memory. At the very center of the image, representing the kernel of the human being, stood the spirit. It was here the Holy Spirit took up residence. The human spirit received impressions from the soul, but not through direct channels. The spirit had its own senses.33

33 Larkin, The Spirit World, 84.
The most remarkable feature of Larkin’s image is its labelling of the spirit’s “sense faculties.” This appears on the right half of the “spirit” circle at the center of the image. Larkin lists the spirit’s “sense faculties” as including faith, hope, reverence, prayer, and worship. The spirit had sense faculties because it possessed a body. Larkin described the spirit as having a “‘psychical’ or ‘Soulish’ body.” This soulish-spirit body possessed unique capabilities. Only a regenerated Christian had the ability to access the knowledge gained through the spirit body while in this present life. Using Jesus’s story
of the Rich Man and Lazarus as biblical precedent, Larkin reasoned that the psychical body “can hear, and speak, and think, and feel,” continuing that “it must have some ‘tangible’ form. It is not a ghostlike structure.” Just like a physical body, the spiritual/psychical body had definite limitations. It also provided tangible experiences and concrete kinds of knowledge. Even though he had died, Larkin observed, the Rich Man who spoke to Lazarus “could see, and feel, and thirst, and talk, and remember, proving that he possessed his senses and had not lost his personality.” Far from an abstract principle, Larkin understood the spirit body as having definite form. It was certainly spiritual and largely imperceptible in ordinary life, but it was also definitely a body. It possessed spiritual senses and generated concrete forms of knowledge. Its limitations would be overcome at the resurrection of the dead, when the spirit body would be united with a physical resurrection body once again.

Spiritual bodies were adapted to life in the spiritual world. Human beings would possess such bodies eventually, but they had limited spiritual sensory capabilities in the present. Other spiritual beings inhabited their spirit bodies all the time. They lived completely within the spirit world. To use an anachronistic description, Larkin envisaged the spirit world something like a parallel universe to the ordinary physical world. In many ways it was similar to the physical world, but it also differed in key

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34 Ibid., 86.
35 Ibid., 87.
qualities. One of the similarities was that both worlds were material. According to
Larkin, “the ‘Spirit World’ is just as much Material as the ‘Natural World’ in which we
dwell.”\footnote{Larkin, The Spirit World, 65.} The spirit world possessed form and structure, even if it was not apparent to
most people living in the natural world. Spiritual beings possessed spiritual bodies,
odies that did not suffer the same limitations as natural bodies. Heavenly beings had
substance and presence, Larkin mused, “The only difference is that the bodies of ‘Spirit
Beings’ are adapted to the ‘Spirit World,’ just as the bodies of fish are adapted to the
world of water.”\footnote{Ibid.} Until they passed into the spirit world at death, Christians had to read
the Bible very carefully to determine how their spirit body sensed. When they managed
to use their spiritual senses in this life, Christians obtained a foretaste of their embodied
eternal life.

**Hell is “Extreme Bodily Suffering”: Eternal Rewards and
Punishments for Spirit Bodies**

While they often differed on the precise specifics of eternal rewards and
punishments, most fundamentalists agreed that a person faced eternity in some kind of
body. The spirit body, only barely present in the physical world, would become a
person’s primary body at death. As a body with sensory capabilities, the spirit body
faced concrete rewards and punishments in the afterlife. Reuben Torrey explained,

“According to the Bible, in the world to come, the redeemed spirit has a body, not this
same body, but a body the perfect counterpart of the redeemed spirit that inhabits it, and partaker with it in all its blessedness.” Likewise, those who were not redeemed faced the prospect of hell in a sensing spiritual body. Torrey described Hell as “a place of extreme bodily suffering.” The human soul and spirit were eternal. Because the spirit had a spirit body, that meant a person faced eternal rewards and punishments of a sensory nature.\textsuperscript{39}

Torrey imagined the punishments of Hell in a graphic, first-person narrative called \textit{Letters from Hell}. The work reads like a highly stylized news dispatch from a war zone, documenting the torments of Hell from one of its occupants’ point of view. Upon entering Hell immediately after death, the lost soul of a man who died in his forties finds himself shivering with cold. He is fully conscious and experiences a barrage of unpleasant sensations. He is in the dark, but, somehow, he can still see terrifying shades. He smells “nauseous vapors.”\textsuperscript{40} He soon realizes he is freezing because he lacks a physical body. Realizing his complete nudity without a body, he says, “All that was left of me was a shade unclothed to the skin—nay, to the inmost soul. No wonder I shivered; no wonder I felt naked.”\textsuperscript{41} Sensing without a physical body, the man experiences the full horrors of the spiritual body’s torment. Without the covering of a physical body, he is naked, cold, and afraid. His spirit body experiences horrible new kinds of sensation. The

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 32.
work aimed to scare readers about the bodily punishments that awaited the unsaved so they would come to Jesus.

Many fundamentalists worried the doctrine of bodily suffering in Hell was disappearing from American Christianity. They wanted to bring it back in order to remind people of the high stakes of life in our mortal bodies. Without “faith in Christ,” a person was doomed to suffer eternity in Hell in a sensing body. What was worse, the punishments of Hell were commensurate to a person’s life of sin. The more sin, the more bodily suffering. A.C. Dixon reasoned, “it is not difficult to convince men that there is a heaven, though I verily believe that there is more proof outside of the Bible that there is a hell.” For Dixon, people’s suffering on earth under the physical consequences of their sins provided overwhelming proof of the existence of Hell. Hell was basically an extension of sinful earthly suffering on an eternal scale. And people lived for eternity in sensing spiritual bodies. Dixon thought Hell must be an actual place of embodied suffering, in order that it provide adequate consequences for a life of sin. “S-I-N spells ‘Hell’ in this world and the next,” he proclaimed. Highly aware of the similarity of his ideas to the literary hells of Milton and Dante, Dixon elaborated that the actual Hell was “no nightmare of medieval darkness […] not the hallucination of a disordered brain. It is a fact which anyone with open eyes must see.” Again using Jesus’s story of the Rich Man and Lazarus as a key text, he deduced that the flames of Hell created conscious, personalized, sensory anguish on bodies that lasted for eternity. Dixon imagined there
was a direct connection between a person’s bodily actions on earth and that person’s torments in Hell. The memories, reasoning, imagination, and conscience that grew from a person’s life in the body translated directly into flames of anguish in Hell.42

In his reading of the Bible, Clarence Larkin discovered a fate far worse than mere eternal bodily torment. After receiving a resurrection body from God, everyone would face judgment.43 The wicked would be cast into the Lake of Fire, which God had prepared for Satan and his fallen angels. There, the flames would destroy their resurrection bodies. In graphic language, he described how the flames of the Lake of Fire would “destroy the ‘body’ by consuming it, and causing it to pass into a gaseous state.”44 With their resurrection bodies vaporized, the wicked would be left with nothing but their souls and spirits. These would live forever in the agony of disembodiment. They would not have the pleasures of the resurrection body, and they would know it. They would suffer unpleasant sensations without a body to comfort them.

In contrast to the sensory torments of Hell stood the remarkable sensory possibilities of a resurrected body destined to go to Heaven. These glorified bodies would make people “like unto the angels,” having great power. The resurrected bodies

43 As one might expect, dispensationalists had an extremely complex timeline regarding resurrections. A person did not obtain the “resurrection body” immediately after death. For Christians, this only happened in the future at the “First Resurrection,” which occurred just before Christ’s Millennial Kingdom was established on earth. For the unsaved, it happened after the Millennium. If a Christian died before this time, they entered an intermediate state of pleasantness. The unsaved entered an intermediate state of torment, only later descending into the Lake of Fire in their resurrection bodies. See: Larkin, The Spirit World, 87–89.
44 Ibid., 117.
of Christians would not experience pain, aches, or any kind of suffering. They would be the same bodies in which people lived their earthly lives, but they would be transformed into something better. James Gray used the analogy of a corn seed. The seed represented the present, physical body. It had to “die,” to fall off the plant, in order to become something else. The resurrection body was like the corn stalk that grew from the seed. It was essentially the same, but transformed into something better. The resurrection body of Christians would continue to experience sensation. But it would be sensation magnified. Gray thought the resurrected body would experience the best kinds of sensation from the earthly life, “That [resurrection body’s] hand […] will be the same that gave the cup of cold water here to a Christian brother. That tongue, then the very rival of Gabriel’s, will be the same which here sang of Jesus.”45 In eternity, Christians would feel, sing, and see in ways familiar, but far beyond ordinary physical capability.

Clarence Larkin strongly agreed that a person’s “resurrection body” possessed sensory capabilities. Reunited with the soul and spirit, the resurrection body in which Christians would spend eternity enjoyed exciting new kinds of sensation. Larkin insisted the resurrection body possessed the power to see spirits and other normally invisible things. He suspected the resurrection body experienced hunger and thirst only so that a person could enjoy the taste of food and drink. Likewise, the resurrection body’s hearing

was going to be more powerful than ordinary hearing. “We can multiply the power of
the human voice by the use of the Megaphone, and the Telephone increases the power of
the human ear,” Larkin reasoned. He continued, “If man can invent such instruments to
augment his power of hearing, what cannot God do for the ear when He endows it with
the power of the Resurrection body?” God was going to do amazing things with
sensing bodies. These would make modern sensory technologies look insignificant by
comparison.

Modern technological sensation conditioned Larkin’s understanding of the
resurrection body. A network of people, spiritual actors, and modern machines
operates in his description of Heaven. God was the supreme actor who bestowed
sensory capability. He built and designed the systems of the spirit body. Those systems
functioned like perfect versions of modern machines. “Memory,” wrote Larkin, “is like
the recording cylinders of a Phonograph, it preserves the doings of our life, and at the
Judgment will recall every ‘idle word’ and justify the fairness of our sentence.” God
built the memory to work like a phonograph. He used the machine to assist in his
processes of eternal judgment. The human spirit body’s phonographic memory enabled

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47 John Modern has used the concept of “feedback” to explore the relationships between religion,
technology, and selfhood in the 1920s. He writes, “By multiplying the possible selves one could inhabit,
technology expanded the horizon of being human. More choices were available, more opportunities to
reflect, more ways of living and dying. In their capacity for reproduction and diffusion, technologies
generated the capacity for regulating both nonhuman and human systems.” John Lardas Modern, “Thinking
about Melville, Religion, and Machines That Think,” in *Deus in Machina: Religion, Technology, and the Things
God’s judgment about where a sensing body should spend eternity to seem fair. The memory contained an indestructible phonograph cylinder that retained every impression, every “idle word” spoken in a lifetime. This divine machine worked whether or not an individual wanted it to. God just had to hit play and an individual heard back every awkward moment. Eternal rewards seemed fair because they had divine and biomechanical justification. People might argue with a capricious God who sent folks to Hell, but not with a spirit body’s phonographic memory machine.
Figure 41 - Clarence Larkin, "The Heavens," from The Spirit World (Glenside, PA: Rev. Clarence Larkin Estate, 1921), p49
Larkin also used technologically influenced modern charts to convince others that his dispensationalist understandings of the spirit body had authority. His chart “The Heavens” pulled back the veil and visualized the afterlife in precise, schematic terms (Figure 41). The chart uses vertical positioning to signal both moral and literal location. The connecting “pipes” function like train lines, carrying the spiritual bodies of the dead to various locations in the afterlife. At the top of the chart stands the Third Heaven. It is a paradise, home of God’s throne. Situated at the top of the chart, Larkin suggests Heaven is located literally above the earth, beyond the upper atmosphere, somewhere in space.49 The afterlife’s places of punishment rest at the bottom of the chart in “the underworld” (also called sheol and hades). The underworld contains the eternal abodes of all the damned, including fallen angels, unsaved people, and Satan himself. Larkin states that the underworld “must be in the ‘heart of the earth,’ and is so pictured on the Chart.”50 The underworld is literally below us, near the molten center of the earth.

As a visual technology, Larkin’s chart aimed to establish sensory certainty about insensible realities. The chart showed the movement of bodies in the afterlife over time. Its tubes and nodes demonstrated the absolute precision of these spiritual movements. Dispensationalism kept no secrets. It decoded everything, leaving no possibility unaccounted for. A person needed only to follow one category of people through the

49 Ibid., 127.
50 Ibid., 48.
chart to see exactly what fate awaited them—and their bodies—in eternity. Suppose a Christian has died. The chart indicates that such a person’s soul and spirit immediately enter “the present paradise,” located in the top left of the image. At some point in the future, the chart sends this spirit on a downward slide toward the grave. The grave contains the bodies of all the dead. The downward slide depicts the “souls of the righteous returning for their bodies.” Together with those “translation saints,” the Christians who were still alive at Christ’s return, they ascend in their bodies to the Judgment Seat of Christ. Here, they receive their rewards in Heaven. They are still in their bodies and will remain so forever, but their bodies have been transformed. Eventually, they travel with the rest of “the church” to the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is a definite location in Heaven, not an abstract notion. Larkin argued, “Heaven is a ‘Place,’ it is not a state or condition. The New Jerusalem is not Heaven, though it is a city of Heaven.” Even when dealing with the most ethereal of spiritual concepts, Larkin worked in concrete, material terms. It only made sense to describe Heaven in such terms because bodies continued sensing in the afterlife.

Larkin depicted the plight of the wicked as slightly more complicated, but just as material, as the fate of the saved. Upon death, the wicked person’s soul enters Hell. At an unknown point in the future, this person’s soul rises to meet their body as it emerges from the grave. The chart calls this the “resurrection of the wicked.” The fallen angels

51 Ibid., 108.
join them. These beings started their journey at the far left of the chart, having been cast into “Tartarus” at the time they died—during Noah’s flood. Together, the wicked and the fallen angels face judgment at the “great white throne” of God. Being found wanting, they descend through another pipeline to the Lake of Fire. They spend eternity here. Larkin contended that Hell was the necessary counterpart of Heaven. He assented to the idea that God is love, but maintained that God is also just. Therefore, Larkin argued, God would “preserve the Righteous from the Wicked. This demands that they be separated for all eternity.” It was possible for physical separation to exist in the afterlife because people faced eternity in bodies. The saved went to one actual place in their bodies, the wicked to another.

**Supernatural Causes, Material Effects: Natural Laws of the Spirit World**

Angels inhabited their spiritual bodies on a permanent basis, so they offered some of the best information about the capabilities and limitations of spirit bodies. One of the most fundamental observations fundamentalists made about angels was that they had spiritual bodies with spiritual sensory capabilities. One Bible teacher contrasted the “tangible” work of angels with the “inward” work of the Holy Spirit, stating, “angels are associated with the more tangible phase of heavenly service, while the Holy Spirit

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52 Ibid., 60.
applies Himself to the ministry of the inward and unseen.”⁵³ Angels possessed spirit bodies that operated in the spiritual world, but they could also influence events in the physical world. People could apprehend their work by specific sensory means. The same Bible teacher insisted angels were “actual beings and not impersonal influences.”⁵⁴ As actual beings, angels lived in bodies. “Though called spirits,” the teacher continued, “this does not prove them to be incorporeal.”⁵⁵ Angels had spirit bodies. And they used their spirit bodies to do the kind of work human beings could comprehend with the senses.

Clarence Larkin enumerated a few basics of the angelic spirit body. He determined angels “are not ethereal in the sense that they are mere ‘ether,’ for they have a materialistic form.”⁵⁶ Their spirit bodies were substantive and capable of interacting with the environment. They ate food with Abraham and Lot in the Old Testament. They spoke in audible voices to people throughout the Bible. Angels also had gender. Specifically, all angels had masculine gender. Some evil angels used their male anatomy to have sexual relationships, albeit illicit sexual relationships, with humans in the time before Noah’s flood. Angels’ spiritual bodies possessed many of the capacities of physical bodies, due to their close resemblance. Larkin explained, “all the ‘Higher

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⁵⁴ Ibid., 18.
⁵⁵ Ibid., 19.
Intelligences’ of the Heavenly World [...] are patterned after the ‘Image’ of God, and that pattern is that of the human body, for man structurally is the ‘Masterpiece’ of the Almighty.”\(^\text{57}\) Despite the resemblance, angels’ capacities exceeded those of human beings. Angels could fly. They could transform from invisible to visible form. They were not subject to the natural laws of the physical world, but to those of the spiritual world.

Larkin described the spiritual world as having its own unique “natural laws.” These were analogous to the natural laws of the physical world, but not identical with them. The basic principle was that the spiritual world made sense on its own terms, if not necessarily on the terms of this world. This helped explain miracles. Miracles did not actually disrupt natural law. Instead, they occurred where the natural laws of the spirit world abrogated those of the natural world. “A miracle,” Larkin argued, “is not something contrary to nature, but the working of a higher law, that, thus far, is contrary to our experience.”\(^\text{58}\) When people finally inhabited the spiritual world, they would understand that “what we now look upon as miracles are simply the working of the natural laws of the ‘Spirit World.’”\(^\text{59}\) He used an analogy about technology to support his argument. He imagined a contemporary American arriving by submarine to visit the natives of “some tropical country” who “had never seen or heard of a submarine boat or

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 30.
\(^{58}\) Ibid., 69.
\(^{59}\) Ibid.
an ice-machine." If this American were to explain to the locals that he had the ability to make water hard or travel beneath it for hours without surfacing, they would laugh in his face. If he then made ice and traveled in his submarine underwater without explaining how the machines worked, the natives would proclaim his actions miracles. But this did not make the American’s actions miraculous. It simply meant the natives had an inadequate understanding of the physical laws governing ice-making and submarines. Larkin concluded, “what to us appears miraculous is only the working of natural laws with which we as yet have not become acquainted.” Miracles obeyed the natural laws of the spirit world, not the natural laws of this world.

Larkin imagined that he discovered the natural laws of the spirit world through his “literal” readings of the Bible alone. Whenever angels appeared, he thought the Bible’s description of their manner of appearing, behavior, and limitations provided

60 Ibid.
61 The episode “Who Watches the Watchers?” (Season 3, Episode 4) of Star Trek: The Next Generation follows a similar plot to Larkin’s imaginative vignette. Technologically unsophisticated aliens proclaim Captain Picard of the USS Enterprise to be a god because of his superior technology. Larkin’s story clearly presumes the superiority of western technologies and perspectives. Apart from the Star Trek episode, it also bears structural similarity to the anthropological assumptions that led scholars to identify “cargo cults” in the Pacific, such as the Prince Philip Movement and the John Frum movement, as millenarian movements focused on acquiring western goods through magical means. For a different perspective, see: Martha Kaplan, Neither Cargo Nor Cult: Ritual Politics and the Colonial Imagination in Fiji (Duke University Press, 1995).
63 Though he does not provide a citation (in typical dispensationalist fashion), Larkin seems to be drawing on the work of Henry Drummond. Drummond was an evangelist and scientist who pioneered the concept of theistic evolution. Drummond argued that the spiritual world contained natural laws just like the physical world. He wrote, “the Spiritual World is not a castle in the air, of an architecture unknown to earth or heaven, but a fair ordered realm furnished with many familiar things and ruled by well-remembered Laws.” Henry Drummond, Natural Law in the Spiritual World (New York: James Pott Co, 1884), 26.
clues about the rules governing the spirit world. He applied a visual hermeneutic of “literalism” to make sense of the presence of spiritual beings (see chapter 1). In short, this meant using naïve images drawn from scriptural descriptions of spiritual beings to interpret the meaning of opaque Bible passages. It was a powerful circle of scripture interpreting scripture: biblical descriptions provided Larkin with fodder for illustrations, and those illustrations helped clarify the meaning of the Bible. So if the Bible said an angel had a hand, Larkin understood it was no mere metaphor or allegory. It was a description of a spiritual being’s body that he could draw (or at least see in his mind’s eye). The Bible referred to real, tangible beings that a person could draw. Those drawings helped clarify exactly what was happening in the Bible. Larkin used the Bible’s descriptions of angels, no matter how seemingly vague or obtuse, as empirical evidence of the “natural laws” governing the other world. He thought spiritual beings behaved in sensory, observable ways that followed predictable patterns. He thought scripture not only proclaimed the reality of these beings, but explained precisely how their spirit bodies looked, how they moved through physical space, how they affected events on earth, and how they were limited.

According to Larkin, one of the natural laws of the spirit world was “the power to transform or change the ‘Spirit Body’ into a ‘physical body’ and back again.”64 He believed physical-spiritual transformation was a natural law of the spirit world because

“all angelic beings seem to possess it.” The angel who visited Abraham’s tent did it. The angel who appeared to Jacob did it. After the resurrection, Jesus was also able to transform his spirit body into a physical one and back again “at pleasure.” As far as Larkin’s reading of the Bible could tell, physical-spiritual transformation was routine in the spirit world. Other “natural laws” of the spirit world seemed even more bizarre from the perspective of the physical world. Spiritual bodies, Larkin concluded based on his reading of Judges 13:15-20, were not vulnerable to fire. They could not burn on earth. They were also able to become visible or invisible at will and traverse immense distances in seconds. No matter how fanciful the descriptions of events in the Bible, Larkin was convinced the spirit world abided by clear natural laws. An informed Christian reader could discover these laws and understand the hidden operations of the spirit world.

Because the spirit world operated according to a higher order of natural laws, Larkin thought a faithful Christian could make reasonable conclusions about how miracles did and did not work. Larkin’s perspective on miracles and the natural laws of the spirit world paraded in full regalia when he read Daniel 5:5, the famous story of “the writing on the wall.” Describing this miraculous appearance of handwriting on the wall during Belshazzar’s feast, Larkin concludes it was the result of spiritual activity. But the appearance of the writing was not just magical or miraculous. This was embodied

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65 Larkin, The Spirit World, 127.
66 Ibid., 122.
67 Ibid., 127.
spiritual action. “Back of the fingers, but invisible,” Larkin concluded, “must have been the person of the one who wrote, for fingers cannot write of themselves.” According to this dispensationalist perspective, writing could appear miraculously on walls. Spiritual beings could fly through the atmosphere and resist burning by fire. However, fingers could not write on their own. It was not enough to let a miracle be a miracle. Larkin used the story of the writing on the wall as evidence for a complex theory of spiritual bodies’ limitations. He concluded that the transformation from spiritual bodies into physical ones need not be an all-or-nothing affair. Spiritual beings could manifest a physical hand, but keep the rest of their bodies hidden. The spiritual world was one of tremendous possibilities, but it had limits. With the right tools, which included dispensationalism and well-tuned spiritual senses, a person could uncover the rules governing the spirit world. A person whose spiritual senses were open could see the spiritual arm behind the physical hand that produced the writing on the wall. This apparent “miracle” was nothing more than a moment in which the natural laws of the spirit world bumped against those of the physical world, producing a result human do not ordinarily encounter.69

68 Ibid.
69 Larkin’s accounts of angels and their powers are especially lively and colorful, which is the reason I have cited him extensively. Other fundamentalists held similar positions, but did not always flesh them out in the ways Larkin’s visually-oriented descriptions did. For additional perspectives, see: A.C. Dixon, Heaven on Earth (New York: Fleming H. Revell, n.d. [c1900]), 10; Haldeman, Can the Dead Communicate with the Living?, 43; Hiller, “Reality of Good and Evil Spirits,” 355–356.
“What is Said Does Not Appear to Come from their Minds or Wills”: The Material and Sensory Aspects of Demon Possession

In the winter of 1877, a man from a mountainous region of rural China purchased several images of deities to hang in his home. His family name was Kwo. One of the pictures depicted Wang Mu-niang, Queen Mother of the West, the Empress of Heaven. He placed the image in “the most honorable position in the house.” Shortly after doing so, strange happenings befell him. Wang Mu-niang appeared to him in a terrifying dream. She informed him that she was taking up residence in his home. This was a matter of great shame for Kwo and his household. Almost immediately, Kwo’s behavior became dangerously erratic. He went to the gambling house and lost months of wages in an evening. He stopped eating. He became irrational in speech, and committed random outbursts of violence. He shot a gun at his own father. The demon began delivering messages through his mouth, of which he had no memory. His desperate family did not know what to do. Speaking through Kwo, Wang Mu-niang began making demands of them. She wanted offerings of incense and other things, which they readily supplied. Still, Kwo’s condition did not improve. He became a pariah in the local community, a dangerous man infected with a demon. His family was terrified and powerless.

One day, Kwo met a Chinese Christian who had converted through the work of an American missionary. The Christian told Kwo Jesus could cure him of his demonic affliction because “Jesus Christ is all-merciful and all-powerful. It is His purpose to deliver us from the dominion of evil spirits; and they flee before Him.” The Christian told Kwo to trust Jesus. He also told him to tear down the shrine and images of Wang Mu-niang in his home. Kwo did. The two then knelt in prayer to Jesus, praying that the demon would leave Kwo alone. Leaving a few books, the Christian departed. About a year later, Kwo met the American missionary, John Livingstone Nevius. Kwo told Nevius that, thanks to Jesus, the demon had left him and never returned. He became an outspoken Christian, and Nevius baptized him along with his wife and children.

Experiences with the likes of Kwo in China convinced Nevius he needed to write a book to persuade people back home about the reality of demon possession in the modern world. Writing in the early 1890s, Nevius felt sure most missionaries went into the field not believing in demon possession. While yet a green missionary himself, Nevius had considered demon possession to be the sort of superstitious nonsense Christianity had moved beyond. His experiences with Kwo and others, however, forced him to reckon with the awful truth that demons still skulked the earth. When he solicited letters on the subject of demon possession from other Protestant missionaries in

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71 Ibid., 18.
72 For the complete version of Kwo’s story, see: Ibid., 16–29.
73 Ibid., 9.
China, Nevius found striking similarities in their experiences. Demons often entered a home through images of non-Christian deities. People who became possessed often delivered messages in the demon’s voice, and had no memory of their words or actions. Audible rappings, tappings, and other strange sensory phenomena often attended the demon’s arrival. Demons caused otherwise good people to lash out in fits of violence, tremors, or sexual impropriety. When people “read the Scriptures, sing hymns, and pray to God,” Nevius noted, the demons usually left. Auditory practices like prayer or singing and visual practices like iconoclasm enabled American Protestant missionaries and native converts to drive out Chinese demons.

Nevius died in 1893, but fundamentalists of the 1910s-20s used his book as an authoritative text about demonic activity. Unlike his contemporaries of the 1880s-90s, fundamentalists no longer needed convincing about the reality of demon possessions in their own times. They were already convinced. The fundamentalists who read Nevius wanted to know what to do with the demons once they manifested. They wanted to know how to distinguish a demon from an illusion. From Nevius’s first-hand reports

74 Ibid., 50–51.
76 James Gray wrote, “[Demons] not only possessed and used human beings in the Old and New Testament days, but they do so in our day. Any who have read Dr. Nevius’ book entitled Demon Possession have no doubt that this is true today in China, as it was in Palestine in the days of Christ. And not only in China, it may be added, but practically in every nation of the earth.” Gray, Satan and the Saint: Or, The Present Darkness and The Coming Light, 55.
and from the Bible’s eyewitness testimony, fundamentalists wanted to extract the rules and classifications governing demonic activity on earth. They wanted to know how to use their bodies to survive the attacks of such a powerful supernatural enemy.

Elizabeth Annabelle Needham, a popular Baptist Bible teacher, also had decidedly embodied understandings of the work of demons.77 According to Needham, demons possessed a peculiar materiality. Unlike angels, they did not possess spiritual bodies. They lost them when God cast Satan and his minions out of Heaven. They had been cursed them to wander the universe in a disembodied state. For this reason, they took special interest in human bodies. “It has always been the primary object of demons,” she observed, “to annoy and injure the bodies of men. Having no bodies of their own since their apostasy, they have special liking for the bodies of men.”78 Demons lusted after human bodies, aimed to harm human bodies, sought to lead human bodies into moral corruption, and worked to “dishonor, abuse, or destroy them.”79 Without bodies of their own, demons posed serious physical dangers to the humans whose bodies they targeted.

77 It is useful to situate Needham theologically, in order to dispel the notion that only Pentecostals cared about spiritual beings. Needham died in 1916, just before the fundamentalist-modernist controversies took full effect at the denominational level. Her husband, George Carter Needham, was an evangelist and regular speaker on the prophecy conference circuit. She published numerous articles, tracts, and books with the likes of MBI’s Christian Workers Magazine and Moody Monthly. Her books became staples of the Moody Press catalogue. In contrast to most pentecostal-leaning “radical” evangelicals, Elizabeth took a firm stand against divine healing. She thought suffering was a necessary part of God’s work in the world. See: Heather D. Curtis, Faith in the Great Physician: Suffering and Divine Healing in American Culture, 1860-1900 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 203–204.
78 Needham, Angels and Demons, 75.
79 Ibid., 70.
Demonic activity overwhelmed a person’s body and caused acute physical harm. One fundamentalist minister asserted that most demons did not have a message to communicate with humans, but merely “seek bodies as the instrument to carry out their own sinful, infamous, and filthy desires.” They looked for bodies already polluted with the sins they wished to commit, then took over all its sensory activity. A person thus possessed by demons completely lost control of their body. Overwhelming the person, the demons aimed to destroy the body and the soul. According to this same preacher, “the effect upon the bodies of those whom they possess is disastrous. They ruin the mind. They ruin the health and happiness.” Demons ruined the people they possessed in body and in soul. Clarence Larkin got even more specific about the physical effects of demon possession. According to him, demons could “cause dumbness, and blindness, and insanity, and the suicidal mania, and personal injuries, and impart supernatural strength, and inflict physical defects and deformities.” Demons caused a host of physical problems in humans. One of these was disease. According to some, demons caused those diseases that “the most scientific diagnostician cannot determine, and the most skillful practitioner cannot cure.” In other words, spiritual reality could explain

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80 Haldeman, Can the Dead Communicate with the Living?, 18.
81 Ibid., 19.
82 Larkin, The Spirit World, 39.
83 Haldeman, Can the Dead Communicate with the Living?, 19.
what medical science could not. Demons caused mysterious illnesses that destroyed lives. They wrecked bodies without regard for people.  

Demons posed grave danger to bodies because they could make humans lose all control over their actions. Demon possession utterly changed the physical characteristics of a person. An alteration in the voice often accompanied a change in behavior, signaling that the demons who occupied a body had completely overwhelmed the personality of the one whose body it was. People spoke with voices not their own. Their bodies acted in ways not their own. The demons made the choices for that person’s body, leading it to sin, corruption, violence, and even death. Nevius observed that when people possessed by demons spoke, they often did so in a voice that suggested the complete loss of their personality: “what is said does not appear to come from their minds or wills, but rather from some other personality, often accompanied by a change of voice.” A possessed person no longer made respectable Christian choices, but acted according to the evil physical impulses of the demons. If they spoke, they spoke with a voice unlike the person’s normal one. A Christian with well-tuned spiritual senses could hear the

84 James Gray attributed the popularity of “mind cures” like Christian Science to Satan’s ability to cause disease. He wrote, “[Satan] knows how much men think of physical life and health; he knows what men will do to save themselves from disease or deliver themselves from it when it comes upon them; he knows that some are ready to sell their souls for the sake of benefiting their bodies. And it is upon this principle, and with reference to this fact, that he influences and holds so many of them today in the subtle snare of Christian Science.” Gray, Satan and the Saint: Or, The Present Darkness and The Coming Light, 16.

85 Nevius, Demon Possession and Allied Themes: Being an Inductive Study of Phenomena of Our Own Times, 49–50.
difference between a demonic voice and a regular one. A demon’s voice sounded different than a person’s, even if it came through the vocal cords of a family member.

Figure 42 - E.J. Pace, "In the 'Snare of the Devil,'" from Christian Cartoons (Chicago: Sunday School Times Co., 1922), n.p.

Images enabled Christians to see the invisible truth of demonic activity. This allowed people to take preemptive measures to stop them before they possessed a body. E.J. Pace’s cartoons sometimes depicted the ways in which a Christian’s behavior invited demonic attacks. One of his cartoons, called “In the ‘Snare of the Devil,’” showed the physical and spiritual consequences of a simple slip-up in religious duty (Figure 42). The image depicted a Christian man in a forest, surrounded by diminutive demons. The man
has fallen off his feet, and the demons have dropped a net on him. He struggles to free himself but remains completely trapped. One demon, labeled “spiritual insensibility,” hammers a stake into the ground to secure the net. This man is going nowhere. Another demon, labeled “sin,” dances a jig on the man’s head. Other demons skip toward the man, delighted that their comrades have captured a new victim. A sign hangs above the man saying, “neglect of prayer.” The image captions suggest that the man’s neglect of prayer made him an easy target for demons. Through his neglect of religious duty, he has become physically trapped in the Devil’s snare.

The tiny demons of this image contrast starkly with the gigantic evil forces of Figure 1. Here, evil is an army of tiny sprites. But the man is still trapped, his body completely under the demons’ influence. The implication seems to be that small choices, such as the choice of not praying, leads to harsh physical and spiritual consequences. A person needed to keep their senses vigilant, seeing the demonic influences at work in the most minor of bodily choices. A good Christian person was supposed to have total mastery over the body. The reality was that demons made it almost impossible to do so. A mere moment of inattention could lead to demonic invasion. Images like this one unveiled the operations of dark forces so Christians could prevent themselves from coming under attack.86

Other Pace cartoons made explicit that non-Christian religious objects and practices harbored demons. Himself a former missionary to the Philippines, Pace knew the demonic dangers that awaited idealistic young missionaries in the field. He depicted these in an image titled “The Missionary Volunteer” (Figure 43). At the center of the image is a determined young Christian man, wearing a suit and tie. His eyes and hands are lifted up towards Heaven, and he says “Here am I, Lord, send me.” He bravely faces the perils of the missionary enterprise. Pace depicts these dangers in circles surrounding the missionary. These range from personal struggles such as “breaking home ties” and
“lonely isolation,” to imminent external threats like “wild beasts” and “inhuman savages.” One circle stands out for its visualization of the threat of “powers of darkness.” Here, Pace shows an image of a skull. It is tied to a pole and held aloft by hair or string, indicating it is a ceremonial object. The figure holding the skull looks like a demon, with pointed ears and bared teeth. It is not clear if this is an actual demon or a ritual specialist wearing a mask. In the context of an image about American missionaries, it hardly matters. The implication is that non-Christian religious traditions are merely masks for the “powers of darkness.” Contact with the ritual objects of non-Christian religions let demons loose. Those who practiced non-Christian religions activated demon presences. In their efforts to win people for Christ, missionaries fought powerful spiritual adversaries lurking in the objects and practices of native religious traditions.87

“The Rain, The Mud, and the Unspeakable Manure”: Fundamentalism vs. Spiritualism for Control of the Spiritual Senses

Clarence Larkin abhorred the Spiritualist movement. He did everything he could to oppose the movement that tried to establish communication between the living and the dead. Though he used the terms “Spiritualism” and “spiritism” interchangeably,

87 Ibid.
Larkin directed his energy against Spiritualism specifically.\textsuperscript{88} Like many fundamentalists, Larkin regarded the modern Spiritualist movement as a dangerous way of rousing dark spiritual forces.\textsuperscript{89} According to a twenty-first-century scholar, Spiritualism was “a new religious movement [of the nineteenth century] aimed at proving the immortality of the soul by establishing communication with the spirits of the dead.”\textsuperscript{90} Spiritualists were certain the spirits of the dead lived forever in another realm. They used a variety of bodily and technological techniques to communicate with the spirits of the dead, who were now living in the spirit world. These included séances, automatic writing, communication through wall tapping, and discerning written messages through the Ouija board. Spiritualism was especially popular among white Protestant women. Women often led séances and other efforts to contact the dead in their own homes.\textsuperscript{91} In the wake of World War I, Spiritualism experienced a major revival

\textsuperscript{88} Anthropologists sometimes use the term “spiritism” to describe the broader phenomena of spirit possessions, communication with ghosts, or other “occult” practices. Spiritualism, by contrast, refers to a British and American religious movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that sought to establish communication between the living and the dead. Larkin opposed the latter.

\textsuperscript{89} In his contribution to The Fundamentals, British evangelist Algernon J. Pollock made it clear that the target of this energy was the Spiritualist movement, not “spiritism” in general. He proclaimed, “Modern Spiritualism claims as its birthday March 31, 1848, and the place of its birth Hydesville, Wayne County, New York, U.S.A.; but it is in reality almost as old as the world’s history, and will go on to its close.” Algernon J. Pollock, “Modern Spiritualism Briefly Tested by Scripture,” in The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth, ed. Reuben A. Torrey and A.C. Dixon, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1917), 166.

\textsuperscript{90} Ann Braude, Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America, Second (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 2.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 3–4; see also: Bret E. Carroll, Spiritualism in Antebellum America: (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 129–130.
in England and the United States. Major artists and scientists like W.B. Yeats, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and Sir Oliver Lodge all supported Spiritualism. So did thousands of ordinary Christians, which made it a major problem for fundamentalist leaders. As far as most fundamentalists were concerned, Spiritualism fell squarely in competition with genuine Christianity as a method for understanding and contacting the spirit world.

Clarence Larkin thought Spiritualism was so influential and dangerous that he framed his book about the spirit world with a grim outline of its flaws. He thought the world needed to know the truth about the spirit world, which meant a dispensationalist account of the Bible’s many passages about spirits. Spiritualism spread lies. It gave false hope that people could contact their dead relatives. It pretended to be scientific, but in fact drew people away from the observable truth. It played with dangerous, dark spiritual powers. Larkin hoped God would use his book about the spirit world to help people escape the snares of Spiritualism. “The prayer of the Author,” he inscribed at the beginning of the book, “is that the Holy Spirit will use the book to free those who are entrapped in the net of ‘Spiritism,’ and cause the curious and the sorrowing to turn to the ‘Word of God’ for help, and the answer to their questioning.” In a similar vein, he ended the book with a plea to his readers. “Dear Reader,” he asked in the closing paragraph,

92 Algernon Pollock guessed that there were 16 million Spiritualists in America by the 1910s. Pollock, “Modern Spiritualism Briefly Tested by Scripture,” 166.
what is your relation to the ‘Spirit World’? Are you yielding yourself to the power and control of ‘Evil Spirits,’ or are you allowing the ‘Holy Spirit’ to have full and complete possession of your life? On your choice depends your Eternal State. Your soul is of priceless value. For its salvation, and the redemption of your body, the Lord Jesus died upon the Cross.\footnote{Ibid., 158.}

Larkin knew with certainty that Jesus died for the salvation of souls and the redemption of bodies. Spiritualism made a mockery out of Jesus’ physical death and resurrection, causing people to yield to the power of evil spirits instead of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritualism imperiled both soul and body.

According to Larkin and many other fundamentalists, Spiritualists regularly consorted with demons. In fact, the entire spiritualist enterprise consisted of nothing less than summoning demons, speaking with demons, and encouraging demons to do their evil work on earth. Worse still, spiritualists propped up the demonic messages, allegedly from “the spirits,” as authoritative revelations. It established a slippery slope. If the spirits of the dead communicated with the living, there was no need for the Bible as a source of truth about the spiritual world. Then, according to one dispensationalist preacher, “The Bible is, therefore, logically set aside; and when that goes, Christianity, as set forth in the Bible, goes.”\footnote{Haldeman, \textit{Can the Dead Communicate with the Living?}, 122.} Spiritualism was a dangerous, demonic religion, no matter the professed Christianity of its practitioners. The same preacher likened Spiritualism to an infectious disease, suggesting it would “submerge multitudes, specially in the great
Like a virus, Spiritualism spread through contact with “infected” people. Cities faced the greatest risk. To combat this grave, modern danger, fundamentalists developed sophisticated understandings that placed spiritualist experiences within a biblical sensory matrix. Based on their own sensory understandings of the spirit world, fundamentalists argued that Spiritualism invited demons to play. It led Christians away from the truth of the Bible, away from Christianity, and ultimately away from God.

Fundamentalists insisted the “spirit voices” contacted through séances gave false views of Heaven because the spirits of the dead did not themselves speak. Demons did. According to Bible commentators, Christians who died went to Heaven immediately and never came back. God did not permit them to communicate with the living. People who died and were not Christians also could not speak to the living from beyond the grave. When spiritualists claimed to have made contact with the dead in the afterlife, they were mistaken. The dead did not speak. Any spirit voices, rappings, tappings, or other inexplicable phenomena of the séance owed to the materialization of demons. James Gray put the matter unequivocally, “That mediums can receive communications from another world there is no doubt, nor is there any doubt that their communications

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96 Ibid., 132.
97 Haldeman expressed the standard view: “The Christian dead do not come back; nor do they in any wise communicate with the living,” Ibid., 28.
are from evil spirits, for the Bible confirms both propositions.\footnote{Gray, \textit{Spiritism and the Fallen Angels in the Light of the Old and New Testaments}, 11.} According to fundamentalist readings of the Bible, spiritualist mediums did make contact with the spiritual world. However, they were wrong to think the messages they received came from the spirits of the dead. Instead, they came from evil spirits. In particular, a specific class of fallen angels called “lying spirits,” “wandering spirits,” or “seducing spirits” conveyed messages through mediums, often masquerading as the Christian dead.\footnote{Haldeman, \textit{Can the Dead Communicate with the Living?}, 49–50.}

Unlike other detractors of Spiritualism, fundamentalists did not question the supernatural nature of the phenomena spiritualists encountered. They agreed that people heard and saw and felt things at spiritualist gatherings that only the spiritual senses could explain. They merely questioned the source of those phenomena.

In short, fundamentalists said spiritualists got the facts wrong. They thought they were experiencing and measuring supernatural phenomena that formed an extension of the present world. They were actually experiencing the material powers of demons from the spirit world, manifested in the physical world. In June and July of 1918, with American casualties mounting in World War I, \textit{The Christian Workers Magazine} ran a two-part article series about the “perils” of Spiritualism. The author divided spiritualist phenomena into two categories: objective phenomena and subjective phenomena. Objective phenomena included the unexplainable movement of bodies, the “production
of abnormal sounds,” the appearance of writing not produced through a person, “voices distinct from those of the medium and experimenter, soft or loud,” luminous appearances or “spirit lights,” and the materialization of faces, hands, or bodies.

Subjective phenomena occurred when demons controlled the mind, tongue, or hand of the medium. These included phenomena such as “clairvoyance or abnormal seeing, clairaudience or abnormal hearing,” automatic writing, speeches given by a medium in trance, appearances in crystal balls, and “psychometry or the power to describe from the touch of an article the place and mode of its manufacture and its history.” Such phenomena were not evidence of the medium’s contact with the dead, of the deep continuity between this world and the spirit world. Rather, they demonstrated the pernicious work of demons. They demonstrated the great dissimilarity between this world and the spirit world, and the demons’ ability to manipulate the physical world.

Spiritualism did not have the proper understandings of the senses to make sense of these phenomena. For example, the author explained clairvoyance and clairaudience as effects of “spirit-hypnotism,” in which “the medium does not actually see the scenes and persons described, but sees mental pictures of them produced by spirits in much the same way in which a hypnotizer produces images in the mind of his subject.”

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101 Ibid.
Some fundamentalists also took issue with Spiritualism’s claims to be scientific. A.T. Pierson argued that Spiritualism could not be considered science because it created such terrible effects. Unlike science, he declared, Spiritualism “has never led to any beneficial goal.” He enumerated its usual ends, stating “it has promoted vague and visionary notions, and a dreamy life, and sometimes landed men in insanity. [...] those who become familiar with spirit phenomena often wander into immorality and sensuality.”¹⁰² In the eyes of many fundamentalists, Spiritualism attributed false causes to phenomena. This made it unscientific. It failed to recognize the agency of demons in the supernatural occurrences observed in its communities and rituals. According to Pierson, real science provided a tangible benefit to society. Spiritualism, despite its appeal to scientific types like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Sir Oliver Lodge, was not real science. It was vague, visionary, and unbiblical, producing no positive benefit to society. By extension, fundamentalism became the modern, scientific, biblical way of understanding spiritual phenomena.

But fundamentalists also thought Spiritualism was dangerous because it caused immorality, insanity, and even sexual licentiousness. Spiritualism, Pierson alleged, had not only “helped stock asylums with insane patients,” but it had also “broken up pure family life by new ‘spiritual affinities.’”¹⁰³ The accusation that Spiritualists put “spiritual

¹⁰² Pierson, The Bible and Spiritual Life, 190.
¹⁰³ Ibid.
affinities” above “pure family life” was a two-pronged argument about women’s religious leadership and sexuality. Pierson suggested that Spiritualists give improper religious authority to women. Women spoke to the spirits, women led gatherings that contacted the spirits, women interpreted spirit communications in relation to their Christianity. They did not need authorized men to contact the other world. They did not need the Bible to tell them how to reach the spirit world. Second, all of Spiritualism’s women-led gatherings in the home weakened patriarchal authority over family life. They challenged the notion of male “headship” over the home. By conducting Spiritualist rituals in their family parlors, Pierson thought women opened their home to authorities other than their husbands and therefore threatened family stability.

Fundamentalists seemed very concerned that good Christians might be deceived by the demonic pretenders who spoke as the spirits during séances. Misinterpretations of supernatural phenomena were one thing, but the demons who spoke through mediums often pretended to be angels, Christians, or even Jesus himself. They were lying spirits, whose sole aim was to deceive people and advance Satan’s cause. Thus, fundamentalists took pains to demonstrate that Christianity and Spiritualism had nothing in common. In a series on Spiritualism in The Christian Workers Magazine, the author explained that any supernatural phenomena associated with Spiritualism were

104 A.T. Pierson argued “Evil spirits acquire their greatest power from their subtility [sic.]. They are masters of the art of deception, and aim to counterfeit that which is good rather than suggest what is obviously and wholly evil.” Ibid., 169.
“bad imitations of Christ.” 105 Jesus, the author insisted, “did not cause tables to dance, pencils to write, or ‘astral’ forces to be withdrawn from unconscious and convulsed persons.” 106 When Jesus healed people or raised the dead, he did it in the full light of day. He healed bodies, real bodies. He dealt with conscious persons, not unconscious ones. He did not restore people to “some kind of ‘astral’ or semi-material body,” but to their original bodies. 107

With lying demons speaking through mediums and pretending to speak with the voice of dead Christians, it begged the question of how a person could determine the truth. Fundamentalists wanted to know how a person could decide if a spiritual message was coming from a fallen angel or a good one, from Satan or from God. In his essay in The Fundamentals, “Modern Spiritualism Briefly Tested by Scripture,” British writer Algernon J. Pollock suggested that the name of Jesus was one of the most powerful tools a Christian could use to expose the demonic sources of spirit communications. He told of a Christian woman from Bradford, England whose Spiritualist neighbor begged her to come to a séance. After repeated entreaties, the Christian woman finally relented. She agreed to attend one séance if the neighbor would never ask her to attend again. At the meeting, the medium sensed trouble. Without ever having met the Christian, she declared to those gathered that a Christian was present

106 Ibid., 870.
107 Ibid.
and the meeting could not proceed until the person left. The Christian remained seated, and the medium tried to make contact with the spirits. It didn’t work. Again, she announced that a Christian was present and had to leave in order for the spirits to manifest. The Christian lady left at this point. According to the neighbor, “the meeting proceeded after she left without any further difficulty.” Pollock took this as positive proof of the demonic source of the spirit communications and the superior power of Jesus. “Such is the power of Christ’s name,” he concluded. The mere presence of a Christian impeded the demonic actors from taking material form.108

When the mere presence of a Christian did not dissuade “the spirits” from speaking, Christians had an auditory litmus test they could use to determine if a message came from a demonic source. Pollock noted, “Scripture furnishes a simple but thorough test of every system of teaching.” That test involved asking the spirit to say the name of Jesus, to admit that he came in the flesh as the Son of God, and to say “Jesus is the Lord.” If the spirit could not do it, it was a demon. Good spirits could speak the name of Jesus and admit that he was the Lord, but demons could not.109 Spoken words had a material presence that drove out demons. The name of Jesus, spoken aloud,

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109 Ibid.
brought the material sound of words into a space. This claimed the space for Christ and nullified the power of any demons that might be present.\

Fundamentalist opponents of Spiritualism often expressed sympathy for the desire to contact dead loved ones. They were especially aware of the interest in spiritual communications created by the mass death of World War I. The firebrand dispensationalist pastor of First Baptist Church in New York, Isaac M. Haldeman, showed a surprisingly tender understanding of people’s desire for contact with dead loved ones. He opened his book about Spiritualism by stating that “the indescribable war” had produced “a holocaust of slain” as its outcome. And the dead did not die well. Battlefield death rent lives asunder. He elegized the war dead, stating, “They went [...] as when the song in its loftiest lilt quivers, breaks, the refrain is hushed and there is only the chorus of choking sobs and the rain of tears.” The real tragedy, however, was that “the living will not let them go.” Haldeman conveyed deep pathos in his admission that he too felt the desire to contact relatives who died young. “I am a father,” he wrote, “I have lost an only son who was an only child. [...] My heart is buried in his grave.” Despite his desire as a grieving father to contact his dead son, his commitment

\[\text{Footnotes:}\]
\[\text{111} \text{Haldeman,} \text{Can the Dead Communicate with the Living?}, 7.\]
\[\text{112} \text{Ibid., 8.}\]
\[\text{113} \text{Ibid.}\]
\[\text{114} \text{Ibid., 51–52.}\]
to the Bible forbade spirit communication. No matter how much he longed to speak to his son again, he knew he should not do it. He wrote a whole book devoted to the topic of Spiritualism, titling it *Can the Dead Communicate with the Living?* His answer was a firm “no.” The dead did not communicate with the living, no matter what spiritualists claimed. There were many facts to prove it.

Haldeman objected to Spiritualism because it presented a faulty understanding of the sensory realities of the afterlife. He spent nearly an entire chapter decrying Sir Oliver Lodge’s 1916 spiritualist book, *Raymond or Life and Death with Examples of the Evidence for Survival of Memory and Affection after Death.* Lodge’s book described séances he and his wife attended, in which they contacted their son Raymond who had died in battle near Ypres, Belgium. Speaking through a medium, Raymond told of his experiences in the afterlife, including his new brick house, his new tooth, and the pounding rain of the spirit world. He told his parents that he received a new suit in the afterlife, which was made from the gas emanating off piles of fluff left over from the wool worsting process. He smelled odors foul and pleasant in the afterlife, got dirty in the afterlife, made friends with a dog, and even contended with manure. According to Haldeman, these alleged accounts of the spirit world were altogether too offending to the senses, to be genuine accounts of Heaven. In contrast to the itchy, smelly, soggy spiritualist heaven, Haldeman taught that the real Heaven was a place of sensory wonders:
Compare, I pray you, the Golden City, the New Jerusalem, the home of those who die in the faith of Christ, that city with its jeweled foundations, its jasper walls, its gates of pearl, its palaces and streets of gold […] compare that city and its glories with Raymond’s brick house, the rain, the mud, and the unspeakable manure. Compare the Heaven of God’s saints with its tall angels, with the harpers harping with their harps, with the seraphim singing their thrice holy song, ‘holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,’ that Heaven where all is righteousness, intensity of spotless purity, and where the fashion is holiness, with the heaven of Spiritism, its dogs, cats, its putrefying smells, its brandy sodas, cigars, and meat. Compare the robe given to the saint who enters the upper city, the robe woven on the looms of eternal light, in the scintillating white of the essential holiness of God, with the English tweed and worsted suits manufactured out of the effluvia, gas, or atoms ascending from the rotting and putrefying things of earth.\(^{115}\)

To Haldeman, the real Heaven promised sensory joy. Glittering gold, angelic songs, and robes woven on looms of eternal light would delight the spirit body’s senses for all eternity. The heaven of Spiritualism, by contrast, was “pitiful stuff.”\(^{116}\) Anywhere with rain, poorly made suits, cats, and manure surely could not be Heaven. Spiritualists had all the sensations of Heaven all wrong.

**“The Age of Faith, and Not the Age of Sight”: The Materiality of the Spirit World**

Never one to mince words, Arno Gaebeliein took the stage at Moody Bible Institute’s Founder’s Week Prayer and Bible Conference in 1922 on a mission. He was going to expose the demonic activity behind claims of miraculous healing. In a series of swashbuckling invectives, he proclaimed that demons produced the many healings that

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\(^{115}\) Ibid., 59–60.
\(^{116}\) Ibid., 61.

Though he took aim at practically every religious movement except dispensationalism, Gaebelein saved his most vitriolic criticisms for fundamentalism’s sibling: Pentecostalism. Over the period from 1907-1922, Gaebelein had become increasingly hostile toward Pentecostalism. He published numerous anti-Pentecostal and anti-healing articles in his journal Our Hope and engaged in a very public war of words with the world’s most famous Pentecostal preacher: Aimee Semple McPherson.¹²⁰ In the speech at MBI, Gaebelein criticized Pentecostalism for its sensory differences with his own brand of Christianity.¹²¹ He took particular issue with the way the gift of

¹¹⁸ Ibid.
¹¹⁹ Ibid.
¹²¹ Gaebelein’s speech was part of a much broader effort by MBI to cleanse any whiff of Pentecostalism from its ranks. As early as 1907, MBI administrators declared that any student found speaking in tongues would be expelled immediately. As time went on, “respectable” middle-class fundamentalist institutions like MBI came increasingly to define themselves against “radical” Pentecostalism. Gaebelein’s invective, though
tongues sounded. “According to these Pentecostal meetings,” he chimed, “the emblem of the Spirit ought to be a hideous screech owl, or a loud mouth parrot which talks without knowing what it says. Only a spiritual imbecile can think or imagine that this is of God.” Pentecostals themselves heard people speaking with the tongues of angels. To them, it was a miracle. Gaebelein heard moronic parrots and piercing screech owls. It did not sound like the kind of sounds God allowed people to make. But there was more. Pentecostalism’s most sacred evidence of God’s action on earth was not just noise. Gaebelein proclaimed, “It is the work of demons pure and simple.”

Gaebelein rehearsed well-worn arguments about the cessation of miraculous gifts in New Testament times. But his perspective on the materiality of spiritual presences showed just how complicated it was for fundamentalists to make their way through an enchanted modern world.

Gaebelein asserted that genuine Christianity did not need miracles anymore. He considered speaking in tongues, healings, and other miracles to be more characteristic of the early part of the dispensation than the present. “Miracles and signs,” he argued, “were prominent in the beginning of this dispensation for they were needed then. The beginning of the age was Jewish and the Jew ‘asks for a sign.’ He wants to see and then

seemingly harsh, was a late development in this longer historical trajectory. Gloege, Guaranteed Pure: The Moody Bible Institute, Business, and the Making of Modern Evangelicalism, 135–137.

122 Gaebelein, “Christianity vs. Modern Cults,” 860.
believe.”¹²³ Before the completion of the New Testament, Gaebelein continued, the earliest Jewish converts to Christianity needed signs and wonders in order to accept Christianity. He based this claim on racial presumptions about Jews—specifically, that they were “materialistic” and needed physical evidence, like miracles of healing, before they would embrace Christianity. Once the New Testament was complete, Gaebelein argued, the true character of the present dispensation flowered: “It became as it is still, the age of Faith, and not the age of sight. The heavens became silent. No more revelation, no more vision, no more prophetic, no more angelic manifestations, no more miracles. Man is to believe, to trust, to walk by faith.”¹²⁴ For Gaebelein, Christianity was a matter of “faith.” It was not about signs. Miracles did not happen.

Gaebelein believed demons healed bodies. He acknowledged that miraculous healings were real. For him, such healings gave evidence of demonic activity on earth. Likewise, he did not suggest that Pentecostals were “making up” the gift of tongues, creating human sounds with human voices. Instead, he suggested that demons produced the miraculous sounds and that people misidentified them as divine. In his world, demons were real. Demons had power in the world of sensation.

In order to understand what “faith” meant to Gaebelein, it is important not to presume it was wholly intellectual. While it is true that he shouted from the rooftops

¹²³ Ibid., 862.
¹²⁴ Ibid.
that his is “the age of faith, not the age of sight,” significant assumptions about the spiritual senses undergird his claims. For him, faith, real faith, genuine faith, had its greatest reality in the spirit world. For Gaebelein, faith was about grand cosmic forces and beings from another realm. Demons came from the spirit world and operated in this one. They reached down and muddied the sensory waters here on earth so Christians would be lured away from Christianity. Demons tried to make people more concerned with physical things like healing rather than spiritual realities—like the demonic source of miraculous healing.

Gaebelein recognized “faith” was more than a disembodied intellectual process. He argued that a real Christian, a faithful Christian, would see any alleged healing “miracle” for what it really was. In his estimation, a modern miracle was nothing more than a manipulation of sensory perception by a demonic actor. There was nothing really “miraculous” happening in a miraculous healing, despite what some people believed. The truth was plain for those with well-trained spiritual senses. Modern miracles seemed to happen because people misunderstood the sensory evidence. Gaebelein suggested that real Christians never took sensory evidence at face value. For him, living in “the age of faith” meant learning to recognize the ways spiritual

forces operated in the physical world. In his own words, Gaebelein’s dispensation was
“the age of faith, and not the age of sight.”

Scholars of fundamentalism miss important evidence if they take such statements to mean that the senses did not matter to fundamentalists. Clearly, they did. Pentecostalism sounded wrong to Arno Gaebelein. The seemingly miraculous sensations of divine healing were really just the ordinary actions of demons in the physical world. It took the right ways of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching to discern the truth about the spirit world in this, the age of faith.
Conclusion: Food for Christian Life and the Smell of Hell

“So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.” – Revelation 3:16

This project has examined four of the fundamentalist senses: sight, hearing, touch, and the spiritual senses. I have argued that sensation provides a useful new approach to the study of fundamentalist history. Far from just a collection of ideas, fundamentalism built upon a foundation of sensation. The story I have sketched in these pages challenges some conventional assumptions about fundamentalist history. Though they certainly cared about doctrines, the fundamentalists we have encountered in these pages were also deeply concerned about bodies. They cared how people’s bodies interacted with the world. Objects and images shaped their lived experiences of Christianity. Their Christian communities coalesced around shared sensations.

Sensation established the shared frameworks of understanding and gut-level assumptions that enabled the rise of fundamentalism. As modes of sensation changed in the late-nineteenth century, American Protestants found themselves confronting new kinds of embodied issues, tackling new kinds of material projects, facing new kinds of perceived threats to their bodies. Fundamentalists used every new sensory trick modernity afforded them. These new articulations of sensation helped them confront the challenges of a changing society. They forged new ways of being Christian that relied on
visual schematics of truth, privatized sonic environments, shared tactile experiences, and specific embodied knowledge of the spiritual world.

The structure of this dissertation begs the question: what about taste and smell? Any examination of fundamentalist sensation would be incomplete without a mention of these other senses. In a longer project, I would have written chapters about these too. However, I have used the current structure to reinforce a central argument of this dissertation. By looking at three “common” senses and one “sixth” sense, the structure of the dissertation supports the idea of the cultural formation of the senses. Culture determines the kinds of sensory experiences people have. Culture prioritizes some kinds of sensation at the expense of others. While it is true that fundamentalists also smelled and tasted, they valued vision, hearing, touch, and the spiritual senses more than these.

Yet another reason I did not pursue smell and taste is the problem of the archive. Anyone who has studied fundamentalism can attest that fundamentalist archives can be tricky to navigate. When university-based scholars are permitted access to the necessary information at all, we usually confront the hard realities of preservation: fundamentalists rarely kept their own archives because they were too busy performing the Lord’s work. Usually, we are at the mercy of their descendants’ judgment when it came to what was worth preserving. A chart here or there is a godsend. No less a figure than Billy Sunday very nearly lost his archive completely—the librarians of Grace College in Winona Lake, Indiana had to go dumpster diving to save what they could
when Helen Sunday died. I had enough trouble convincing people I wanted to see original photographs and charts rather than read theological book manuscripts, or to hear original sound recordings rather than read songbooks on microfilm. At Dallas Theological Seminary, I was told I was the first person ever to look through their extensive collection of prophecy charts. I suspect I would have raised more than a few eyebrows if I had also asked to smell Cyrus Scofield’s cologne. I stuck to what was possible given the available archival evidence.

Smell is particularly difficult to—ahem—sniff out in the fundamentalist archive. But it wafts here and there amid the dusty stacks of theological treatises. R.A. Torrey’s sensory-laden descriptions of Hell, found in his book Letters from Hell, contained several scenes of unpleasant scents. His first-person narrator described how a river ran through hell and was “fed by the falsehood and injustice of the world.”¹ On days when earth’s inhabitants behaved particularly wickedly, the river would flood, “leaving stench and pestilence behind it.”² In other words, sin stunk. It produced noxious odors that assaulted the spiritual nostrils of Hell’s inhabitants.

In a scene later in the book, Torrey’s narrator tears a page from Marcel Proust to describe the intense connection between olfaction and autobiographical memory. In Hell, the narrator moans, there are no flowers of any kind. Not even wilted ones. “Those

2 Ibid.
millions of perfumed blossoms [on earth],” he pines, “are the vouchers of love eternal—the sparkling pearls of the cup which runneth over, given by God to man.” If flowers on earth are vouchers of God’s eternal love, the presence of floral smells in Hell are some of its most intimate torments. The narrator explains that a pleasant smell from a flower will sometimes seem to enter the nostrils of the inhabitant of hell. The smell is completely imaginary, but the effect is real. When these smells manifest, “the sweet incense has power to call up, not feelings merely, but visions on which we love to dwell—the spell of vanished enjoyment.” Smell connects the sufferer in Hell with the pleasant memories of friends, happy experiences, and intense love. These are exactly the sorts of pleasures which are now lost forever. The imagined perfumes of different flowers carry specific memories with them. The smell of a rose reminds the narrator of a special moment on a trip to Venice. In St. Mark’s Square, a former love kissed a rose and gave it to him. “O happy thought,” he recollects, “let me hold it fast … alas it has vanished… transient as the wafted odor itself!” Evanescent odors overwhelm the inhabitants of Hell with memories of their former lives, reminding them of all their lost pleasures and former potential. The smell of flowers provides personalized torment rooted in recollection and personal reflection.

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3 Ibid., 230.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., 232.
A chapter on smell in fundamentalism would pursue the connection between olfaction and memory. It would ask how smell contributed to fundamentalists’ understandings of their own Christian autobiographies. Maybe the world smelled different after salvation. The chapter would examine how fundamentalists hierarchized good smells and bad smells. It seems clear that they made a strong association between bad smells and sinfulness. A full chapter would follow this line of inquiry through the archive, asking how fundamentalists understood the stink of sin to operate. I would also ask about the social hierarchies that influenced interpretations of smell. George Orwell famously declared that the history of class in England could be summed up in the sentence: *the lower classes smell.*[^1] I would start my examination with missionary reports, to determine how poor people, immigrants, and indigenous inhabitants of distant lands smelled to fundamentalist missionaries. I would explore how an invisible sense like smell registered racial, class, and other social hierarchies.

A chapter on fundamentalist taste would start with cookbooks. By the 1940s, cookbooks became the financial lifeblood of many fundamentalist women’s auxiliary societies. Sold as fundraisers, church cookbooks contained the accumulated wisdom of generations of home cooks, along with scripture readings, snippets of advice, home remedies, and even jokes. But it was not just local churches that claimed a slice of that pie. Larger organizations capitalized on the financial opportunity presented by

cookbooks too. Frances Youngren, director of Moody Bible Institute radio’s “Home Hour,” published a collection of recipes in *Food for the Body, Food for the Soul*. It included such classic dishes as “victory meat muffins,” “pineapple mounds,” and “spaghetti ring with asparagus and eggs.” The latter consisted of spaghetti noodles pressed into a bundt cake pan, topped with asparagus and hard-boiled eggs.7

Youngren’s book mixed practical advice for home managers with Christian principles for women. It included mundane suggestions such as tips for how to buy the best meat for cheap, but it also included meditations on food-related scripture passages and scripture-related food ideas. One section mixed a discussion about vitamins in food with a description of the essential “nutrients” required for Christian life. According to Youngren, a Christian could not live a proper life without healthy doses of Vitamin A and Vitamin B, by which she meant “Vitamin Acceptance” and “Vitamin Belief.” “The joyous exuberance of youth and the hearty vigor of old age,” she explained, “owe their existence to Vitamin A, acceptance vitamin, and their continued well-being to Belief Vitamin.”8 Cookbooks blended cooking advice with advice for Christian living. That advice was almost always aimed toward women, particularly to women in the role of “housewife.” Youngren’s foreword noted, “The home was established by God and in His plan for mankind. The family unit is that upon which the whole structure of

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7 Frances Youngren, *Food: For the Body, for the Soul* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1943), 35.
8 Ibid., 17.
humanity and the fabric of civilization rests. If the home goes, the nation goes.”

Any study of fundamentalist taste would have to examine how cookbooks contributed to gender norms.

Fundamentalists were among the first generation of Americans to think about nutrition, not just food. The discovery of vitamins, along with advances in food preservation and food processing technology, meant that people became concerned about the nutrients that constituted good health. Mary Wood-Allen, the physician whose work I examined in chapter three, argued that young Christian women should not be “hampered by ‘don’ts’ and restrictions as to what you shall eat.” Nevertheless, they were supposed to think seriously about their diet and abide by the principle that “eating is to be governed by judgment and not by the pleasures of sense.” Every nutrient was supposed to matter. Christians were supposed to eat only “healthful” food. “Why do we eat?” she asked rhetorically, “Not merely because the food tastes good. There is a better reason. We eat to live.” Christians were supposed to eat in order to gain the nutrients required to survive, not for silly reasons like food’s good taste. Wood-Allen suggested a reasonable diet of “plain meat, vegetables, fruits, cereals, milk and

9 Ibid., 6.
11 Some of this territory has been covered by Marie Griffith’s discussion of Christian dieting in the nineteenth century. R. Marie Griffith, Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2004), 23–68.
13 Ibid., 34.
14 Ibid.
eggs, plainly prepared” but vigilant avoidance of “rich pastries, cakes, puddings, pickles and sweetmeats.” Coffee, she reminded readers, was not even food at all, but one of several popular “nerve-poisons” that offered no contribution whatsoever to the nourishment of the body.\textsuperscript{15} A chapter on fundamentalist taste would have to draw from the Marie Griffith recipe book, asking how fundamentalists imagined that restricting the enjoyment of food contributed to their spiritual development.

I would also explore how a focus on nutrients in the body contributed to fundamentalists’ understanding of spiritual growth and development. Fundamentalists often described non-Christian people as being “hungry for the gospel.” This described either a strong perceived interest in Christianity or a strong perceived need for Christianity. The solution was to provide spiritual nourishment to these “hungry” people in the form of Christian preaching, Bibles, or other Christian literature. E.J. Pace once depicted spiritual hunger in a cartoon (Figure 44).\textsuperscript{16} In it, a man cries hungrily, “Bread! Bread!!” A hand labeled “the new theology” holds up a diamond in front of the man’s mouth. The diamond is labeled “a merely human Christ.” The image is a complex metaphor for spiritual nourishment. The diamond might look appealing, but it does not contain adequate nutrients to support a Christian’s spiritual growth and development. The image contends that the modernist notion of a Christ as an exemplary human but

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 35.  
not a divine being cannot sustain Christian life. A Christian will starve and die without hearing the right kind of preaching, without ingesting the right scriptural teachings on a regular basis.

![Image](image.jpg)

**Figure 44 - E.J. Pace from Christian Cartoons (Chicago: Sunday School Times Co., 1922)**

My examination of the senses of fundamentalism is far from exhaustive. It has never been the goal. I have aimed instead to look afresh at a familiar story. I have tried to turn fundamentalism on its head by shifting scholarly focus from brains to bodies. The people and actions outlined in these pages aim to prompt further discussion rather than provide the final word.
Fundamentalism provides a useful test case for material culture approaches to the study of religion. If we can demonstrate that shared ways of sensing held *fundamentalists* together, of all people, surely material culture can provide significant insight into other religious groups as well. A study of the fundamentalist senses encourages scholars of religion to rethink our assumptions about what makes religious groups cohere. To be sure, institutions and ideas created backbones for many religious groups. But we should not assume this is the case everywhere at all times. In some cases, we have mistaken fingers for backbones. We have assigned values to ideas and institutions that would be unrecognizable to the people who lived with them.

Fundamentalists did care about ideas. However, they recognized ideas as having real substance. Faith, orthodoxy, and tradition were not abstract concepts to fundamentalists. They had sensory presence. They produced real effects on people’s bodies. Fundamentalism happened when people felt uneasy in the presence of séances. It happened when they felt certain that an image conveyed the truth of the scriptures. It happened when they heard the powerful sounds of Christian fellowship over the air. Fundamentalism happened when people put on their shirts and dresses. It happened when ordinary people encountered angels and demons doing extraordinary things.
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Biography

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