Summer 7-1-2022

Catastrophic Christianity: an Iconological Study of the Messianic Idea in American Protestant Christianity Circa 1900-1940

Adam D. J. Brett
Syracuse University

ABSTRACT

A historically variegated emblem of trust and faith, the messianic idea is the offer of religion to the people for salvation from the coming catastrophe. This dissertation analyzes the messianic idea in "America." The foci of the study are popular messianic figurations that serve as heuristic devices to explicate early 20th century U.S. culture, revealing two ideological impulses that encapsulate collective responses to the anxieties of the age: authoritarian-populism and catastrophic-utopianism. Four case studies, encompassing four different genres of media, define and illustrate these ideological impulses: *The Fundamentals*, Superman comic books, Bruce Barton's capitalist Christianity, and *The Wizard of Oz* film. These iconic figures reflect respectively: a fundamentalist and nostalgic desire for the past; libidinal authoritarianism; commodification of religion; and the triumph of grift and hucksterism. Together, these figures constellate the messianic idea in "America," a collective investment in an elongated historical present, which, in turn, colonizes psycho-social space with increasingly entrenched images that congeal into icons overtime. The messianic idea in "America" is best understood iconologically rather than theologically. As an icon, messianism's primary contributions to the "American" cosmovision are a paranoid catastrophic-utopianism and religiously inflected authoritarian-populism.

Catastrophic Christianity:
An Iconological study of the Messianic Idea in American Protestant Christianity Circa 1900-1940

By

Adam DJ Brett

B.A., Warner University, 2006

M.T.S., Brite Divinity School, 2009

Th.M., Brite Divinity School, 2011

M.Phil., Syracuse University, 2014

Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Religion

Syracuse University

July 2022

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is dedicated to Stephanie M. Wyatt.

Thank you for always believing in me.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Preface

Icons are everywhere. The United States is suffused with icons, phone icons, desktop icons, IKON, etc. Icons are used to mark and brand everything from money to corporations to people and, of course, to religious spaces. In a landscape overflowing with icons, perhaps none are more common than Christological icons. Churches of course are filled with icons of Jesus Christ; likewise Christians adorn their homes and bodies with Christological icons. Christological icons, like the cross, proliferate to such an extent that Supreme Court Justice Samuel A. Alito, Jr. argues in *American Legion v. American Humanist* (2018), "With sufficient time, religiously expressive monuments, symbols and practices can become embedded features of a community's landscape and identity. The community may come to value them without necessarily embracing their religious roots."[1] While icons may indeed become embedded within culture, I will argue that icons, like the cross, cannot escape their religious connotations.

According to Martin E. Marty, the United States is a landscape suffused with icons ranging from the Bible to John Wayne to Oprah Winfrey.[2] Initially this suffusion of icons may come as a surprise considering America's religious history. Namely, the Puritans were rather famously iconophobic: they worshipped in unadorned meeting halls with their piety marked solely by the presence of a bare podium.[3] Puritans purged icons from their meeting halls out of disdain, yet it is this self-same disdain that charges icons and images with such vast power. Those who revile icons invest at least the same, if not more, feeling as those who revere icons.[4]

---

[1] Samuel A. Alito Jr., "The American Legion v. American Humanist Association," 588 U.S. ___ (2019) § Majority Opinion (2019), https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/588/17-1717/.
[2] Martin E. Marty, "America's Iconic Book," http://www.illuminos.com/mem/selectPapers/contentsSelectList.html; Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011); Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., 2021)
[3] Madeline H. Caviness, "Iconoclasm and Iconophobia: Four Historical Case Studies," *Diogenes* 50, no. 3 (August 1, 2003): 99–114, https://doi.org/10.1177/03921921030503008. 102.
[4] Ibid, 99.

Both the iconoclast and the iconodule, i.e., an icon venerator, understand the power of an icon. In short, iconoclasts and iconodules are flip sides of the same coin.

In U.S. Protestantism icons serve as a powerful animating force. Mark C. Taylor and David Morgan note three specific possibilities for the icon's power in this theological tradition: 1.) "the attempt to represent the unrepresentable," 2.) the "spiritual significance" of an icon, and 3.) the "pedagogical value of the visual arts."[5] For Christians, all three of these elements are tied directly to Jesus Christ. For trinitarian Christians, God dwells in three persons: God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Of these, only Jesus Christ held a temporal form and then only briefly. Thus, how does one represent the irrepresentable trinity? The concept of the trinity is difficult to convey when one lacks access to either physical or mental symbols. While representational images convey a sense of meaning and identity, icons carry a felt spiritual significance.[6] Lastly, Christian iconography encodes a pedagogical question visible in theological reflections on the *imago Dei* (image of God), *imitatio Dei* (imitation of God), and *imitatio Christi* (imitation of Christ). In 20th century evangelical Christianity, Charles Sheldon's question -- "What Would Jesus Do?" — has likewise played this kind of a significant and visible pedagogical role.

In the United States of America, the feedback loop created by evangelical Protestants' disdain for icons presents the inescapable and impossible dilemma posed by images serving as the imitation of Christ. The evangelical Christian wishes to imitate Christ without falling into idolatry or heresy, yet evangelical Christians will often see icons of Jesus everywhere. Mass culture is suffused with representations of Jesus in manifest, as well as latent, or even subliminal, form and these messianic icons proliferate throughout American culture. These representations

---

[5] Mark C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1998). 2; David Morgan, *Protestants & Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5–10.

[6] Whether that is a Bible, Warner Sallman's "The Boy Christ" painting, or a piece of mass culture, like Superman or The Wizard of Oz. David Morgan, *Visual Piety a History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 130–49.

do not simply stop at Christological figures but also include a wide range of crypto-messianic figures. Crypto-messianic figures are caught between the Jesus and Christ of Scripture and "American" *communitas*, as imagined.

Iconology and Pan-imagism

Media theorist WJT Mitchell defines iconology as the "study of the "logos" (the words, ideas, discourse, or 'science') of "icons": (images, pictures, or likenesses). It is thus a "'rhetoric of images' in a double sense: first, as a study of 'what to say about images'…and 'what images say.'"[7] Unlike Panofsky, Mitchell situates this double tradition within the long history of iconology, not starting in the Renaissance, but instead moving further back to the biblical account of creation. Mitchell argues, "In a broader sense, the critical study of the icon begins with the idea that human beings are created 'in the image and likeness' of their creator and culminates, rather less grandly, in the modern science of 'image- making' in advertising and propaganda."[8] Here Mitchell situates icons and iconology squarely within Christian and Jewish theology.[9] For Mitchell, iconology's etiology rests in the theology of the *imago Dei* (image of God). Mitchell connects the idea of *imago Dei* to the modern science of image-making in the form of advertising as propaganda. The long history of icons and iconology weaves seamlessly into the also long history of messianism and messianic figures.

Iconology is the study of icons and iconography in their broadest possible sense. Within Christian theology, *imago Dei* contextualizes the Pauline emphasis on the human imitation of Christ (Ephesians 5:1–1 NRSV). If humans are created in the image of God and are called to be followers of God, to live holy and virtuous lives, so too must they be imitators of God's Son

[7] Mitchell, *Iconology*, 2.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Later in *Iconology* Mitchell turns to Talmud, Maimonides, and Clement of Alexandria to make his point. Mitchell, *Iconology*, 31-ff.

Jesus Christ. Or, to put it simply, one should ask "What Would Jesus Do?" and then try to follow Jesus' actions. Modern Christian fundamentalists see themselves as "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15), interpreting scripture correctly, bearing the image of God, imitating Jesus, anticipating the end times and the return of Christ.[10] These examples illustrate Mitchell's argument that "'Iconology' turned out to be, not just the science of icons, but the political psychology of icons, the study of iconophobia, iconophilia, and the struggle between iconoclasm and idolatry."[11]

For Mitchell, the image is agential. In his view "images are not just a particular kind of sign, but something like an actor on the historical stage, a presence or character endowed with legendary status, a history that parallels and participates in the stories we tell ourselves about our own evolution from creatures 'made in the image' of a creator, to creatures who make themselves and their world in their own image." Images have historical and religious dimensions that are further sedimented within social and cultural practices involving image production and ritualized engagement with images. Again, Mitchell's analysis of images focuses upon characters with auratic qualities: image, *tselem*, *eikon*, and *imago*.[12] Mitchell's argument suggests that in the Western tradition images are made in the image of the creator and images remake the world in their own image. This process is recursive and without end.

Mitchell's taxonomy of images serves as the foundation for my iconology of religion, placing the focus on the messianic idea in "America" by highlighting the catastrophic consequences of Christianity and U.S. mass culture's hyper-investment in the messianic idea beyond its theological significance. Mitchell's approach is pan-imagistic. For Mitchell, the image

[10] C. I. Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth (2 Tim. 2:15): Ten Outline Studies of the More Important Divisions of Scripture* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1885); Clarence Larkin, *Rightly Dividing the Word*. (New York: Cosimo Classics, 1920).
[11] Mitchell, *Iconology*, 3.
[12] Ibid., 9, 31.

can be graphic, optical, perceptual, or verbal. These four types are distinct but share overlapping characters and can be present in certain iconic formulations. The messianic figurations presented in this dissertation contain all four elements, with varying degrees of intensity. Mitchell continues: "the image is not simply a particular kind of sign, but a fundamental principle of what Michel Foucault would call 'the order of things.'"[13]

In this order of things (as schematized by Mitchell), an image, which includes likeness, resemblance, and similitude, can be graphic, including pictures, statues, and designs; images might be optical, like mirrors and projections; images may be perceptual, including sense data and appearances; images may refer to mental phenomena such as dreams, memories, ideas, and phantasms; lastly, images could also be verbal, including metaphors and descriptions. Pan-imagism means that all things are -- at least potentially -- imagistic. The messianic idea is quintessentially imagistic in nature. For instance, even what Gershom Scholem calls the "messianic idea" appears in the form of an image. Messianic figures take shape in everything from Christian *Kulturkampf* in comic books to Madison Avenue and film. While some may think that the messianic idea is philosophical and/or theological, I argue that at least in its "American" form, the image of the messiah is everywhere. It crystalizes into iconic images, which in turn, influence, transform, and reform messianic theology and philosophy. In the introduction to my dissertation, I will return more fully to the iconic nature of the messianic idea and its imagistic and iconological character.[14]

Icons, Iconology, Images and Material Religions

Religious studies properly understood is iconological. Signs, symbols, and significations, whether material, visual, or mental, are all images. An iconological method helps to trace the

[13] Ibid., 10-11.
[14] Ibid.

slippage between visual, mental, and material figurations and to highlight the slippery circulation of emotion and (the limited) agency between signs, symbols, significations, their creators, and their audiences. The purpose of tracing a genealogy of visual and cultural studies alongside of religious studies for this dissertation is not to create a historical-linear genealogy but instead to map a network of nodal points. Diagramming the network elucidates not only the primary nodes of the network but also highlights the flows between the nodes. The flows of emotion, agency, and imagination electrify the network moving the signals between the nodes. The mainframe of the network would be Martin E. Marty's 1980 presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) on "America's Iconic Book," where he traces the irony of the United States imagining itself as anti-iconic while hyper-investing in icons like the Bible. For Marty, the Bible is one part of America's mental carapace, comprised entirely of mental images made up of material and visual cultural elements, like physical Bibles bound in leather with tissue paper pages.[15] The Bible's imagined place in society is represented and situated within the minds and feelings of the public.

The Bible and the rest of the imagined carapace of images serve as a normative and determinative function for orienting religious and cultural life in the United States. For Marty, "a carapace of images is necessary in order for individuals and society to function cognitively or morally." Thus, the U.S. mental carapace of images that gives primacy to the Bible provides a protective shell that supports the élan vital of American society and culture. Marty summarizes Albert C. Moore's *Iconography of Religion* to five points,

> First, an image evokes the experience of the numinous. Second, it captures a religious experience that is valued as a continuing reality...Third, the image embodies a manifestation of sacred power…Fourth, the image offers the worshiper an ideal archetype or sacred model for the sake of regular transformation... Finally, the image enables one to be related to the cosmos, for it is a microcosm with which one can identify. One almost

[15] Marty, "America's Iconic Book."

> needs a physical object for gathering images under the individual and collective psychic carapace.[16]

Marty's summation of Moore serves as a primary piece transmitted through the network, and then along the network. Images are religious because they index and provide an experience of the numinous, transmitting, and manifesting power and protection, serving as an archetypal model, and finally forming a powerful psycho-social bond where the microcosm replicates the macrocosm.

In this dissertation, I want to argue that messianic figurations function according to these same iconographic patterns. First, messianic figures index and provide an experience of the numinous. Second, they express an important religious experience: the idea that the messiah is returning to save us. Third, messianic figures represent sacred power. Fourth, messianic figures provide people with an archetype to imitate and apply to their lives. Finally, messianic figures circulate through mass culture and serve as a micro-cosmological expression of the macro-cosmological messianic return.

For David Morgan, the study of religion can be best understood *as* the study of religious visual culture. He writes, "The study of religious visual culture is therefore the study of images, but also the practices and habits that rely on images as well as the attitudes and preconceptions that inform vision as a cultural act."[17] Whether one is speaking of icons, images, pictures, visual (cultural) studies, or materiality, one is talking about primary objects and elements in the study of religion. Texts are but one index of these materials and one approach to studying the materiality of religion. Even the more textually based disciplines of the field, like biblical studies, are never too distant from signs, symbols, and significations. For instance, archeological

---

[16] Ibid.
[17] David. Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 3.

evidence, scroll caches, codices, printing, written, and oral cultures all convey mental images via visual and aural media. The study of religion is then the natural home for the study of messianic figures and all their various figurations. Whether scholars are examining religion and film, religion and comic books, religion and art, or the material objects of religion, they are all engaged in expanding the contours of the field of religion beyond the limits of textual analysis.

As Kathryn Lofton notes, "the icon is made by the very thing it makes."[18] Sensing, feeling, and imagining the absence or presence of the divine make up the form and function of the icon. Physical icons provide a likeness or trace between the signs and symbols situated in the imagination and those of the material world. Something happens when sensing and feeling an icon: there is a relationship created through time and space when gazing upon an icon and the viewer has a relationship with the viewed. Both are in dialogue with the creator/s. The mental image is subsequently made manifest in the actual image. An icon of Jesus Christ must be revered and preserved as a likeness that is manifest as Jesus Christ, the deity, and Jesus Christ, the historical person, and that which is preserved in the icon itself. This recursive relationship between the mental and material valence of icons is religious, and material religion provides a vocabulary for discussing this recursion.

This dissertation analyzes messianic figurations functioning as iconic images indexed within a particular space (The United States), time (1900s–1950s), and religious tradition (Protestantism). We can examine these messianic figurations through their likeness and imitation of Jesus Christ, focusing careful attention on their form and function. Messianic figurations maintain their legibility and iconicity through their style and dialogue with systems of power and influence. Messianic figures, then, are never far from sources of populist power, authoritarian modalities of leadership, catastrophism, apocalyptic thinking, and utopian impulses. The

[18] Lofton, *Oprah*, 14.

networked model of messianic figures that I am schematizing could be analogized as an U.S. cultural Protestantism that forms a cloud to both send and receive data from a network of messianic figures. Messianism provides service and data to four primary nodes: authoritarianism, populism, catastrophism, and utopianism. These nodes can be thought of as data packets, shaped and styled into recognizable packages or likenesses to circulate first within the localized intranet before passing through to the more public Internet. Iconic power provides this network of transmission with its energy source. The signal then passes through matrices formed of emotion.

Cosmovision

I argue that in the United States from early to mid-twentieth century, the messianic idea becomes an animating force of the "American" cosmovision. Historian of religion Davíd Carrasco defines cosmovision as "a worldview that is charged with religious forces, stories, divinities, and ancestors who created the world and assist in its maintenance and renewal."[19] While Carrasco focused on Mesoamerica, I see something analogous when examining "American" religion. Thus, I place "America" in scare quotes to acknowledge my limited usage of the term to refer to the United States of America, and I always specify that I mean the "American" cosmovision, not the Indigenous and more historical cosmovision Carrasco examines. Within this dissertation cosmovision is a more analytically useful and clarifying term than myth.

The messianic idea crystallizes within American culture as a constellation of mass culture icons like the messianic figurations of the fundamentalist messiah, superhero messiah, capitalist messiah, and the huckster-grifter messiah. Touching, seeing, feeling these messianic icons allows one to connect with the cosmovision and helps to animate and give the messianic idea force and

[19] Davíd Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica*, 2nd ed., (Long Grove, Il: Waveland Press, 2014), 14-15.

meaning. These iconic figurations of messianism do more to animate and expand the messianic idea and the "American" cosmovision more so than the theological formulations and articulations of messianism during the era. The flow between messianic figurations and the "American" cosmovision is multidirectional with the messianic icons and images serving as a mediating nexus. Religion, media, and culture reinforce messianic iconologies and vice versa, creating a cyclical relationship of influences between the "American" cosmovision and the messianic idea and its iconologies. This cyclical relationship illustrates how messianism functions primarily through icons and images and people's investments and relationships with said images. An iconological analysis of religion allows one to interrogate the multiplicities of messianism in a pan imagistic manner, considering mental, material, aural, and visual iconic dimensions.

Introduction
The Messianic Idea in the U.S. Christian Imagination

This dissertation maps an iconology of the messianic idea within the "American" cosmovision during the era of the 1900s to 1940s. Here I highlight the most *iconic* contributions to the cosmovision. These contributions are imagistic in nature and essence. As Jewish philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel once stated, "words create worlds."[1] So do, of course images; they create and refract worlds. The rise of messianic figures during this era represents an amalgam of both the medium and the message, made possible by emerging media, burgeoning capital, and mass-marketing. The resulting iconological map reveals two impulses within 20th century U.S. society: authoritarian-populism and catastrophic-utopianism. At its core the messianic idea is the offer of religion to the people for salvation from the coming catastrophe. But the messianic idea is quintessentially catastrophic, because it culminates in the consumption of the world and the messiah at the end of history. My iconology of the messianic idea in "America" underscores just how deeply catastrophic the inclusion of messianism within the cosmovision has been.

Messianism's Roots

Etymologically, both the terms, "messiah," from the Hebrew, *mashiach*, and "Christ" from the Greek, *Christos*, means "anointed one." During antiquity these attributions were most often used to denote a priest or a king. For example, in the Hebrew Bible, Samuel anoints Saul as king by rubbing oil on his head; later Samuel similarly anoints David. But the messianic idea will find new meaning in prophetic and apocalyptic literature. During periods of Jewish exile, the lack of a king connotatively shifts the concept of "messiah" away from a current, sitting monarch to a

[1] Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Preface," in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays*, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), viii.

future, hoped-for ideal, a figurative anointed king who would return to deliver his people from bondage. Christian formulations of the messianic idea focused on individualistic redemption, the destruction of the world, and the creation of a new heaven and earth. Drawing from this religio-cultural tradition of an anointed king, Christians claimed the identity of Messiah/Christ for Jesus of Nazareth. Though Christians quickly co-opted the messianic for Christ, Jews still preserved the term "messiah" for their eschatological imaginings, where the term came to mean a returning figure(s) or the idea of the community itself. Jewish thought centered on a nationalistic, communal, and cosmic redemption coupled with the collapse of history and the possibility for a new moment in history. Despite its complex and varied history, the most common notions of the "messianic" are shaped with or against either a Jewish and/or Christian backdrop.

In his pivotal essay "Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism," Gershom Scholem traces two primary strains of messianism that will be central to this dissertation: the first restorative and the second utopian-catastrophic (also called apocalyptic).[2] The restorative model of messianism provides a nostalgic lens to imagine a messiah who will return the people to the halcyon days of yore during the Davidic Kingdom. The utopian-catastrophic model acknowledges that the messiah's return means there will be a rupture. While that rupture portends the end of the present; hope for a new utopian era will follow. Scholem's study of messianism reveals that messianism at its core is paradoxical. When a messiah arrives, he brings about the end of present tradition, which may take effect either by moving backwards or forwards. Should the messiah never arrive, the messianic desire goes unfulfilled and is deferred.

Some might suggest that restorative messianism can be non-catastrophic if it manages to avoid an encounter with utopian-catastrophic messianism. One might even have their anxieties

[2] Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, 1–37.

assuaged by restorative messianism because it seeks to return to something that feels more "known" than the unknown standing at the end of history. However, restorative messianism is still catastrophic in its undoing of the present to remake and return to the past. The problem with restorative messianism is that nostalgic yearning for the past occludes perception. In other words, nostalgic desire is as much of a yearning for a non-place as it is the utopian yearning for the afterwards. Nostalgia and utopianism are essentially doppelgangers. Their distinction is one of temporality, not of spatiality: is the messiah ushering us into the past or into the future?

For Scholem, messianism has a kind of life force that is an essential component of the history of Judaism. Messianism cannot be contained; it will continue to circulate and transform not only the communities it interacts with, but also, itself. For Scholem this ever-stronger version of messianism circulates constantly throughout Christian and Jewish religion and culture.[3] Even though the messianic movement fades away, iterations of it live on and prove especially dangerous to modern Zionism. In accordance with this dissertation's proposals, Scholem's work demonstrates that the legacy of the restorative messianic tradition lives on not only in U.S. messianism's nostalgia but also in its authoritarian-populism. To yearn for a messianic return to the past is to yearn for a time when strong leaders merely spoke and their word and will were thus enacted. The utopian-catastrophic type of messianism is amplified in premillennial dispensational theology and its detailed temporal mapping of the eschatological event horizon. The fusion of the nostalgic and utopian impulses of messianism creates an unresolved paradoxical tension between a nostalgic desire for preservation and a feeling of powerlessness, both of which amplify how "the Messianic idea has compelled a *life lived in deferment*."[4] In

[3] Ibid., 32–37.
[4] Ibid., 35.

summation, to live inside a messianic cosmovision is to live within a continually catastrophic present.

Iconic Messianic Figures

The 1900s–40s were marked by increased catastrophism, utopianism, authoritarianism, and populism. These four elements were further modified by a paradoxically anti-modern modernity, which exceeded the boundaries of nostalgia, in addition to an anti-intellectual valorization of the commoner. A distinctly U.S. Protestant messianic tradition emerged and unfolded through several primary figurations: religious, reactionary messianism, super-heroic messianism, libidinal messianic, commodified messianism, and fantastical messianism.[5]

Messianic figurations perform a tremendous amount of religious, cultural, political, and economic work far beyond only the figure of Jesus. Rather than on individual persons, my focus lands squarely on the spaces where messianic figurations appear. Kathryn Lofton's *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon* and Kristin Kobes Du Mez's *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* are foundational for my own thinking as they foreground the importance of individual character studies and the study of cultural iconography and flows. Lofton reminds her readers, "Icons are multivalent objects and ideas, simultaneously engendering ritual worship and being engendered by such ritual adoration."[6] I wish to open the study of icons to move beyond persons and back towards objects, ideas, and images.

Cultural iconography serves as a touchstone for the establishment of four media empires: fundamentalist messianism, superhero messianism, corporatized messianism, and technicolor cinematic messianism. These four types and the media empires that they cultivate repackage messianism into new forms of discourse. Lofton's analysis of Oprah shares how there needs to

[5] Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life: The Paranoid Style in American Politics Uncollected Essays 1956-1965*, eds. Sean Wilentz and Nicolaus A. Huber (New York: Library of America, 2020), 503–6.
[6] Lofton, *Oprah*, 14.

be more engagement with "the new forms of discourse—consumer, religious, celebrity, market—that have emerged…"[7] Each of my four chapters engages with how messianism intersects with iconicity in America. Thus, my case studies illustrate elements that have been overlooked in other studies of messianic figures. My focus concentrates on messianic style, influence, and their impact on the consumer, religion, iconicity, and the market. Moving beyond Jesus and iconic persons highlights how messianic figures become iconic synecdoches.

Messianic figures are iconic because of the way they are both product and commodity. Additionally, messianic figurations curate a brand that includes, messiahs, imitators of Christ, charismatic leaders, Jesus figures, superheroes, and most, if not all, otherworldly salvific figures providing liberation. Messianic figures display an excess of excess — they exceed the boundaries of the narrative, and they herald the end of history, bringing forth the arrival of a new era. These figures refuse to be contained by their stories, instead seeming to leap off fictive page and screen to become concomitant with reality. Messianic figures circulate on a massive, well-marketed, and low-cost scale. Their stories disseminate far and wide, influencing and being influenced by all those whom they encounter. Messianic figures quickly become mass culture icons through marketing and the largesse of their patrons, often helping these patrons consolidate and amass power and control.[8]

Again, extending from Lofton, I argue that what makes messianic figures iconic is the way in which they 1) inspire veneration, 2) perform the double valence of icon (they are made iconic by the movement they make), 3) serve as a symbol and totem, and 4) function as a brand and/or commodity. Messianic figures inspire veneration through awe, reverence, and fantasy. In this way they embody the most important aspect of an icon, which is their double valance.

[7] Ibid., 11.
[8] Ibid., 2–10.

Messianic figures are made iconic by the movements they create. They inspire the very devotion needed for their own preservation and function. The tautological nature of this system is a feature not a bug. Messianic figures need populism and populism needs messiahs. Messianic figures become totemic symbols supported by the masses with not infrequent aspersions cast on them by academics and religious leaders. Like many other brands, the messianic figures risk becoming corrupted by their own success.

Christian theology quickly codifies all things messiah and pertaining to Jesus of Nazareth into the theological corpus under the category of Christology. Christology focuses on the person, nature, and role of Jesus Christ within Christian theology. Informed by the work of James W. Perkinson, I see the messianic as being figural, impressionistic, and moving beyond Jesus and Christology while still retaining its religious impact. [9] It is not that there is an elision of the messianic, but an excess of excess: messianism overwhelms. Therefore, the messianic always implies risk as the incoming messiah signals the collapse and end of history. [10] Any figure that has this much power is necessarily excessive. The catastrophic/apocalyptic language of messianism illustrates its excessive nature. Messianic images overwhelm the senses with a force that is simultaneously ideational and visual.

Scholem's writing about the messianic idea underscores two important elements of messianic thinking: first, its authoritarian nature, and second, its catastrophic nature. His analysis highlights that the messianic idea releases destructive powers. About messianism, Scholem proffers these lasting words:

> In an almost natural way Messianic apocalypticism orders the old promises and traditions, along with the newly adhering motifs, interpretations, and reinterpretations,

[9] Perkinson, *Messianism against Christology*, 1–23.
[10] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Michael Naas and Pascale-Anne Brault, Meridian (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 110–12.

> under the two aspects which the Messianic idea henceforth takes on and keeps in Jewish consciousness. These two aspects, which in fact are based on the words of the prophets themselves and are more or less visible there, concern the catastrophic and destructive nature of the redemption on the one hand and the utopianism of the content of realized Messianism on the other. Jewish Messianism is in its origins and by its nature—this cannot be sufficiently emphasized—a theory of catastrophe.[11]

The messianic idea is never far from apocalypticism, in fact, they require one another, what Scholem calls a messianic apocalypticism. For the utopianism of messianism to be realized one must first survive the catastrophism of the end of the world. Within the messianic idea there is no utopian new beginning without a cataclysmic ending. Likewise, there is no messianism without an apocalyptic ending. The whole point of a messiah is to herald the end of one epoch and to bring forth a better new epoch.

The Gilded Age and the Rise of Progressivism

The Progressive Era was one such epoch. The Gilded Age (c. 1870–1900) had been a time of rapid technological progress, industrialization, and the rise of business managerial classes. For Historian Richard White, "Abraham Lincoln, the politician whose memory and legacy dominated the Gilded Age, died…but he never really vanished…Lincoln had come to be both the personification of the American common people and the nation's greatest—and most uncommon—president."[12] As the shadow of Lincoln looms large over the Gilded Age, it is wealthy elite white men like Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller who came to define it with their relentless quest for wealth and their deification of individualism.[13] The opulence, largess, and exploitation of the Gilded Age stoked the fires of populist dissent as poverty and inequality swept through the country. The excesses of the Gilded Age fomented the religious,

[11] Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, 7.
[12] Richard White, *The Republic for Which It Stands: The United States during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865-1896*, Oxford History of the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017) 6.
[13] Cornelius Vanderbilt IV as quoted in Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 8.

civil, and social unrest that followed. As the myth of Lincoln and corporate tycoons like Carnegie and Rockefeller grew, they would become as foundational as Jesus Christ to the messianic idea in "America."

The largess of the Gilded Age ended with a bang on September 14, 1901 when Anarchist Leon Czolgosz assassinated President William McKinley. As Cornelius Vanderbilt IV remarked: "the party…was over."[14] Yet, out of the chaos of McKinley's death comes the Progressive Era (c. 1896–1916) with its social and political philosophy of progressivism. Michael McGerr, a historian of the Progressive Era, defines the philosophy thusly: "Progressivism, the creed of a crusading middle class, offered the promise of utopianism—and generated the inevitable letdown of unrealistic expectations." [15] As McGerr notes, the creation of a middle class and a push for social reforms, like regulating industrialized capital, alleviating poverty, ending political corruption, and women's suffrage are all part of the changes that took place during the era. According to McGerr, "the progressives intended to build what William James sneeringly, but accurately labeled a 'middle-class paradise.'"[16]

The Progressive Era marks the further suffusion of Protestantism into the fabric of the United States.[17] Historian Mark Noll demonstrates that during this period, Protestantism in the United States shifted away from the austere asceticism of its Puritan and Separatist ancestors to embrace a more democratic and "American" ethos. These changes signaled a shift towards inward contemplation, an emphasis on the individual, an embrace of industrialization, and a flexible theological structure that accepts, changes, subsumes, and resists political and cultural movements. This tradition became so tightly interwoven with culture and politics that it was

[14] Ibid., 39.
[15] McGerr., xiv.
[16] Ibid., xv; 69–70.
[17] McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America*, 8.

subsumed into the cultural fabric.[18] Just as Protestantism wove itself into American culture and politics, so too did dualistic notions of the relationship between public and private life and the individual and society, leading to tensions between the concept of the individual and the collective.[19]

The Progressive Era inspires a progressive movement in churches called the Social Gospel. Like progressivism, it seeks to leverage association and collective action as a means of supporting and gaining populist support. The ministries of Jane Addams' Hull-House and Walter Rauschenbusch serve as two great examples of the Social Gospel movement's push for association. Addams argued, "We must demand that the individual shall be willing to lose the sense of personal achievement and shall be content to realize his activity only in connection with the activity of the many." Walter Rauschenbusch taught that association was one of the great principles of the faith. He believed that "our disorganized competitive life must pass into an organic cooperative life." [20] Both Addams and Rauschenbusch understood the growing tension between individualism and the vital need for association. Collective religious and social action, intersected by wealthy individuals' philanthropic activities, existed in a constantly tense push-and-pull.

The Progressive Era, however, was not progressive for everyone. Christian Fundamentalism developed as a backlash to the progressive gains the Social Gospel movement achieves. Fundamentalists leveraged association in its populist form to mount a conservative response to Christian progressivism. White supremacy continues to dominate and the racism, anti-Semitism, and nativism of the era intensified. The utopian desires of progressivism were

[18] Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3-52.
[19] McGerr, 64–74.
[20] Cornelius Vanderbilt IV as quoted in Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 66-68.

restricted primarily to the white working class. As McGerr notes, "All of these differences of race, ethnicity, and religion produced suspicion, antagonism, and conflict among the workers."[21] White supremacy, racism, and sexism persisted. Kelly J. Baker's work on the KKK emphasizes the centrality of white Protestantism to Progressivism. Baker argues, "The second revival of the Klan (1915-1930) was more representative of American culture than a peripheral movement of extremism."[22] Following McGerr's and Baker's assertions, white supremacy was integral not only to the Progressive Era, but to progressivism itself. The Protestantism that pervaded the 1900s–1940s only made white supremacy more palatable. The social milieu of the post-World War I era was marked by recalcitrant white supremacy in church and culture.

As the burgeoning middle class attempted to rein in the excesses of the upper class and sought a better life for itself, the wealthy pushed back. Racialized, gendered, and class tensions created a center (middle) that could not hold. The United States' entry into World War I under President Woodrow Wilson in 1917 represented the nadir of the progressive movement. As war tore at the fabric of society, it highlighted exactly how profoundly things were not improving. As presidential historian John Milton Cooper argues, while President Wilson fought for the League of Nations in 1919 and 1920, "truly terrible events also exploded during these months in the form of nasty domestic turmoil over labor and race relations, economic readjustment, and free speech and rights of dissent."[23] According to Cooper, the U.S.'s entry into the war and Wilson's vision for the League of Nations were the militarized and globalized versions of these Progressive Era values.[24] It is precisely the war's violence and cruelty that crushed all hope that

[21] McGerr, xiv, 33.
[22] Kelly Baker, *The Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America*, 1915-1930 (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2011), 10–11; Kelly J Baker, "Evangelizing Klansmen, Nationalizing the South: Faith, Fraternity, and Lost Cause Religion in the 1920s Klan," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 39, no. 3 (September 2012): 261–73.
[23] John Milton Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight over the League of Nations* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3.
[24] Ibid., 412–33.

this would be the last Great War. Instead of being the jewel in the crown of progressivism, The League of Nations was the messianic hope that arrived too late. While the Progressive Era of the early 20th Century begins with a utopian fervor, it ends in disappointment and catastrophe.

The Rise of Populism

Historian Michael Kazin in his signal work, *The Populist Persuasion* establishes two main types of populism in the United States. The capital *P* Populist movement began in the 1880s with mostly southern and western farmers, came to power in the 1890s, and crashed and faded in the early 1900s. The second form of populism, and the one that constitutes his focus (and mine), is lower case *p* populism. Kazin writes, "My definition of populism is a persistent yet mutable style of political rhetoric with roots deep in the nineteenth century." As a rhetorical style, populism in the U.S. transcended the demographic borders that could have curtailed the movement. Within populist movements like Protestant fundamentalism, it was not uncommon to find the wealthy and/or intellectual elites collaborating with the common people. These populist coalitions tended to be buttressed by an almost utopian optimism, especially as populism became more and more intertwined with "evangelical churchgoers." Kazin argues that, as populism became more connected with evangelical churches, conservative theology reinforced conservative politics.[25]

Populism is defined by Kazin as "a language whose speakers conceive of ordinary people as a noble assemblage not bounded narrowly by class, view their elite opponents as self-serving and undemocratic, and seek to mobilize the former against the latter." Kazin focuses primarily on his "abiding fascination with mass movements and prominent figures who sought to speak *for* the people." For Kazin, populist leaders were placed on a pedestal by everyday people, held in high regards, seen as heroes, advocated a bootstrap narrative, etc. These populist figures managed to

[25] Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History.* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 1-2.

be both set apart and "other," while also appearing to be commoners. In other words, they are a lot like Superman: both alien and friend. In contrast to Kazin with his focus on language, the people, and politics, my own focus highlights the imagistic, figural, and iconic face of the messianic idea in "American" populism. I seek to expand upon his interrogation of the porosity between religion and politics within populism by bringing fundamentalism into the foreground. As Kazin rightly notes, post-World War II "populism began a migration from Left to Right." What was once the rhetoric of reformers and radicals was "creatively altered by conservative groups and politicians" after World War II.

In her own study, *Populism*, Margaret Canovan continues the distinction between P/populism through a set of clarifying typologies of populisms.[26] Her work examines agrarian and political populisms, both of which are further subdivided. Agrarian populism has two main subsets: "farmers radicalism" and "peasant movements." Political populism can be further subdivided into "populist dictatorship," "populist democracy," "reactionary populism," and "politicians' populism." Each of these populisms can be combined and detached with and from one another to create new relational forms.[27] All of these approaches explore the ideological elements and the nature of populism. Petra Guasti and Lenka Buštíková argue that "the most common markers of populism in Europe and the United States are nationalism, nativism, xenophobia, and racism. The ideology of populism is also compatible with religious conservatism, machismo, and anti-intellectualism."[28]All of these markers make an appearance in this dissertation's case studies.

The Oxford Handbook of Populism emphasizes three scholarly approaches to the study of populism: ideational, a political-strategic, and a sociocultural.[29] This dissertation focuses

[26] Margaret Canovan, *Populism (New York; London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981)*, 16, 293.
[27] Ibid., 293.
[28] Petra Guasti and Lenka Bustikova, "Populism," in *Oxford Bibliographies in Political Science*, ed. Sandy Maisel (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), doi: 10.1093/OBO/9780199756223-0300.
[29] Franz Georg Kaltwasser et al., *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, 2017.

primarily on the ideational approach to populism.[30] Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser argue that "populism should be defined as a set of ideas that not only depicts society as divided between 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,' but also claims that politics is about respecting popular sovereignty at any cost."[31] This definition reflects the dualities at play during both the 1900s and 1940s. The ideational approach to populism focused less on the etiology and the definitional limits of the term "populism," and instead highlighted the primary moves that populism made. For the purposes of this dissertation, I examine how populism functions as "style" and as a "thin-centered ideology."[32] As a "thin-centered ideology" populism lacks a center and is thus sutured onto other stronger and more polemical arguments.[33] Populism's shallowness allows for the binary distinction between the masses versus the elites to be applied to nearly any set of grievances. As Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser note, to understand the gravitational force of populism one must also examine the context and other elements surrounding prominent charismatic populist leaders and their investments.[34] Within the United States, populism's performance of *reductio ad absurdum* allows for grievance-driven, socio-cultural, and religious strife. Thus, populism is formed through omnidirectional and pugilistic anger. As *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* notes, populism, especially in the United States, is marked by a politics of resentment, especially towards minoritized peoples.[35] One striking

[30] Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, "Studying Populism in Comparative Perspective: Reflections on the Contemporary and Future Research Agenda," *Comparative Political Studies* 51, no. 13 (July 26, 2018): 1667–93, https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018789490.
[31] Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, "Studying Populism in Comparative Perspective: Reflections on the Contemporary and Future Research Agenda," *Comparative Political Studies* 51, no. 13 (July 26, 2018): 1667–93 (1669), https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018789490.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," 544.
[34] Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, "Studying Populism in Comparative Perspective: Reflections on the Contemporary and Future Research Agenda," 1669.
[35] Daniel Patrick Moynihan in his introduction to Edward Shils' classic Torment of Secrecy argues that Shils failed to consider how much racism drove populist resentment in the United States. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "Introduction," in *The Torment of Secrecy: The Background and Consequences of American Security Policies, by Edward Shils* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 1669.; Edward Shils, *The Torment of Secrecy: The Background and Consequences of American Security Policies* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 98–103.

example of this within this era is evidenced by how many white Christian fundamentalists and white progressives sought to preserve racial segregation.

Cas Mudde writes, "I define populism as an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people."[36] Mudde's illustrative definition highlights some of populism's key elements that reflect a Manichean worldview. [37] This Manichean worldview expresses itself through populism's "gut feelings" and reductive solutions, blaming the elite, and calling for a chaotic overhaul to return to the halcyon days of yore. For Mudd and other political scientists, populism reveals itself to be a "thin-centered ideology" which is unable to stand on its own thus requiring the support of mutually reinforcing ideologies like nationalism, socialism, or authoritarianism. As a thin-centered ideology, populism emphasizes moral feelings. Manicheanism does not allow for compromise: to compromise is to corrupt the "purity" of one's position. Opponents are then necessarily always evil. Therefore, those who partake in one's populist worldview, but who make compromises or deviate from excessive certainty, are regarded with as much, if not more, contempt than the "elites" who are to be actively opposed.[38]

Populism tugs on the people's nostalgia for the halcyon days of a bygone era when things were better. It hardly matters if things were indeed materially better if it feels like they were better. In this way populism, like messianism, is tinged with utopian desire. Better days are arriving imminently. Paul Taggert argues that populist Manichaeism does not unfold along class

[36] Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," 543. Emphasis in the original.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 542-44. Cf. Michael Freeden, "Is Nationalism a Distinct Ideology?," *Political Studies 46*, no. 4 (September 1, 1998): 750, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.00165; Paul Taggart*, Populism: Concepts in the Social Sciences* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000), 9–43; Pierre-André Taguieff, "Political Science Confronts Populism: From a Conceptual Mirage to a Real Problem," *Telos* 1995, no. 103 (1995): 9–43; Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

lines. Instead, the fault line is spatial.[39] Taggart argues: "The invocation of 'the people' as a rhetorical device is ubiquitous in populism because it is derivative of the deeply embedded, if implicit, conception of the heartland in which, in the populist imagination, a virtuous and unified population resides."[40] When the populist speaks of the people, they speak of an imagined community, existing outside of time and located in a non-real/utopian space. The heartland is a no-place. Therefore, populism operates in tandem with nationalism because both idealize a no-place.[41]

In the United States, these elements became particularly prescient for analyzing populist movements and their dispersal throughout U.S. culture.[42] According to the political scientist Joseph Lowndes, American populism finds its origins in the agrarian political movements of the late nineteenth century movement, which culminate in the creation of the People's Party and the subsequent nomination of populist scion William Jennings Bryan for the presidency in 1896.[43] After Bryan's defeat in 1896, the party fizzled out and populism disperses throughout culture and politics, creating a "Populist Zeitgeist."[44] This widespread circulation of Populism allows Bryan to again run for president in 1900, on the Democratic ticket, where he loses once more. While Bryan may not have won the presidency, the populist sentiment that drove his candidacy won over the people. Bryan's presidential run, the collapse of the populist parties, and the diffuse circulation of populist sentiment emphasizes how populism is a thin-centered ideology fueled by a nostalgic and utopian desire for the heartland and a bygone era.

---

[39] Paul Taggart, *Populism* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000), 95, doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.11.
[40] Ibid., 95–96.
[41] Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 2016); Taggart, *Populism*, 95–96; Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," 546.
[42] Pierre Ostiguy, "Populism: A Socio-Cultural Approach," in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, ed. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.11.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Mudde does not focus on the late 1880s-1940s in his essay, however his framework for what qualifies as a "Populist Zeitgeist" is illustrative here. Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," 543–50. 543-550.

Functioning beyond the contours of U.S. political parties, populism finds its primary expressions in social movements and extra-institutional formations.[45] In this dissertation I argue that populism also expresses itself in Christian fundamentalism, superhero comics, fantasy film, and corporate marketing and self-help literature. Inquiring into these materials allows me to move beyond defining populism. As Lowndes writes, "It is perhaps better then to analyze not what populism is but what populism does."[46] I understand that the lack of a coherent center amplifies populism's pugilistic elements and its ensuing search for a charismatic leader who will provide ideological content and a coherent directionality for anger at the "elites." U.S. populism, especially right-wing conservative populism, draws upon rage, resentment, and repressed desires to form what Elizabeth Anker calls "orgies of feeling."[47] In this way populism is well suited to serve and function as an affective style. Charismatic leaders leverage populism by gaining direct access to mass communication and possessing the ability to communicate their message clearly and persuasively to the people. Furthermore, charismatic leaders use polemical rhetoric that directs the anger of the populous towards constellations of elites, whether political, economic, academic, or religious.[48]

Authoritarian Populism

Struggling to stand on its own, populism attaches itself to stronger ideologies like nationalism, authoritarianism, socialism, and capitalism. Authoritarianism is one of the common ideological attachment points for populism. Authoritarianism and populism might seem like

[45]Laura Grattan, *Populism's Power: Radical Grassroots Democracy in America*, 2016., 1-19. Joseph Lowndes, "Populism in the United States," in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, ed. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.11.
[46] Lowndes, "Populism in the United States."
[47] Elisabeth R. Anker, *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 1–30; Lowndes, "Populism in the United States."
[48] Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," 542–44.

unlikely bedfellows because populism frequently erodes faith in authority.[49] However as Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart note, populism provides an opening for authoritarian figures to embody the desires of the people. The successful authoritarian embodies the will of the people and points out that the populace's concerns about authority figures are valid in theory, but the problem is not authority *sine qua non* but rather a particular assemblage of the elites. Thus, it is the authoritarian who can serve as virtuous leader and help the masses in their fight against the true enemy: the Other. For the authoritarian, the Other comprises raced, gendered, classed, and minoritized communities who they see as outsiders. Populist resentment provides authorization for the opportunity to seize the will of the people and redirect their flow of anger away from elites in general, instead diverting this animus towards assemblages of elites and outsiders.[50]

Like populism, authoritarianism is difficult to define and its definition rests in the doing, or, as Norris and Inglehart note, authoritarians are defined by their actions. Focusing on these actions, Norris and Inglehart define authoritarianism "as a cluster of values prioritizing collective security for the group at the expense of liberal autonomy for the individual." As they posit, the three key elements of authoritarianism are security, conformity, and obedience. Authoritarians provide security and protection against chaos; they preserve the traditions of a bygone era by ensuring everyone conform to an earlier value system; and they demand complete and total loyalty: one is either in or else out. One can never remain lukewarm in their dedication to these ideals. Like populism, the primary feeling animating these core authoritarian elements is fear. Populism channels this fear upwards while authoritarianism drives this fear outwards towards the Other.[51] Together this creates a potent combination that allows authoritarian populist leaders to blame the elites for the failure to protect the people against the Other. Thus, the problem

[49] Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*, 6-7.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.

becomes *who* is in power not the structures of power itself. As Margaret Canovan argues, "authoritarianisms often contain a curious mixture of populism and elitism."[52] This shift in public perceptions of who to blame allows for the authoritarian populist leader to assume the mantle of an all-powerful leader of the people who will protect the public by punishing or subjugating the Other. This move then allows the authoritarian populist leader to absorb all powers held previously by the elites, as well as absorbing the power of the people. This skillful redirection of populist ire, from being confined to the elites to include the Other as the primary target for blame and rage, allows the authoritarian populist leader to advance his or her position of power through claims of providing clarity and strength during crisis. Having stronger leaders who can see the issues clearly assures the public that these leaders will be able to take strong and decisive action.[53]

My understanding of authoritarian populism as an ideology and a movement is that it seeks to strengthen majoritarian power vis-à-vis minority populations. In the 1900s–1940s, many conservative white men who had long comprised the systemic American power structure began to fear their loss of power and relevancy due to rising immigration, industrialization, women's movements, and civil rights movements. Functioning from a space of fear and anxiety, authoritarian populism is filled with contradictions. Thus, one can be simultaneously anti-establishment while creating and leading establishments, anti-authority while following authoritarian figures, anti-elite while being funded by elites. The fundamentalists exemplify authoritarian populism as anti-intellectuals who nevertheless love academic credentialism and founding universities.

[52] Canovan, *Populism*, 149.
[53] Norris and Inglehart, 7-8.

In this dissertation, more squarely focused on religion and the messianic idea, I highlight how the conservative theological and political drift was already in play in the early 1900s especially within the fundamentalist movement that sought to redefine Protestantism and the United States by fantasizing about the end of the world rather than the end of capitalism. With Kazin, I argue that fundamentalism changed populism by remaking it in its own image. In my estimation, populism became catastrophic when, as per Kazin, "[t]he vocabulary of grassroots rebellion now served to thwart and reverse social and cultural change rather than to promote it."[54] This impulse is another example of political theology, how theological icons and iconography carry over into the culture at large.

The American Messianic After World War I

During the war, anxieties about the end of the world rose as people were confronted with the precarity of life, mass industrialized death, and the use of chemical agents in war. The size and scale of the calamity was shocking for many. After the war veterans returned and faced a severe lack of social services to help them rejoin non-military society. They experienced physical and psychological trauma, homelessness, and joblessness, which led to strikes, riots, and general unrest. Tensions between the waning Social Gospel Movement and nascent fundamentalist movements grew in post-war American Christianity. The Social Gospel movement sought to use Christian social ethics to address social problems and to try to make the world a better place. The nascent fundamentalist movement viewed the world as in a state of catastrophe, and they heard the clarion call of an imminently returning Christ. Between the followers of the Social Gospel and the fundamentalists, there was a reexamination of messianic figures. Ideologically this

[54] Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History.* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 1-6.

dissertation is interested in how four themes coming out of this tumultuous time impacted the messianic idea. These themes are authoritarianism, populism, catastrophism, and utopianism.

Following Prothero, examining the excessive nature of messianism expands the iconography from its particular Christian locus into the culture at large, especially in the twentieth century. When the messianic idea began to have a life beyond Christology, a broader understanding of the messianic became possible. The concept of the messianic expanded to include figures beyond Jesus Christ and to imagine of variety of human figures as messiahs. Previously such ideas would have elicited the accusation of heresy in churches and condemnation in the court of public opinion. Recognizing the porousness of the messianic idea acknowledges that messianic figures influence and absorb influence from a wide range of sources. Like Warburg's image atlas, messianic iconologies are a bricolage.[55]

Taking Fox's argument, a step further, I argue that messianism begins to exceed Jesus and Christology. Through their imitation of Christ, fundamentalists start to explore embracing messianic traits like salvation. They begin to offer a premillennial, dispensationalist rapture as a method of salvation from the catastrophic present moment. Likewise, Bruce Barton offered to sanctify corporate titans through re-narrating the Bible and history to transform Jesus into a figure more like himself. Through his work with BBDO, Barton proffered salvation to the masses through the purchase of material goods and services, so that one's experience of the present might be a little more like heaven on earth. Such capacious understandings of messianism were not restricted to religion and commercialism; they also are took place within mass culture, such as in the Superman comics and with *The Wizard of Oz*. These fantastical worlds afforded yet another form of salvation from one's quotidian existence. Instead of

[55] Tellingly, Fox's chapter on Jesus in the early twentieth century is titled "Jesus was Certainly not a Christian." Richard Wightman Fox, *Jesus in America: Personal Savior, Cultural Hero, National Obsession,* (Harper: San Francisco, 2005), 307–50.

escaping into the sacred or into shopping, one could escape into vibrant, participatory, and fantastical worlds.

James W. Perkinson's iconic contemporary study *Messianism Against Christology* highlights not only how messianism exceeds, but also is sometimes opposed to Christology. Like Perkinson I agree that messianism goes beyond theology and into signs and symbols. Here in the space of significations and symbols the messianic idea is in its ideal form. The messianic idea, while frequently doctrinal and theological, is quintessentially imagistic. It is enacted through mental and material images. These images, while often iconic, are often at odds with systematic theology's understanding of Christology. As Perkinson notes, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim representations of the messianic idea naturally fall outside of Christology. Likewise, the "American" cosmovision, while having absorbed a substantial amount of Christianity, is not inherently Christian. According to Perkinson, messianic thinking both exceeds and opposes Christology. As a vernacular imaging-making tradition, messianism uses the artist supplies at hand to make and remake the signs and symbols of the messianic idea.[56]

Fox rightly notes that Jesus exceeds Christianity (and by extension Christology) due to the arrival of new immigrants to U.S. shores, thinkers outside of Christianity engaging Jesus as one of the most iconic figures in the "American" cosmovision, and the increased interest of veterans in messianism during the interwar period as they seek to process and understand questions of theodicy, evil, and human suffering. Modernism and film are perhaps the two most important shifts that Fox highlights. Modernists like Barton preached the gospel of a humanized Christ who, once separated from his divinity and miracles, beame imminently replicable and not necessarily Christian. The advent of film allowed Jesus to step off the pages of scripture and

[56] James W. Perkinson, *Messianism against Christology: Resistance Movements, Folk Arts, and Empire*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), xiii–xxxii; 1–24.

become flesh once more – all too often an Arian and Aryan Jesus (c.f. *Intolerance* (1916) by D.W. Griffith). Barton's collaboration with iconic filmmaker Cecil B. DeMille further underscores the union between modernism, advertising, and cinema.

As Perkinson points out, the most significant limit of Fox's study of *Jesus in America* is Fox's singular focus on Jesus as the determinant of messianic figurations beyond Christology.[57] Stephen Prothero's iconic work *American Jesus* moves messianic figures beyond Christology. From the beginning, Prothero's "quest is for the cultural Jesus."[58] Making his case, Prothero proceeds chronologically through white Protestant Christianity, before examining Jesus in "the black church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, American Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism."[59] For Prothero, Jesus "became not just a national icon but also a profitable brand…."[60] Prothero suggests that this transformation begins in earnest with Thomas Jefferson's vision of a Jesus liberated from Christianity, a notion which was also "advanced by Jewish writers and rabbis between the 1860s and 1930s."[61] In agreement, I suggest that the final stage of this transformation accelerates during the 1900s to 1930s, until ultimately the national icon, brand, and cultural scion transcends our former understanding of Jesus, to become a Jesus who is a part of the messianic icon. After this transformation is complete, American messianism exceeds, but cannot fully leave, Christianity behind because America is foundational not only to messianism but also to itself.[62]

U.S. religious studies that focus on the material aspects of iconic and cultural density build upon a well-established terrain of scholarship, text, and thought from David Morgan,

---

[57] Fox, *Jesus in America*, 307–50.
[58] Stephen R. Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 9.
[59] Ibid., 15.
[60] Prothero, *The American Bible: How Our Words Unite, Divide, and Define a Nation*, 146.
[61] Ibid., 14.
[62] Fox, *Jesus in America*, 1–28; Prothero, *American Jesus*, 3–18; Perkinson, *Messianism against Christology*, 1–24; Gershom Gerhard Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken, 2006), 1–12.

Stephen Prothero, Thomas Tweed, Robert Orsi, and Kathryn Lofton.[63] Placing Fox, Prothero, and Perkinson into conversation with Robert Orsi and Kathryn Lofton further reveals how Jesus as an iconic messianic figure is used for the accumulation of power and capital.[64] As Fox, Kobes Du Mez, and Prothero's studies of Jesus underscore, Jesus is one part of a more generalizable messianic idea and tradition. Not all messianic thinking is about Jesus. The messianic idea and its messianic figures are part of the packaging of the cultural *bricolage* of U.S. religion and culture. Jesus, John Wayne, Oprah, and Superman are but some of the messianic figures that dot the cosmovision. One of the limitations of academic studies of messianism is that they are either limited in scope to Jesus, as is the case in the work of Fox, Kobes Du Mez, and Prothero, or are focused on the contemporary U.S. milieu, like Perkinson and Lofton's studies. This dissertation seeks to trace popular American messianism in an earlier phase of development, as it develops in the first half of the 20th century.

In the early twentieth century, messianic figures and charismatic leaders captured the attention of the masses, exposed a cultural preoccupation with charismatic authoritarians that would, in theory, save the world. Consequently, messianic figures exercised immense power and authority to achieved these ends (authoritarian-populism). Furthermore, the desire to seek out

---

[63] David Morgan, *Icons of American Protestantism: The Art of Warner Sallman* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1996); David Morgan and Sally M. Promey, *The Visual Culture of American Religions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); David Morgan, *Keywords in Religion, Media, and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2008); David. Morgan, *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief* (London: Routledge, 2010); Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*; Morgan, *Visual Piety*; David Morgan, *The Forge of Vision: A Visual History of Modern Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015); David Morgan, *The Lure of Images: A History of Religion and Visual Media in America* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Morgan, *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling*; Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*; Prothero*, American Jesus*; Prothero, *The American Bible: How Our Words Unite, Divide, and Define a Nation*; Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: a Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem*, 1880-1950 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Kathryn. Lofton, *Oprah : The Gospel of an Icon* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

[64] The study of religion and power for Orsi reveals that, "religion is one of the more effective media by which social power is realized in bodies, just as religion shapes, orients, and limits the imagination, and it is pointless to study religion without reference to power (to both kinds of power), pointless and irresponsible." Robert A. Orsi, "Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live in? Special Presidential Plenary Address, *Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Salt Lake City*, November 2, 2002," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42, no. 2 (2003): 172.

messianic figures that could fix the problems of the moment enabled a deep cultural preoccupation with prophecy and apocalypticism. Through the exercise of power and mass appeal, a messianic figure might liberate or destroy, but whatever this figure does, everything changes. Apocalyptic thinking is nourished and sustained through a hope for a utopian future, or what Scholem called catastrophic utopianism.[65]

Cultural concerns about social and economic precarity created a feedback loop, whereby the looming sense of catastrophe fuels the need for an authoritarian leader. This cyclical relationship between authoritarian-populism and catastrophic-utopianism becomes the animating force of U.S. messianic expression. Cultural narratives that assumed that there could be no liberation without catastrophism have had long-lasting effects on American religious, cultural, and political landscapes. Messianic figures characterized by authoritarian-populism and catastrophic-utopianism did not provide collective liberation and social transformation; instead, they absolved the community of its own responsibility by opting to concentrate power and authority in a single charismatic leader. The messianic stories told and heroes celebrated determine whether or not embracing and actualizing religious and social transformation is possible. What followers of the Social Gospel saw as a liberatory motif, making the world a better place so that the messiah will want to return, became a reactionary motif of messianic punishment in the hands of the fundamentalists. Fundamentalists sought to rehabilitate authoritarian strongmen and feed the paranoia and concerns of the populace. This reactionary motif plays out throughout the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s in American mass culture.

[65] Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, 4–17.

Chapter Outline: Messianic Thinking 1900–1940

Charting a path through the iconic contributions of the messianic idea to the "American" cosmovision, I focus on four critical historical contributions. In the first chapter, I examine the cartographical mapping of messianism within America that is performed first by *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to Truth*; second, by the *Scofield Reference Bible*; and third, by *Dispensational Truth (or God's Plan and Purpose in the Ages)*. These texts become the foundation for how American fundamentalists will map out the messianic idea through paratextual citational apparatuses and technical drawings in specially published Bibles. Together the paratextual apparatus and the visual/technical apparatuses create a mental and visual mapping of the fundamentalist reshaping of the messianic idea in the era into what Richard Hofstadter famous called "the paranoid style in American politics."

In the second chapter, Superman comic books combine word and image, visually distilling the paratextual commentary and technical images into the comic image. "Comic book realism" saturates the page fusing together the mental and *mythopoetic* image of the messiah. Where a fundamentalist messiah emphasizes authority and apocalypticism, Superman emphasizes messianic power: a power so great and unrestrained that it consumes spaces space and time and ultimately itself. The irrepressible libido manifests itself as Superman, dressed as a cape crusading strongman with a chiseled physique; he represents a muscular masculinity that draws influence from muscular religious movements and the fetishization of the circus/carnival strong man. Superman serves as a reminder that the messianic idea in "America" is a ravenous Ouroboros. The paradox of Superman in the original comics is that he has all the salvific power in the world and yet the world remains unredeemed, because Superman does very little. In the later movies at the turn of the twenty-first century, ala director Zack Snyder, Superman saves the

world only by way of destroying it; this move encapsulates my thesis but is beyond the scope of this study.

In the third chapter, Bruce Barton's *The Man Nobody Knows* coupled with Barton's hagiographical portraits of CEOs and corporations highlights the next iconological contribution of the reimagining of messianism happening during the era. Like with fundamentalism and comic books, the messianic idea is once again reshaped this time in the model of a CEO. Thus, the messiah imitates the CEO and vice versa. Those who see the advertisements and consume the products produced by corporations are able in some small way to consume messianism and to participate in imitating the messiah. Once again, word and image collide as they are condensed down even further into a single advertisement. While Barton chronologically precedes Superman, thematically his contributions to the messianic idea take root later in the era. The messiah must first become a hypermasculine icon before he can become a corporate titan.

The final chapter follows the transformation of messianic idea as it transitions to the silver screen with *The Wizard of Oz* and picks up the theme of capitalist grift introduced in my study of Barton. In this deflationary reading of the film, Dorothy is not the messiah. The promise of salvation and redemption of catastrophe is revealed to be only a dream. As theorized by Susan Sontag, the technicolor Camp of Oz is pure artifice and style. As I will argue this aesthetic modality obscures the conservative reactionary nostalgia of the film's most famous refrain. The home that is Kansas is a bleak place which in the total Oz cosmovision is saturated by racism and racist figurations. Perhaps only an immigrant, like Salman Rushdie, will have understood that a natal point of origin can be a dangerous place. *The Wizard of Oz* underscores the illusory nature of the promise of salvation. All that lies over the rainbow is a return home because there is *no place* like home.

Chapter 1
Mapping Messianism: The Rise of Fundamentalist Messianism

Ever since its rise to notoriety in the 1920s, scholars have predicted the imminent demise of the movement. The Fundamentalists, to return the favor, have predicted the speedy end of the world. Neither prophecy has so far been fulfilled.
~ Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*[1]

The Progressive Era — defined here as spanning from roughly 1890–1920 — was marked by significant social and political change in American society. During this time, ideas of modernity rapidly took shape, capital grew and expanded, and people moved into cities. Industrialization, immigration, urbanization, and new roles for women in society began to alter the landscape of the American city. People moved *en masse* and at a rapid pace away from a rural agrarian way of life into industrialized corporate jobs in manufacturing and business. By 1920, the U.S. ratified a constitutional amendment to affirm women's suffrage. The air reverberated with the signs of progress. Now, American society generally views the concept of modern progress as positive, despite its historically negative impacts, such as increases in poverty, greed, racism, classism, and sexism. But during the Progressive Era, there was a hope that society was advancing and improving, even in the face of obvious political corruption, robber baron capitalists, and widespread corporate monopolies. In academia, higher criticism, which sought to situate the Bible within history to better understand its socio-cultural context, took theology and biblical studies by storm. Hucksters and heroes abounded. U.S. culture heralded the titans of industry and unions as both heroes and villains in one undifferentiated ethical mass.[2]

[1] Ernest Robert Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), ix.
[2] Here I am relying on the iconic histories of Gabriel Kolko and Michael McGerr. Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Re-Interpretation of American History, 1900-1916* (New York: Free Press, 1977); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

During this time of social and political inequality, the churches, especially mainline Protestant churches, embraced the Social Gospel movement, a Christian societal reform movement that arose in the United States and Canada.[3] The Social Gospel movement understood the Christian life to be not only about one's personal salvific relationship with Jesus Christ, but also about social and political reform. [4] Charles Hodge Evans describes the Social Gospel movement as "an offshoot of theological liberalism that strove to apply a progressive theological vision to engage American social, political, and economic structures."[5] The logic of this movement was that if Jesus transformed the life of the believer, then surely the believer could, likewise, transform the life of the culture and society. The movement was theologically and socially liberal and attempted to address issues like poverty, alcoholism, child labor, slums, racism, immigration, environmental damage, war mongering, and so forth.[6] The movement reached its peak between the 1870s and 1920s.

Historically, the Social Gospel movement was pro-union, anti-child labor, pro-temperance, pro-environment, anti-war, anti-poverty, and struggled to come to terms in better and worse ways with the racism and sexism in the church. The movement embraced the power of collectivism and working together. Adherents believed they were doing the work, socially and politically, concomitant with preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.[7] They saw themselves as imitating Christ and doing his will in a way that fit the needs of the times in which they lived. Washington Gladden, one of the leaders of Social Gospel, uses Christian ethics to make the case

[3] Both Susan Curtis and Christopher Hodge Evans build on the works of scholars providing critiques through returning to primary sources and expanding the scope of reach into the movement. Following these two influential histories of the social gospel movement, I lower case the term social gospel. Cf. Christopher Hodge Evans, *The Social Gospel in American Religion: A History* (New York: NYU Press, 2017); Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2001).
[4] Mark A. Noll, *History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*. (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019); Randall Balmer, "Critical Junctures in American Evangelicalism: II The Transition from Postmillennialism to Premillennialism," *Ashland Theological Journal* 38 (2006): 51–58.
[5] Evans, *The Social Gospel in American Religion*, 1.
[6] McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 79.
[7] Ibid., 66–68.

for unions. Evans highlights three important elements of the Social Gospel movement: its "social idealism," its understanding of religion as a means for advocating for social change, and its "vision of America as a religiously and culturally pluralist society."[8] The works of Walter Rauschenbusch, Richard T. Ely, and Charles M. Sheldon gave the Social Gospel a postmillennial theological orientation.[9] Postmillennial eschatological theology is the belief that that the return of Jesus Christ will unfold after a millennium when the world will become a progressive, and thus better place, and all will come to embrace Jesus as their savior. Once this perfected state is reached, then Jesus will return. The return of Jesus Christ is seen as a reward for the faithful rather than as a judgment cast upon a depraved world.

Modernity and the Social Gospel movement energize significant societal changes that alarm, rather than encourage, many Protestant Christians. Protestant Christian fundamentalism thus emerges as a reactionary movement against the modern world.[10] Marty and Appleby argue that fundamentalisms are best understood as militant opposition to modernity.[11] Sociologist of Religion, Nancy T. Ammerman, argues that a 19th century U.S. fundamentalist is a modern anti-modernist in the most technical sense of these terms.[12] Fundamentalism's anti-modern modernism foments despite its continued co-dependence on modernity. Dutch legal scholar Pauline C. Westerman argues, "…we may conclude that the fundamentalist movement, despite

---

[8] Evans, *The Social Gospel in American Religion*, 1-2.

[9] These theologians continued to hold sway and influence even after World Wars I and II; Evans' history of the movement highlights how they continued to be read and cited by civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr. Evans, 1-ff.

[10] Modernity is a clash between the old and new, with strong reactionary tendencies. Modernism is a form of criticism of the 19th century through rejection of the aesthetics and thinking of the present. The Progressive Era is a form of liberalism, not modernism; modernism is a revolutionary rejection of bourgeois aesthetics, and it is a thinking of the present with a certain kind of alignment and investment in charismatic movements and leaders as is seen with socialism and fascism of the day. Cf. Zachary Braiterman, *The Shape of Revelation: Aesthetics and Modern Jewish Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 135–37.

[11] R. Scott Appleby and Martin E. Marty, "Introduction: The Fundamentalism Project: A User's Guide," in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004), vii–xiii.

[12] When speaking of the Protestant Christian fundamentalist movement, I lowercase fundamentalist and fundamentalism to let the reader know I'm referring to the specific movement formed during this time frame. This is in keeping with scholars George Marsden, Martin Marty, et al. When speaking of the diffusion of fundamentalism beyond the contours of the original movement I make sure to use fundamentalism in the lower case, such as when speaking of what George Marsden calls the "fundamentalist style." George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 199–228.

its antimodern rhetoric, is thoroughly shaped by modernism itself."[13] Here, she refers to fundamentalism's preoccupation with individualism, scientism, rationalism, as well as the embrace of modernism's capitalism, marketing, and advertising. Fundamentalism's virulent anti-modern modernism illustrates how these slight differences are significant to insiders. Fundamentalists saw the Social Gospel movement and modernist movements within the church as embodying the modernizing and progressive tendencies that they disdained. Ironically, fundamentalists embraced modernist technological trends like electricity, cars, and a technological mindset for approaching religiosity. B. M. Pietsch calls this formulation of modernism "dispensational modernism." For Pietsch dispensational modernism is "the epistemic and methodological techniques that undergird dispensational thinking." He continues:

> said simply, dispensationalists embraced engineering methods to produce authoritative interpretations of text and time. Based on these methods, they came to believe biblical prophecy was a unified whole that gave meaning to the experience of discontinuous time, and its deeper, scientific meaning emerged in intricate literary intertextual referentiality.[14]

Fundamentalists amassed power by building vertically integrated ministerial networks that mirrored the monopolies of business. Additionally, fundamentalists created their own parallel religious and social order to reassert the power and authority they believed was lost. In a stunning moment that exemplifies this dynamic, an oil baron partnered with Conservative Christian leaders to combat the Progressive Era, fight against higher criticism, and do battle against the Social Gospel and its progressive reforms. Fundamentalism shifted the conversation away from Charles M. Sheldon's "What Would Jesus Do?" version of social justice, inflecting the imitation of Christ, towards a militant authoritarian style of imitating Christ. Fundamentalists saw themselves as cleansing society by attacking the twin temples of higher criticism and Social

[13] Pauline Westerman, "The Modernity of Fundamentalism: *Fundamentalisms Observed*, Vol. 1 by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby," *Journal of Religion* 74, no. 1 (1994): 77–85.
[14] B. M. Pietsch, *Dispensational Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3; cf. 1–16.

Gospel. The imitation of Christ became about performing a messianic style of leadership that embraced a dire picture of the state of the world. This type of Christ-imitation amassed power through gaining converts while waiting for the return of the Messiah. Fundamentalists expected God to rapture them at the beginning of the eschaton, vindicating their theological position. Because they read and interpreted the signs correctly, the Messiah would arrive from the clouds to reward them with their ascension into heaven as part of the elect.

Fundamentalists shifted the focus away from imitating Christ through direct social action to imitating Christ through style. The fundamentalists placed emphasis on following a charismatic leader who captured the minds of the populace and gave the pastor, politician, or businessman all the power that he needed to lead. In order to consolidate power in the person of a charismatic leader, the fundamentalists raised questions about the ideas of experts and intellectuals. Fundamentalists shifted the focus from actualizing the Kingdom of God in the present to the eschatological incoming Kingdom of God. In some Christian circles, it becomes a foregone conclusion that the Kingdom of God can only ever be realized in the eschaton after the cataclysmic destruction of the earth. Hofstadter refers to this fundamentalistic mindset as essentially Manichean.[15] In short, fundamentalism developed a messianic ideal during the era of 1900–1940s, animated by authoritarian populism, catastrophic-utopianism, and anti-intellectualism.

Iconic Bible

For symbolic anthropologist Rosemary Gordon, icons and images provide a way for humans to organize and understand the world. In writing about the psychological, religious, and social function of icons, she invokes the analogy of a carapace — the hard upper shell of a turtle

[15] Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life: The Paranoid Style in American Politics Uncollected Essays 1956-1965*, ed. Sean Wilentz and Nicolaus A. Huber (New York: Library of America, 2020), 497.

— that protects the vulnerable creature that resides within it. Icons, such as the carapace, protect those who reside within them from the world outside. A reciprocal relational exchange occurs between the turtle and the shell, the viewer, and the icon. A person's iconic carapace consists of a series of images (these can be mental, material, or even mnemonic) that allow humans to make meaning and organize the world around them often in the midst of a confusing and threatening mental landscape. Martin Marty builds on Gordon's analogy in his 1980 address to the Society of Biblical Literature titled "America's Iconic Book."[16] Marty writes, "The Bible, in American history and in much of present-day culture, provided and provides as an object a basic element in the carapace of images..."[17] James W. Watts condenses Marty's larger core argument as follows: "He [Marty] argued that, more than its contents, the book itself has become a dominant symbol in the nation's mental 'carapace'" Watts goes on to explain that the two most important points of Marty's analysis are: one, the Bible is a primary part of the U.S. mental carapace and two, the Bible's contents matter less than the generation of aesthetics and feelings associated with scripture as a focal point of the national carapace. [18]

In keeping with Gordon, Marty, and Watts, the morphology of messianism in the United States during this period can be compared to a turtle. My focus in this chapter are three primary texts that construct a metaphor: the creature who lives inside of the shell is the messiah himself [*sic*]. The carapace shell resting upon the turtle's back protecting it is the *Scofield Reference Bible*.[19] The multi-volume works *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to Truth* serves as the plastron (the turtle's hard underbelly), providing protection from all threats great and small, while also

[16] Martin Marty, "America's Iconic Book," http://www.illuminos.com/mem/selectPapers/contentsSelectList.html.
[17] Ibid.; Cf. Rosemary Gordon, "A Very Private World," in *The Function and Nature of Imagery*, ed. Peter W. Sheehan (New York: Academic Press, 1981), 63–80.
[18] James W. Watts, *Iconic Books and Texts* (Sheffield, UK: Equinox Publishing, 2015), 138.
[19] The *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909) was so popular it was updated. Both versions contain a paratextual apparatus not only explaining dispensationalism but also the "plain meaning" and "intent" of the Bible. Nancy T. Ammerman, "North American Protestant Fundamentalism," in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 7.

providing flexible and soft fissures between disparate theological groups that make up the fundamentalist movement. Clarence Larkin's *Dispensational Truth or God's Plan and Purpose in the Ages* serves as the girdle connecting the carapace to the plastron. Its architectural style and illustrations make plain the premillennial dispensational theology which is tucked away inside of the paratextual apparatus of the *Scofield Reference Bible*.[20] These three texts provide a complete exoskeleton that has evolved to preserve and protect the animal within. Without the exoskeleton, the turtle cannot live, and without the turtle, the exoskeleton is no longer living.

One way of articulating the shifts in U.S. Protestantism during the Progressive Era is to point out that the growing divisiveness within the church did not necessarily happen solely along denominational divisions (although that happened as well, it is not my primary object of inquiry at this moment). The divisions in the church took shape according to modernity and its discontents. The Social Gospel movement sought to reform modernity and the anti-modern modernist fundamentalists spoke boisterously of dismantling it.[21] Martin Marty, in his classic work *Righteous Empire*, argues that these critiques of modernity established a two party system with "private party" conservatives and fundamentalists on the one side and "public party" liberals and those espousing Social Gospel on the other.[22] As the fissures between the "private party" fundamentalists and the "public party" followers of the Social Gospel grew,

---

[20] C.I. Scofield, ed., *The Scofield Reference Bible ... With a New System of Connected Topical References to All the Greater Themes of Scripture, with Annotations, Revised Marginal Readings, Summaries, Definitions, and Index*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909); Clarence Larkin, *Dispensational Truth: Or God's Plan and Purpose in the Ages* (Philadelphia: Rev. Clarence Larkin Est., 1918); R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon, eds., *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, vol. 1, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 2008).

[21] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 199–228.

[22] Martin E Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 177–87. In 2007 Marty would revisit this hypothesis engaging with his critics and the texts that have followed the first edition of Righteous Empire. Marty and his critics would affirm that the two-party hypothesis made a unique and significant contribution to religion, history, and political science, however this hypothesis winds up being overplayed as this binary is overly reified. There are other ways to tell this story, and the division between public and private held for a long time before an eventual flip due to the "politics of resentment," whereby fundamentalists returned as the public party. Finally, the binary between public and private parties elides the complexities of the Pentecostal experience. Still Pentecostal churches, Black churches, and other minorized church communities were forced to cross and complicate the lines of division between these two white bourgeois parties. I would like to suggest that perhaps better articulation for the fissure that was forming at the time would be the modernists versus the anti-modernists. Cf. Martin E. Marty, *Righteous Empire Revisited* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 2007), 37-60.

fundamentalist subcultures began to emerge.[23] Fundamentalists did not fracture along traditional theological fault lines, but instead fissured along the lines of public/private and rural/urban distinctions. These fissures were at their clearest in large metropolitan cities like New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles where fundamentalists and their financial backers lived. In these places white fundamentalists watched the effects of the Great Migration of African Americans to the cities, the increase in Jewish immigration from eastern Europe, the rise of Italian Catholics, and the growing Mexican population in California. These demographic changes fueled fundamentalist anxieties by signaling shifts in religious piety towards non-white Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Judaism, and non-Christian religions. They saw any threat (real or imagined) to their cultural hegemony and dominance as a sign of the end times.[24]

Defining Fundamentalism

Initially the term "fundamentalism" was an emic label of self-identification and pride. Noted fundamentalist scion Curtis Lee Laws created the first definition of fundamentalist as one who is militant enough "to do battle royal for the Fundamentals."[25] In line with Laws, Marsden defines fundamentalism as:

> militantly anti-modernist Protestant evangelicalism. Fundamentalists were evangelical Christians, close to the traditions of the dominant American revivalist establishment of the nineteenth century, who in the twentieth century militantly opposed both modernism in theology and the cultural changes that modernism endorsed.[26]

---

[23] David Harrington Watt, *A Transforming Faith Explorations of Twentieth Century American Evangelicalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 73–91. For more on the social gospel movement and its relationship to the labor movement see Philip Di Angi's master's thesis on the topic. Philip Guy Di Angi, "The Lost Alliance: A Study of the Social Gospellers and the American Labor Movement, 1877-1918." (Master's Thesis, Kent State University, 1972).

[24] Daniel R Bare, "Whitewashed Fundamentalism: Reassessing the Fundamentalist Movement Across Racial Lines," *Fides et Historia* 52, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2020): 28–49; Christopher D. Cantwell, "The Bible Class Teacher: Piety and Politics in the Age of Fundamentalism," *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (Ph.D., Ann Arbor, Cornell University, 2012), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (1013853776), https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/bible-class-teacher-piety-politics-age/docview/1013853776/se-2?accountid=14214.

[25] Curtis Lee Laws, "Convention Side Lights," Watchman-Examiner VIII (July 1, 1920): 834.Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 159; David Harrington Watt, "Fundamentalists of the 1920s and 1930s," in *Fundamentalism: Perspectives on a Contested History*, ed. Simon A. Wood and David Harrington Watt (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2014), 20.

[26] Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, 4. Marsden uses the term "modern" and "modernism" interchangeably like the early twentieth century fundamentalists he is examining.

Simon A. Wood, David Harrington Watt, Martin Marty, R. Scott Appleby, Gabriel A. Almond, Emmanuel Sivan, Malise Ruthven, and others note that the term fundamentalist quickly took on a life of its own, and by the 1970s became a term used by scholars and journalists to describe recalcitrant conservative ideologues across religious traditions, deployed with variable precision.[27] As Wood and Harrington Watt note, the fundamentalists have offered no formal robust definition of fundamentalism. Fundamentalists have not specified which fundamentals they seek to protect.[28] Sandeen emphasizes that while the terms fundamentalism and fundamentalist find their origins in the 1900s to 1920s, it is important to remember that the theological and ideological origins of fundamentalism have their roots even further back in earlier iterations of evangelicalism, conservative Protestantism, conservative Calvinism, and various pietistic/holiness movements.[29] The 1900s to 1920s served as a chrysalis for the burgeoning fundamentalist movement, a movement which sought, but never achieved a unitary existence. Instead of a unified movement, a subculture and identity emerged; thus, it is better to speak of fundamentalists and fundamentalisms in the plural form.[30]

For some of the early fundamentalists, the fundamentals in question were those covered in *The Fundamentals. The Fundamentals* mattered more as iconic texts than as a systematic theology. They provided a bulwark of intellectual authority and respectability against the

---

[27] Simon A. Wood and David Harrington Watt, *Fundamentalism: Perspectives on a Contested History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2014); Gabriel A. Almond, R. Scott. Appleby, and Emmanuel. Sivan, Strong Religion: *The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); R. Scott Appleby and Martin E. Marty, *Fundamentalisms Observed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Martin E. Marty, *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *Fundamentalisms Comprehended* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Polities, Economies, and Militance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
[28] Simon A. Wood and David Harrington Watt, "Introduction," in *Fundamentalism: Perspectives on a Contested History*, Ed. David Harrington Watt and Simon A. Wood (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2014), 1–17.
[29] Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, 9.
[30] Appleby and Marty, "The Fundamentalism Project: A User's Guide," vii–xiii.

encroachment of liberalism and modernity.[31] Although not the only hallmarks of a fundamentalist, George Marsden, Ernest Sandeen, and Margaret Lamberts Bendroth identify five primary fundamentals that are drawn from these texts: [1] the affirmation of the Virgin birth of Jesus Christ; [2] the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ; [3] the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, as well the supernatural and divine nature of his miracles; [4] the plenary infallibility of scripture; [5] and the rejection of higher criticism.[32] Certainly many Christians, would have affirmed the virgin birth, resurrection, and the divinity of Christ. Depending on the fundamentalist sect there might be debate about which model of atonement theology should be accepted, but atonement theology itself, was rarely a divisive issue. Sandeen distills the list down even further by arguing that the only two contested points between fundamentalists, evangelicals, social gospellers, and mainline Protestants were premillennial dispensationalism and affirmations of biblical inerrancy (coupled with the polemic against higher criticism).[33] Historian Robert Wegner is correct in his assessment that fundamentalisms will be remembered primarily for how their theology manifests as social thought and how it impacts religion, media, culture, and politics in the U.S.[34] Richard Hofstadter's iconic essay *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* echoes Wegner's point.[35]

Yet Marsden provides the most succinct definition that encapsulates the fundamentalist movement and subculture, explaining that, "Fundamentalism was a loose, diverse, and changing federation of co-belligerents united by their fierce opposition to modernist attempts to bring

[31] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 118–23.
[32] Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender: 1875 to the Present*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 4; Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 4; Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, xiii–xiv.
[33] Ernest R. Sandeen rightly notes that it is Princeton Theological Seminary professors and J. Gresham Machen who wind up greatly influencing the fundamentalist movement especially on the problem of higher criticism and the inerrancy of the Bible. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, 112–14, 168-170.
[34] Robert Elwood Wenger, *Social Thought in American Fundamentalism, 1918-1933* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007).
[35] Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*.

Christianity into line with modern thought."[36] The enduring legacy of fundamentalisms, as Lamberts, Bendroth, Marsden, Sandeen, and others note, is in its white lower middle-class (yet upwardly mobile) hyper-masculinized, militant, and ultimately paranoid style.[37] Fundamentalism was best practiced and affirmed neither through a careful and attentive reading of *The Fundamentals* nor through an adherence to a creedal statement (though these abounded) but through stylistic investment in a particular aesthetic and emotional register. This style was Victorian in dress, pugilistic by disposition and in rhetoric, and an ideologically paranoid sentiment of the anti-modern modernists.

Between formal denominations and parachurch movements, fundamentalists sought control over denominations, seminaries, and organizations. As a movement, fundamentalism is best understood and defined by the mass culture movement that it built, while creating a sub-cultural network that it used to influence the rest of Protestant Christianity and culture. As David Harrington Watt explains, "Fundamentalism had its own distinctive institutions, publications, leaders, networks of influence, and doctrinal emphases that differentiated it from other forms of conservative Protestantism." As Harrington Watt notes, while fundamentalists attacked modernists with aplomb, they often reserved some of their most polemical language for the conservative Protestants who were close to, but not a part of, the fundamentalist movement. Theologically and ideologically, the two shared some core features, like anti-modern modernism, militant rhetoric, biblical inerrancy, and a preoccupation with apocalypticism.[38]

The fundamentalist style, which valorized the agrarian gentleman, felt anachronistic to thinkers like H.L. Mencken. Mencken's merciless reporting on the Scopes trial, and the wide

[36] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 4.
[37] Ibid., 199–211; Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, 75; Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*: 1875 to the Present., 19–20, 61–64.
[38] Watt, "Fundamentalists of the 1920s and 1930s," 21.

circulation of his columns, painted a vivid and perhaps definitive picture of the proceedings. Due to Mencken's characterization of the Scopes trial, despite fundamentalists being predominantly upwardly mobile whites living mostly in the North and Midwest, the negative stereotypes, i.e., ignorant or backwards, associated with rural southern whites fused with the negative stereotypes of fundamentalists, i.e., arrogant or disdainful. The fusion of these two stereotypes was in large part due to H.L. Mencken's acerbic style, as shown in his eulogy of William Jennings Bryan.

> Bryan was a vulgar and common man, a cad undiluted. He was ignorant, bigoted, self-seeking, blatant and dishonest. His career brought him into contact with the first men of his time; he preferred the company of rustic ignoramuses…He was a peasant come home to the dung-pile. Imagine a gentleman, and you have imagined everything that he was not.[39]

Mencken's pillarization of Bryan, evangelical Christians, and by extension fundamentalists, as ignorant, undereducated, backwoods Southern agrarians shaped the national narrative.[40] However, more historical studies, such as Margaret Lamberts Bendroth's *Fundamentalists in the City*, highlight this disjunction between the real and the imagined fundamentalist.[41] As Bendroth notes, two of the most influential fundamentalist congregations were in Boston, hardly an agrarian Southern stronghold. Princeton Theological Seminary and its fundamentalist offshoot Westminster Theological Seminary, respectively located in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, were additional centers of fundamentalist power and authority.[42] William Vance Trollinger's biography of W.B. Riley, "The Grand Old Man of Fundamentalism," further adds a historical account of the story of fundamentalism's national distribution, including in the Midwest, which while agrarian was not associated with the same stereotypes about the South as Mencken had lampooned. Contrary to popular perception, many fundamentalists tended to be urban

[39] H. L. Mencken, "William Jennings Bryan," Menckeniana, no. 193 (2010): 12–16.
[40] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 187–88.
[41] Bendroth, *Fundamentalists in the City: Conflict and Division in Boston's Churches, 1885-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3–10.
[42] Watt, "Fundamentalists of the 1920s and 1930s," 23–25.

Northerners who were well educated and taught and studied at prestigious institutions like Princeton Theological Seminary. The men and women who made up the membership and support base of this fundamentalist movement tended to own small businesses, be upwardly mobile, and live in cities.[43]

As American religious historian Ann D. Braude highlights, the majority of the membership of the fundamentalist churches, institutions, and meetings were women. As Bendroth notes, one of the most influential fundamentalist churches, Park Street Church in Boston, was composed of a nearly 70 percent female membership.[44] In fact, audiences attending fundamentalist evangelistic crusades were made up of women outnumbering men nearly three to one.[45] Not only did women comprise the majority of the membership rolls but they served predominantly as the teachers, missionaries, and administration of the fundamentalist movement.[46] While fundamentalism fought bitterly against Progressive Era gender reforms, the ordination of women, and women's role in the workplace, it nevertheless benefitted from and utilized women's labor. The white male leadership of fundamentalism constantly lamented what they saw as the feminization of the church under the modern era, not only in modern liberal churches but in their own churches. Yet fundamentalists saw the labor, support, and attendance of women as a problem to be solved, not as a gift to be celebrated.[47]

Another layer of white male social exclusivity taken by the fundamentalist movement extended beyond grudges against women's involvement and into racial exclusivity. African Americans shielded themselves from fundamentalist ire through a variety of strategies.

---

[43] Ibid.
[44] Ann D. Braude, "Women's History Is American Religious History," in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 166.
[45] Margaret Lamberts Bendroth's unpublished data as cited in Watt, "Fundamentalists of the 1920s and 1930s," 24
[46] Bendroth, Fundamentalism and Gender: 1875 to the Present., 81–89. For more on fundamentalism in Boston area churches see Bendroth, *Fundamentalists in the City: Conflict and Division in Boston's Churches, 1885-1950*.
[47] Watt, "Fundamentalists of the 1920s and 1930s," 24.

According to C. Eric Lincoln, the Black Church was insulated from white Christian fundamentalism because "black ethnicity denies the relevance of white styles of worship for black people and sanctions the ritual patterns developed in the churches of the black experience."[48] Ammerman agrees with Lincoln that while white racism and Black separatism helped to insulate the Black churches, they may have still shared some theological emphases with fundamentalists of the era, however, they did not take up common cause. Ammerman writes, "Although they [the Black church] share many beliefs with other evangelicals, those beliefs function quite differently in their very different social world."[49] Afraid of racial equality and inclusion, many white fundamentalist churches remained cloistered, racially segregated enclaves.

To return to an earlier thread about the expansive circulation of *The Fundamentals* and its general impact on fundamentalism, the very facticity of its grand distribution helped to cultivate the sense that there was a broad, large, and unified movement of people invested in returning to the "Old Gospel." The myriad conferences, missions, journals, literature, institutes, and universities finding common cause (no matter how tenuous) with fundamentalism helped to increase the sense that there was a broad coalition. Lyman and Milton Stewart's financial support for many fundamentalist projects helped to solidify this sense. Significantly this broad coalition was comprised of primarily an older generation. Marsden writes:

> Of the 37 most prominent authors (that is those whose names appear in library catalogs) still living in 1910 (who contributed over two thirds of the essays) the average birth date was 1850. By 1913, the mid-year of publication, 16 of these authors were in their seventies (this would include two recently deceased), 4 in their sixties, 12 in their fifties, and 4 in their forties. Only 9 of the 37 were still living in 1925 and of these 3 were not sympathetic to the more militant fundamentalism.[50]

[48] C. Eric Lincoln, *Race, Religion, and the Continuing American Dilemma* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984), 363–72.
[49] Ammerman, "North American Protestant Fundamentalism," 3.
[50] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 292–93, fn. 2.

But in a stunning twist of events, by the end of 1925, only six of the still living authors in *The Fundamentals* would identify with the same movement that they helped to found. The imagined community that was carefully crafted for *The Fundamentals* provided a center that would not hold. Because nothing united the authors beyond being bound in a single volume, the initially imagined fundamentalist community collapsed. However, once there was momentum, others would pick up the mantle of fundamentalist and create multiple communities, organizations, and issues under that same name. Their individual charisma would carry the movement far beyond what was initially conceived.

Fundamentalism as a Response to the Social Gospel

In 1896, Congregationalist Minister and Social Gospel Scion, Charles M. Sheldon (1857-1946) famously asked, "What Would Jesus Do?"[51] Sheldon's book *In His Steps*, which emphasized living a moral life and doing justice, became an iconic text of the Social Gospel movement. The very question "What Would Jesus Do?" (a.k.a. WWJD?) became an essential and iconic phrase.[52] Sheldon's book was a morality play against the evils of income inequality, tobacco, alcohol, boxing, and lax sabbath observance. For Sheldon, the answer to WWJD? was to imitate the life of Jesus, by standing against the powers of the ruling class, alongside the poor and the oppressed. However, recalcitrant oil baron Lyman Stewart, an avowed critic of the Social Gospel, chafed at the social reform propositions offered by Sheldon. For Stewart, even if the bars closed and government reforms enacted, the larger problem of individual sin would remain. For

[51] In the early nineteenth century, Charles M. Sheldon offered his deeply Protestant and American takes on the theological line of inquiry, known as the Imitation of God/Christ (imitatio Dei/Christi). His book, In His Steps, would become the lodestar for the Social Gospel movement. The central question of the book is "What Would Jesus Do?" Sheldon's work is not unique, as theologians like Augustine and Thomas à Kempis had previously written treaties on the same topic. Sheldon's contribution was more so to popularize, Protestantize, and Americanize "What Would Jesus Do?" In 1913, he continued his musings on the subject with Jesus is Here. The title serves as its own spoiler: there is a mysterious stranger calling people to be more Christian and this person is, not surprisingly, Jesus. *Jesus is Here* making the postmillennialist impulse of *In His Steps* more explicit.

[52] In the 1990s, the phrase "What Would Jesus Do?" was resurrected and shortened to "WWJD?" and then placed on all sorts of Christian apparel.

Stewart, what mattered most was evangelization and building a bulwark to protect the church from culture and its critics. Stewart's criticisms of movements within the church extended beyond Social Gospel and into Higher Criticism, Women's Suffrage, and Progressivism.[53] In response to the Social Gospel, Lyman Stewart decided to create an artificial and fake grassroots movement. Lyman and Milton Stewart helped to fund C.I. Scofield's work on *The Scofield Reference Bible*, *The Fundamentals*, the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, Union Rescue Mission, and other projects.

The Stewarts helped fund the creation of a fundamentalist movement that served as a bulwark, protecting what they saw as the most important elements of Jesus' message. They funded the creation and distribution of resources, training institutes, and mission outreaches, all of which continue to serve as an active presence in U.S. Society today. All of these projects helped to deftly shift the focus from the Social Gospel's postmillennialist desire to improve the world to Christ's second coming as the premillennialist punitive return of Christ. In the latter approach there is an urgency around saving as many souls as possible before the world ends in catastrophic judgment. By shifting the focus from praxis ("What Would Jesus Do?") to apologetics ("battle royal for the Fundamentals"), Stewart changed the conversation.[54] Imitating Christ becomes not about helping the widow, orphan, and stranger first, but about saving souls and defending the faith from liberalism and progressivism in all forms.

In their willingness to engage in *battle royale*, fundamentalists seized messianism for themselves by focusing first on saving souls, second on ensuring orthodoxy, and lastly on providing material aid to those in need. The focus moved from social transformation to soul transformation: what mattered most was people remaining ready for the rapture. Shifting the

[53] Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 82-90.
[54] Laws, "Convention Side Lights."

Christian's gaze from the present to the looming eschatological cataclysm created a sense of urgency to prepare for the messiah's arrival, which provided a theological rationale for the consolidation and concentration of power in a few of the faithful. Christians' gaze shifting away from looking upon the present to looking towards any eschatological cataclysm allowed for a restructuring of the Protestant subculture. In turn, new church organizations, denominations, colleges, seminaries, and churches were formed while local church autonomy was limited through doctrinal covenants and increased pastoral authority. Colleges and seminaries moved away from tenure to contracts and shifted power from faculty senates to the board of trustees. The power of the purse increasingly usurped the power of the people. As more invested in fighting pet theological and social causes, fundamentalists did not have to justify their non-concern for the widow, orphan, and sojourner. The dominant worldview became one where the world is already doomed, and Christ's return is imminent. Jesus' statement "For you always have the poor with you…"[55] shifts from being an obligation to an observation.

Premillennial Dispensational Theology

One of the major theological differences between the Social Gospel movement and the burgeoning fundamentalist movement were their differing understandings of eschatology. Fundamentalists tended to be premillennialists and social gospellers tended to be postmillennialists. Premillennialists believed, based on their reading of Revelation 19 and 20, that after a period of catastrophism Jesus Christ would return in bodily form and when he did return, Christians both living, and dead would be raptured (ascend into heaven). After which Christ would rule and reign over the earth for a millennium before the final act of the end of the world occurred, when the Anti-Christ and Satan are defeated, the earth is destroyed and there is a

[55] Matthew 26:11, NRSV.

new heaven and a new earth, which are eternal and perfected. The new heaven and the new earth would be filled with the faithful. Whereas postmillennialists believe that the millennium is less a literal one thousand year period and more a figural long time, they see the millennial reign of Jesus Christ on earth having already started in the here and now. Thus, as the millennial kingdom continues to unfold, this belief holds that it is incumbent upon Christians to create the necessary conditions for Christ's return by making the world a better place. Eventually Christians could improve the world to such an extent that Christ would want to return and commence the new heaven and the new earth.

According to Stephen Prothero, Horace Bushnell, Washington Gladden, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, Social Gospel adherents placed great importance on prioritizing the individual's relationship with Christ and their personal salvation over and against doctrinal unity and conformity.[56] While the Social Gospel movement was idealist and optimistic in its postmillennial theological outlook, it prioritized soteriology over eschatology in order to emphasize the individual's personal felt relationship with Christ. In contradistinction to the Social Gospel movement, fundamentalists prioritized theological conformity, soteriology, and a strong emphasis on eschatology. Eschatology is the branch of Christian theology concerned with the end of the world, the return of Christ, Christ's rule on earth, life after death, and other matters. Millennialism is a subtopic within eschatology. Millennialism tends to concern itself with the interpretation of the Book of Revelations, especially Chapter 20, in trying to determine the order surrounding the thousand-year reign of Christ, the binding of the devil, the judgement of the dead, the second coming of Christ, and the rapture. The two primary schools of thought are postmillennialism and premillennialism.

[56] Stephen R. Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 54-55.

Postmillennialists saw the world as getting better and believed that it was the Christian's obligation to work for a more just world. As the world improved, eventually one would enter the time of perfection and righteousness, and then after a thousand years, Christ would return to judge the living and the dead and to subsequently bind Satan for all eternity. Thus, it is the Christian's obligation to work for a more perfect world to bring about the millennial kingdom.[57] The postmillennial outlook on the Social Gospel movement understood the theological significance of the Kingdom of God, which it sought to bring about on earth as it is in heaven. As Evans writes, "social gospel leaders believed that salvation was not about escaping the sins of the world, it was about saving the world."[58] Like fundamentalism, the Social Gospel saw the world in need of salvation and transformation, but the two diverged on the question of whether such salvation and transformation were actually achievable. For the postmillennialists making the world a better place and preparing the way for Jesus Christ's return would provide healing. The premillennial fundamentalist does not see healing as a actually possibility, only destruction. The Social Gospel movement took a more capacious approach to salvation and sought to save not only the souls of people, but also the world and to therefore transform society to be more just and culturally pluralist.[59]

In contradistinction, premillennial dispensationalists did not see the world growing progressively better, but rather, growing progressively worse. In their ideation, one day the world would become so depraved it would reach a catastrophic tipping point when God would rapture Christians — both the living and the dead — into heaven. In this view, the rapture would be followed by seven years of tribulation when the anti-Christ would reign. After the seven years of tribulation, Christ would return, defeat the anti-Christ, and bind Satan in hell. Then, Christ would

[57] Balmer, "Critical Junctures in American Evangelicalism: II The Transition from Postmillennialism to Premillennialism."
[58] Evans, *The Social Gospel in American Religion*, 6.
[59] Evans, 1-20.

rule and reign over the earth for on thousand years. After the thousand-year reign, Christ would judge the living and the dead, destroy the heavens and earth, and establish a new heaven and new earth populated by Christians for an eternity.[60] There are several schools of millennial thought and a great deal of difference and debate within the premillennial and postmillennial schools of thought as well, but this schematic provides a general chronological overview.[61]

Irish churchman John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) was one of the founders and major advocates for premillennial dispensational theology.[62] Darby argued that the world is not getting better, that history does not tilt towards progress but instead destruction. [63] Therefore, the church must return to earlier teachings and to scripture to prepare the way for Christ's impending return. In Ireland and the British Isles, Darby's dispensational eschatology proved controversial. Some members of his own denomination, The Plymouth Brethren, supported his thought, but divided support for Darby's views splintered the church. Darby and his followers became known as Exclusive Brethren. This schism convinced Darby of the importance of Christians separating from the world and from heretical Christians. Seeking a more receptive audience for his premillennial dispensational theology, Darby departed for a tour of the United States. In the United States, he found a deeply receptive audience for his complex theological and eschatological views, which proved popular with this more fertile audience than in the British Isles.[64]

Premillennialism was further clarified and understood through its theological schematization. Dispensationalism is a schematization of history through a particular

---

[60] Balmer, "Critical Junctures in American Evangelicalism: II The Transition from Postmillennialism to Premillennialism."
[61] Mal Couch and Floyd Elmore, eds., "Darby, John Nelson," in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology: A Practical Guide to the People, Viewpoints, and History of Prophetic Studies* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996), 82–84.
[62] Watt, *A Transforming Faith*, 73.
[63] Akenson, *Exporting the Rapture: John Nelson Darby and the Victorian Conquest of North American Evangelicalism*, 42–50.
[64] Timothy C. F. Stunt, "John Nelson Darby," in *Protestant Millennialism, Evangelicalism, and Irish Society, 1790–2005*, ed. Crawford Gribben and Andrew R. Holmes (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2006), 83–98, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230595941_4.

interpretation of history. If higher criticism seeks to situate the Bible in history, then dispensationalism seeks to situate the past, present, and future within scripture. Darby believed in the divinely ordered nature of history and its continued impact on the contemporary world of his day. Darby divided history into seven dispensations (or periods): Paradise, Noah, Abraham, Israel, Gentiles, the Spirit, and the Millennium. Of critical distinction is that history, in Darby's view, does not consist of progress but of *progressive* revelation. Utilizing the Bible, Christians could interpret history and realize that history is progressing towards the eschaton. For Darby then, history is subject to the Bible; the Bible is not subject to history. This theology enables a hyper-textual and hyper-literalist reading that interpolates the present into the Bible, reducing it to a series of confirmation-bias-proof texts. Darby's biblical interpretation was philosemitic, arguing for the restoration of the Jewish people. Darby expressed great admiration and support for the Jewish people, while also arguing for the absolute and total separation of the Jews and Christians into distinct peoples of God.[65] In Darby's obsession with the separation between dispensations, separation between Jews and Christians, and his view of the rapture, his thought became focused on resentment and anti-Semitism.[66]

Neither postmillennialist nor premillennialist beliefs proved ideal. The postmillennialist was obligated to make the world better and to strive for social reform, so postmillennialism offers some hope that things will get better. It encouraged everyone to work together. However, in the face of child labor, industrialization, urbanization, political corruption, monopolies,

[65] For more on Philo-Semitism in Darby, Scofield, and fundamentalisms see, Akenson, *Exporting the Rapture: John Nelson Darby and the Victorian Conquest of North-American Evangelicalism*, 42–50; Yaakov S. Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to Jews in America, 1880-200*0 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); B Eugene Griessman, "Philo-Semitism and Protestant Fundamentalism: The Unlikely Zionists," *Phylon* (1960-) 37, no. 3 (1976): 197–211; Paul Richard Wilkinson, *For Zion's Sake: Christian Zionism and the Role of John Nelson Darby* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008); Robert K Whalen, "'Christians Love the Jews!' The Development of American Philo-Semitism, 1790-1860," *Religion and American Culture* 6, no. 2 (1996): 225–59.

[66] Cf. Robert O. Smith, "Systematizing the Jew: John Nelson Darby and the Putative Paternity of Christian Zionism," in More Desired than Our Owne Salvation (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199993246.003.0008.

sexism, and racism, postmillennialism's promise for a better future could feel unrealistic and even myopic. On the other hand, premillennialism offered a bleak alternative; one was already living in the end times. Everyday becomes one day closer to the rapture. Only the rapture will spare believers from tribulation and grant them eternity in heaven. Premillennialism allowed pastors and theologians to prophesy doom and gloom, along with an unrealized hope, which was always deferred into some vaguely defined and distant future.

The differing of hope and futurity deferred might suggest the that one could rest on their laurels, but that was not the case for the fundamentalists. Instead, they worked hard to spread their ideas, to learn, and to climb some social and economic ladders. They may have believed the rapture was coming soon, but that did not mean that human could not embrace a little social advancement. As Harrington Watt notes, for many "aligning oneself with the fundamentalist movement was, in and of itself a form of upwardly mobility...Mastering the intricacies of the dispensationalist schema could sharpen one's mind."[67] As Randall Balmer notes, "Although this may appear to be a recondite doctrinal debate, the unfortunate detritus of people with too much time on their hands, the distinction here has had enormous repercussions for the ways that evangelicals approach society."[68] Because dispensationalism was viewed as an important theological and intellectual schema, it provided fundamentalists with a sense of gnosis. This gnosis granted privileged forms of access to elite fundamentalist circles and the chance to mix with not only fundamentalist scions but also corporate titans and industrialists.

Messianism in Premillennial Dispensationalist Theology

Fundamentalism weaves a complex theological and denominational tapestry. As Martin Marty's *Fundamentalism Project* illustrates, it is difficult to say that "fundamentalism" is one

[67] Watt, "Fundamentalists of the 1920s and 1930s," 25.
[68] Ibid., 52.

thing, even during the era of its birth. Theologically, Protestant fundamentalism concerned itself more with bolstering its self-image as a unified bulwark against liberalism and progressivism than fully policing doctrine. Formally, the form of the fundamentalist image was that of God's army willing to fight to defend the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Fundamentalists saw themselves as a people doubly set apart from "the world" (i.e. liberalism and progressivism) and heretics (i.e. Social Gospel and theological liberalism). The irresolvable paradox of fundamentalism is the difficulty in discerning which differences warrant a schism and which ones can be ignored. Pulling from a wide variety of denominations and theological traditions, early fundamentalism, especially in *The Fundamentals*, lacked a deeper coherence. The volumes were consistent in setting themselves in opposition to liberalism and progressivism in all its forms. The aesthetics of the cover, along with the credentialism of the table of contents, conveyed the idea of a unifying seriousness and theological coherence across denominations. The image collapses when scrutinized too closely. The aesthetics of *The Fundamentals*, the way they feel and look, ends up being more important than the content they contain. Despite their illusory nature, they wind up imbued with a sense of religiosity and pious devotion that transforms them into a material icon of the movement.

Examining Fundamentalism and its influence on the messianic idea allows for an interrogating of the form and content. For example, theologically, not all fundamentalists held a premillennial dispensationalist eschatology; however, all premillennial dispensationalists were fundamentalists. *The Scofield Reference Bible* and *Dispensational Truth* forced fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists to contend with the modern anti-modernism of apocalyptic thinking of premillennial dispensationalism and how it captured the ima*gination.* The helping hand of *Scofield* Bible and the helpful cartography of *Dispensational Truth* provided helpful

visualizations of complex theological, historical, sociological, and apocalyptic resources giving fundamentalism part of its form. In form, fundamentalism is a paranoid modern anti-modernism that embraces a technological and visual cartography or blueprints to explain the complex content of premillennial dispensationalism to insiders and outsiders.

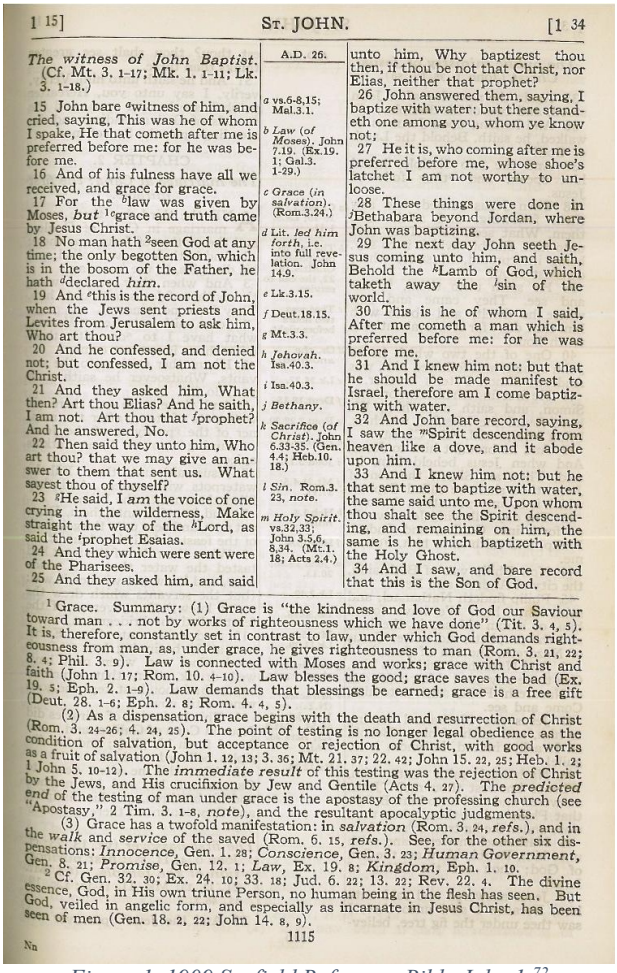
From the 1900s to the 1940s, messianic fundamentalism rapidly evolved and developed a new style and aesthetic of representation and presentation. *The Scofield Reference Bible*, *The Fundamentals,* and *Dispensational Truth* all worked together to form the protective shell of fundamentalism and a fortified messianism. [69] *The Scofield Reference Bible* (1909) functioned like Wikipedia for early twentieth Protestant Christians. The central column of its chain references provided a hypertextual interlinking apparatus comprised of dates and biblical references. Additionally, *The Scofield Reference Bible* introduced all manner of paratextual material like a dating system, biblical commentary, maps, charts, and notes. The paratextual material became part and parcel of the text itself. The more one read t*he Scofield Reference Bible*, the more the paratextual material ceased to be supporting material and instead became a primary interpretative lens. Scofield's dispensationalist and apocalyptic sensibilities amplified the biblical text. Taken together, the *Scofield Reference Bible's* presentation of premillennial dispensationalism takes on added valances through World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II.[70] World War I created a deep sense of a spiritual and cultural crisis for many Christians. The fundamentalists, especially the premillennial dispensationalists, clearly affirmed that the world was not getting better, the world felt like it was ending, and the point of Jesus'

[69] Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible*; Torrey and Dixon, *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*; Larkin, *Dispensational Truth*.

[70] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 141–53.

return was imminent. There was some comfort in the message that things would get worse before they get better, but that "getting better," in this case, meant the rapture and thus Jesus' return.[71]

The Scofield Reference Bible (1909)



1 15] ST. JOHN. [1 34

The witness of John Baptist. (Cf. Mt. 3. 1–17; Mk. 1. 1–11; Lk. 3. 1–18.)

15 John bare [a]witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.
16 And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.
17 For the [b]law was given by Moses, *but* [1][c]grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.
18 No man hath [2]seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath [d]declared *him*.
19 And [e]this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?
20 And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ.
21 And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that [f]prophet? And he answered, No.
22 Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?
23 [g]He said, I *am* the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the [h]Lord, as said the [f]prophet Esaias.
24 And they which were sent were of the Pharisees.
25 And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?
26 John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not;
27 He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.
28 These things were done in [j]Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.
29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the [k]Lamb of God, which taketh away the [l]sin of the world.
30 This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.
31 And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.
32 And John bare record, saying, I saw the [m]Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.
33 And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.
34 And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.

A.D. 26.

[a] vs.6-8,15; Mal.3.1.
[b] *Law (of Moses).* John 7.19. (Ex.19. 1; Gal.3. 1-29.)
[c] *Grace (in salvation).* (Rom.3.24.)
[d] Lit. *led him forth*, i.e. into full revelation. John 14.9.
[e] Lk.3.15.
[f] Deut.18.15.
[g] Mt.3.3.
[h] *Jehovah.* Isa.40.3.
[i] Isa.40.3.
[j] *Bethany.*
[k] *Sacrifice (of Christ).* John 6.33-35. (Gen. 4.4; Heb.10. 18.)
[l] *Sin.* Rom.3. 23, *note.*
[m] *Holy Spirit.* vs.32,33; John 3.5,6, 8,34. (Mt.1. 18; Acts 2.4.)

[1] Grace. Summary: (1) Grace is "the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man . . . not by works of righteousness which we have done" (Tit. 3. 4, 5). It is, therefore, constantly set in contrast to law, under which God demands righteousness from man, as, under grace, he gives righteousness to man (Rom. 3. 21, 22; 8. 4; Phil. 3. 9). Law is connected with Moses and works; grace with Christ and faith (John 1. 17; Rom. 10. 4–10). Law blesses the good; grace saves the bad (Ex. 19. 5; Eph. 2. 1–9). Law demands that blessings be earned; grace is a free gift (Deut. 28. 1–6; Eph. 2. 8; Rom. 4. 4, 5).
(2) As a dispensation, grace begins with the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 3. 24–26; 4. 24, 25). The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but acceptance or rejection of Christ, with good works as a fruit of salvation (John 1. 12, 13; 3. 36; Mt. 21. 37; 22. 42; John 15. 22, 25; Heb. 1. 2; 1 John 5. 10–12). The *immediate result* of this testing was the rejection of Christ by the Jews, and His crucifixion by Jew and Gentile (Acts 4. 27). The *predicted end* of the testing of man under grace is the apostasy of the professing church (see "Apostasy," 2 Tim. 3. 1–8, *note*), and the resultant apocalyptic judgments.
(3) Grace has a twofold manifestation: in *salvation* (Rom. 3. 24, *refs.*), and in the *walk* and *service* of the saved (Rom. 6. 15, *refs.*). See, for the other six dispensations: *Innocence*, Gen. 1. 28; *Conscience*, Gen. 3. 23; *Human Government*, Gen. 8. 21; *Promise*, Gen. 12. 1; *Law*, Ex. 19. 8; *Kingdom*, Eph. 1. 10.
[2] Cf. Gen. 32. 30; Ex. 24. 10; 33. 18; Jud. 6. 22; 13. 22; Rev. 22. 4. The divine essence, God, in His own triune Person, no human being in the flesh has seen. But God, veiled in angelic form, and especially as incarnate in Jesus Christ, has been seen of men (Gen. 18. 2, 22; John 14. 8, 9).

Nn 1115

Figure 1. 1909 Scofield Reference Bible John 1.[72]

In 1909 when C.I. Scofield published his *Scofield Reference Bible*, it quickly became a hugely popular Bible and put Scofield on the map as an intellectual in the Protestant church.[73] The *Scofield Reference Bible* printed biblical commentary alongside the biblical text (King James Version), similar to the Geneva Bible. Printing the commentary alongside the text allowed

[71] Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, 233–37.
[72] *Scofield Reference Bible, John 1*, 1909, Scofield Reference Bible, page 1115, 5 x 8 in., https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ScofieldBible.jpg.
[73] Ibid.

the reader to have scripture and commentary in one compact volume.[74] It also utilized a center column paratextual cross-reference system, called chain references, which showed how one Bible verse related to another Bible verse. This allowed the reader to read the Bible thematically so they too could see the themes and patterns in scripture that Scofield identified for them. In the 1917 edition, Scofield added dates in his biblical commentary so that lay readers could have a timeline to accompany his commentary. Scofield used James Ussher's date of 4004 B.C. for the Creation story in Genesis chapter 1.[75] The *Scofield Reference Bible* additionally incorporated Darby's premillennial dispensational thought and Scofield's "gap theory" approach to creation.[76] *The Scofield Reference Bible* helped to popularize premillennial dispensational theology and creationism; both of these doctrines would become critical fault lines in Protestant Christianity.

A major part of the legacy of *The Scofield Reference Bible* is its promotion of Darby's premillennial dispensational thought. By placing Darby's work alongside the biblical text and creating a chain reference system that was designed to prove Darby's point, Scofield succeeded in making a rather complex and convoluted work of theology accessible to lay readers, while also portraying this system of thought as rational, obvious, and most importantly biblical and authoritative. Scofield's work allowed for Darby's thought to be seen as natural, obvious, cogent, and logical. Additionally, Scofield's charts, graphs, and maps of the seven dispensations, and notes connecting scripture to world history lent a greater sense of validity and authority to this text. The catastrophism of World War I certainly validated for many the idea of an epistemology predicated upon a looming catastrophic apocalypse in which all of humanity, save the special few who manage to escape, are doomed. The ever-speculative enterprise of eschatological

[74] Gordon Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version, 1611-2011* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 26.
[75] Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible*, 3.
[76] R. Todd Mangum and Mark S. Sweetnam, *Scofield Bible: Its History and Impact on the Evangelical Church*. (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2012), 97.

prediction took on new and different registers after the publication of *The Scofield Reference Bible*. Now any lay person with this wildly popular Bible could speculate and fantasize about the impending collapse of civilization and their ability to escape catastrophe at the last possible moment. By 1945, *The Scofield Reference Bible*'s popularity was such that it had sold over two million copies. And in 1967, it underwent a controversial revision which modernized some of the KJV texts, updated Scofield's notes, and his cross references,[77] so much so that the 1966 *Scofield Reference Bible* is still the most popular edition with contemporary dispensational premillennialists.[78]

Even critics of *The Scofield Reference Bible* grudgingly lauded the text for its thematization of Scripture. However, according to B.M. Pietsch, "Dutch Reformed Bible professor Albertus Pieters…warned that Scofield's Bible was 'one of the most dangerous books on the market…Its use should be quietly and tactfully, but persistently and vigilantly opposed."[79] Pieters primary concern was the interpolation of premillennial dispensational theology into the text, as well as the way that *The Scofield Reference Bible* naturalized and normalized a theology which Pieters found antithetical to the Dutch Reformed tradition. *The Scofield Reference Bible* was broadly appealing, predominantly to Protestant audiences, allowing premillennial dispensationalist theology to enter the theological mainstream among an influential segment of Protestant readers. Pieters' criticism illustrates the immersive quality of Scofield's Bible. It draws you into not only the biblical world but more essentially into the premillennial dispensationalist world.

[77] Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible*; Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*; Campbell, *Bible*; Mangum and Sweetnam, *Scofield Bible*.
[78] Rebecca Joyce Frey, *Fundamentalism* (Global Issues) (New York: Facts on File, 2007), 53.
[79] As quoted in Pietsch, *Dispensational Modernism*, 190.

The Scofield Reference Bible presents itself as having the final word on the topic of biblical interpretation and biblical authority. Yet, it lacks a scholarly textual critical apparatus to point out discrepancies in the text, to mention scholarly debates over translations, to note variants between historical sources, etc. By popularizing premillennial dispensational thought and providing a densely encapsulated epistemology, Scofield established a foundation for using the Bible as a primary authoritative text in creationist and evolutionary debates.

Scofield's specific genius resided in his deft maneuvering between using religious ("Rev.") and intellectual ("D.D.") credentials to establish credibility and authority while disavowing the theological and interpretive power he exerted over the text. The title page for *the Scofield Reference Bible* describes itself as presenting a "new system of connected topical references…, with annotations, revised marginal renderings, summaries, definitions, and index" along with "helps at hard places, explanations of seeming discrepancies, and a new system of paragraphs."[80] Scofield never states that he is constructing a theology or offering a distinct interpretation. Scofield describes his work as merely providing aids to help the reader interpret this "self-interpreting" Bible. Visually the lines between biblical text and paratextual apparatus begin to blur in the mind's eye. Scofield's notations interpolate the text.[81] As a visual and material object, *The Scofield Reference Bible* served as an intellectual and physical rampart against higher criticism; higher criticism becomes unnecessary when one has a self-interpreting Bible that assists the reader in ascertaining the plain meaning of the text. Higher critics, moreover, become unnecessary when one has Oxford University Press and faithful Christian

[80] C.I Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), i.
[81] For example, in John 1:17, footnotes one and two articulate the dispensation of Grace. The Grace of Christ also becomes an age and dispensation, or a historical period. Footnote 3 tells the reader where to go to learn of the other seven dispensations. The dispensation of grace begins with death and resurrection. So now even grace is catastrophic. To wit, each of the dispensations presented in the Bible either begin and/or end with catastrophe. All dispensations point teleologically towards the rapture and the coming of a new heaven and new earth.

ministers, actual doctors of the church, presenting such an aesthetically pleasing and technically serious Bible as Scofield's.

The Scofield Reference Bible holds more in common with technical manuscripts than the illuminated Bibles of yore. As B.M. Pietsch emphasizes, the visual and technical apparatuses of the Bible marks a transition from illuminated manuscripts to enumerated manuscripts. Furthermore, Scofield's Bible uses "modern instruments for the production of knowledge" like "classification, quantification, typologies, and other methods of taxonomic reading."[82] Scofield creates the appearance of scholarly diligence while launching a deep critique of modernity and historical criticism. He uses modern technological methods so that his thoughts are visually framed around the biblical text. His words and methods become *de facto* gospel.

Scofield's premillennial dispensationalism and his tractates like "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth" (1888) were so popular that they inspired Lyman Stewart to embark on his own project challenging modernity and higher criticism. In fact, Stewart wrote to Scofield and said:

> a matter which had been on our hearts for some time, that of sending some kind of warning and testimony to the English-speaking ministers, theological teachers and students, and English-speaking missionaries of the world ... which would put them on their guard and bring them into right lines again ... The more we have thought about it the more we have been led to feel that you are the man to prepare this warning and testimony, or whatever it might be designated.[83]

Because he was finishing the notes for his *Scofield Reference Bible*, Scofield declined the opportunity to help with Stewart's nascent project, however Stewart did agree to help fund Scofield's editorial work so that his Bible could be completed. In turn, Scofield assisted Stewart by extolling the project with his friends and colleagues, providing Stewart with contacts, some of whom would appear in *The Fundamentals*. Stewart and Scofield's correspondence reveals that

[82] Pietsch, 187
[83] The Lyman Stewart Papers, letter from Lyman Stewart to C. I. Scofield, dated July 21, 1908. As quoted in Paul W. Rood, *Remembering the Fundamentals Project, 1909-1915.*, vol. 1 (La Mirada, CA: Biola University, 2014), 24–25, http://elibrary.biola.edu/ebooks/Rood_Remember_2014.

both men were preoccupied with confronting the challenge of higher criticism to the "Old Gospel." Eventually, Stewart funded not only *The Fundamentals* and *Scofield's Reference Bible*, but also the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, which he declared would help "'the propagation of the old Gospel' and remain loyal to 'the Word of Truth.'"[84]

The first edition of *The Scofield Reference Bible* came out in 1909. Its publication was an opportunity not only for Scofield but also for Oxford University Press to showcase their technological achievements. For Oxford, it was their Oxford India Paper: a lighter, tougher, and cheaper-to-produce paper, that allowed the production of more portable and durable Bibles. For Scofield, the importance of Oxford India Paper meant that his paratextual apparatus would not enlarge the text and thus the cost. The first edition of *The Scofield Reference Bible* had eight different formats and prices, described as, "The most expensive—on Oxford India Paper and featuring 'Sealskin, divinity circuit, calf lined to edge, silk sewed, round corners, red under gold edges'—was priced at a hefty ten dollars." As Pietsch highlights, the deluxe version quickly became a pietistic status symbol. [85] As a sacred Protestant object, *The Scofield Reference Bible* needed to look and feel sacred without being ostentatious or showy. It contained no illuminated pages, only maps and technical illustrations. It needed what Max Weber might call an aura of "this worldly asceticism" while still occupying a space and place in the world. The paratextual apparatus of *Scofield* imbued the text with a modern and technologically serious appearance. A modern Bible for a modern age, but not too modern, *Scofield* eschewed a more contemporary translation for the King James Version of the Bible. While expensive, these early *Scofield Reference Bibles* signified an ever so slight transition in Protestant austerity. The Bible was thinner and smaller than other larger reference Bibles, which made it less showy. However, it

[84] Ibid.
[85] B. M. Pietsch, *Dispensational Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 181-186.

was printed on luxe paper and bound in luxurious hides: a gentle and subtle luxury that communicated specialness and sacredness. The owner of *Scofield Reference Bible* signaled that he or she was a serious and dedicated student of scripture who understood that a finely constructed Bible spoke to the transcendental significance and sacredness of Scripture.

A visually and technologically impressive Bible, Scofield's material and contents highlight an intellectual and moral seriousness, implying that this Bible is for those who are *truly invested* in reading the Bible. Solid black lines divide the page into three columns. The two exterior columns contain the biblical text, and the interior column contains the chain reference system, as well as often containing a proposed date of authorship. This chain reference system maps, for the reader, how various biblical passages connect with one another. Scofield's footnotes run along the bottom of many pages. But the biblical text itself and paratextual apparatus are surrounded by blank margins. The black dividing line, the in-text headings and citations, along with the footnotes shift the visual emphasis away from the biblical text and towards the supporting intellectual apparatus. In total, the biblical text is segmented and divided to create a harmonious and thematic whole. Pietsch counts all of Scofield's aids, summing up that there are "approximately eight hundred notes, three thousand subheads, and twenty-seven thousand cross-references." The patterned pages have a technical, imagistic order to them; Scofield's visually immersive quality pulls the reader into a world suffused with a visual structure. [86]

Visually and narratively, the text attempts to find a balance between scholarly expertise and what Pietsch calls "interpretive populism."[87] One of the contributing editors to *The Scofield Reference Bible*, Methodist minister Arno C. Gaebelein, defended the interpretive populism of

[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., 174.

the Bible by emphasizing how the reference notes were indeed methodological and technical aids. For Gaebelein, "The Bible is a self-interpreting Book."[88] For Gaebelein and Scofield the interpretive agency of reading Scripture still resided with the reader. Underscoring this point, Pietsch writes, "The front matter dripped with scholarly ambition, the notes themselves were highly accessible. The goal, after all, was to turn readers into experts." Scofield's Bible, deftly "taught readers all the elements required for proper interpretation."[89] The thick black lines of the paratextual apparatus were designed for "Rightly Dividing The Word of Truth."[90] The paratextual apparatus taught readers a kind of "how to" for the premillennial dispensational theological system and method, including how to structure and divide time into dispensations. These dispensations emphasized how history is subject to the Bible, rather than the Bible being subject to history. *The Scofield Reference Bible* presented a dated historical record of a bygone era. In the structure of premillennial dispensationalist theology, biblical prophecy referred not to the past but to the present, and to the not-too distant present at that. [91]

[88] Arno C. Gaebelein, *The History of the Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Our Hope Publications, 1943), 52; and as quoted in Pietsch, 183.
[89] Pietsch, *Dispensational Modernism*, 183.
[90] This was a fundamentalist catch phrase from 2 Timothy 2:15b. In 1888, Scofield wrote a premillennial dispensationalist theology pamphlet by the same name.
[91] Pietsch., 186.

The Fundamentals: A Testimony to Truth (1910-1915)

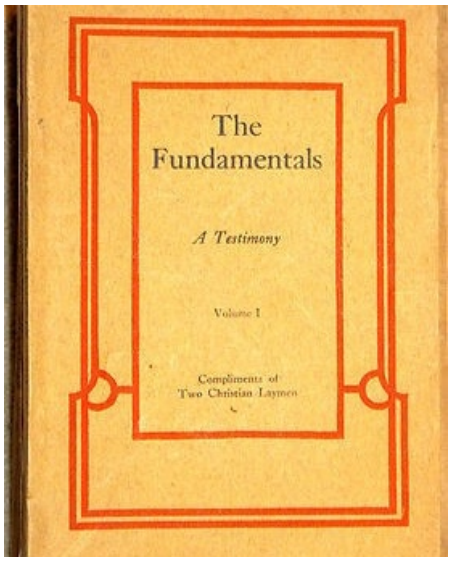


Figure 2. The book cover for *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth, Vol. 1*

Lyman and Milton Stewart used their significant fortune to fund the publication and distribution of the aesthetic *tour de force*, *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to Truth*.[92] The volumes had the aura of a serious intellectual achievement. The red minimalist columns showcase a modernist sentiment while also leaning into a historic and traditional design element. *The Fundamentals* are a tautology, they create the thing they proport to comment upon. The benefit of creating the movement one seeks to reflect is that the illusory nature of the enterprise allows one to imagine a broad tent for what is already, and will continue to be, a fractious ideology. Having quickly accomplished their task of creating an idea, *The Fundamentals* were widely circulated, little read, and clearly understood. To be sure, the success of the project rests not only with the editors but also with their financial backer. The difference between Lyman Stewart and his contemporaries, who were also imagining a conservative movement that responded to social change, is that Stewart had the funds and the connections to enable the

[92] *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, Vol. 1. (Eds. R.A. Torrey and A.C. Dixon, Chicago: Testimony Publishing Company, 1910), Photo courtesy of The New York Public Library, 5 x 8 in., https://archive.org/details/fundamentalstest17chic/page/n9/mode/2up

creation of a document that provided fundamentalism with its etiology. Seeking to provide an appealing counter-narrative to the era, Stewart solicited the help of the most influential Christian thinkers he could recruit to serve as editors for this project. These men, in turn, collected a veritable VIP list of essayists for the project. Even from the beginning, there was a tacit understanding that presenting the illusion of a broad spectrum of support and unity for the nascent Christian fundamentalist movement required inter-textual ideological agreement. Thus, the project was to include a panoply of English, Welsh, and American thinkers, including Princeton Theological Seminary professors, pastors, revivalists, medical doctors, and laypeople. For the era, this was an impressive assemblage composed of ninety essays by well-respected men like Howard Atwood Kelly. As a superficial gesture to inclusion, the project included the work of one woman, the Welsh revivalist, Jessie Penn-Lewis.[93] She was controversial for readers and editors because she taught and preached to audiences of women and men. However, if the editors wanted to demonstrate a large and inclusive movement, they needed to include this leading revivalist of the era (despite their own objections).

The Fundamentals (1910–1915) were self-published, bound into twelve paperback volumes with a strong art nouveau aesthetic conveying an air of intellectual importance and seriousness. In their modernity, they convey a message of sounding the alarm about modernity. Their anti-modern modernism becomes a defining feature. After printing and assembly, three million individual volumes were distributed around the world. According to Marsden, the volumes were sent to nearly every pastor, missionary, professor, Sunday school superintendent,

[93] Howard Atwood Kelly was one of the founders of the Johns Hopkins Medical School and a founder of gynecology as a medical specialty. CF Ikenna Nweze MD et al., "Howard Atwood Kelly: Man of Science, Man of God," *The American Surgeon* 83, no. 5 (May 2017): E171–75; Tiffany R. Wang, "Devout Pedagogies: A Textual Analysis of Late Nineteenth Century Christian Women," ProQuest Dissertations and Theses (Ph.D., Ann Arbor, Bowling Green State University, 2017), ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (1943343192), https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/devout-pedagogies-textual-analysis-late/docview/1943343192/se-2?accountid=14214. David John Smith, "Using the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits of Ignatius Loyola to Critique the Methodology for the Discernment of Spirits within the Writings of Mrs. Jessie Penn-Lewis" (Th.M. Thesis, National Library of Canada = Bibliothèque nationale du Canada, Regis College, 2001), https://go.exlibris.link/7srzgnDN.

and religious leader. *The Fundamentals* quickly became popular, but were rarely read. Marsden notes that *The Fundamentals* "…became a symbolic point of reference for identifying a 'fundamentalist' movement. When in 1920 the term 'fundamentalist' was coined, it called to mind the broad united front of the kind of opposition to modernism that characterized these widely known, if little studied, volumes."[94]

The Fundamentals were meant to displayed and observed. Mailing out millions of copies for free to church leaders was meant to convey the seriousness and importance of the project. These are volumes designed to be added to a library and to serve as reference materials. Their aura communicated as much, if not more, than the content of the essays. *The Fundamentals* function as a piece of art. They are designed for display upon the shelf and the desk. As a mass-produced object, they convey both distance and authenticity while maintaining an aura around them. They provided and created the etiology of the movement they claim to reflect. Despite the artifice and illusion of the project, they nevertheless birthed a fundamentalist movement; one far more divisive than what the progenitors imagined, but a movement nonetheless. Perhaps their success lies in the visual and iconic aura of *The Fundamentals* as a physical object.

Walter Benjamin defines aura in two ways, first as "…the unique phenomenon of distance" and second, through a work's authenticity. He writes "It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the 'authentic' work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value."[95] While mass-produced, *The Fundamentals* retained their aura through distance and authenticity. Instead of naming Lyman and Milton Stewart on the cover, the inscription reads "compliments of two Christian laymen." This epigraph piously hides the

[94] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 118–19.
[95] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: [Essays and Reflections]*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry. Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2013), 222-224.

Stewart's influence, but winks at those in the know. Additionally, the epigraph lets readers know that this is a project funded by the laity of the church. It established a distance between the movement's leaders and the laity. *The Fundamentals* appear to ascend from the pew to the dais, obscuring the reality that they come from above insofar as they come from the upper class. In Protestant circles many of those involved were well known at the time. Many of the authors were ordained men and their pastoral power further lent an air of authority. The testimonials woven throughout the volumes helped to bolster the sense of their authenticity. The scholarly polemics were testimonials to truth just like the salvation testimonies. Each are presented as valid sources of reason and authority within the volumes. The front cover reflects the movement between distance and authenticity.

What mattered most was not the content of these texts but their aesthetics and aura of authority; they looked and felt significant and solemn. These volumes exuded an air of being written by great men from prestigious institutions and important intellectual and urban centers. Plus, the essays paired nicely with *the Scofield Reference Bible* and later Clarence Larkin's charts. Together Scofield's Bible, Larkin's charts, and Stewart's essay help make fundamentalism timelessly modern, static, and yet stylish. *The Fundamentals*' aesthetic conveyed a weighty mood, repositioning God's warriors as God's pugilistic gentlemen.[96]

Many of the editors and authors of *The Fundamentals* were famous for their fiery preaching, strong theological, and social positions. The carefully crafted fundamentalist style that these men were known for caused many people to judge the book by the cover: established journals and magazines received *The Fundamentals* with a studied disinterest. Those who offered reviews

[96] A.C. Dixon one of the editors of The Fundamentals remarked, "Above all things I love peace, but next to peace I love a fight, and I believe the next best thing to peace is a theological fight." As quoted in Ibid., 364.

focused on the essayists' qualifications, fame, and prestige.[97] *The Fundamentals* provided such a comprehensive and effective bulwark against modernism that the essays' actual contents were only of tangential interest. Even the reviews of the second printing rarely focused on content.[98] The vision of a united fundamentalist movement standing against liberalism was such a felt need for conservative Protestant Christians that they cared little for the founding essay's contents at all. *The Fundamentals* looked and felt important and that was all that mattered.

In his essay "The Scriptures," written for *The Fundamentals*, editor A.C. Dixon asserts the inerrant and infallible nature of scripture and argues for reading the Bible by three methods.[99] The first method for reading is to use D.L. Moody's "grasshopper method," where one jumps from word to word, concept to concept.[100] The second method for reading is Dixon's "sectional method" which classifies and gathers data for examination, one paragraph after another. Both of these approaches are part of what I am calling the hypertextual method of reading scripture. The third and final method for reading is to regard the Bible as literature, starting in Genesis and ending with Revelation. For Dixon, reading the Bible book by book enables the reader to see the forest from the trees. After reading the Bible as literature, one can then return to the grasshopper, sectional, and word study methods gleaning even more meaning. Dixon's essay provides a summary of how hypertextual reading should occur. *The Scofield Reference Bible* further makes reading through these three methods even easier.

---

[97] Noted fundamentalist Caspar W. Hodge, *The Princeton Theological Review*, and *The Presbyterian of the South*, focuses on reviews concerning reputation and prestige. C.W. Hodge, "Review of *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to Truth*. Vol III. Testimony Publishing Co, Chicago. 120," in *The Princeton Theological Review*, vol. 10, 1912. page 122; William Brent Green, Jr. Review of "THE FUNDAMENTALS. A Testimony to the Truth. vols. I and II. 8v0., 126 and 125. Testimony Publishing Company, 808 La Salle Ave. Chicago, Ill., U.S.A." in *The Princeton Theological Review*, vol 9. no. 1. 1911, 130-131 ; *The Presbyterian of the South: [combining the] Southwestern Presbyterian, Central Presbyterian, Southern Presbyterian*. (Atlanta, Ga.), 06 April 1910. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Lib. of Congress. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/10021978/1910-04-06/ed-1/seq-27/>, 442.

[98] R.A. Torrey, "Preface" in *The Fundamentals—A Testimony to the Truth*, 4 vols. 12 mo. Preface by R.A. Torrey. Los Angeles Bible Institute, California, 1917, in *The Missionary Review of the World*, vol. XLI, no. 6, June 1918, page XII.

[99] A. C. Dixon, "The Scriptures," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to Truth*, Second printing, vol. 4, 4 vols. (Rio, WI: AGES Software, 2000), 224–31.

[100] Ibid., 229.

The defense of scripture through the doctrines of plenary inerrancy and infallibility highlighted one of the changes and transformations wrought by fundamentalisms. Instead of the Bible presented as a guide or as a rule of faith, the Bible became, as Ammerman highlights, a "storehouse of facts."[101] Biblical inerrancy then allows for a shared common document to serve as the basis for the fundamentalist movement and for the imaginary notion that all fundamentalist who "plainly read" scripture would subsequently arrive at the exact same conclusions, even though a reality-based account of reading *The Fundamentals* demonstrates the opposite case.[102] For the fundamentalist, Higher Criticism threatened not only biblical inerrancy but also the messianism of Jesus Christ. Fundamentalists needed to support the idea that the Bible was historical document situated in history to affirm that Jesus Christ was a historical person also subject to history.[103] Early premillennial dispensationalist Anglican clergy W. H. Griffith Thomas, expressed concern that Higher Criticism threatened the "the universal belief of Jews and Christians in a personal Messiah."[104] For Griffith Thomas, Higher Criticism launched a number of critiques, not only a critique of a personal messiah, but also critiques of supernatural and messianic prophecy, which relegated Old Testament prophecies to the past.[105]

In the same vein as Griffith Thomas, Canadian Presbyterian theologian William Caven saw Christ revealed as a personal messiah in the Old Testament. For Caven, the Psalms and David himself attested that the messiah is Lord. These affirmations proved to Caven and other similar thinkers, that scripture is indubitable, attesting to the supernatural power of Christ.[106] For

[101] Ammerman, "North American Protestant Fundamentalism," 5-6,11.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Robert Anderson, "Christ and Criticism," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to Truth*, Second Printing, vol. 1 (Rio, WI: AGES Software, 2000), 95.
[104] W. H. Griffith Thomas, "Old Testament Criticism and New Testament Christianity," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to Truth*, Second printing, vol. 1, 4 vols. (Rio, WI: AGES Software, 2000), 102–20. He was also one of the co-founders of Dallas Theological Seminary.
[105] Ibid., 112.
[106] William Caven, "The Testimony of Christ to the Old Testament," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to Truth*, Second printing, vol. 1 (Rio, WI: AGES Software, 2000), 178, 182.

example, George L. Robinson's essay rejected Higher Criticism, rejected the theory of multiple authors for the biblical book of Isaiah, and argued that that the messianic portions of the Old Testament participated in a coherent, ancient narrative that concluded with the coming of Jesus Christ.[107] Robinson challenged the idea that the later messianic portions of Isaiah were interpolated into the text. For him, historicizing and contextualizing Isaiah denied the messianic and prophetic power and authority of the text, and for Robinson the stakes are high:

> The one outstanding differentiating Characteristic of Israel's religion is predictive prophecy. Only the Hebrews ever predicted the coming of the Messiah of the kingdom of God. Accordingly, to predict the coming of a Cyrus as the human agent of Israel's salvation is but the reverse side of the same prophet's picture of the Divine agent, the obedient, suffering Servant of Jehovah, who would redeem Israel from their sin.[108]

For Robinson, the primary purpose of the book of Isaiah, and by extension, ancient Judaism, was to predict not only the coming of Jesus Christ, but also human messianic parallels like King Cyrus, who are a short-term palliative until Jesus Christ returns during the Rapture. In short, for *The Fundamentals,* Higher Criticism threatens not only biblical inerrancy, biblical interpretation, and the supernatural work of God, but even the messiahship of Jesus Christ.

Studying the messianic idea, according to these writers, helped Christians become more and more like Jesus. For instance, in his essay "The Scriptures," A.C. Dixon argues that one of the key reasons to read scripture is for "…tracing the messianic idea through the Bible." For Dixon, "It begins with the curse upon the serpent in Genesis and closes with 'the Lamb as it had been slain in the midst of the throne' in Revelation." Dixon continues to say that "we become more and more like Him, until by and by, we shall see His unveiled face and be completely transformed into His likeness." Studying the messianic idea, then, provided the Christian with a

[107] George L. Robinson, "One Isaiah," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to Truth*, Second printing, vol. 1, 4 vols. (Rio, WI: AGES Software, 2000), 201–16.
[108] Caven, "The Testimony of Christ to the Old Testament."

means of becoming more like Christ and further revealed the true face of Christ in all scripture.[109]

For the committed readers who made it past the table of contents would have begun to notice a lack of explicitly premillennial dispensationalist content in the volumes. This lack would be especially surprising because authors like Dixon, Torrey, and James M. Gray's premillennial dispensationalists credentials preceded them. The lack of premillennial dispensationalist content is intentional because the funder and the editors sought to appeal to a broadly evangelical audience. Thus, in order to thread this needle carefully, Dixon provided intentional illusions in his essay on Scripture to let fellow premillennial dispensationalists know that he was still a premillennial dispensationalist. For example, Dixon's mention of the Lamb of God in Revelation helps signal to premillennial dispensationalists (those in the know) that his method of reading and his theological outlook are in line with their theology.[110]

The imagined community established by *The Fundamentals* was a deeply anti-modernist one, constituted primarily by three groups: the premillennial dispensationalists, the reformed Princeton Theology adherents, and the Keswick holiness teachers. The teachings from Keswick are highlighted in *The Fundamentals* by several authors, which I will briefly detail: through social practices, speeches, and other writings of or from these early fundamentalists, the movement emerged as far more strident and divisive than before, losing its earlier moderate tone in its appeals to those in the Keswick Holiness movement (and others). C.I. Scofield's essay[111] "The Grace of God" provided an extensive disposition on the Keswick teachings in addition to a masterful performance that used a chain reference system of citation to develop theological

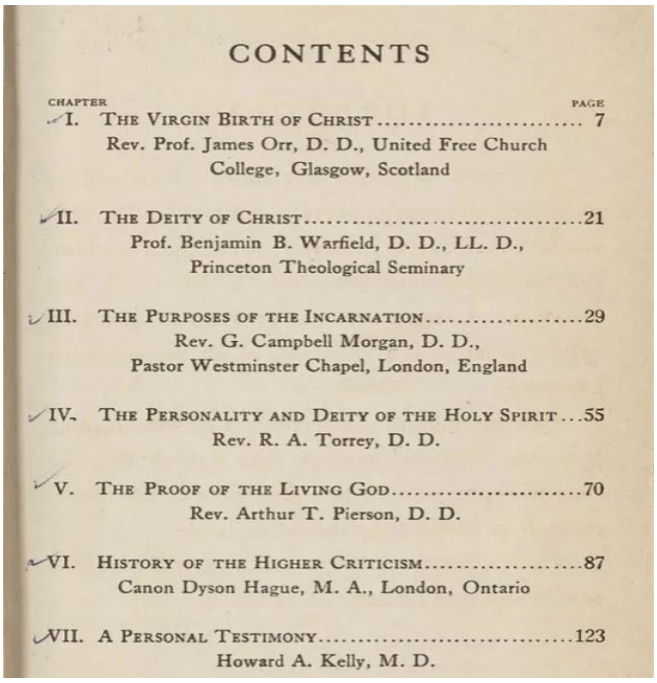
[109] Dixon, "The Scriptures," 230–31.
[110] Ibid.
[111] C. I. Scofield, "The Grace of God," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to Truth*, Second Printing, vol. 3 (Rio, WI: AGES Software, 2000), 82–91.

positions. Yet Scofield's essay lacked any explicit disposition on dispensationalism. Certainly, Scofield's dispensationalist approach was visible to all vis-à-vis his ordering of history as existing in the present. For those who were already premillennial dispensationalists, this theology is embedded in Scofield's subtext, but he chose not to make an argument for the theology itself in the essay, "The Grace of God."[112] Unlike premillennial dispensationalism, which was deftly kept in the margins of *The Fundamentals*, Princeton Theology and the reformed movements influence upon the volumes was prominently displayed as a means of highlighting the prestigious and serious nature of the project.[113]

The Fundamentals wanted to build a broad coalition of combatants to demonstrate their intellectual seriousness, academic, spiritual power, and authority. There were few better ways to accomplish this task than to include authors who built their reputation upon teaching what was then known as "Princeton Theology." The heavy reliance upon Princeton Theological Seminary faculty and alumni, as well as the inclusion of Bishops and Canons, provided an air of intellectual seriousness and authority. The editors of *The Fundamentals*, Torrey and Dixon, also wanted to appeal to Protestants across denominational lines in order to create a non-denominational coalition that would span even the most serious divide in Protestantism — that between the Calvinist reformed tradition and the Wesleyan/Holiness free-will tradition. In order to demonstrate this case, Torrey and Dixon included many reformed authors like BB Warfield, Arthur T. Pierson, and others, while minimally including those of the Wesleyan Holiness perspective, embodied in the lone voice of Jessie Penn Lewis. This imbalance illustrates the editor's preference for Reformed theology. However, even if not wholly balanced, the gambit still worked, and Bible schools began to appeal to people across denominational lines. It is

[112] Scofield, "The Grace of God."
[113] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 119.

interesting that premillennialism and dispensationalism were not discussed until the second to last volume in the series. As Marsden suggests, this might have been an intentional editorial move trying to provide an easy, noncontroversial introduction to the topics covered by *The Fundamentals*.[114]



CONTENTS

Figure 3. The Table of Contents for The Fundamentals *vol. 1.*

Lyman Stewart knew that there was no broad coalition critique of *Social Gospel*, higher criticism, secularism, Women's suffrage, and the Progressive Era. [115] However, with *the Fundamentals*, he and the editors sought to artificially create such a broad coalition. Thus, what matters most about *The Fundamentals* is not the theological content of the essays, which were never so much the point as the rhetorical suggestion conferred by these texts as "widely read," thus the appearance of cover and the table of contents are of outsized importance. Of note are the cover, with its art nouveau style, serif fonts, and the reminder that this project was funded by two

[114] Ibid., 293n7.
[115] *The Table of Contents for The Fundamentals Vol. 1*, 1910, 5 x 8 in., 1910, New York Public Library, https://archive.org/details/fundamentalstest17chic/page/n9/mode/2up.

"anonymous" Christian laymen (Lyman and Milton Stewart). The cover picture presents Stewart not as a wealthy philanthropist like Carnegie or Rockefeller but as a Christian everyman. The visual character of the table of contents lists the article title and the author's most impressive credentials. Like *The Scofield Reference Bible*, *The Fundamentals*' tried to gain power by making appeals to authority, establishing that its authors are rooted in church, world, and academia. As Marsden noted, part of the irony and paradox of fundamentalism is the polemics against authority and intellectuals while also demanding one be taken seriously as an authority and intellectual.[116] A fitting instance of this is when *The Fundamentals* editor R.A. Torrey quips that anyone who lists their credentials like "Rev. Dr. Bighead, D.D., Ph.D., LL.D., Litt.D., F.R.G.S, A.S.S." should not be trusted. Christians should believe common sense interpretations "in spite of all the A.S.S.E.S. in the world."[117] Torrey's quip demonstrates the fundamentalist deeper resentment of intellectuals. Nevertheless, Torrey lists himself as R.A. Torrey, D.D. in *The Fundamentals*' Table of Contents, which makes no distinction between earned and honorary credentials. This anti-intellectualist credentialism functions in several ways: first it allows fundamentalists to claim to be just like everyone else while simultaneously providing them with a means to attack their opponents for being too academic and intellectual. Secondly, it allows for the fundamentalist to naturalize interpretations, like premillennial dispensational theology, as something everyone in the pew would be familiar with and thus would not question. The table of contents and the cover operate together to evoke a sense of authority and aura that this compendium is an impressive and serious project made and distributed by serious men [*sic*]. So much for Stewart's broad and inclusive coalition or resounding sincerity. But at the level of smoke and mirrors, *The Fundamentals* checks off every box.

[116] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 7.
[117] R. A. Torrey, *The Importance and Value of Proper Bible Study* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1921), 45.

Each volume of *The Fundamentals* serves as a *tour de force* of conservative Christian apologetics. The essayists were intentionally chosen to convey the sense of an international united fundamentalist movement, which has put aside past differences to reclaim ancient points of unity. This imagined broad coalition projects an allied Christianity willing to stand steadfast for the gospel, united against the evils of the age, such as higher criticism. From the outset, Volume I, essay one, launches into a direct critique of higher criticism. Opening in this manner allowed *The Fundamentals* to first educate lay people about the threat of higher criticism, then to establish an ancient landmark (the "plain" reading of the Bible), to next demonstrate the superiority of that landmark, and finally to directly attack the academy. Having vanquished the deadliest of foes, the volume thus proceeds its urgent and unrelenting polemical attack on a broad spectrum of theological issues. The volume concludes with the personal testimony of Howard A. Kelly's, to provide a reprieve from theological polemics and to establish one key point of the project, which is that *The Fundamentals* are not wholly anti-intellectual but rather only enemy to a particular type of intellectual. Kelly is presented as the "right" kind of intellectual, a medical doctor. Most importantly, Kelly appears as solid, salt of the earth fundamentalist folk, merely a simple man earning his living by trying to learn and preach the gospel.

The plastron, underbelly of the turtle, of *The Fundamentals* pairs ideally with *Scofield's Reference Bible* to project a shared investment in catastrophic utopianism, authoritarian populism, and, to a lesser extent, premillennial dispensationalism. Additionally, all are invested in conveying the urgency of preparing for the imminent return of the messiah and participate in protecting messianism. As an overdetermined and little read text, the best offered by The *Fundamentals is* found in the Table of Contents credentialism. For Protestant Christians of the

era, skimming through the text provides a strong sense of awe: this is an impressive international list. Additionally, seeing so many names listed together subtly hint that even such disparate people share a common, core set of commitments, even when their theological and social agendas disagreed with one another. In time, it will be seen that plenty of these authors held little common cause with one another and their imagined united front would quickly dissolve. But even though the broad coalition never truly forms, the imagined coalition does its job of insulating and protecting the nascent fundamentalist movement.

Dispensationalist Distillations of Messianism

Fundamentalist Baptist pastor and mechanical engineer, Clarence Larkin's (1850-1924) schematic, titled *Dispensational Truth (or God's Plan and Purpose in the Ages)*, distills fundamentalist premillennial dispensationalist theology into a modern style pen and ink drawings filled with geometric designs to serve as memory aids.[118] Larkin's engineering backgrounds gives these images an architectural blueprint aesthetic. They establish distance as the reader "reads" them like a homeowner reads a blueprint, referring to it in quick glances moving rapidly between the virtual world of the image and the material world.[119] As a reference drawing these images overwhelm the senses with their attention to detail. The more one learns about the theological system represented in the drawings the more the drawings help to clarify. Premillennial dispensationalism enjoys a mutually reinforcing relationship between the charts and *The Scofield Reference Bible.* Where the reference Bible interpolates the theological system into the text, the charts provide the visual and mental mapping of the system. Continuing the architectural analogy *Scofield* is the contract for the home, *Dispensational Truth* is the

[118] Clarence Larkin, "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth," in *Dispensational Truth: Or God's Plan and Purpose in the Ages* (Philadelphia: Rev. Clarence Larkin Est., 1920), 17 ½ , https://archive.org/details/dispensationaltr0000lark.
[119] David Morgan, *Visual Piety a History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 187.

blueprints, and *The Fundamentals* are the reference matter for the agents and architects, perhaps even a coffee table book for the discerning homeowner. The auratic quality of *Dispensational Truth* while present in the coffee table book it is stronger and clearer in the way that churches and revivalists displayed them magnified, looming large, covering the entire wall. Leaning on the authority of being interpolated into the scripture premillennial dispensational theology takes on an overwhelming sense of divine authority and authenticity as a theology. Hanging on the wall the chart schematizes and reveals the gnosis of premillennial dispensational theology for the laity. The charts look modern and feel ancient because they purport to chart a biblical theology given by God to humanity. The distance between God and humanity collapses within the modernist artistic rendering of the theology. No longer architect, artist, or author Larkin fades into the background as the Sunday school classes ritualized reference glancing upon the chart during the day's lesson takes over.

During World War I, Larkin's parishioners' concerns about the war's implication for prophecy and the eschaton led Larkin to start working on publishing his charts as a monograph.[120] The text serves as an interpretive lens to help readers see their place in dispensationalist theology's articulation of prophetic history. His book was designed as a coffee table book (approximately 10.5 in by 10.5 in) to visually represent the omen of the coming times. The book contained short chapters, charts, and cuts, reminiscent of comic strips and wood cuts. The reverse side of the page is blank, leaving space all of the charts. These charts were also sold as wall-sized monumental charts for churches, Sunday schools and revivals. Some used in tent revivals were ten feet long and four feet high.[121] Larkin's charts look less like the charts of the

[120] Clarence Larkin, *Dispensational Truth: Or God's Plan and Purpose in the Ages* (Philadelphia: Rev. Clarence Larkin Est., 1918), https://archive.org/details/dispensationaltr0000lark.; "Clarence Larkin (1850 - 1924)," Blog, *The Rev. Clarence Larkin Estate*, n.d., http://www.larkinestate.com/about/rev-clarence-larkin.html; Pietsch, *Dispensational Modernism*, 141–45.
[121] Mitch Fraas, "A Taste of Recent Acquisitions," Blog, *Unique at Penn, a Penn Libraries Blog* (blog), October 1, 2013, https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=uniqueatpenn.

boardroom and more like blueprints, technical drawings, and storyboards.[122] These charts were so popular that Larkin quickly issued a revised and expanded version of *Dispensational Truth* in 1920.

As David Morgan highlights, dispensationalist fundamentalists were deeply iconophobic Christians, and yet not even they could resist the appeal of imagery.[123] Larkin's charts create a prescient and prophetic visualization and mapping of the ideas presented in *The Scofield Reference Bible*. In many respects Scofield and Larkin shared a similar epistemology: both were concerned with presenting what they saw as the biblical truth of premillennial dispensationalist theology and gap theory creationism. To convey his theology, Larkin, a minister, would illustrate these large wall charts, articulating and explaining premillennial dispensationalism in a visually compelling art nouveau style. These charts were also compiled and printed in *Dispensational Truth*, which serves as a visual supplement of premillennial dispensationalist theology. The paradox of Larkin's charts is that they are both easier to understand than many premillennial dispensationalist theological works while also being completely illegible to outsiders. Larkin's charts emphasize themes of Jesus the returning messiah, the imminent apocalypse, eternal life, the so-called "great men of history" [*sic*], male leaders, and an appealing aesthetic style for the masses. Both Larkin and Scofield's works perform a prophetic anti-modern modernist (*Dispensational Modernism*) critique.[124]

Premillennial dispensationalism proposes a taxonomical schematization of theology and culture. It sorts the past, present, and future into a discrete set of categories. In this construct, each age ends in catastrophe that marks the emergence of a new age. The penultimate age ends

[122] Pietsch, *Dispensational Modernism*, 209-210.
[123] Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 187.
[124] B. M. Pietsch, *Dispensational Modernism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1-16.

with the final apocalyptic moment. Of course, Christians are spared the worst of the catastrophe because they are raptured into the heavens by the Messiah, Jesus Christ. After the rapture, and at some time during the apocalyptic age, Jesus returns to earth to rule and reign for one thousand years. After the end of Jesus' thousand year reign the world descends even further towards catastrophe until the world finally ends and the utopian era of a new heaven and a new earth begins. During this eternal state of perfection, Christ reigns and is worshipped by the faithful for all eternity, in a world without end.

Larkin's work visualizes the paratextual apparatus of *The Scofield Reference Bible* and transforms some of the key themes of *The Fundamentals* into compelling visual forms. In these charts, one can see the influence of C.I. Scofield and J.N. Darby as the clearest support for Larkin embrace of dispensationalist theology and gap theory creationism. Larkin's refusal to disparage other fundamentalist teachers, especially around the number of dispensations and theories of creations, reveals a particularly fundamentalist desire for generally presenting a sense of unity in general which further extends to dispensationalists and creationists**.** Larkin's avoidance of the conflict and refusal to name sources are extensions of his high view of the divine inspiration for his project. For Larkin the charts are mental images necessary for clarifying and contextualizing eschatological thinking. In his foreword, Larkin writes, "the charts had to be thought out and developed under the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit." [125] Larkin's pen, serving as a conduit for the divine, contains echoes of the way iconographers speak of their task and the ways in which fundamentalists speak of biblical inspiration. [126] While Larkin papers over the interpretative force of his charts, Morgan sees the charts as the interpretive vehicles that they are. Morgan writes "memory…[for] later generations of

[125] Larkin, *Dispensational Truth*, I.
[126] M. A. Willcox, "Theories of Inspiration," *The Biblical World* 5, no. 3 (1895): 173.

fundamentalists was a dynamic act of interpretation, an explicitly visual process of construction of personal and communal identity."[127]

Dispensational Truth maps Larkin's mental eschatological images while transmitting that mental image to others. Mapping the eschaton was appealing because it provided a visual and mental image and created a memory aid. Dispensationalist charts like Larkin's reveal "a fascinating use of imagery that appealed to the memory both as a means of learning what the Bible says about the eschatological prophecies and as a means of interpreting those prophecies."[128] Here Morgan is correct in that the double work of the dispensationalist image is what made this so compelling to creators and consumers alike. Larkin used text and images to create a visual hermeneutics rooted in a mnemonic that recounts a history from ancient Israel to the modern era. If a picture is worth a thousand words, Larkin's images are worth double.

To the uninitiated, Larkin's wall sized charts can look confusing and convoluted. However, for the premillennial dispensationalist these charts had a modern plain and technical sensibility like a blueprint for a house. On the other hand, it is the German biblical scholars with their higher criticism who are confusing.[129] Marsden writes that for the premillennial dispensationalists, "their own scheme was by contrast presented as simple and straightforward interpretation of fact according to plain laws available to common sense and the common man [*sic*]."[130] For the fundamentalists, premillennial dispensationalism was inseparable from inerrancy because these are mutually reinforcing pieces of doxa. Ammerman writes, "strict inerrancy, then, is taken by fundamentalists as demanding a premillennial interpretation of Scripture and attention to its 'inerrant' prophecy alongside its inerrant history, science, and moral

[127] Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 192.
[128] Ibid., 187.
[129] Ammerman, "North American Protestant Fundamentalism," 11.
[130] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 61.

teaching. In this view, the truth of Scripture can be 'proved' by its accurate predictions of future events, as well as by its practical advice about salvation and Christian living."[131] Thanks to the *Scofield Reference Bible, Dispensational Truth,* and *The Fundamentals* the religio-social commitments were naturalized and seen as part of the plain, obvious reading of the Bible and the Christian tradition, and those who disagreed -- like the higher critics and the modernists -- were the ones imposing an extra-textual and convoluted system.

According to Morgan, dispensationalists rejected post-Renaissance artistic tradition in favor of the modernist schematic blueprint and chart. Dispensationalists are not so anti-modernist as to embrace a pre-modern tradition like post-Renaissance art. The former was seen as too iconic whereas the latter was seen as a technical image. Charts and graphs fill the lacuna between iconophiles and iconodules. The charts organize the manifold genres and complexities of biblical literature into a neat linear eschatological blueprint which provides a "total gestalt." Morgan writes "such schematic imagery thus acts as a sort of software that programs memory as a directed information storage and retrieval system—a sacred database. Memory becomes a visual chain of references, a hermeneutical construction of prophecy and history." The dispensationalist software encodes *The Scofield Reference Bible, The Fundamentals,* and *Dispensational Truth* into a single unified visual system. The interpretive work is hidden behind the curtain along with those who are doing the work. Thinkers like Larkin like to imagine they are passive conduits for the divine electricity that runs the engine of prophetic history; however, they are more than engineers, they are creators themselves.[132]

The *Dispensational Truth* software encodes and decodes the prophetic history gestalt through an "apocalyptic glance." Morgan defines the "apocalyptic glance" as the restless gaze.

[131] Ammerman, "North American Protestant Fundamentalism," 7.
[132] Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 189.

The eye scans the chart looking for the information needed. Morgan writes: "The Charts abstracted prophetic imagery from the Bible and displayed it in a chronological framework such that extraordinary and sacred symbols were mapped over ordinary, profane time to plot a trajectory along which the eye traveled in search of the end of time." The charts are intentionally visually overwhelming, possessing a monumentality and iconicity to them. These schematics are for designing the biblical prophetic equivalent to the Flat Iron Building or the Woolworth Building in New York. The formidable nature of the chart means the eye glances around settling on no one thing, looking for that which the mind simultaneously both forgets and remembers. The charts make the viewer impatient, ever scanning the chart for that last final moment, the end of history: "As the eye arrived at the end of the prophetic chronology the believer arrived at the end of time, which was coincident with the present day."[133]

The apocalyptic glance is a feature not a bug of the dispensationalist mapping software. It is impossible to take in all the information at once. The viewer, like the foreman on a construction site, prints the blueprints and glances at them whenever they have questions. Morgan notes, "Taking the events portrayed in 'at a glance,' which its commentators often hailed as the millennial chart's great virtue, meant refreshing the memory along the ceaseless march toward Armageddon."[134] Larkin's "Ages and Dispensations" chart distills dispensationalist teaching and entire books down into one chart. The journey matters less than the destination. History is compressed and reduced to a sign, symbol, or a glyph of signification. Babylonian history is distilled into a tincture. God becomes an A, Noah's Ark, in between, Israel is deprived

[133] Ibid., 192.
[134] Ibid.

of symbols, Christ and the church are ☩, the second coming is a mountain, the apocalypse is a world on fire, and there is only an Ω at the end.[135]

As Morgan notes the charts are unsettling: "Deprivation of the object of contemplative vision powerfully engaged the imagination. Denied the object on which it might finally rest, the eye was thrust back over the pathways of memory to retrace the prophetically marked road to the long-awaited advent of Christ." Anxious and unsettled by the present and the chart, the viewer scans the image, ever seeing, but never perceiving (Mark 4:12 NRSV), impatiently awaiting the end. The chart then serves as a mnemonic aid re/creating the memories of prophecy and history in the mind of the viewer. Mapping the neural pathways, connecting scripture, history, tradition, and prophecy to construct the perfect second coming. The chart as a "visual image conjures a corresponding mental image."[136]

The intention of the chart is to make dispensationalist theology clear and understandable to believers. However, depending on one's familiarity with dispensationalist theology, this chart might be more difficult to understand than the treatises on dispensationalism. The chart presents three ages: "The Antediluvian Age," "The Present Age," and "The Age of Ages." The antediluvian age contains two dispensations; the first is the "Edenic Dispensation" which is represented by a tree as well as the John Milton reference "Paradise Lost." The second dispensation is "Antediluvian Dispensation" from Adam to Noah, the "Antediluvian Age." The flood ruptures the continuity between the ages and stands outside the dispensations and the ages as a cataclysmic rupture. "The Present Age" is comprised of four dispensations: "Post-Diluvian," "Patriarchal," "Legal Dispensation," and "Ecclesiastical Dispensation." The legal and ecclesiastical dispensations are separated by the rupture of the first coming of Jesus Christ, his

[135] Larkin, "Ages and Dispensations."
[136] Ibid.

crucifixion and resurrection. As, the "Ecclesiastical Dispensation" has a slight bubble added on to represent "the Tribulation." The present age ends in the cataclysmic rupture of "The Second Coming," which like the flood happens outside of the ages and dispensations. The final age has two dispensations, "The Messianic Dispensation" and "The Dispensation of the Fullness of Times."

The "Ages and Dispensations" visually represents Darby and Scofield's supersessionist theology and their concepts of progressive revelation. These three men, Darby, Scofield, and Larkin all believed that the work of God and Godself are progressively revealed through history, and it is important to know where one is in the grand scheme of ages and dispensations. That way one knows what to expect and where to direct one's sense of hope. The implication, of course, being that each generation moves progressively closer to the final age and final dispensation.

The overall effect is exhausting and overwhelming. Studying Larkin's chart in detail reveals many fascinating elements of premillennial dispensationalist theology. One element worth highlighting is that the ecclesiastical dispensational loop does not close; it remains open. The rapture for Larkin is not a moment of rupture. Instead, the rapture happens with intense verticality from the grave to the Judgement Seat of Christ. The rapture does not close and thus end the Ecclesiastical Dispensation, which remains open but connects to another circle labeled "The Tribulation." The Tribulation starts with the rapture and remains open to the Ecclesiastical age. The closing of the Tribulation coincides with the closing of the present age. "The Second Coming" of Jesus Christ is the end of history and the present age. The "Second Coming" happens outside of the ages; it is neither the "Present Age" nor the "Age of Ages," "The Ages of Ages" begins with the "Messianic Dispensation" which is the rule and reign of Christ over the

earth for one-thousand years. After which the final battle between good and evil occurs, Christ wins. After Christ triumphs, the "Messianic Dispensation" ends, and the "Great White Throne of Judgment" separates the "Messianic Dispensation" from "Dispensation of the Fullness of Time." After an unspecified length of time, the "Dispensation of the Fullness of Time," and the "New Heaven and New Earth" which it establishes, comes to an end. Once the final dispensation has ended, the "Age of Ages" ends and the meta-container of the "Time Between Eternities" concludes, thus heralding the eternal start of the Omega -- or the "Ages of Ages" -- which is the eternal bliss of all Christians living in heaven with God.[137]

Larkin's "Ages and Dispensations" chart underscores not only the complexity of premillennial dispensationalist theology but also how it recalibrates the messianic idea in "America." As the charts illustrate premillennial dispensationalism understands messianism as a dispensation while the messianic idea exceeds the geographical and *chronological* boundary of the dispensation. The messiah is to be anticipated from beginning to end as messianic signs and symbols saturate the chart. When viewing the chart one can see how most of the ages end in a catastrophe. One dispensation comes to a catastrophic end and a new dispensation begins with a looming and pending catastrophic end. In this way premillennial dispensationalism understand the catastrophic nature of the messianic idea and naturalizes a theology of catastrophism into its cosmology. The next cataclysm is as inevitable as the rapture and Christs return. There is nothing that one can do to escape the spatio-temporal order of premillennial dispensationalism so why try and make the world better like the social gospellers, instead prepare for the end.

The "Ages and Dispensations" chart provided by Larkin is but one example of the detailed and methodological charting of "premillennial dispensationalism" provided by Larkin. The next chart I wish to examine is his "Second Coming of Christ" chart. This chart crystalizes

[137] The use of title case here is meant to repeat the style and writing used by Larkin.

and distills premillennial dispensationalist fundamentalist eschatological thinking into one image. The image while perhaps confusing to the outsider grants the insider much needed clarity. Additionally, in keeping with the hypertextual and paratextual functionality of *the Scofield Reference Bible*, each of Larkin's charts leads to further charts and graphics which provide an even more granular visual analysis of the theology.

Unlike the "Ages and Dispensations" chart, the "Second Coming" chart contains far more graphic components and artistic detail, such as snakes, dragons, lions, lambs, statues, fire, and more. There is still a periodization marked by vertical lines and circles but there is more fluidity and white space provided even as the graphic fills more of the page.[138] Along the bottom one third of the page, there is an explicit illustration of philosemitism and supersessionism with text reading "The Jews Scattered Among the Nations." The visual flow of this ground is broken by the phrase "The Nations" and a sidewise Babylonian statue (presumably Nebuchadnezzar) in addition to Daniel 2:3-45, one of the few Old Testament/Hebrew Bible references in the chart. In this passage the prophet Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Throughout this chart Larkin blends Old Testament/Hebrew Bible references and New Testament references together, disregarding the traditional Protestant Bible's ordering of the texts, or any sort of historical genealogy of when the texts were written. Instead, references are supplied wherever Larkin sees fit and whenever the reference ties to the element depicted. For someone wanting to map and periodize Scripture, Larkin is remarkably uninvested in providing a linear set of references from the Bible. Larkin's approach to citing Scripture mirrors Scofield's chain reference and has a hypertextual sensibility whereby all scripture refers to one another and verses can be summoned

[138] Clarence Larkin, "The Second Coming," in *Dispensational Truth: Or God's Plan and Purpose in the Ages* (Philadelphia: Rev. Clarence Larkin Est., 1920), 12, https://archive.org/details/dispensationaltr0000lark.

in proof-texting fashion. To understand the images is to understand and see the divine plan for yourself, for the universe, and for the coming end of the world.

Together Scofield's paratextual apparatus and Larkin's charts provide the visual and technical scaffolding for fundamentalist premillennial dispensational thinking. Examining the *Scofield Reference Bible, The Fundamentals,* and *Dispensational Truth* illustrates Morgan's theory about dispensationalist "visual piety." For dispensationalists "memory becomes a visual chain of references, a hermeneutical construction of prophecy and history" linking "diverse parts of Scripture into a single lineage representing successive phases of human history from ancient Israel to the modern world." [139] Expanding on Morgan's work in the twentieth century, I would argue, it was not just any Bible that formed a "visual chain of reference" but specifically the *Scofield Reference Bible* with its chain reference paratextual apparatus. Additionally, I would add *The Fundamentals* to this visual schematic because these volumes provided an authorized intellectual backing to dispensationalism. *The Fundamentals* mass-market circulation anchored dispensationalism in the mainstream of Christian culture. Without any need to be read, only seen, mass-marketing of *The Fundamentals* lent credence to the movement, fostering the illusory sense of unity. Likewise, Larkin's *Dispensationalist Truth* serves as an also illusory mental image, a memory aid. Larkin's charts were taught regularly from the pulpit and in Sunday school. Hanging as triumphalist in the classrooms of churches, the banners proclaimed to all that the end is nigh and that the world will soon burn. Memory and mental images triumph over logos. The "visual chain of reference" of the schematic image validates the charts as authoritative mental images, styling the movement through a potently paranoid admixture of nostalgia, memory, and schematics.[140]

[139] Ibid., 189.
[140] Ibid.

Fundamentalist Paranoia and Expansion

The fundamentalist movement is less a coherent theological movement than a style which lends itself to a paranoid mode.[141] George Marsden, Eric Sandeen, and Richard Hofstadter all note in their analyses of the fundamentalist movement the presence of rhetorical, aesthetic, and physical style elements. When taken in concert, these elements create the hallmark of a fundamentalist style.[142] The fundamentalist was plain spoken in manner, but with the rhetorical force of a lawyer cross-examining a hostile witness, and with enough bias and paranoia to make Richard Hofstadter blush. This fundamentalist "paranoid style" was "shaped by a desire to strike back at everything modern—the higher criticism, evolutionism, the Social Gospel, rational criticism of any kind."[143] But to first look at fundamentalist style, as Ammerman notes, even as patterns of dress change in fundamentalist Baptist circles, the clothes one wears to the conventions un/consciously mark not only ones' affiliation with fundamentalism, but also ones positionality within the movement, along with serving as a markers of class. [144]

The anti-intellectual and paranoid style of fundamentalisms allowed for fundamentalists, to readily embrace conspiracy theories, especially the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The movements apocalypticism and attraction to conspiracy theories especially anti-Semitic ones and those peddled by industrialists like Henry Ford were as Hofstadter mutually reinforcing ideological elements.[145] Hofstadter writes, "The distinguishing thing about the paranoid style is … that they regard a 'vast' or 'gigantic' conspiracy as *the motive force* in historical events. History *is* a conspiracy, set in motion by demonic forces of almost transcendent power, and what

[141] Here I am drawing on Marsden and his analysis of fundamentalist style. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 60, 130–31, 180–81, 198–200.
[142] Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, 9; Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, 121; 133–55; 489–768; Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 180–81; 198–200.
[143] Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, 489–768; Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 199.
[144] Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 133–34.
[145] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 210.

is felt to be needed to defeat it is not the usual methods of political give-and-take, but an all-out crusade. The paranoid spokesman sees the fate of this conspiracy in apocalyptic terms—he traffics in the birth and death of whole worlds, whole political orders, whole systems of human values."[146] Part of the fundamentalists style is the reduction of the world into a set of binary oppositions: good versus evil, modernity versus tradition, liberalism versus conservativism, fundamentalism versus the Social Gospel. Marsden agrees with Hofstadter that he admixture of apocalypticism, paranoia, and conspiracy theories helps to make the militant Manichaeism of fundamentalisms legible.[147] One might suspect the fundamentalists with their vision cast towards the heavens and the imminent return of the messiah would not be so invested in religious, political, and culture wars. The catastrophism, apocalypticism, and conspiracy theories amplify the white male fundamentalists anxieties about "social displacement."[148] Thus Manicheanism provides solipsistic succor, the celestial drama between good and evil must be played out in all arenas here on earth as well. The microcosm mirrors the macrocosm. [149]

The core of the critique is a nostalgic desire to return to a bygone era solely of their creation. The aggrieved modern anti-modernist leader transforms into fundamentalist preachers and teachers who tend to build empires around themselves and create heroic mythologies about themselves. The messiah is no longer a suffering servant supporting unionization for better working conditions and the end of child labor but a charismatic baseball player (Billy Sunday) or charismatic revivalist (DL Moody). "While Sunday's Jesus was a street fighter, putting up his dukes against individual sin, Rauschenbusch's Jesus was a progressive activist going into battle

[146] Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, 525.

[147] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 210–11.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, 525; Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 210–11.

against the collective sins of a capitalist society."[150] The fundamentalist style shifts the focus away from Jesus as a friend and the urgency of social justice and towards the horizon scanning for the incoming prize fighting messiah. The catastrophic end of the world is taken as an inescapable conclusion.

For the fundamentalist, the theological, social, cultural, and political are connected in a hypertextual fashion. The everything-is-connected approach to life reveals just how influential Scofield's hypertextual apparatus and Larkin's cartography of premillennial dispensationalism was in shaping the movement. This hypertextual approach is also reflected in *The Fundamentals*, where the volumes move seamlessly between doctrinal concerns, personal testimony, social, and cultural issues, with the latter volumes focusing almost exclusively on social and cultural issues. For the fundamentalist, viewing theology, culture, and politics as interconnected amplifies their apocalyptic preoccupations. Living through World War I only heightened the intensity of the impending apocalyptic doom. As Marsden notes, "it is true that the crusading spirit of the war, together with the urgency of cultural alarm that followed, contributed to the intensity of the fundamentalist reaction. It also served to provide, as has been pointed out, a new cultural dimension to the movement."[151] R.A. Torrey gleefully quipped: "The darker the night gets, the lighter my heart gets."[152] For the fundamentalists, the worse things are the better they will be. In contradistinction to the social gospellers, who wanted the world to get better as a means of actualizing the Kingdom of God on earth, Torrey wants the world to get worse in order to accelerate the end time.

[150] Stephen R. Prothero, *American Jesus How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 96.
[151] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 159–60.
[152] Malise. Ruthven, *Fundamentalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23.

The fundamentalist confronts the world in quixotic fashion, convinced danger lurks behind every corner. For the Protestant Fundamentalist, few things are more dangerous than Catholicism.[153] Apocalyptic paranoia, anti-Catholicism, coupled with a pugilistic excess prove to be a deadly combination. In Fort Worth, Texas fundamentalist scion J. Frank Norris crusades against the Roman Catholic mayor, H.C. Meacham, escalating into a shooting. As the story goes, D.E. Chipps, a friend and supporter of the mayor, went to Norris' office to try to deescalate what was a growing situation. Norris claims he was threatened and so he pulled out a pistol and shot an unarmed Chipps three times. Norris would be acquitted of the crime.[154] Norris' story reveals how mercurial the boundary could be between aggressive, conservative rhetoric, violent fantasies, and actual violence.[155] Moreover, Norris was hardly alone in his virulent hatred for the Roman Catholic Church. Fundamentalists feared Catholicism because, for them, the United States was a Protestant nation established by Puritans and Catholics, where immigrant idolaters were gaining too much power in political and cultural spheres of influence.[156] While fundamentalists sought to distance themselves from Norris' materially violent act of anti-Catholicism, the connection between religious fundamentalism and violence was made[157]

Fundamentalists have a peculiar obsession with being center and margin, hero and victim, intellectual yet everyman, working-class gentleman who fight. Following Michael Kazin here, the fundamentalists are casting themselves as populist scions. They are at once quotidian commoners and the leaders of a movement who are a cut above the rest. These paradoxes go unresolved. To be an everyman and to also have enough charisma to be a leader made someone

[153] Pietsch, *Dispensational Modernism*, 66–67; Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017), 205–16.
[154] For more on Norris and the shooting see, David R. Stokes, *The Shooting Salvationist: J. Frank Norris and the Murder Trial That Captivated America* (Hanover, N.H.: Steerforth Press, 2012); Barry Hankins*, God's Rascal: J. Frank Norris & the Beginnings of Southern Fundamentalism* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996); Charles Allyn Russell, *J. Frank Norris: Violent Fundamentalist* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1972).
[155] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 190.
[156] Watt, "Fundamentalists of the 1920s and 1930s," 26–27.
[157] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 237–42.

the authority and expert who could "rightly divide the word of truth."[158] The primary means of resolving these tensions is through charisma: the more charismatic the leader, the less such contradictions would matter. As Joel Carpenter rightly points out, our post-1925 fundamentalist infatuation with charismatic leaders becomes even stronger with the movement as the movement itself associates itself inextricably with many well-known fundamentalist names.[159] These names become brand identities: Moody Bible Institute (f. 1886); Bob Jones University (f. 1927); and Bryan College (f. 1930). The Bible Institute of Los Angeles (f. 1908) while not directly bearing Stewart's name still becomes heir to his legacy, even publishing the second printing of *The Fundamentals*.[160] These universities, and their strong relationships with their founders, become the training grounds for future generations of fundamentalists. In the 1930s and 40s the subculture of fundamentalist churches, colleges, schools, radio, and television greatly expands creating not only a flourishing subculture but also reaching into the mainstream.[161]

As historian Virginia Lesion Brereton notes, fundamentalism trained educators, teachers, pastors, and missionaries primarily in Bible schools and Bible training institutes although not necessarily at colleges. [162] In these Bible schools, mainly white-working class and lower-middle class, yet socially, economically, and religiously upwardly mobile students, most particularly white women, were educated for a fraction of the cost of a usual university education. Bible schools tend to have a two-year instead of a four-year curriculum, with members of local

---

[158] The phrase "rightly dividing the word of truth" is a quote from 2 Timothy 2:15b (KJV), This second part of the verse becomes a popular fundamentalist phrase. A.T. Coates, "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth," *Object Narrative, in Conversations: An Online Journal of the Center for the Study of Material and Visual Cultures of Religion* (2014), doi:10.22332/con.obj.2014.28.
[159] Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 237.
[160] All of these institutions are still open.
[161] Douglas Carl Abrams, *Selling the Old-Time Religion: American Fundamentalists and Mass Culture, 1920-1940* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001); Tona J. Hangen, *Redeeming the Dial: Radio, Religion & Popular Culture in America* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Michael E. Pohlman, *Broadcasting the Faith: Protestant Religious Radio and Theology in America, 192050* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2021).
[162] Virginia Lieson Brereton, *Training God's Army: The American Bible School, 1880-1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 61.

churches serving as volunteer faculty, staff, and administration.[163] These schools relied on a curriculum based primarily on *The Scofield Reference Bible*, premillennial dispensationalism, memorization of scripture, and the use of memory aids like Larkin's charts. These Bible schools served to systematized and unify fundamentalist teachings across the country and helped at least for a time to reduce the schismatic tendencies of fundamentalism. Plus, a university education was rendered suspect by students and family due to concerns about state schools being too secular and liberal, while Christian schools were regarded as too liberal and modern. Thus, fundamentalist families were more likely to be comfortable sending their children to Bible schools. Brereton writes that schools provide "formal education at its least formal and therefore least objectionable."[164] Overtime the more successful Bible schools built and developed brands before expanding into becoming colleges and universities, as is the case Brereton's four case studies wherein: Missionary Training Institute becomes Nyack College in Rockland County and in Manhattan; Boston Missionary Training School is now Gordon College in Boston; Chicago Evangelization Society becomes Moody Bible Institute in Chicago; and the Bible Institute of Los Angeles becomes BIOLA University. Bible schools carried the closest thing to the Protestant *Imprimatur* and that was the seal of approval from iconic charismatic Protestant leaders. Parents and Parishioners could trust that the Bible schools house at the local church were "rightly dividing the word of truth" because the courses were open to all, the book list simple, and the curriculum affirmed by the congregation. One did not have to worry about "institutional drift" when the institution was housed in one's own church. For larger and more famous institutes like Moody Bible Institute and BIOLA parents, students, and supporters could trust that those institutions would stand by the fundamentals because Scofield, Stewart, and Torrey vouchsafed

[163] Ibid., 150.
[164] Ibid.

for these institutions. BIOLA would go on to be the institutional home of *The Fundamentals* and Moody would become the home of Scofield's correspondence Bible study program. Finally, and perhaps most assuredly administration, faculty, staff, and students at these institutions would have to sign doctrinal statements and lifestyle agreements assuring doctrinal integrity and moral behavior within the parameters of the movement.

The fundamentalist style of charismatic leadership also reveals a deep commitment to branding and capitalism as well. Leaders served as constellations of power and authority, creating multimedia empires, and institutionalizing their style through churches, bible schools, and publishing houses. Despite being anti-modernists, fundamentalists had no problem embracing modern technology like radio, which they used adeptly to spread their message, as well as advances in marketing and advertising. Fundamentalist churches, colleges, and organizations held all the markings of "modern commercial enterprise."[165] They took advantage of marketing and advertising. Harrington Watt tells the story of the fundamentalist leader Mel Trotter who figured out that each soul saved through his ministry cost him $1.60.[166] The fundamentalists were fastidious at saving souls and saving money. Despite fundamentalisms bluster they were not entirely opposed to modernity, there were elements that they enjoyed like modern capitalism, advertising, marketing, industrialized printing, and radio to name a few. While it is easy to see fundamentalisms as anti-modern, what the Trotter anecdote underscores, is that fundamentalism was also a deeply modernist movement, one that utilized modernist methods of accounting, advertising, and marketing to spread an anti-modernist message.

[165] Watt, "Fundamentalists of the 1920s and 1930s," 28.
[166] Ibid.

Conclusion

Prone to schisms and fights over minutiae, the big tent fundamentalism envisioned by *The Fundamentals* was never realized. However, the image quickly became iconic. What mattered was seeing *The Fundamentals* upon bookshelves, looking at the *Dispensationalist Truth* charts unfurled on the walls of the Sunday school room and the side of the revival, and carrying a *Scofield Reference Bible* in hand. Together these symbols crystalize into the image of fundamentalisms. As an image, fundamentalism was able to be distilled and explained to the novice and initiate alike. Instead of becoming a unifying tent, fundamentalism became a wedge that could be driven into the heart of American Protestant Christianity. A wedge which when driven into a ministry, school, or denomination demanded a response and engagement to the icon on the icon's own terms. Lacking a centralized vertically integrated structure perhaps has made fundamentalisms more powerful. Instead of having to contend with one institutional form of fundamentalisms, its opponents must constantly contend a plurivocity of fundamentalisms. These fundamentalisms while crystalized around institutions and individuals nevertheless resemble and imitate the iconic image while offering slight variations upon a theme. The multiple types of fundamentalisms did crystalize around individuals and institutions. Where fundamentalism as a unitary movement failed, fundamentalisms succeeded.[167]

As per Sandeen's epigraph, reports of fundamentalism's demise have been greatly exaggerated.[168] Thanks to strong economic backing and a firmly established subculture, fundamentalisms remain. Ammerman's work highlights not only fundamentalism's resilience but also its diffusion throughout U.S. religion, media, culture, and especially politics.[169] As many

[167] Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby's *Fundamentalism Projec*t out of the University of Chicago does an excellent job charting this shift. Cf. R. Scott Appleby and Martin E. Marty, "Introduction: The Fundamentalism Project: A User's Guide," in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004), vi–xiii.
[168] Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, ix.
[169] Ammerman, "North American Protestant Fundamentalism," 45–47.

scholars cited here have mentioned, Richard Hofstadter's prescient analysis of the influence upon politics by evangelicalism and fundamentalism, continues to resound. The demagoguery of fundamentalists drew no distinction between spheres; for them there was only the battle between good and evil and evil must be fought wherever it appears. Due to the embrace of new media, especially mass-market printing, radio, and a diffuse network of parachurch and academic educational institutions, fundamentalist ideological frameworks enjoyed wide circulation throughout the era.[170]

In the wake of the success of *The Scofield Reference Bible*, *The Fundamentals*, and *Dispensational Truth*, fundamentalism's premillennial dispensational theology and also the core elements of catastrophic-utopianism and authoritarian populism enjoyed mass circulation through the culture at large. Social transformation and interwar anxieties, coupled with paranoia and conspiracy theories, further fostered a continuous feedback loop of fundamentalist eschatology. Fundamentalism's impact was not only on culture and politics but also on "the old-time religion." To highlight how big of a transformation this was, Ammerman turns the scholar's attention to Clifford Geertz, who, in his studies of Islam, points to the difference between "being held by" one's beliefs and "holding" one's beliefs." Ammerman writes, "Fundamentalism, then, differs from traditionalism or orthodoxy or even a mere revivalist movement. It differs in that it is a movement in conscious organized opposition to the disruption of those traditions and orthodoxies."[171] For example, for religious transformation and innovation to occur it cannot be seen as being innovative but must instead be seen either preserving and/or reclaiming the ancient

[170] Ibid., 1–65.
[171] Ibid, 14.

landmarks.[172] Fundamentalism granted itself the authority to defend the tradition from modernity, and through this defense, it thus transformed and modernized the tradition.

Messianism winds up being transformed by an artificially created fundamentalist religious movement which rapidly splits into tiny shards and fiefdoms but not before leaving an indelible mark upon U.S. Protestant theology, especially on messianic theology. Messianism's catastrophic apocalypticism winds up being amplified not only by fundamentalism but also by the events of the era. These elements increase the utopian escapist desire for the rapture. The fatalism of catastrophism and the escapist fantasy of leaving the earth provide a lacuna for an authoritarian populist leader to fill. Messianism in this era, with its preexisting authoritarian bent, is amplified by the fundamentalist demand to doubly separate from not only non-Christians but also from Christians who are perceived as heretical. Finally, fundamentalist leaders present themselves as Victorian gentleman farmers who are merely salt of the earth folk who have dedicated themselves to studying the leadership style of Christ and who one should trust and obey, as they will help others to prepare for, and to remain ready, for the rapture.

Messianism is changed through charisma. To be a messianic figure, one is not doing the work of Social Gospel and seeking to change society but instead is focusing on the eschatological horizon, saving as many souls as possible. Thus, to be a messianic figure is to amass power for oneself, to build an empire, and to help to create a parallel counter-society. One is to be "of" but not "in" the world, doubly separated from both the social and from theological liberalism, attending fundamentalist churches, schools, consuming fundamentalist media, and supporting fundamentalist businesses. It proves disastrous because as the fundamentalists opt out of participation in society, they do not care about the poor or about Progressive Era changes like

[172] For more on the Landmark movement see Smith, Fundamentalism, Fundraising, and the Transformation of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1919-1925.

women's suffrage and the upward mobility of black and brown people, which threaten their fiefdoms. Furthermore, Messianism is irreparably changed through encounters with fundamentalism and modernity. Collecting conversions and amassing congregations continues the settler colonial formation of collecting souls as a form of power. The fundamentalist style is completed when messianic figures are transformed into pop-cultural icons with mass appeal in secular society and culture icons.

Chapter 2
"It's a bird, it's a plane, it's Messianism": Muscular Messianism in Popular culture with special attention Paid to Superheroes

"The pictorial consumer age is dead. The iconic age is upon us."
~ Marshall McLuhan.[1]

In this chapter, I explore how messianism becomes contextualized within the American experience and integrated into a socio-cultural political frame. Here, my project examines the mass cultural appeal of superheroes and explore how superheroes simultaneously come out of an assimilated religious context *and* influence both religious and popular cultural discourse. In this chapter I explore how and why the messianic figure is transformed. The paradox of Superman, as I present him here, is that he is both an icon of messianic power and a schlemiel, a schlemiel, being a Yiddish word for hapless comedic figure like a Charlie Chaplain character but not as sweet and more like a *schmuck*.[2] I suggest this coupling of the messiah with Superman is so intriguing because Superman conceals as much as he reveals when he exists in a space that is both critiquing and reimagining the world. An ostensibly secular messiah and arguably Jewish, he is an alien figure, an immigrant from other planetary shores who comes to save the day for "America." Superman is beloved by his fans and by the people while feared by his critics. In the icon of Superman lurks the twin dangers of authoritarianism and populism rooted in otherworldly superpowers, wherein lies his religious potential.

As per Scholem's analysis of messianic time, the messiah cannot arrive too early or too late, but only in the hour of need. [3] That means that there is an unspoken promise between a

[1] Marshall McLuhan, "Comics: 'Mad' Vestibule to TV," in *Arguing Comics*, ed. Jeet. Heer and Kent Worcester (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 109.
[2] Famously, Hannah Arendt argued that the messiah has become the schlemiel and the schlemiel has become Superman. Hannah Arendt, "The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition," *Jewish Social Studies* 6, no. 2 (1944): 99–122.
[3] Gershom Gerhard Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken, 2006).

messiah and their people that once the crisis is resolved the messiah will leave. But Superman never leaves, he always remains. By remaining, he creates the conditions that justify and make his existence "necessary." As Umberto Eco skillfully illustrates, Superman consumes the world and, in the process, consumes himself as well.[4] Thus the messianic idea does not save; instead it can only create the catastrophes which require a messiah in the first place. Examining the rise and development of comic books reveals an intriguing use of religious rhetoric in their efforts. Comic book authors turn to religious concepts in their myth making, as ways of reflecting on the present. Comic books like religion in "America" are a bricolage of mythmaking.

As a character study on the messianic idea, Superman comics serve what religion scholar Davíd Carrasco would call a "cosmovision." For Carrasco, "cosmovision means a worldview that is charged with religious forces, stories, divinities, and ancestors who created the world and assist in its maintenance and renewal." [5] Within this cosmovision Superman is a messiah. Further underscoring how comic book realism conveys the cosmovision, I seek to highlight how superhero comics became a mirror for religion, politics, and mass culture. Here I find Hoff Kraemer's and Lewis' use of religious historian Catherine Albanese's definition of religion to contextualize Superman comics as "one site where individuals grapple with issues of ethics, meaning, and values, engage in ritualized behavior; and explore both traditional and new religious traditions." Superman comics provide a liminal space for the play of ethics, meaning, and value using old and new religious traditions. Waiting with messianic anticipation for the return of Superman and the return of the messiah, both are religious rituals. While fundamentalist messiah maps the messianic idea, it is not fun. Superman make the messianic idea feel fun and embodied. As Hoff Kraemer and Lewis remind us, Superman comics reflect a culture's "hopes,

[4] Umberto Eco, "The Myth of Superman," in *Arguing Comics*, ed. Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 146–64.
[5] David Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2014), 14–15.

fears, prejudices, and values."[6] As an icon, Superman is an empty signifier. Superman is empty enough for the reader to enter the story and become Superman. The cape, block S, strong man shorts, and leotard, all serve as markers of Superman's messianicity, those which fans can borrow to claim and embrace the identity for themselves. There is much more room to play and imagine oneself as Superman than there is with Jesus. Where fundamentalism was invested in charting the cosmos of the messianic idea, Superman comics focus on representing the messianic idea in a figure where one is able to play and imagine themselves as the messiah that they need.

The iconology of Superman has two parts the form and the content. Chapter 1 illustrated the importance of an icons content and how dense theologically material can be visualized and mapped into a sort of messianic mind palace, this chapter reminds one of the importance of the form of the messianic idea. Following Zachary Harris King Superman comics participate in a "comic book realism."[7] Superman comics look and feel part of the vernacular folk-art tradition of the Sunday funnies while also carving out their own niche and style establishing the sub-genre of Superhero comics style describes King as "comic book realism." Comic book realism imbues the comics with an aura based on distance and authenticity (which King reads as sincerity) and through providing a fantastical/fantasy space for the exploration of ethics. For Superman comics, distance, authenticity, reality/fantasy prove tricky. As will be discussed later in the chapter, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster's early draft of Superman fails because he is too real and the wall between fantasy and reality collapses and the lesson in ethics lacks subtlety.

The comic book realist style transforms the messianic idea. Superman establishes not only a new set of messianic emblems of cape, tights, strongman shorts, and an emblem on the

[6] A. David Lewis and Christine Hoff Kraemer, "Introduction," in *Graven Images: Religion in Comic Books and Graphic Novels*, ed. A. David Lewis and Christine Hoff Kraemer (New York: Continuum, 2010), 3-5.
[7] Zachary Harrison King, "Comic Book Realism: Sincerity, Ethics, and the Superhero in Contemporary American Literature" (Dissertation, University of Iowa, 2016), https://doi.org/10.17077/etd.6ruf-5txw.

chest but also a new aesthetic. The new aesthetic is that of an otherworldly strongman vigilante who gets down to the business of salvation immediately but eschews positions of power. Superman recognizes that messianic figurations hold far more power operating outside the law than as instruments upholding the law, thus he lacks political, corporate, or religious office. Devotees of Superman might suggest that his operating outside the law increases his authenticity as a messianic figure because he is not corrupted by political office. However as this chapter will illustrate, this makes Superman far more catastrophic and chaotic a figure since after all there is no way to hold Superman accountable, no constraint upon his power. After the cataclysm ends Superman is free to fly off into the sunset unacceptable for the damage done and the harm caused. Maintenance and restoration are not messianic arts.

While some may discount Superhero comics, and comics in general, as an unserious artform and thus unable to interface with the "American" cosmovision, leading public intellectuals of the era, like H.L. Menken, Dorothy Parker, and e.e. cummings saw comics as being part of a distinct U.S. folk art tradition. Intellectuals and commoners alike "all took pleasure in what historian Ann Douglas refers to as the "'linguistic explosions'…of the comics page." [8] Some intellectuals like Gilbert Seldes understood comics to be "an indigenous [*sic*] art form."[9] While comics may have been imported from Europe to the United States, the United States refined the medium into a vernacular folk-art style which combined with mass printing created a sequential, disposable folk art existing in the space between the art gallery, magazine,

[8] Jeet Herr and Kent Worcester, "Introduction," in *Arguing Comics*, ed. Jeet. Heer and Kent Worcester (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), xii

[9] Jeet Herr and Kent Worcester, "Early Twentieth-Century Voices," in *Arguing Comics*, ed. Jeet. Heer and Kent Worcester (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 2–3. Ken Koltun-Fromm agrees. Ken Koltun-Fromm, *Drawing on Religion: Reading and the Moral Imagination in Comics and Graphic Novels* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020), 1–12.

and book.[10] For legendary cartoonist Will Eisner, part of what differentiated comics from other American folk art is the nature of this "sequential art."[11] For Eisner comics provided a sequential immersive narrative form where the story is told in the interplay and interaction between sparse language and fantastical pen and ink images.

Seldes had published the works of T.S. Eliot and Thomas Mann, and therefore he understands the value of "genteel" and vernacular art.[12] Likewise, media critic Marshall McLuhan quips that "popular art is the clown reminding us of all the life and faculty we have omitted from our daily routines." Like Seldes, McLuhan sees popular art as providing a space for critique, a funhouse mirror refracting society back upon itself in a clownish way. The clown is this schlemiel-like character who is also the forerunner to Superman. So, the clown, and Superman, remind people of what was lacking – or omitted, to refer back to McLuhan – as these figures parody society in their attempts to find their way.[13] Clad in tights, strongman shorts, and a cape the messiah looks and fits the part of a circus performer and a clown. Here is an all-powerful being who is using his genius and powers could solve all manner of social problems but instead he chose to fight crime, stop the eschaton, and be a big blue boy scout. Imagine what the messiah could do to stop world hunger. Each time Superman stops petty crimes, rescues cats from trees, and performs quotidian acts of human kindness with superhuman abilities, he looks like a dumb schmuck. As Superman lingers around waiting for the next test of his skills he serves as a clownish figure reminding people what is lacking, being a clownish reflection of everyday life and being a clownish reflection of himself.

---

[10] As an intellectual, Seldes' "liberal cultural nationalism" occluded his vision and thus he ignored the longer history and innovation of comics in Europe. Herr and Worcester write "this notion of comics as a distinctively American art form slights the medium's lengthy gestation period in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the iconic language of comics was being developed in Europe." Herr and Worcester, "Introduction," xii–xiii.
[11] Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art: Principles and Practices from the Legendary Cartoonist*; [Incl. New and Updated Material] (New York, NY: Norton, 2008), 5.
[12] Herr and Worcester, "Early Twentieth-Century Voices."
[13] McLuhan, "Comics," 109.

In 1950s, West Indian intellectual and critic C.L.R James finds deep resonances with comic books, which for him "mirror from year to year the deep social responses and evolution of the American people in relation to the fate which has overtaken the original concepts of freedom, free individuality, free association etc." In James' examination of comics, he found "the clearest ideological expression of the sentiments and deepest feelings of the American people and a great window in the future of America and the modern world."[14] James understood that comics, along with other forms of U.S. mass culture, highlighted the curtailing of freedom in the United States, which other critics like McLuhan will connect to totalitarianism and authoritarianism. For James, reading comics is putting one's fingers on the ideological pulse of the nation, and I would argue into the cosmovision of the U.S.

Umberto Eco's influential work on Superman further elucidates how Superman functions as part of a distinctively U.S. cosmovision that illuminates the dream-like quality saturating the messianic idea and catastrophic Christianity. Eco's essay focuses on the *mythopoeic* process in Superman, which he sees as expressed in through endless layering of intertextual bricolage.[15] Eco, perhaps drawing from Claude Lévi-Strauss, illustrates how *mythopoesis*, like bricolage, creates a symbolic referential order using whatever materials are at hand.[16] Superman comics then are an innovative *mythopoeic* space where one may court disaster/catastrophe and fantasize about wish-fulfilling utopias where good triumphs over evil, creating what Eco calls, an "oneiric climate."[17] One of the ways that the "oneiric" climate is represented in the Superman comics is through the use of bricolage and a composite style. The images are framed and separated by the

[14] C.L.R. James, "C.L.R. James on Comic Strips," in *Arguing Comics*, ed. Jeet. Heer and Kent Worcester (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 142.
[15] Umberto Eco, "The Myth of Superman," in *Arguing Comics*, ed. Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 155.
[16] Eco, "The Myth of Superman"; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind: (La Pensée Sauvage)* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 16–33.
[17] Eco, "The Myth of Superman," 153.

gutters splitting them. Divided yet united. Thematically, Superman's comics draw from Norse, Greek, Roman, Jewish, Christian, and Occultic symbolism and imagery.[18] It is perhaps this composite nature which H.L. Mencken remarks upon when he praises comics as capturing "the national fancy for the terse, the vivid, and above all the bold and imaginative."[19] Religious Studies scholars Christine Hoff Kraemer and A. David Lewis seem in agreement with Eco and Mencken when they observe that in (superhero) comics, "images….simply will not stay inert on the surface where they're drawn; they penetrate our hearts, and to expose ourselves to the wrong images invites the worst kind of disaster."[20] The chaotic composite style of the *bricoleur* creates the ephemeral essence of the superhero comic.

Critical to understanding the messianic idea of Superman is Eco's "oneiric climate." As the progenitor (in the mythic and etiological senses) of disposable, serialized folk-art tradition, Superman comics alter time, suspending the past and future for an elongated, immersive experience of the un-ending present where Superman's (and by extension the reader's) movement towards death is delayed through a liminal experience.[21] Eco's analysis of temporality in Superman is dense, so to clarify I make reference to John E. Smith's work on *Chronos* (quantity, linear) and *Kairos* (quality, temporally ambiguous).[22] For Eco in Superman *Chronos* (linear time) is suspended and all that remains is the *Kairos* (temporal ambiguity) of the narrative arc.[23] Part of what makes the messianic idea so catastrophic is the end of linear time (*Chronos*) through the coming catastrophe. The arrival of a messianic figure supplants *Chronos* with an elongated *Kairos* of messianic time. Getting caught within the messianic time means that one is

[18] For Gershon Legman, the composite nature of comics is important, but Seldes' fête is excessive. Gershon Legman, "'From Love and Death:' A Study in Censorship," in *Arguing Comics*, ed. Jeet. Heer and Kent Worcester (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 28.
[19] As quoted in Herr and Worcester, "Introduction," xii.
[20] Lewis and Kraemer, "Introduction," 1.
[21] Eco, "The Myth of Superman."
[22] John E. Smith, "Time, Times, and the 'Right Time'; 'Chronos' and 'Kairos,'" *The Monist* 53, no. 1 (1969): 1–13.
[23] Eco, "The Myth of Superman."

caught and suspended between dispensations in a liminal moment of rupture between the end and the new age. Part of what concerns Eco about Superman is that this *Kairotic* suspension which cocoons the reader inside a nihilistic fatalism where waiting on messiahs' arrival and/or the apocalypse means they do not act to prevent the messiah and/or catastrophe's arrival.

For those waiting at the comic bookstore, the childlike sense of awe and wonder at the newest edition of the Superman comic is an example of the type of *Kairotic* time which I see Eco gesturing towards. Superman comics represent the spatiotemporally of messianic expectation creating a mass culture pocket dimension where one can escape into comic book realism and find narrative closer and possibly redemption, things which are increasingly difficult to find in the reality of lived experience. Fantasy, like an opiate, can serve as a salve and provide healing but can become harmful in large quantities. The child, filled with hopeful expectation, cannot wait to read the comic and gets lost entirely inside the narrative. The parent does not care. The parent is too invested in moving between chronological time points along the schedule of the day. The sense of getting lost inside that world for an indeterminate amount of time is the "oneiric climate" to which Eco refers.

It is not the content of the event but the event itself, the arrival of the newest edition of the messianic, the vehicle of time that brings what is hoped for. This *Kairotic* function is not original to Superman or superhero comics. Instead, as Religion scholar and ethicist Ken Koltun-Fromm underscores, it is a residual trace of religion preserved within the iconological frame of the comic book. For Koltun-Fromm, comics and "religious iconography" draw upon and reshape mental images. Additionally, both draw upon and reshape the sacred, doing the work of mythmaking.

The biggest differences between these are that comics are serialized.[24] Librarian and media scholar Darby Orcutt sees the "iconic nature of comics" in the "spare visual representation for which readers must fill in the details."[25] For Koltun-Fromm and Orcutt, comics and icons require something of the viewer: the viewer must connect the symbols and fill in the gaps to tell the story. While D.C. Comics believed the initial demographic of *Superman* readers were children, in the 1940s they realized that adults were also a core part of the audience.[26] The conceit of Superman comics is that they are "for children" is part of what makes the story compelling. As comic book author and artist Scott McCloud argues, adults are not often ready to admit to reading and enjoying comic books because of their bright colors, narrative resolution, sequential style, and disposable form. It is easier for adults to imagine that "comics" are "for" children while enjoying them themselves.[27] The of use comic book realism and a sequential art style creates a shared universe for thinking with and through the messianic idea.

The Comic Style

Reading Superman along with the early critics of (superhero) comics reveals the ways in which superhero comics overtake the senses and draw upon the wells of what Eco sees as the *mythopoeic* heritage of comics. Two critical element of the *mythopoeisis* of Superman comics are the messianic idea and "American" mass culture. Both help to shape the aesthetics and the referential signposting of the Superman comics. While some critics only see the comic style as derivative of other aesthetic styles, thinkers like Marshall McLuhan, Manny Farber, Leslie Fielder, and Gilbert Seldes are willing to interrogate the art form on its own terms. What may

[24] Koltun-Fromm, Drawing on Religion, 1–12.
[25] Darby Orcutt, "Comics and Religion: Theoretical Connections," in *Graven Images: Religion in Comic Books and Graphic Novels*, ed. A. David Lewis and Christine Hoff. Kraemer (New York: Continuum, 2010), 95.
[26] Matthew Freeman, "Up, Up and Across: Superman, the Second World War and the Historical Development of Transmedia Storytelling," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 35, no. 2 (April 3, 2015): 215–39, https://doi.org/10.1080/01439685.2014.941564.
[27] Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The invisible Art* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), 2-3.

appear derivative of other art forms is part of the comic style. To tell a compact textual and visual narrative one needs to draw upon well establish elements of religion and culture that the audience will know immediately. While taking the comic style seriously but also situating it within larger aesthetic and mythic frameworks are Umberto Eco, Ken Koltun-Fromm, Christine Hoff Kraemer, and others. Placing these theorists together, several elements of the comic style emerge: first, comic style is imagistic and iconic; second, it is a reflective mirror style; and third, it creates a moral space of reasoning or reflection. Imagism and reflection within a moral universe are only as useful insofar as they are meaningful. Reflections may conceal as much as they reveal, especially if the reflections are represented through caricature and funhouse mirrors. Mirror art can be dangerous. If a reflection contains too much verisimilitude it may be pass unremarked and forgotten. If a reflection is too distorted through caricature it will not be recognizable. In order to provide access to the mythic and moral universe of a comic book one must see themselves reflected in a way that creates a pause, freezing the reader in place and letting the tidal wave crash over them. Becoming lost in this iconological world is how one finds oneself.

McLuhan decreed, “The pictorial consumer age is dead. The iconic age is upon us.” Looking at the 1920s to 50s, McLuhan saw the rise of iconic image whether those were the “iconic mosaic images” of television, or the iconic images of comics, or the new age of iconic advertisements. Looking at meteoric rise of new visual media genres and formats, McLuhan understood that part of what made them work is the way that they could distill ideas down to an iconic image which circulates through the aura and sentiment attached to the image. In the mind’s eye, when someone thinks of Superman, one might think of a particular drawing or a favorite comic edition but for everyone imaging Superman the vital symbols of his messianic

power are present. In the iconic age, sequential art further challenges the spatial temporality of media both expanding stories out into universes and distilling them down to a flat symbol like a block S or a cross. For McLuhan comics are a central part of the iconic age. He sees an aesthetic similarity and style between comic book sand "eighth-century illuminations." Both are overlooked because of their form and contents.[28] American Studies scholar Jean-Paul Gabilliet argues, "comic art is the form taken by stories in images in an age of mass publishing that started in the nineteenth century."[29]

In 1955, cultural critic Leslie Fiedler situates comic books "midway between icon and story."[30] Comics like Superman invite the reader into a participatory relationship by blending abstraction and realism into the images, as cartoonist Scott McCloud contends in *Understanding Comics.* He writes, "the cartoon is a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled an empty shell that we inhabit which enables us to travel in another realm. We don't just observe the cartoon we become it."[31] The challenge of Superman comics is they need to be abstract enough so the reader can escape into the story, empty enough that they can insert themselves, and rich enough they can find the world to be an immersive auratic cocoon fantastical enough for escapism and real enough to feel part of the story. Superheroes and their comic books through application of vibrant cover art which invites the reader to enter the world.[32] Comics are the juxtaposition of text and image, word and icon.[33]

As iconic images, superhero comics draw upon the same emotional milieu as the hypermasculine catastrophic utopianism of fundamentalism and the corporatized masculinity of

---

[28] McLuhan, "Comics," 109-110.
[29] Jean-Paul Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*, trans. Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 3–4; Koltun-Fromm, *Drawing on Religion*, 6.
[30] Leslie Fiedler, "The Middle Against Both Ends," in *Arguing Comics*, ed. Jeet. Heer and Kent Worcester (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 123.
[31] Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The invisible Ar*t (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), 36.
[32] Orcutt, "Comics and Religion: Theoretical Connections," 96–97.
[33] Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art*, 5.

authoritarian populism of mass-marketed messianism present during the early twentieth century. Superman takes some of the terrifying edge off of catastrophe. One imagines oneself as Superman or one of the friends rescued; one does not imagine oneself as an innocent bystander eviscerated in the cataclysmic event. Just as one imagines oneself as the raptured and saved who gets to enjoy the utopia in fundamentalist messianism, so too does one like to imagine oneself as the saved or savior. "Real men" are saviors and messiahs. The messiah complex flourishes in the comic book fantastical world. Superman shows up and takes charge, bolstered by an excited nation desperate for his help. Acting alone and according to his own vision Superman saves the day. Here in the "oneiric climate" of Superman, the anxiety and terror of the cataclysm is consigned to the margins of the story. The three ways in which the cosmovision is communicated and fulfilled in Superman comics are through the mercurial relationship with the *Kairos* of catastrophism and utopianism of Eco's "oneiric climate."[34] Authoritarian populism is communicated through superhero comics' use of what comic book creator Scott McCloud calls "iconic abstraction." Together these elements underscore the religious dimensions of an "American" cosmovision establishing aesthetic and religious dimensions that comic book scholar Zachary Harrison King calls "comic book realism."[35]

In 1924, critic Gilbert Seldes provides an early examination of comics style.[36] Seldes analysis of the comic style illustrates how messianism and *schlemielkeit* were already minor parts of the comic form before Superman ensconced them in the collective psyche. For Seldes early comic strip contain the "gentle monsters of our new mythology." Where Seldes sees

[34] Eco, "The Myth of Superman," 153.
[35] Zachary Harrison King, "Comic Book Realism: Sincerity, Ethics, and the Superhero in Contemporary American Literature" (Dissertation, University of Iowa, 2016), https://doi.org/10.17077/etd.6ruf-5txw.
[36] Gilbert Seldes, "The Krazy Kat That Walks by Himself," in *Arguing Comics*, ed. Jeet. Heer and Kent Worcester (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 22–24.

gentility, Koltun-Fromm, see terrifying monsters.[37] Seldes effusive praise of the form and style early comic strips helps to situate the rise of Superman comics in the broader context of early-twentieth century comic art. He rightly notes the relationship between word and image how theme and structure are conveyed through the lines, panels, colorization and how they highlight a movement between a naïve "primitivism" and "expressionistic" highlighting existential anxiety endemic to the time.[38]

Writing in 1951 the iconoclastic, painter, writer, filmmaker, and critic, Manny Farber lamented the comic style as grotesque. Farber's theorization of comic from and style as grotesque captures an important nuanced transition for the messianic idea. As the messianic idea becomes more about form than content, a biosphere with an oneiric climate, it becomes more elastic and distorted. The messianic idea is still recognizable as part of messianism and the "American" cosmovision but in moving beyond being strictly about particularized Christological content, something was lost in the shift from content to form. Following Farber part of what was lost is reflected in the simplistic pen and ink line drawings lacked depth, nuance, and substance. The finished product of comics looked like unfinished cinema story boards to Farber. For him comics are "pseudo-movies—taking over close-ups, tricky lighting, and the rest."[39] Minimalism's reductive nature cuts to the bone. "Primitive" and "roughneck" comics "energetic" and kinetic energy overtake the senses, providing the audience with libidinal containers to insert themselves into the story and through their aesthetic and narrative shallowness, they inhibit moral judgment.[40]

[37] Koltun-Fromm, Drawing on Religion, 2.
[38] Seldes, "The Krazy Kat That Walks by Himself," 29.
[39] Manny Farber, "Comic Strips," in *Arguing Comics*, ed. Jeet. Heer and Kent Worcester (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 93.
[40] Farber, "Comic Strips," 93.

What Farber sees as a negative, Orcutt sees as positive, comics being like a movie or a film storyboard.[41] Condescendingly Farber admits that comics "satisfy a demand for inventiveness, energetic drawing, and a roughneck enthusiasm for life that other plastic arts cannot meet."[42] "Primitive," "roughneck," "expressionistic," "energetic," and "enthusiastic" comics make a psychological, emotional, and aesthetic appeal that is difficult to resist. The problem with comics for critics like Farber is that they are an immersive and disposable art form. They function as a visual and narrative tidal wave. The enthusiastic and immersive nature of the comic book overtake the senses, leaving the reader bewildered and caught in a state of emotional flux with resolution differed to another day. In this overwhelming of the senses readers are being sucked into the *mythopoetic* nature of superhero comics.

Where Fiedler and Eco are able to appreciate the force of this tidal wave, Farber still has concerns. For Farber the artistic push and pull upon the emotional states of their audiences is serious business and should only be done in the name of substance. Farber sees only style without substance whereas Fiedler and Eco find substance in the mythopoeic resonances of superhero comics, for them the depth lies in the gutters of the strip and in the hypertextual and subtextual references and engagements with the socio-cultural milieu and the mythic.

Fiedler's analysis is correct as a vernacular folk-art tradition with a narrative, superhero comics find themselves betwixt and between poetry and prose, art and cinema, icon and story; and in the most "Americanized" of ways as both icon and advertisement. Framing iconic images marked by excesses of immersive myths, color, disposability, and a refusal to know its place. The mercurial nature of Superhero comic books opens new discursive possibilities for the circulation of the messianic idea. Circulating throughout religion and mass culture the messianic

[41] Orcutt, "Comics and Religion: Theoretical Connections," 97.
[42] Farber, "Comic Strips," 93.

idea no longer has a static place (like within Christology). Instead, it can circulate freely, expanding out into a sequential omnibus or contracting down to one iconic image. McLuhan argues that comic books have "a participational and do-it-yourself character."[43] The messianic idea can slip outside of space and time, creating an elongated *Kairotic* experience.[44] Comic book writers and artists artfully balance between too much and not enough information, creating a fully immersive world where the reader is invited to be part of building the immersive world and to see themselves as the protagonist. They are both reader and iconographer.

It's a Bird it's a Plane, It's Religion

Acknowledging the ways that images especially comic books work on readers just as readers works on them allows scholars to reflect on how the messianic idea is working outside of traditional religious and theological categories. Building on the work of Koltun-Fromm, I see superhero comics as "moral imagination in visual play." Once one has studied the mythic structure of the superhero comic one is able to understand why the comics are popular. If comics are inviting readers in and asking them to fill in the gaps of the white space and the gutters, and to see themselves present or absent from the stories as so many of the thinkers discussed here argue, then Koltun-Fromm is correct that comics are a space for ethical reflection, whether or not that is what they intend. [45]

Looked at critically, Superman makes authoritarianism look zany, endearing, the quickest way to resolve a conflict. The core of the problem with Superman comics is that while they provide a space for ethical reasoning that is disconnected with larger discourses about ethical reasoning. I believe the immersive quality has a tendency to reinforce the status quo of

[43] As quoted in Orcutt, "Comics and Religion: Theoretical Connections," 99; Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding media: the extensions of man* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 225.
[44] McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The invisible Art*, 88.
[45] Kolton-Fromm, 5-6; 10.

hegemony. For some critics, it is alarming that comic books wind up becoming a space for ethical reflection, for critics like Fielder and McLuhan, comics are far too saturated with violence to provide a meaningful space of ethical reflection. Both Fiedler and McLuhan understand that violence in comic books reflects the "flood" of violence in the world. Situating the messianic idea within mental, material, and virtual worlds that are hyper saturated with violence reifies the problem of using violence to solve religious, political, and cultural problems.

The troubling aspect of super heroic violence is that so often the end justifies the means. If Superman can save Metropolis, he is rarely held to account for the direct and indirect death tool of his actions and is instead hailed a hero. Thus further entrenching the narrative of redemptive violence and the necessity of violence into the messianic idea. Both theorists understand that comic books mirror the world around them.[46] They are concerned that what ethical reflection may occur is perhaps discarded when the issue is discarded, collapsing under the weight of constant episodic catastrophe. McLuhan writes, "the violence of an industrial and mechanical environment had to be believed and given meaning and motive in the nerves and viscera of the young. To live and experience anything is to translate its direct impact into many indirect forms of awareness." The violence and anxieties of the industrial age are reflected in the pages of the comic books so when the comics "provide a reasonable facsimile of the ordinary city vehemence, eyebrows are raised."[47] For McLuhan, comic books' utilization of frames and panels, allows comics to literally frame and mirror society. The framing, and reframing of society potentially allows one to reflect upon the image gazing back at the reader.

Using Panofky's threefold method of iconology on Superman comics reveals just how much the messianic idea has been transformed by the encounter with the genre of comics.

[46] Ibid., 127; McLuhan, "Comics," 110.
[47] McLuhan, "Comics," 110.

Superman comics kept the primary subject (the messianic idea) while also opening it up to be a container for artists, authors, and audiences to situate themselves within. Reduced to its essence, the messianic idea, preserves its catastrophic nature each story within the sequential art from is from catastrophic to utopia (order). The space and time between episodes is filled with imagining what new crisis will unfold. With each episode the cycle repeats itself. A crisis arrives, the people turn to Superman, Superman stops the crisis. His power and authority is maintained. It is a never-ending cycle.

The immersive worldbuilding cycle of comic books blends words and images, parallels Carrasco's analysis of cosmovision. The immersive worldbuilding using already extant mythologies and socio-cultural legible sources coupled with the blending of word and image creates what Fiedler would call a "post-literate" art form.[48] As post-literate art form comic books are an anti-intellectual vernacular art that has resonances with Hofstadter's fundamentalist style. In the world of the comic, anyone can become a hero, all it takes is the destruction of your home planet, a meteor crash, a laboratory accident, or a substantial inheritance and you too can mete out cosmic justice *in loco Dei*.

Fiedler sees the post-literacy and anti-genteel nature of superhero comics as part and parcel of what makes them true heirs to the American folk-art tradition, reflecting that, "Thought of in this light, the comic books with their legends of the eternally threatened metropolis eternally protected by immaculate and modest heroes (who shrink back after each exploit in the image of the crippled newsboy, the impotent and cowardly report) are seen as inheritors, for all their superficial differences, of the *inner* impulses of traditional folk art. The interior folk-art elements that Fielder sees in comics are dreamlike, libidinal, violent, and impulsive. All of these are highlighted in their stories of looming catastrophe, the cessation of the story, and the resetting of

[48] Fiedler, "The Middle Against Both Ends," 125.

the timeline to the moment just prior to *this* catastrophe awaiting the *next* catastrophe. The liminal space that stands, chronologically, in-between superhero comic book issues is a utopia marked by lack. While awaiting the next issue, one must imagine Superman happy, with everything being fine in Metropolis until the moment when the next catastrophe begins. The style of Superhero comics then highlights important elements about the structure of messianism within this emerging milieu. Iconology helps to understand Fiedler's point. The interior folk-art elements like the dreamlike, libidinal, violent, and impulsive nature of vernacular folk art are all amplified by Superman comics framing of the messianic idea within this emergent media. In this way both the messianism and comic books grotesquely amplify the underlying issues with both the genre and leitmotif. Messianism becomes marked by how comic books handle "time, space, and narrative progression."[49] Messianism also becomes a disposable folk art to be set down and discarded until next time -- and there is *always* a next time.

Comic books offer the reader the chance to be one of the architects in building a fantasy that is "psychologically and emotionally" satisfying to inhabit, as Orcutt argues in agreement with McLuhan.[50] The utopia offered by comic books is the fully immersive liminal space of the comic book issue. Once the world has been devoured, it may be discarded or set aside for later use. Koltun-Fromm takes the argument further by pointing out that comic book readers desire closure, explaining the ways that comics fill in the gaps and tie up loose ends will resolve the story in a clear and easy manner, taking advantage of comic books' use of stereotypes and tropes in order to more quickly fill in these gaps.[51] The comic books' emotionally satisfying conclusion, coupled with the immersion and disposability of the story, means that the sort of ethical reflection that Koltun-Fromm wants readers to have is often cut short (as he notes) by the use of

[49] Ibid., 126.
[50] Orcutt, "Comics and Religion: Theoretical Connections," 98.
[51] Koltun-Fromm, Drawing on Religion, 220.

stereotypes and mythic tropes.[52] By offering readers a way into the frame of Superman comics and a chance to embody the messianic idea means forecloses the possibilities of ethical reasoning. Challenging the structure of the messianic idea in "America" and by extension the structure of Superman comics becomes all the more difficult once one is inside the story. Now the Superman/the messiah's story is the reader's story and as *The Wizard of Oz* illustrates no one is paying attention to the man behind the curtain.

"The Myth of Superman"[53]

Superman becomes the American messiah. He is an alien from a strange land who is strong, powerful, comes to save the day and punches Nazis. He is the libidinal wish fulfillment fantasy of the "American" mind. Through his presence, one can think of and imagine a modern-day messiah dressed up in tights and a cape, a messiah who might come in one's lifetime, not necessarily Superman himself but someone *like* him, an imitator, one who can leverage the charismatic power of messianism to save the day and bring about a new world. The recursive mythologization of Superman, Siegel, and Shuster and their attendant commodification captures the religious and capitalist valences of *mythopoesis* in the United States. This sort of mythological process is not unique to Superman but instead a metonymic feature of the cosmovision. Myths imbue the nation with meaning. Lewis and Kraemer summarize fellow religions scholar Catherine Albanese's definition of religion "as a creed (beliefs), code (standards of behavior), and cultus (system of practice) by which a community 'orients [itself] in the world with reference to both ordinary and extraordinary powers, meanings, and values."[54] Applying Albanese's framework to Superman one can see how Superman becomes a vital

[52] Ibid.
[53] Apologies to Umberto Eco for my appropriation of his essays title.
[54] A. David Lewis and Christine Hoff Kraemer, "Introduction," *Graven Images: Religion in Comic Books and Graphic Novels* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 3.

animating part of the "American" (religion) imagination. Thus, the Superman mythology participates in the foundational mythology of the United States.[55]

Tom De Haven, comic book scholar and author of the Superman themed novel *It's Superman,* tells the iconic story of Superman in the Yale University Press series, *Icons of America*. In 1933, in Cleveland, Ohio, Superman was born to Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, the sons of Jewish immigrants.[56] In 1938, Superman was announced to the world with the publication of *Action Comics #1*, published by Detective Comics (better known as DC Comics).[57] Superman would go on well beyond this initial publication to become the paradigmatic superhero icon against whom all other superheroes would be measured, who in time would become a popular culture icon, with his own radio and television shows, film franchises, and mass-market of every conceivable kind of kitsch. Yet the 1938 publication of *Action Comics #1* was of vital importance in that it defined the comic book genre and later the genre of the graphic novel. While neither serialized storytelling nor comics or art with speech bubbles were new, *Action Comics #1* defined the superhero comic genre: the size and dimensions were highly portable and cheap to print, disposable, with vibrant colors, and a modern style that sold stories.

Combining myths, humor, action, and adventure with science-fiction and some fantasy sprinkled in for good measure proved to be a highly successful formula for Superman. Siegel and Shuster created a portable mythology that could be transported into almost any medium: comics, radio, television, film, books, lunch pails, the sky was the limit. Like the origins of Superman himself, the origins of the creation and publication of Superman is mythological. Everywhere

[55] Lewis and Kraemer, "Introduction," 1–11.
[56] Tom De Haven, *Our Hero: Superman on Earth* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 27–33.
[57] Larry Tye, *Superman: The High-Flying History of America's Most Enduring Hero* (New York: Random House, 2012), 3–34. De Haven, *Our Hero*, 27–30.

one looks there is myth. Thanks in large part to Siegel and Shuster "self-heroizing," along with fans' *paeans* both men have been recreated in the image of their son. As de Haven further illustrates their awe and reverence for Superman, and his progenitors, continues to increase through fans interpolation of the comics, and Superman's mass merchandising. Nothing not even the creators themselves are beyond commodification. First runs, autographs, early editions, anything touched or rumored to have been sanctified by the creators becomes a relic of great reverence which one may part with for a price.[58]

As an iconic figure Superman transcends genre. He is represented not only as a superhero in his strongman shorts, tights, and cape with an iconic logo on his chest but just as the iconic block S inside a triangle. The hero's iconological visage and sign can be found in the Sunday funnies (comics), in comic books, on products, in advertisements, and later in film and in marketing materials. Highlighting the versatility of Superman's iconology, I wish to focus on his three earliest Siegel/Shuster incarnations, first as a villain in "The Reign of The Superman," second as an intergalactic alien straight from the cosmos to the funny pages (comics), and finally as savior/reinventor of the comic book. After discussing these three iconic forms I will turn to the moment where Superman appears in *Look* magazine and breaks the fourth wall. These four iconic moments capture the essence of Superman. An essence which will be distilled, repackaged, resold, and ultimately absorbed into myth and the American cosmovision. The iconic function of Superman provides a new wrapper to the form of the messianic idea. One that is now able to be inhabited and imitated by audiences. Superman provides vivid illustrations of what messiahs can do and encourages the reader to see themselves as a Superman. The side effect of this chance to embody messianism is that the comics naturalize and normalizes the authoritarianism, catastrophism, and violence. Another consequence of Superman's impact upon

[58] De Haven, Our Hero, 64–84.

the messianic idea is that superhero messianism becomes as fatalistic as fundamentalist messianism. Both present a world inevitably careening towards a cataclysmic end and say that this seems like a job for a messiah.

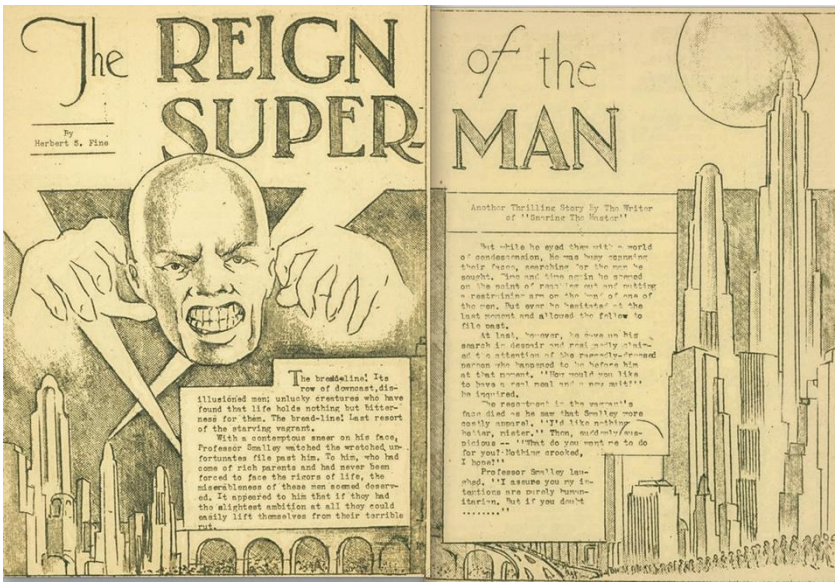


Figure 4. The Reign of the Superman[59]

The Evolution of Superman from "the Reign of Superman" to Clark Kent, an American Icon.

The peculiar origin of Superman highlights the complicated and elusive nature of "comic book realism." In the early days of comics, one could not be too realistic. The original story of Superman fails because it is far to bleak and the mirror reflects reality not a funhouse distorted reality in which one might which to play. The origin story of Superman is the story of power, chaos, and violence. Superman did not start out as hero from Krypton sent to earth but instead as man from the breadlines of the Great Depression who was taken by an evil scientist and given phenomenal cosmic powers which he used initially to take revenge against the wealthy elites and all those who wronged and slighted him before expanding into everyday villainy. This unusual backstory to Superman tells us some important elements about the myth of Superman. The first

[59] Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, *The Reign of Superman*, 1933, pen and ink, 18.5 x 9.34, Science Fiction #3, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Reign_of_the_Superman.jpg.

draft of the Man of Steel who everyone knows and loves a character marked by power, chaos, and violence. The mythic transformation Superman from villain to hero tells us something important about the power and chaos that resides within the messianic idea. Superman as a container can just as easily be a hero or a villain what makes the character messianic is their relationship to power, chaos, and catastrophe.

As sociologist Thomas Andrae highlighted in 1987, Siegel and Shuster's Superman was not the first superhero figure to be a super-human, a superman, or a superwoman.[60] Like comics, there is a larger etiology for the emergence of the Superman phenomenon. Previous supermen had been outcasts, monsters, aberrations, aliens, and tyrants.[61] Indeed, the very first of our Superman is the 1933 "The Reign of Superman," written by Siegel and illustrated by Shuster. It was self-published in their fanzine *Science Fiction* and participates in this earlier monstrous tradition.[62] The story is simple. A mad scientist creates a potion to give to a vagrant named "Bill Dunn, Gentleman of the Road," superpowers for a limited time. Seeking to test the formula, the scientist plucks a random person from the breadlines and bestows upon them superpowers like telekinesis. The everyman now seeing that he has superpowers immediately seeks world domination (through reading and controlling minds). Immediately he begins wreaks havoc, creates chaos, seeks to pit the armies of the world against one another, and ultimately kills his creator only to discover that the serum provides only short-term powers. Angry and disappointed that his plans for world domination evaporated so quickly the man returns to the breadlines only

[60] Superman cover image by Herbert S. Fine (Jerry Siegel) (Jerry Siegel) and Joe Shuster - *Science Fiction: The Advance Guard of Future Civilization #3*, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=39629889
[61] Thomas Andrae, "From Menace to Messiah: The History and Historicity of Superman," in *American Media and Mass Culture*, ed. Donald Lazere (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 125, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=21257.
[62] Jerry Siegel, "The Reign of the Superman," *Science Fiction: The Vanguard of Future Civilization*, January 1933, The Sol and Penny Davidson Collection, https://ufl-flvc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01FALSC_UFL/175ga98/alma990214369280306597.

to be forgotten.[63] A bleak story steeped in the tragedy of the Great Depression and the anxiety about madmen starting wars, the protagonist of, "The Reign of Superman," despite being self-published was shelved.

Later when Siegel and Shuster returned to revamp the character, the only resemblance between this baldheaded Superman and the later full-headed Superman is the name. The first Superman, drawn by Siegel in 1933, is an unemployed and homeless on the breadline, a hapless human experiment by an evil scientist. This bald villainous version of Superman, motivated by making money and a form of self-indulgent mayhem, later becomes nothing less than the archetypal villain Lex Luthor himself, the nemesis of the later Superman.[64] This early draft of Superman was no big blue boy scout. In his creator's imagination here is a superhuman with superpowers would embrace chaos, catastrophe, and villainy. Despite the telekinetic powers of the early Superman, he was too real and relatable. Lacking a clear hero to see oneself in the story would be to admit that one is the villain. Filled with simple pen and ink drawing with hard lines coupled with the breadlines, unstable rulers, and the world on the brink of war made "The Reign of Superman" all too real. The comic ends with Superman stripped of his powers returning to the breadlines. Telekinesis and potions could not overcome the bracing verisimilitude staring back at one from the page. Superman requires color, diegesis, and hope that good triumphs over evil, and that there is more to the story than standing in the breadline.

"The Reign of Superman" would not be the only Siegel and Shuster tincture added to the final edition of this hybrid monster. In 1935, Siegel and Shuster were working on "Doctor Occult, the Ghost Detective," under aliases.[65] Doctor Occult was a detective with supernatural

[63] Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, "The Reign of Superman," in *Jerry Siegel's & Joe Shuster's Science Fiction Full Book: The Advance Guard of Future Civilization*, ed. C. Sesselego and L. Livi (Eastbourne: Blue Monkey Studio, 2020), 29–46.
[64] Tye, *Superman*, 109–110.
[65] Ibid., 23.

and mystical powers. He first appeared in 1935's *New Fun Comics #6*.[66] Comic book artist Christopher Knowles traces the main leitmotifs of Doctor Occult; first, Doctor Occult was a detective who travels to a mystic realm where he can fly courtesy of his cape, making him perhaps the first caped crusader. Doctor Occult shows Siegel and Shuster playing with Gnosticism, magic, and esoteric knowledge that grants power and blends science fiction, fantasy, and action-adventure. The Doctor Occult stories provide a backdrop for the eventual rise of Superman. [67]

Villainous Superman, everyman Superman, a musketeer, and a detective with occultist superpowers serve as the primordial matrices for Superman and the myth of the messiah. Slowly, Superman evolves into first a demi-god, and it could be argued, later a god who is able to do almost anything. With these powers come his great responsibility lest he become the villain. His status as everyman is secured by the schlemiel figure, Clark Kent, and his powers come from a mystical alien planet, Krypton. As Christopher Knowles notes, the Doctor Occult interplay between esoteric and exoteric knowledge remains within the Superman mythology and forms part of a basis for most Superheroes. Almost all superheroes have secret identities, (not-so-secret) vulnerabilities, and the full extent of their powers is often unknown to most. The entire mythology of superheroes is built upon a sense of gnostic religiosity which simultaneously draws its power from culture and powers culture in return.[68] The recursive relation creates an unresolvable tension about which influence is strongest. Having traced the thematic origins that combine into the mythological, spandex-clad figure of Siegel and Shuster's creation, Andrae concludes that their innovation was in transforming Superman into "a truly messianic figure…"[69]

---

[66] De Haven, *Our Hero*, 41–47.
[67] Christopher Knowles, *Our Gods Wear Spandex: The Secret History of Comic Book Heroes* (San Francisco: Weiser Books, 2007), i-xv, 115–116.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Andrae, "From Menace to Messiah," 125.

The Superman that fans know and love today is a narrative inversion of villainous "Reign of Superman." Eventually, Siegel and Shuster would return to the idea of a Superman, creating a new hero who is the narrative inversion of the villainous "Reign of Superman." One whose powers are extra-terrestrial and more vaguely "scientific" feeling to them than the telekinesis and mind control of evil Superman or the magical powers of Doctor Occult. A powerful and compelling iconic archetype is reborn. As an icon Superman is a mosaic. He feels mythlike but the mythic sources are not readily identifiable. There is a sense of you have seen this before, but it is made-up mythology. The actual mythic structure is American, a bricolage of immigrant mythologies. Superman is the model immigrant success story reflecting Siegel and Shuster's second generation American Jewish immigrant milieu. The immigrant turning into the messiah, that is the myth of Superman.[70]

The daily comic strips of Superman stand out not only because of syndication, audience size, and early popularity but also narrative and visual format. The pressures of having six strips and over fifty plus comic book pages to do for Superman a week meant that the artistic styling was necessarily sparse and fast. A functionalist minimalism whose chief stylistic quality was a deadline. As a more established genre than comic books, readers of the "funny pages" had expectations they wanted serialized stories with episodic arcs that they could follow and would keep them invested. Newspaper publishers wanted the same because it would keep people purchasing papers. Thus, the Superman daily strips had a serial visual format which allowed for more robust and often more memorable story arcs than what was seen in the early comic books of Superman. In the daily strips Superman directly engaged with important social issues of his

[70] For popular Jewish interpretations of Superman see, Simcha Weinstein , *Up, up, and Oy Vey!: How Jewish History, Culture, and Values Shaped the Comic Book Superhero* (Fort Lee, NJ: Barricade Books, 2014); Harry Brod, *Superman Is Jewish?: How Comic Book Superheroes Came to Serve Truth, Justice, and the Jewish-American Way* (New York: Free Press, 2016); Martin. Lund, "Re-Constructing the Man of Steel : Superman 19381941, Jewish American History, and the Invention of the JewishComics Connection," 2016, http://ezproxy.uniandes.edu.co:8080/login?url=http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-42960-1.

day like domestic violence, slumlords, war profiteers, drugs, and alcohol. [71]

The daily strips open with a very cosmological focus.[72] The first word is Krypton. They begin with Superman's alienness, establishing early on that he is a fish out of water. Krypton is a planet on the brink of destruction and a young Superman is a preternaturally strong young "roughneck." The twelve-strip arc about the death of Krypton and Superman's arrival on earth introduced Superman to newspaper readers and established a rich backstory. Like any good messianic backstory Superman's backstory is one marked by catastrophe, death, and out of death comes life. These early panels establish that Superman is an alien from another planet who is both like and unlike us. The final two panels announce to the world that Clark Kent is here to serve humanity as a champion for the oppressed, serving the needy. A modern messianic figure.

As the strips unfold, readers get to meet Clark Kent/Superman and experience first-hand for themselves just how much both are fish out water. Both are trying to fit in and lend a helping hand. However, everywhere they go they are beset with crises that need to be addressed. Thanks to Superman's superhuman powers these problems are always wrapped up rather quickly and often in collaboration with the powers and authority that be. Despite his powers, Superman often works with authorities even when he is bringing corrupt politicians to justice. Superman does not become president or leader of the world. Even Clark Kent chooses to become a journalist instead of a police officer or a politician or a social worker. While few things are outside Superman's power, superman chooses to limit his powers using them mostly for physical confrontations with villains and preventing confrontations. A quintessential "American" messiah, he is restrained not regal, temperate not a tyrant, preferring to work alone outside of the official legal channels.

---

[71] James Vance, "A Job for Superman," in *Superman, the Dailies: Strips 1-966*, 1939-1942 (New York: Sterling Pub. Co., 2006), 6–11.

[72] Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, "Superman Is Born and Destruction Menaces," in *Superman, the Dailies: Strips 1-966, 1939-1942* (New York: Sterling Pub. Co., 2006), 13. The daily strips were archived online by Jared Bond, "The Speeding Bullet: Superman Dailies 1939-1966," *The Speeding Bullet*, February 4, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20100204100223/http://www.thespeedingbullet.com/daily/index.html.

In 1938, Superman returns making his new heroic debut on the cover of *Action Comics #1*.[73] The publication of this anthology signaled the dawn of a new age, the age of the Superman (comic books). Superman is on the cover of the comic book in his now iconic blue suit, red strong man shorts, and red cape. He is holding a wrecked car in the air and presumably saving the man from underneath the rubble. Due to the success of *Action Comics #1,* Superman launches a multimedia empire starting with a black and white daily and color weekend comic strip in syndicated in newspapers across the country and a periodical comic book. Superman quickly becomes an American icon saturated in color, fusing with the American cosmovision. The icon is threefold, the block S, the square jawed muscular man-of-steel, and the mental image of the messiah arriving just in time. *Action Comics #1* embrace of comic book realism and transformation of Superman into a heroic figure made him all the more likeable and relatable. The alien messiah becomes a success. The bight colorful panels provide a wish fulfillment escapist fantasy one which immediately resonates with audiences. Superman's backstory is still tragic, but it is otherworldly, so it is less "real," he is still courting chaos and stopping catastrophes through superhuman displays of his powers, but he is not out for vengeance against those who wronged him, instead he is vigilante acting in support of the status quo.

What made the comic books like *Action Comics #1* different from the daily black and white comic strips is that there was a stronger focus on the visual, the chance to use more color, and a longer window until print. Initially early Superman comic books were a bricolage not a narrative art form with multi-issue arcs. As creators and readers adjusted and adapted to superhero comic books the genre began to expand and adapt into what it is known for today. The

[73] Joe Shuster and Jerry Seigel, *Action Comics* #1 (New York, National Allied Publications, June 1938). https://web.archive.org/web/20090826031819/http://xroads.virginia.edu/~UG02/yeung/actioncomics/cover.html.

bricolage of early comic books is especially clear in *Action Comics #1*. The origin story of Superman in *Action Comics #1* are six text heavy colorized panels. Panel 1 has a planet being destroyed and a rocket taking off containing a scientist's son. In panel 2, this child arrives on earth in a rocket laying on a highway spotlighted by a car's high beams. Panel 3 has the child showing off his strength. Panel 4 is subdivided into three action packed sub-panels which showcase Superman's initial powers. Panels 5 is all text and is the *raison d'être* for Superman. Panel 6 shows Superman in his iconic costume and colors. The S on his chest is not as clear in this first edition as it will be in later works. Panel 6 is also a subdivided panel which contains a detailed scientific explanation and justification for Superman's powers. It feels more like an educational pop-out than part of the strip. On Page 2 the story begins. For the next 12 pages Superman saves an innocent woman from execution and delivers the real culprit to the Governor's mansion with a signed confession. After fixing that injustice Superman rescues Lois Lane from being kidnapped by a gangster who she brushed off in a night club. It is in this story where the iconic cover scene with Superman lifting the car takes place. Next Superman leaps off tall buildings with a Senator flinging him around like a rag doll to intimidate and terrify him into admitting he is corrupt. The final act of the story is Clark Kent trying to keep Superman out of the papers so that Superman can exert his powers in the shadows.

Color accentuates and highlights the iconicity of Superman. The mental image of Superman is in his blue spandex body suit, red strongman shorts, red cape, yellow chest piece with the red S on his chest. Superman exists as a sign (S), symbol (Superman), and as signifier. [74] As a signifier Superman is an index of contemporary and putatively "secular" transcendent and imminent power. As his powers grow through the golden age of comic books (ca. 1938-1956) he

[74] Superman's costume looks like that of a circus performer. The tights and cape of an acrobat, along with the shorts and sigil of a strongman.

becomes more and more god-like. Still in this early moment when his powers are still as humble and modest as Clark Kent, he radiates transcendence. As an alien from another planet his powers are other-worldly, and no-amount of scientific breakout panels will reduce the mystical, religious, and mythic nature of these powers. (Even as an infant on Krypton his powers exceeded the physical laws and expectations of what a Kryptonian child). The sources of Superman's power are beyond even his comprehension. Each day when Clark Kent goes to work, Superman exists in a condition of possibility at any moment a crisis can occur, and should Superman deem it worthy of his time he will shed the costume of Clark Kent and exert the fullness of his possibility. Each time someone cries out and hopes in expectation that Superman will appear. Each time he answers the call, Superman answers a prayer. Superman's power is so transcendent that the name, the logo, the suit, the cape all conjures up images of his appearance. The appearance of Superman in his iconic suit is what renders him as an icon. Clark Kent is the person in street clothes and Clark Kent my not have time to shed the Kent costume for his super suit, but it is only when the man is in the blue leotard, strongman shorts, and cape that he is Superman. The colorized comic books and weekend comic strips heighten the iconic authority of the apparition.

As a messianic figure Superman harnesses the transcendent power of the other-worldly, so too does he harness the immanent sacred and secular nature of the power. As a transcendent source of power, Superman has no need to seeking earthly institutions of power and authority. He does not need to run for president, senate, or join the police force. As the most powerful being they by default work for him. In *Action Comics #1* Superman gift wraps a criminal and drops them off at the governor's mansion with a signed confession. When a politician is abusing his power, Superman violently threatens him until he confesses. Superman understands that the

locus and nature of his power exceeds earthly institution and that sometimes the most powerful man is the man behind the curtain. As an icon, Superman refracts power through the prism of color. In the comics power is red, white, blue, and yellow. As an icon of power, Superman relishes in the iconography of messianism.

Draped in the gold of the sun, halos, saints, and deities, Superman becomes an index of power for the nation-state. His power provides an index of historically contingent power of ideology and the transcendent power of the sacred. The salvific power of Superman allows him to serve as the sign and symbol not only of messianism but also of truth, justice, and as it was added just to overstate the obvious "the American way."[75] As a messianic figure Superman saves not only people but also ideals and ideology. He saves justice by stopping political corruption, he pursues truth by bringing criminals to justice, and securing confession. His service to the nation-state was clear in the comics (both the strips and books) and did not need to be overstated. Superman was the resident alien foreigner. The model minority who became the savior of the state that rescued him (after all, in the first run of the story Superman is raised as a ward of the state). Orphaned, alone, raised by the state, this iteration of Superman is a protector of the weak and the powerless. He is the stranger made stronger and protector. A narrative inversion of his earlier villainous self, a mad hardened man, embittered by the Great Depression. Instead, this Superman likewise lives through the Great Depression but is thankful to his adopted planet and country and seeks to make them better not serve them their just deserts.

As a messianic icon, Superman leverages the salvific power of messianism to save and sanctify the United States and most importantly himself. Superman's initial popularity and sparking a "golden age" of comic books speaks to and captures just how much of an icon he was

[75] The radio dramatizations of Superman created the catchphrase "truth, justice, and the American way." This phrase would gain its iconic status thanks to the 1950s television show when Superman played by George Reeve fought communism. It is not until the 1970s with Christopher Reeve as Superman that he utters the iconic line himself.

and how many children and youth he saved especially in immigrant communities. Reading the story of Superman was like reading the story of oneself and provided a level of seen-ness. Here is a Superhero who understandings what it is like to be a stranger in a strange and hostile land.

Some Jewish fans of Superman find themselves in the myth. They see Superman as a Moses or a Davidic type of figure; they find Hebrew meaning in Superman's Kryptonian name Kal-El, see hints of kabbalah, mystical meanings, and more. These readings seek to burnish the icon of Superman to mark a quintessentially American figure as a Jewish figure. Reading these readings charitably, they seek to burnish the ethnic nature of the icon of Superman to reclaim him from Christian appropriation, disrupting the easy Christological narration that can be so easily applied to Superman. Through the lenses of Muscular Christianity and Muscular Judaism, both audiences, especially the men, see themselves in Superman's masculinity, strength, and physique. He is the archetypal man's man. Building on the work of Sarah Imhoff, I wish to emphasize how important it is to hold onto the corporeal American Jewishness of Superman and Clark Kent. During this era Jewish men were seen as other. Circus strongmen/*Shtarker*'s like Joseph Greenstein (the Might Atom) and performers like Harry Houdini leveraged existing tropes about Jewish masculinity in order to create a new muscular Judaism. Similarly Jewish boxers, basketball players and golfers were helping to make the case that Jewish men were not only quintessentially American but also a man's man. Superman's colorful cape, leotard/tights, strongman shorts, and the insignia on his chest all serve as symbolic markers of Americanness, Jewishness, messianism, and masculinity. He looks like a Jewish circus strongman and/or performer. The verisimilitude is strong enough that even Nazi propaganda reluctantly acknowledge his Jewish masculinity.

The Jewishness of Superman is part and parcel of what makes Superman an iconic

figuration of the messianic idea in U.S. culture. Superman's status as alien/outsider, having to hold multiple identities, slipping between messiah and schlemiel are all Jewish element of the character. Critics like Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong, and Umberto Eco are concerned about the authoritarianism and totalitarianism that lurks within the figure of Superman. This is a residual holdover from messianism. Superman represents an amplification and intensification of this pre-existing condition, perhaps brought on by Superman's crash landing on earth. Superman's messianic, Jewish, and American nature is taken to new heights with a renewed importance and seriousness when Superman and his creators Siegel and Shuster are pilloried by Nazi propaganda. Perhaps the most clear and iconic representation of Superman's tripartite identities is when Superman finally confronts Hitler and Stalin on the pages of *Look Magazine*.

When Superheroes Go to War: Punching Nazis

One of the remarkable features of contemporary comics is that they provide a glorification of white male vigilantism and explore the idea of a benevolent dictator/the good strongman and the wish-fulfillment fantasies of the working class. Superman is the justified vigilante, the white passing alien who never has to legally immigrate. He is the kind and benevolent strongman who is just as likely to save a cat from a tree as he is to dispense his brand of justice upon a foe. All the time that Superman does not save and does not appear are implied but not really stated in the comics. Of course, Superman cannot be everywhere at once but that is fine because he is so often there when it counts. Still there is no real sense of logic and ethics undergirding when, where, and why Superman appears for all the lesser villains and crimes or that he often appears at the last possible moments for the supervillains.

Narratively speaking, on February 27, 1940, Superman is dragged off the pages of *Action Comics* and into *Look Magazine* with a special feature titled "How Superman Would End the

War."[76] Here he is forced to confront his greatest foes, not some Big Bad who is out to destroy the galaxy but Hitler and Joseph Stalin. Superman enters the fray dressed like a "*shtarker"* or a Jewish strongman. In his white leotard top, strongman shorts, cape, and iconic insignia, Superman looks the part. Equal parts superhero, circus performer, and Guardian Angel. Like a good *shtarker,* Superman steps away from his performance to protect the community. Like Joseph Greenstein aka the Might Atom, the *shtarker* who beat Nazis with a baseball bat in New York City, Superman lands his punches against the Nazis as well.[77] Superman threatens violence against Hitler—while also breaking the fourth wall by expressing his desire to land a non-Aryan punch—but Superman does not follow through with these threats. Instead, Superman—who has killed drug lords in South America by now—lets the League of Nations judge Hitler and Stalin. Like a good *shtarker* Superman stops short of rendering a verdict himself and instead demands that the (*goyish*) authorities who have abandoned the community now take a moment to act, now that he has done the hard part for them.

The Superman of *Look Magazine* appears very different from his *Action Comics* compatriot. In *Look Magazine,* the comic is rendered in grayscale and red, unlike the full color pages of *Action Comics*. This peculiar color palette renders the scene uncanny. This non-canonical comic strip steps into a world saturated with blood red. Superman wears the white of innocence and justice. Setting aside his traditional American color palette, Superman is clad in a red and white, while the villains are dressed in gray, black, and red. Acting wholly unlike himself, with no time for punching Hitler, but plenty of time for monologuing; Superman winks through the fourth wall as he confesses that "I would like to land a non-Aryan sock on your jaw,

[76] Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, "How Superman Would End the World," *Look Magazine*, February 27, 1940; reprinted in Roy Thomas, *Superman: The War Years 1938-1945*, vol. 2 (Burbank, CA: Chartwell Books, 2015), 70–72.
[77] Superman restrains himself from killing anyone (except possibly one pilot) in this special edition of Look Magazine.

but there's no time for that!"[78]

Here Superman references his Kryptonian/Jewish status. In this moment, Superman the messianic Superhero, expresses a deeply human desire and shows his own vulnerability, a demand for truth and justice. A demand that breaks the fourth wall. There is an urgency in his restraint. A god would not hesitate to kill, much less punch Hitler in the face. Unable to stop the actual war himself, our mythological hero instead calls for international involvement (and by extension US involvement) in the war. Tellingly, Superman does not and perhaps *cannot* liberate the camps, help people fleeing Nazi oppression find safety and shelter. Instead, Superman advocates for human justice and a human approach to the end of the war. Koltun-Fromm reminds scholars that "comics are haunted by more than a nativist logic; they have participated in a representational history of violence."[79] This is especially true for Superman. He is haunted by histories of violence towards Jewish people, immigrants in the United States, and of course anti-Semitism. Even as the symbol of America, Superman and his creators were unable to avoid anti-Semitic attacks by the Nazis and Hitler supporters.[80]

Look Magazine's Superman is not the Superman of *Action Comics #1* or for that matter "The Jew as Pariah." When confronted by the perils of World War II and Hitler and Stalin, Superman sublimates his authoritarian impulses. This Superman stands in need of the international human community to act.[81] Superman wishes to protect humanity but also needs the League of Nations and nation-states to do what he cannot do and that is hold Hitler and Stalin accountable for their crimes. Superman finds himself in need of justice, in need of others to act, as he is unable to leap off the page in a single bound and act himself. The mythological pleads

[78] Siegel and Shuster, "How Superman Would End the War."
[79] Koltun-Fromm, Drawing on Religion, 11.
[80] For more on how the Nazi's attacked Siegel, Shuster, and Superman see Randall Bytwerk, "Jerry Siegel Attacks!," Resources, German Propaganda Archive at Calvin College, 1998, https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/superman.htm.
[81] "How Superman Would End the War;" Thomas, *Superman*, 2:70–72.

with reality to act. Superman refuses to enact escapism, fantasy, or wish fulfillment. Instead, here he stands like Charlie Chaplin in *The Great Dictator*, begging and pleading for help. Here Superman drops the act, he is no longer holding the mirror refracting culture back on itself in a way that causes laughter and reflection, there is only an anxious plea for action. When confronted with the authoritarianism of Hitler and Stalin, Superman needs help. In this moment, he is no longer the mythic and fantastical response to theodicy. He has become part of the problem. In this moment, even Superman needs a messiah.

In his popular history of Judaism and comic books, Rabbi Simcha Weinstein argues that whether Siegel and Shuster explicitly made Superman/Kent Jewish is beside the point because their characters were read as Jewish, fitting subconscious social stereotypes of Jews and coded by the comic creators' overtly Jewish names.[82] The Nazi propaganda newspaper *Das Schwarze Korps* certainly understood what was happening in *Look Magazine* better than many Americans: in its April 25, 1940, edition *Das Schwarze Korps* pilloried *Look*, Siegel, and Superman.[83] Even though Superman was only two years old at this point, the Nazis understood the iconic power of Superman and felt the need to issue a full-scale denunciation against him. *Das Schwarze Korps* sees *Look*'s Superman as a Krypto-Jew and goes after not only Schlemiel Superman but also after Jerry Siegel, whose name is Jewish sounding enough to their ear (despite the obvious overlap between Yiddish and German surnames).

Das Schwarze Korps published an article titled "Jerry Siegel Attacks." In the headline, a star of David replaces the dot on the "i" in Siegel. Below the headline are two epigraphs, the first of which says: "Once there was a man who was so strong that he could stop a speeding locomotive with his ring finger, but he didn't do it. —Folk tale from Des Moines, Iowa, USA."

[82] Weinstein, *Up, up, and Oy Vey!* 19–33.
[83] Randall Bytwerk, "*Das Schwarze Korps*, 25 April 1940, p. 8." (German Propaganda Archive at Calvin College, 1998), https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/superman.htm.

The second states: “Siegellack stinkt! — Sprichwort aus Massachusetts.” Both epigraphs are quite remarkable. The first epigraph denigrates the inaction of Superman in *Look*. Superman is so strong that he can stop a train (or kill Hitler), but he instead chooses not to, and for the Nazis, this is a sign of weakness. *Das Schwarze Korps* displaces this critique as coming not from Germany but from the heartland of America as if the heartland is calling out Superman for his inaction. The second epigraph is *Das Schwarze Korps* punning Siegel’s name, which Randall Bytwerk translates rather literally as “Sealing wax stinks.”[84] This is a rather obvious and absurd statement to call a proverb. *Look Magazine* also remarks on Schlemiel Superman’s non-violence in the following postscript after the two-page comic:

> Siegel and Shuster gave Superman a big job in this episode, when they assigned him to solve the international situation just for LOOK, but such tasks are nothing new for him. He once stopped a war “somewhere in South America” by dumping a munitions profiteer into the trenches for a dose of his own medicine. On another occasion he plucked two opposing generals from their tents and told them to settle their differences with bare fists. They knew no “differences,” shook hands and made peace.[85]

Look Magazine’s postscript remarks on how Superman’s behavior is both strange and familiar for the hero. Their postscript serves as an implicit acknowledgement that the United States had yet to enter the war and that the “international situation” needs a hero and a major solution to the problem. Both *Look Magazine* and *Das Schwarze Korps* observe that Superman’s behavior is neither the expected nor desired behavior from a superhero. Here there is no cosmic battle between good and evil, no vengeful punch, no masculinist wish fulfillment. Instead, there is only Siegel and Shuster pleading with the League of Nations to capture Hitler and Stalin. Siegel, Shuster, and Superman cease with the wonder and the laughs to make a deadpan call for justice -- a justice not dripping in blood or vengeance.

---

[84] Ibid.
[85] “How Superman Would End the War.”

The Nazi propaganda about Jerry Siegel and Superman demonstrates just how important a cultural icon Superman is. He is seen as being *both* Jewish and American.[86] Additionally the propaganda provides an upsetting reminder of how malleable Superman's story is and how quickly his story can be bent to fascist means. What works for the Nazis about Superman is his masculinity, strength, and his authoritarianism. They can also see how Superman is an agent for cataclysmic change who might be able to help them fulfill their utopian dreams. Additionally, the Nazis are angered by Superman's proximity and closeness to Jewishness because that challenges and threatens their understanding of Jews. Superman's existence can be read as a challenge to Nazi tropes about Jewish men, perturbing the Nazis greatly.

As journalist and Superman biographer Larry Tye notes, Superman's ontological Americanness is represented through his traditional color palette of the reds and blues of a strong man, plus yellow accents. For Tye, Superman's uniform is as iconic as Elvis Presley's jumpsuit.[87] In *Look Magazine*, Superman appears in red and white tones flying from the US to Europe to demand the League of Nations — the child of US President Woodrow Wilson — hold Hitler and Stalin accountable for their actions. What Superman is concerned about is not Europe's violence against people but the ways in which Hitler and Stalin for "history's greatest crime—unprovoked aggression against defenseless countries." Here Superman is acting on behalf of a nation state which has refused to yet enter the War. Superman takes Hitler and Stalin to the League of Nations and demands that the League of Nations hold them to account for a phrase which will be very familiar to the modern reader: the "unprovoked aggression against defenseless countries." [88] Which makes one wonder whether unprovoked aggression against countries that can defend themselves is perhaps then a lesser charge. One also wonders if

[86] Bytwerk, "*Das Schwarze Korps*, 25 April 1940, 8."
[87] Tye, *Superman*, ix–xiv; De Haven, Our Hero, 104–5.
[88] "How Superman Would End the War."

warranted aggression against defenseless countries is a crime, would these crimes prompt Superman to involve himself? The problem with Superman is always what crimes get Superman to engage and how does he determine what those crimes are? In that way Superman is the perfect proxy for the nation state.

Superman provides a wish fulfilment fantasy that thrives on being a simulacrum; if Superman gets too close to reality the whole thing collapses. As the comics progress so too do Superman's powers until he becomes a literal god among mortals. Yet gods are best kept in the simulacrum, especially if you want to sell comics that are wish fulfillment fantasies. As the world descends into the chaos of World War II, Metropolis is still Metropolis. There is a consistency and regularity to the ready appearance of supervillains who are always promptly dispatched. World War II mostly stays off the pages of *Superman*, as noted by De Haven quoting Superman declaring that "The American Armed forces…are powerful enough to smash their treacherous foes without the aid of Superman."[89] As de Haven highlights, there is plenty of winking through the fourth wall in these epic battles between good and evil where the good always wins, against all odds. Superman, unlike other heroes of this time, cannot risk getting too close to the war because, in involving himself, a whole host of problems arrive. What happens if Superman ends the war in the comics but then the war continues to rage in real life?

Superman fighting in the war ends the hopeful and optimistic escapist fantasy of the comics. Other superheroes can go to war because they are not omnipotent gods, and their etiologies thrive on revenge fantasies, nationalism, and more grounded wish fulfilments. However, Superman is basically a god and needs the hope and optimism of a solipsistic world where there may be threats to his power but not deep *existential threats*. Once Superman enters the world of existential threats, then reading the comics reminds folks about their dead relatives

[89] De Haven, *Our Hero*, 80-82.

and the silence of god in the face of war. Instead, during World War II, Superman saves Metropolis from "the anarchist—the Dadaist—shenanigans of Mr. Mxyzptlk" who is defeated by saying his name backwards. As De Haven notes, from a sales and marketing perspective, sticking to Dadaist villains and fifth dimensional threats allows both soldiers and the general populace to escape into the world of Superman. Unsurprisingly, during World War II, Superman far outsells other superhero comics.[90]

As World War II stretches on, and as more and more superheroes not only punch Nazis but also punch Hitler, Superman is eventually forced to enter the fray. Wonder Woman can punch Nazis; Batman can punch Nazis; Captain America can be born of a US military science project gone awry and still fight for America and punch Nazis. All the Superheroes can punch Nazis, to the point that it becomes a well-established trope of the comic book genre of the times. It is notable that Superman's entry point into the foray of Nazi-punching is not in the pages of his ever-popular comic book serials, or even in a splashy newspaper spread, but at the back of *Look Magazine.* In fact, *Look Magazine* corners Siegel and Shuster and demands that Superman "solve the international situation."[91] After all, this will not be the first time that Superman will punch through the fourth wall, that would be when Superman went to South America and dumped a gun runner into the trenches so they could get a taste of their own medicine." On another occasion Superman forced the generals to work out their differences via fisticuffs, however these generals could not find any actual differences, so they shook hands, and this ends the war (*Look Magazine*).[92]

On February 27, 1940, in a two-page, fifteen-panel red, white, and pink spread, Superman

[90] Ibid.
[91] Thomas, *Superman*, 2:70–72.
[92] "How Superman Would End the War."

finally gets his shot at Nazis. What does Superman do? He rounds up Hitler and Stalin and takes them before the League of Nations to stand trial. Once there, he asks the League, "What is your judgement?" and the nameless League official replies, "Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin, we pronounce you guilty of modern history's greatest crime, unprovoked aggression against defenseless countries."

The conclusion of the comic is intriguing because here is Superman and his two assimilated Jewish American creators refusing vigilantism. Superman does not offer grand superhero justice; he steals away two leaders and takes them before the League of Nations and then demands a verdict in Geneva, Switzerland. These men get to stand trial and are found guilty of their crimes. It is unclear what exactly the punishment will be for "unprovoked aggression against defenseless countries." The *Look Magazine* comic is neither a revenge fantasy nor is it an American patriotism fantasy. Instead, it introduces a hopeful note that perhaps the League of Nations can render justice against Hitler and Stalin. Additionally, in 1941 Hitler invades Russia and Stalin moves from being an Axis Power to an Ally Power, dating this *Look Magazine* profile rather quickly. One wonders if Superman would still arrest Stalin in 1941. It is also interesting to note that Mussolini is missing from the League of Nations meeting. Surely if Superman was going to round up Hitler and Stalin, then he should have also swung by Italy and grabbed Mussolini on the way.

Over half of the *Look Magazine* comic is dedicated to Superman fighting Nazis. His fight with Hitler is allocated three panels. But Superman does not have to fight to get to Stalin; he simply snatches Stalin off a balcony in a single panel. The Nazis, however, bear the brunt of Superman's wrath.[93] In Superman's fighting with the Nazis, two panels stand out. One is a panel

[93] Ibid.

where Hitler says: “Kill the Swine! Don’t let him touch me!” The second is a panel where Superman is strangling Hitler and he says: “I’d like to land a strictly non-Aryan sock on your jaw, but there’s no time for that! You’re coming with me while I visit a certain pal of yours.” Superman finally has the chance to punch Hitler, yet unlike other superheroes, he refrains from Hitler punching. Wish fulfilment fantasy denied. Superman acknowledges that his desire is to punch Hitler with his non-Aryan fists — an explicit acknowledgement of his status as Other and a strong wink to the creator’s Jewish heritage – but instead he settles on a choke hold, rounding up Stalin, and demanding that the League of Nations serve as the arbitrator of justice.

In total, the *Look Magazine* spread on Superman is only three pages: the first page is a photo gallery with some captions and two brief paragraphs about Superman, Siegel, and Shuster, and the final two pages are the comic strip. Superman is described as “a character who combines the best talents of a Robin Hood and a god, and every day his feats of strength, speed and benevolence bring thrills to millions of newspapers and comic magazine readers.” Superman is portrayed as a benevolent god who brings enjoyment to millions of readers, but that enjoyment comes through an escapist fantasy that thrives on critical distance. What happens when Superman enters the real world is that critical distance dissolves, leaving the naïve optimism of an alien god who trusts the better angels of human nature. As Koltun-Fromm argues, comic books fulfill the psychological need for closure, and, I would argue, escapism and *jouissance* as well. Superman entering *too much* of the real world is a reminder of how little closure there is in real life. Superman fighting Hitler and Stalin requires precisely the sort of second order ethical reflection comics are meant to short circuit.[94]

The messianic is an icon of justice, but there are two types of justice. The first type of justice is where a superhero serves as the arresting vigilante who turns the villain over to the

[94] Koltun-Fromm, *Drawing on Religion*, 199.

police for arrest and trial, with the presumption that the suspect is found guilty. The second type of justice is when the superhero-messiah serves as the sole arbiter of justice, and he incarcerates, banishes, and occasionally kills his foes. As Howe argues, part of the appeal of mass culture is that it "allows the audience the limited freedom of vicariously breaking social law." Within the liminal space of the comic book page, allowing readers to be able to break the law and exercise vigilante justice completes the fantasy and allows the industrial worker to excise and displace some of their anger onto the villain (who stands in for someone who they resent in real life). Howe argues that the revolutionary potential of such fantasy is limited because "even this safe violation of social law in the audience's reactions to mass culture serves ultimately to reinforce real life adherence to social law."[95]

Superman: The Man, The Myth, The Messiah

In 1962, Umberto Eco published, "The Myth of Superman," an important essay which interrogates not only how the *mythopoeic* functions for Superman but also the United States as well.[96] He argues that an industrial age requires an industrial messiah. As the world gets more complicated, industrialized, and automated the everyday person feels disempowered and the old myths lack the same resonances. Superman's ever shifting and expanding powers and mythologies reflect a vital element of the messianic idea. The power and promise of Superman comics are that he is the messiah that society needs and not the messiah that society deserves. As war, labor, and everyday life become more mechanized, the strength and power of the machines both liberates and terrifies. Eco writes, "in such a society the positive hero must embody to an unthinkable degree the power demands that the average citizen nurtures but cannot satisfy." Superman has the power to take on the machines. He is all powerful and godlike. For Eco,

[95] Howe, "Notes on Mass Culture," 49; Legman, "From Love and Death," 120.
[96] Eco, "The Myth of Superman."

Superman could use his powers to make diamonds, to cut lumber, and to build ships, but instead he fights crimes. What sets Superman apart is not his strength and superpowers, but the fact that "he is kind, handsome, modest, and helpful; his life is dedicated to the battle against the forces of evil; and the police find him an untiring collaborator." [97] Eco understands what other critics miss; what makes Superman a mythopoeic figure is the fact he has the power to remake the world in his image and instead chooses to support the status quo.[98]

One of the complicating features of messianism is the blurring to the point of indistinction between the person and the messiah. The fundamentalists were angered that biblical scholars would seek to delineate between the historical Jesus of Nazareth and the theological figure of Jesus Christ. Just as "The Son of Man" and the "the Son of God" are conflated, so too are Clark Kent and Superman. As Eco highlights, Superman and his alter ego Clark Kent are more similar than one might imagine. The more one examines the two figures, the more difficult it becomes to figure out who is the alter ego and who is the ego. Who is the one wearing a disguise, Clark Kent or Superman? Eco writes: "Clark Kent personifies fairly typically the average reader who is harassed by complexes and despised by his fellow men; though an obvious process of self-identification, any accountant in any American city secretly feeds the hope that one day, from the slough of his actual personality, there can spring forth a superman who is capable of redeeming years of mediocre existence."[99] As Eco and others have noted, part of the power of Superman is his double identity with Kent. Together they allow the reader to identify with Kent/Superman and to see themselves as being the superhero. No longer the victim or the bystander, the reader is now Superman.

---

[97] Ibid., 146.
[98] Cf. Mark Waid, "The Real Truth About Superman: And the Rest of Us Too," in *Superheroes and Philosophy Truth, Justice, and the Socratic Way*, ed. Tom Morris and Matt Morris (Chicago, Ill: Open Court, 2012), 5.
[99] Eco, "The Myth of Superman," 147.

The myth is always unfolding, being written and rewritten, and full closure continually defers into the future. A predictable unpredictability. For Eco, Superman "finds himself in this singular situation: he must be an archetype, the totality of certain collective aspirations, and therefore he must necessarily become immobilized in an emblematic and fixed nature which renders him easily recognizable." In other words Superman must become iconic. There is a rigidity to his plasticity, such is the duality of the character. As the modern anti-modern instantiation of Arendt's messianic turn, Superman's development is constantly curtailed by his need to save the world and that is the function of messianic figures. His narrative development is constantly constrained. This inability to grow, along with his being constantly stuck in a slew of never ending crises, means that, as per Eco, "Superman, by definition the character whom nothing can impede, finds himself in the worrisome narrative situation of being a hero without an adversary and therefore without the possibility of any development."[100] This creates a crisis for Superman's comic books because there comes a point where the iconic immersive escapist fantasy of Superman collides with the real world. When the walls between the worlds collapse and worlds collide, in this collision Superman comes face to face with actual human terrors. Superman finds himself unable to be a savior. The serialization of Superman is the serialization of the never-ending state crisis in the industrial age.

Superman's elevation from comic book hero to mythological icon happens because of the suspension of *Chronos* for an elongated *Kairotic* present unfolding in an "oneiric climate." Eco defines an oneiric climate as "where what has happened before and what has happened after appear extremely hazy."[101] Superman is a man standing outside of time. Superman is a liminal figure being towards death. He is consumed but he cannot be consumed. *Chronos* poses a

[100] Ibid., 149.
[101] Ibid., 140-150.

problem for comic books as it creates narratives that are far too structured and linear. To tell Superman's story within the structure of *Chronos* would be to tell a more permanent and genteel story which would in turn cease to be Superman. The serialization and disposability of comic books push the stories outside of *Chronos* and into the *Kairotic* time of this "oneiric climate" of libidinal fantasy. This is the messianic suspension of temporality. As Eco's analysis reveals, the notion of progress fades away in the comic books. The question arises of what makes the world in *this* issue different from the world of the *previous* issue and the *next* issue? This difference is the crisis. Eco writes, "Superman happens to live in an imaginary universe in which, as opposed to ours, casual chains are not open…but closed, and it no longer makes sense to talk about temporal progression, the basis of which we usually describe the happening of the macrocosm."[102] The alteration of space and time through a never-ending story elevates Superman into the dreamscape.

Eco's analysis resonates with religion scholar Mircea Eliade's analysis of religious myths and time.[103] Following Eliade, Orcutt emphasizes that comic book time and religious time are both non-linear and disruptive to modernist notions of temporality.[104] This sentiment is one which Eco would certainly endorse. What Eliade and Orcutt add to Eco's analysis is that sacred time like the *Kairotic* and "oneiric climate" of comic time requires repetition and participation.[105] In this way Superman becomes the Lord of Time. The shift away from *Chronos* to an opaque *Kairos* creates the conditions of plausibility for Superman's story; for Superman to be a mythic savior he must have control over time.[106] As Eco notes, "Superman comes off as a myth only if the reader loses control of the temporal relationships and renounces the need to

[102] Ibid., 155.
[103] Mircea Eliade and Jonathan Z. Smith, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 34; Orcutt, "Comics and Religion: Theoretical Connections," 99–100.
[104] Orcutt, 100.
[105] Eliade and Smith, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 34; Orcutt, "Comics and Religion," 99–100.
[106] Eco, "The Myth of Superman," 156.

reason on their basis, thereby giving himself up to the uncontrollable flux of the stories which are accessible to him and, at the same time, holding on to the illusion of a continuous present." One must give oneself over to the narrative and melt into the story, embracing the deindividuation of the dream-like fugue state of the looming apocalypse, ceding control of temporality to Superman. Losing oneself into the "every-continuing present," the reader consumes the inconsumable Superman, thereby consuming themselves in the process.[107]

Lewis agrees with Eco that Superman is not a dynamic figure who is capable of growth and expansion. Instead, he is a static figure who can only provide a limited number of options for deferring the apocalypse. Superman cannot end the apocalypse because there will always be another one just around the corner. Since he can only defer the apocalypse, he is reactive, not proactive. In lieu of staving off an apocalypse, like stopping an alien invasion or a meteor shower, all that is left for Superman is protecting private property and doling out vigilante justice to small time crooks. He cannot "effect real change or alter the status quo" as doing either would undo Superman and make "him acutely vulnerable to questions of cosmic responsibility and human independence." To answer these questions would only further highlight Superman's authoritarianism. So instead, these questions remain lurking below the surface. After the crisis resolves, Superman fades into the background and changes into Clark Kent, who is kind and helpful and the perfect companion in the "atemporal" dreamlike world between comic book issues.[108] For Eco, reading Superman has apocalyptic resonances and the reader of Superman is an "other directed man" whose orientation is positioned towards the oneiric atemporal

[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid., 149.

apocalyptic climate. It is here where advertisement, propaganda, and comic books collide, as for Eco they are all atemporal and focus on resolving catastrophe and living into a utopia.[109]

The narrative structure of Superman's comic books, their *Kairotic* time, and their ouroboros nature reflect what Eco sees as the "pedagogic principles" that govern U.S. culture. Thus, for Eco, Superman is a "pedagogic instrument" and the "destruction of time" pursued throughout Superman is part of the destruction of time during the industrial age. Eco then takes this point further and argues that all of this is "part of a plan to make obsolete the idea of planning and of personal responsibility." The erosion of *Chronos* gets rid of the weight of history and the future, giving way to an ever-continuing present marked not by the passing of time or by the preparation for the future but marked by the endurance of one catastrophe after another.

Eco sees the collapse of time itself (*Chronos*) and in its place is the elongated catastrophic present of messianic time (*Kairos)*. Kairotic messianism also erases the distance of transcendence replacing it with the hyper-presence of immanence, the messiah *is here and now*. Having replaced distance and authority with immanence and authority, the aura of catastrophism comes fully into view. In the destruction of *Chronos* there is an embrace of an ever unfolding, inescapable, hyper-immanent, authoritarian, and catastrophic present. Superman's "*high-redundance message*" that there is an apocalypse coming and one cannot stop it or control it, therefore one must rely on Superman to save you, echoes the *"high-redundance message"* of advertising during this era for Eco. Both in advertisements and in comic books, the "narrative of redundance" provides a soothing and relaxing message which seeks to offset the anxiety of being unable to avert one's gaze away from the Kairotic messianic moment, and the fear that the messiah will not arrive, and that maybe one is just a bystander and not a main character. Over time, apocalypticism becomes reassuring, redundant, and relaxing as one escapes into the

[109] Eco, "The Myth of Superman," 156-162.

narrative. Superman once more must save the world from this manageable catastrophe (unlike the unmanageable ones outside of the frame). For Eco, the problem is not the escapist wish fulfillment fantasy but that it "sustains and expressed a world."[110]

As Eco remarks, with each issue of Superman and the resolution of the crisis at hand, Superman takes one more step closer to death. Eco writes, "*to act,* then for Superman, as for any other character (or for each of us), means to 'consume' himself." Eco continues and points out that as an iconic mythic figure Superman cannot consume himself, he is inconsumable. "Superman, then, must remain 'inconsumable' and at the same time be 'consumed' according to the ways of everyday life.[111] Thus Superman becomes an ouroboros.

Superman is trapped in the imminent and ever-unfolding *Kairotic* moment of the present; he is only ever able to make small changes when he is not stopping cataclysmic change from occurring. If Superman were to start making large-scale changes actually befitting his powers, he would be revealed as the totalitarian that he is. His world must remain vaguely like our world. Large scale structural changes are ill-suited to the pages of disposable comic books. If Superman solves world hunger, then the continued existence of world hunger becomes a problem. As the mythopoeic trapped in the present, Superman's powers are constrained by the "oneiric climate" of an eternal present. It is necessary to ignore the past and denounce any future where a better world is possible in favor of an eternal present which is not that bad. Eco concludes: "Superman is obliged to continue his activities in the sphere of small and infinitesimal modifications of the immediately visible" because anything larger "would draw the world, and Superman with it toward final consumption."[112] Superman is not saving the world from the cataclysm of the apocalypse but extending the catastrophism of the eternal present. The inconsumable superman

[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid., 150.
[112] Ibid., 148,164.

trapped consuming himself preserves the fugue state of the present, such is the tyranny of the industrialization of *Kairos*.

Conclusion: super heroic Salvation

Eco's investigation of the *mythopoeic* divine function and mythological archetype emphasizes Superman's relationship with messianism.[113] The folding of the messianic into Superman highlights his otherness, the alteration of time, and the ways in which catastrophe follows him around. Superman is constantly courting authoritarianism and catastrophism. Superman's messianism, like that of the fundamentalist messiah, and the marketing messiah (of the next chapter) is rife with paradoxes. "Superman is the answer against finality; he is the story that, never-ending, can sustain all stories."[114] Superman continually resets the atomic clock to seven minutes before midnight. In his continued success at stopping the *Kairotic* cataclysm of the moment he becomes the ultimate deferral of the apocalypse that is to come. By elongating the present, Superman protects Metropolis inside of *Kairos*. He allows people to have the *jouissance* of seeing the world end. But instead of being raptured and escaping to heaven, one becomes a spectator to the end of the world, filling the blank spaces of the metanarrative container that is Superman, praying that one is the hero and not the bystander.

The *Kairotic* moment fuses together the hyper-immanence of the messiah made manifest, overwhelming power, and provides the ultimate power to salvific power to Superman, cosmogenic absolution. Lewis argues, "Superman does not operate simply as a metaphorical savior. He is also a metanarrative savior, the *tertium quid* that belongs neither fully to humanity nor divinity but to the reality of fiction."[115] Superman's attempt to protect the nation within the reality/fiction lacuna for the duration of the *Kairotic* moment animates Superman, bringing

[113] Eco, "The Myth of Superman," 148–150.
[114] Lewis, "Superman Graveside: Superhero Salvation beyond Jesus," 181, 186n57.
[115] Ibid.

Siegel and Shuster's Golem to life. Superman is like the Golem of Prague in his attempt to save brings only calamity. Superman is marked by an excess of excess; he exceeds the boundaries of space and time, myth and fiction. As a messianic and salvific figure, Superman "saves by internalizing the memories and drives of the others." The power and problem of Superman is like the figures of religious icons: he too continually exceeds the frame. Such is the power, promise, and terror of Superman.[116]

By the 1940s Superman has been integrated into the "American" cosmovision. Once part of the cosmovision, Superman becomes an iconic and nearly definitive messianic figure for the nation. Superman accomplishes this task by taking vaguely quasi mythological leitmotifs from wherever one can find them and combining them into a quintessential American bricolage. In this generically mythical and numinous archive the traditions that stand out as the clearest elements are the Jewish and Christian elements. In the United States the Jewish and Christian elements or perhaps more accurately the Jewish and Christian interpretations of Superman are the most culturally legible because of the socio-cultural "literacy" of these traditions. In an archetypal way Superman is the resident alien immigrant turned beloved son of the nation. As the beloved child of the nation, in times of crisis people turn to Superman's imagery, name, and super heroic attempts to solve a crisis by themselves and save the country (and by extension the world). The vaguely Jewish and Christian elements create a salvific hero that people need. One who is always there in a time of crisis. The hero who is there for you as you experience an elongated and industrialized *Kairos*. One where the weight of history and *Chronos* coupled with the catastrophism and despair of industrialism is too much to bear so escaping into an immersive multi-media universe where one can be the Superhero and fix the problem provides some succor.

[116] Lewis, "Superman Graveside: Superhero Salvation beyond Jesus," 183.

It serves as a balm briefly numbing the pain of the suturing of *Kairos* and *Chronos*. However, escaping into the story and getting lost in Superman provides temporary comfort and joy. Superman cannot save one from the catastrophism of the present. All he can do is ask for your help. The myth provides comfort. The rest is up to us.

Looking at Superman and the ways in which he functions as a messianic figure in the United States reflects other understandings of messianic function and expectation. Just as Superman saves (some) people from the catastrophism so too do the premillennialist hope that the rapture and return of their messiah will spare them from the ultimate catastrophism and apocalypse. When one begins to embrace the reality that messianism has been transformed by its encounter with "America." One can begin to see that messianism in the U.S. does not serve to provide salvation from catastrophism or apocalypticism, nor does it prepare the way for an incoming other. Instead like Superman it serves as a balm to soothe the pain of the present. It is not actually saving or liberating, instead messianism often seems to be disempowering because instead of encouraging people to seek collective action it used to encourage investment in singular messianic and salvific figures (a point that will become even clearer in the following chapter on Bruce Barton and *The Man Nobody Knows*).

When messianic figures are provided with enough energy that the motor of messianism begins to move, displaying images that look a lot like Superman. This allows for savvy marketers and public relations personnel to recast CEOs, politicians, and religious leaders as messianic figures themselves. Once the focus is firmly upon the arrival of the messianic figure, the chaos and violence left in the figures wake is occluded, just like how after Superman vanquishes his super villainous foes the clean-up and restoration happen outside the frame. In Superman and in American messianism there is a cynical and cyclical cycle of investment in a

messianic figure who will fix the catastrophe. The projected image of a super heroic messiah is ultimately illusory and a distraction, like in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) film. “Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain!” (c.f. chapter 4). However, what is often messed is that Superman and other messianic figures insatiate more chaos and violence. It is a never-ending cycle. The messianic figure fixes the problem (that they might have caused, c.f. the next chapter) only to lead to more chaos and terror. Thus, within the “American” cosmovision messianic figurations are an ouroboros the snake/dragon eating its own tail.

Chapter 3
The Messiah That Nobody Knows

Shifting from fundamentalist messianism and super-heroic messianism, I turn now to the mass-market messianism of advertisement executive Bruce Barton. Mass-mark messianism builds on the paranoid catastrophism and artifice of fundamentalist messianism and instead of selling religion, uses religion in the service of capitalism. Likewise, mass-mark messianism is a continuation of themes from superhero messianism as well. It embraces the idea of the messiah as an outsider, as one who does not hold a religious or political position, and positions business leaders as the new outsiders and messianic leaders The lesson that mass-market messianism learns from Superman comics is the important of what we saw Eco call "high redundance messaging." Repetition is essential to the creation of icons and iconography. From Madison Avenue, the new visual dimension of the messianic idea in "America" is the restoration of transcendence to reanimate the corporate soul of America and thus reenchanting capitalism after the largess of the Gilded Age.

Bruce Barton (1886–1967) was a writer, marketer, public relations expert, and advertising executive and partner in the infamous firm Barton, Durstine & Osborn (BDO) (founded in 1919), and since merging with the Batten Company in 1928, it is now known as Batten, Barton, Durstine, & Osborn (BBDO).[1] Barton's father was a congregationalist minister and author. He and Barton's mother profoundly influenced their son's life, instilling in him a love of the church and the gospels. Their son, an enterprising young man, was long interested in integrating Christian principles with business and politics. Barton was raised near Chicago and

[1] Cf. Richard M. Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew: Bruce Barton and the Making of Modern America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005).

briefly attended Berea college before transferring to Amherst College in Massachusetts. After college, Barton moved to New York to work in advertising, eventually founding his firm, which became BBDO, one of the world's largest and most successful advertising agencies through mergers. He is known for renaming and branding General Electric and General Motors. His advertisements sold not only products but also politicians, colleges, and Christianity.[2]

As Richard Fried highlights, Barton made his career during the "'high' Progressive Era." In agreement with historian Arthur Link, Fried highlights how the Progressive Era was a time of transition, when the middle class shifted their hopes for social change and transformation away from political leaders and towards business leaders. Barton's own career reflects these changing dynamics as well. Barton was both an advertising executive and politician moving back and forth between the two arenas but enjoying the most success in the world of business.[3] Barton's books *A Young Man's Jesus* and *The Man Nobody Knows* serve as advertisements for his branding and marketing work. If Barton can sell Jesus first to the young men who are "this side of thirty-five," and then later sell Jesus to distinguished executives, he can clearly help sell cars, lightbulbs, and corporate conglomerates themselves.[4]

Mass-market messianism returns to the old iconography that is imitation of Christ. However, there is now a new iconology that twists that traditional iconography. Business executives imitate Christ, and Christ imitates them. The flow of imitation as a means of gleaning authority is now omnidirectional. The new iconology sets capitalism in the image of Christ and Christ in the image of capitalism. Thanks to the advertising and mass-marketing work of men like Bruce Barton, the messianic idea in America incorporates religion even further into the idiom of capitalism. Religious images wrap capitalism in a messianic cloak, making capitalism

[2] Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew*, 3-21.
[3] Ibid., 23-24, 84–113, 159–92.
[4] Ibid., 32.

and the industrial age feel and seem inevitable and part of God's ineffable plan. Transmogrifying Jesus Christ into a capitalist savior is no easy task; it requires the skilled hands of a man like Bruce Barton; someone who creates a particular image of Jesus, based upon easily legible stereotypical images. This new image of Jesus focuses on his genius in building a corporation like Christianity and consigns the miraculous and supernatural aspects of Christ's narrative to the shadows. Miracles are merely amusing anecdotes.

Mass-market messianism transforms the messianic idea and the "American" cosmovision in several ways. The corporate imitation of Christ possibly even warps what was once called "the essence of Christianity," the triumph of love over law. In this iconological shift, we see the apotheosis of capitalism in a new historical and ideological frame. Barton's work represents a massive cultural historical reframing of the messianic iconography of traditional Protestantism as Weber and German theologians in the nineteenth century like Adolf von Harnack would have recognized it. Barton's primary contributions to these shifts are the throughgoing con/fusion of religion and capitalism, the conflating of Christ and capitalists, and a triumphalist theological narrative of consumption.

The Spirit of Capitalism and Jesus

An icon in his own right, sociologist Max Weber is famous the "comparative-historical and multicausal analysis" of religions and ideas.[5] Weber's wide ranging intellectual interests led him to study China, India, Ancient Judaism, and most famously *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.[6] First published in a social science journal in 1904-1905, Weber's work quickly

[5] Max Weber and Stephen Kalberg, "Introduction to The Protestant Ethic," in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: The Revised 1920 Edition, Translation and Introduction by Stephen Kalberg, trans. Stephen Kalberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6–7.
[6] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: The Revised 1920 Edition, Translation and Introduction* by Stephen Kalberg, trans. Stephen Kalberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). When quoting from Kalberg's translation of Weber, all italics are in the text.

made a stir and was published as a book, which was revised in 1920. Here I am using the revised and expanded 1920 version as translated by Stephen Kalberg. In this important work, Weber argues that one important source overlooked in the studies of modern capitalism and culture was religion. He famously argues that modern capitalism is set apart from its pre-modern economic antecedents due to a defining Protestant *ethos*. That *ethos* is the iconic spirit of capitalism. For Weber, to understand the spirit of capitalism is to understand that Protestant ethic which created and still defines it. Weber starts with a simple question. Why does capitalism develop in western Europe of all places? What are the ideological and intellectual forces shaping the moment? In Weber's own words, "By no means can the content of religious ideas be deduced from 'economic' forces. These ideas are, and nothing can change this, actually, for their part, the most powerful elements shaping 'national character,' they carry purely within themselves an autonomous moment."

Weber's analysis begins with origins (chapter 1), compares Renaissance Florence with eighteenth century Pennsylvania (chapter 2), roots that phenomenon in Martin Luther's notion of calling (chapter 3), explores "the religious foundations of this-worldly asceticism" in Calvinism and other Protestant sects (chapter 4), and concludes with the *stahlhartes Gehäuse* (the so-called iron cage) of secular bureaucratic capitalism in the nineteenth century (chapter 5).[7] Barton will come to integrate capitalism and Christianity even further and provide people with a roadmap to become the next Henry Ford, whereas Weber sounds the alarm about what I would identify as the coming catastrophe of weaving together Christianity, Capitalism, and "America."

[7] Kalberg translates *stahlhartes Gehäuse* as steel-hard casing because this is closer to the German. Kalberg writes "translated by [Talcott] Parsons as 'iron cage,' this phrase has acquired near mythical status in sociology…There are many reasons that speak in favor of 'steel-hard casing.' Not least, it is a literal rendering of the German. Had Weber wished to convey an 'iron cage' to his German readership he could easily have done so by employing a commonly used phrase, *eisener Käfig* (or even *eisenes Gefängis* [iron prison])." Ibid., 390-91n96; 397-398n133.

Weber turns to Benjamin Franklin with his folksy homespun values and "handicraft shop" to illustrate how "capitalist entrepreneurs" become a driving force in secularizing the Protestant ethic and helping to establish a bureaucratic authority. In Franklin's maxims, Weber finds, "a *ethically* oriented maxim for the organization of life." Franklin's proverbs provide a utilitarian framing of the new secularized virtues. Honesty, punctuality, frugality, and modesty all provide the social framework for a system of exchange rooted in relationship. As Weber notes what matters most is not the belief undergirding these values but only the appearance of adherence to these values. Weber admits that "the common German tendency to perceive the American virtues as 'hypocrisy' appears here confirmed beyond a doubt."[8] In the disenchantment of the spirit of capitalism and the extrusion of Protestantism and asceticism, a cynical capitalist entrepreneur could perform the external appearance of honesty and simplicity while being inwardly dishonest and greedy. For the modern capitalist, the values of the spirit of capitalism are in service to the generation of value and profit. Weber all but calls Benjamin Franklin a huckster.

Modern capitalism and culture owe their ascetic aesthetic and ethos to Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, Mennonites, Pietisms, Quakers, and others.[9] While Weber examines these denominations in Europe, the ideal type for Weber is the Puritan of North America. In Weber's estimation, Puritanism was a severe social form characterized by the systematization of work, asceticism, and interrogating the question of election, vocational calling (*Beruf*), and, critically, salvation.[10] His is rather a descriptive analysis of economics, markets, and the social system used for the exchange of goods, services, and labor undergirded by religion. Inverting Marx's schema,

[8] Ibid., 79–80, 89.
[9] Kalberg, "Introduction to The Protestant Ethic," 9.
[10] CF Kalberg's detailed footnote on why vocational calling is a more accurate translation of *Beruf*. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 303n1-305n1.

it is religion that provides the structure for a putatively secular economic system that entraps people in a meaningless disenchanted world. Weber's criticism of capitalism in no way resembles or approximates a Marxist or prophetic sensibility.

Weber's point is that, in the sixteenth century, Catholicism had set up a wall of separation between cloistered religious life and the outside world.[11] This framing runs against the grain of contemporary political theology that insists that Protestantism is responsible for the separation of church and society. Luther's innovation was in saying that religious vocational calling (*Beruf*) was a gift given by God to all Christians. What Weber sees in Luther's interpretation of the book of Hebrews is that the priesthood of all believers means that now everyone had a vocational calling not necessarily to vowed religious life but to work.[12] As Kalberg suggests, "all callings for Luther were of equal value." Yet despite this innovation, Weber concludes that Lutheranism remains traditional because it continued to see the acquisition of material goods as sinful and kept the theological focus on the community. This leads Weber into the next section on Calvinism.[13]

Weber indicates that the spirit of capitalism owes a special debt to Calvinism in particular. Especially in Calvinism, Weber sees a social form of Christianity that is fundamentally a *methodical-rational organization of life* that places spiritual and psychological rewards upon modern capitalist activity.[14] For Weber, John Calvin intensifies Lutheranism in two important ways. First, he posits a wrathful and omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent God. Indeed, Weber cited the 147 Westminster Confession chapter III, No. 9, "The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he

[11] Weber and Kalberg, "Introduction to The Protestant Ethic," 24; Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 128–29.
[12] Weber, 100-101.
[13] Kalberg, 25; Weber, 103-105.
[14] Kalberg, 23-25, Weber 88-92, 132-133. For Weber's discussion of the *Westminster Confession* cf. 116-117.

extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice."[15] Secondly, all of humanity is prone to the wrath of this vengeful and distant God. As Calvin argues, this God has predetermined the elect to be saved and have eternal life in heaven with God. Those who are not elect are the damned, the elect a small minority.[16] As the elect, they are superior to the damned and they are to be committed to being instruments of God's glory.

For Weber, Calvinism presents a set of theological tenets conducive to social and psychological alienation. First, there is no clear path for one to be certain of their salvation.[17] Second, neither the church nor those with a religious vocation have a special connection to God. Weber writes, "we wish to ascertain which psychological motivations gave direction to the organization of the believer's life and held the individual firmly to it."[18] Weber sees in this an alienating theology. In their desperation and uncertainty, the human person begins to look for anything that could be considered a sign of God's blessing in their life, a sign that will reassure them that they are indeed a member of the elect. Working hard, working long hours, and committing oneself to one's work all became indicators of a person adhering to God's expectation. If one behaves and works in a virtuous fashion, then one is working for God and if one is working for God then surely one is saved. The evidence of grace would be material reward and blessing in the world. But in this version of "this-worldly asceticism," these rewards should not be enjoyed promoting a simple and sober life. The accumulation of blessings balances one's spiritual ledger.

---

[15] Philip Schaff, "The Westminster Confession of Faith. A.D. 1647," in *The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches*, Reprinted 4th, vol. Volume III, 3 vols., Creeds of Christendom (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1977), 601–73, https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds3/creeds3.iv.xvii.ii.html.
[16] Kalberg, 25-26; Weber, 119-21.
[17] Weber, 123-124.
[18] Ibid, 115.

In Weber's estimation, Calvinism and the Protestant sects that stem from Calvinism created an intensive ethic based upon "methodical-rational" labor and the systematization of all aspects of life.[19] A life lived in accordance with the glorification of God through the adherence to ecclesiastical law and by extension earthly laws and bureaucratic systems. Calvinism represents "a *thrust* to *methodically supervise* [a person's] state of grace. An organizing and directing of life ensued and, in the process, its manifold penetration by *asceticism*." According to the ethical principles of Calvinism, a methodical order for the rationalization of life was woven into the spirit of capitalism, transforming Christianity in the process. "Christian asceticism slammed the gates of the cloister, entered into the hustle and bustle of life, and undertook a new task: to saturate mundane, *everyday* life with its methodical nature. In the process, it sought to reorganize practical life into a rational life *in* the world rather than, as earlier, in the monastery. Yet this rational life in the world was *not of* this world or *for* this world." [20]

A victim of its own success, the Protestant ethic is now further reduced by Benjamin Franklin to a set of utilitarian values determined by mechanism. Having transformed the austerity of this world asceticism into the norms and *nomos* of modern life, Protestantism set about a methodical rational organization of this worldly life. What Weber will now call "victorious capitalism" ends on a bleak and catastrophic ecological note. Looking around at the steel-hard casing/iron cage in which he found himself, Weber seeks to understand who can live within this *steel-hard casing*.[21] Weber laments,

> The Puritan *wanted* to be a person with a vocational calling; *we must* be. For to the extent that asceticism moved out of the monastic cell and was carried over into the life of work in a vocational calling, and then commenced to rule over this-worldly morality, it helped to do its part to build the might cosmos of the modern economic order. This economy is

[19] Kalberg 27; Weber 159-161.
[20] Weber, 157 (emphases in the original).
[21] Literally as Kalberg suggests a steel-hard casing. Talcott Parsons early translates this German idiom into rather idiomatically or at least more understandable to an English audience as an iron cage.

> bound to the technical and economic conditions of mechanized, machine-based production…This cosmos today determines the style of life *not* only of those directly engaged in economically productive activity, but of all born into this grinding mechanism. It does so with overwhelming force, and perhaps it will continue to do so until the last ton of fossil fuel has burnt to ashes. The concern for material goods, according to Baxter, should lie on the shoulders of his saints like 'a lightweight coat that one can throw off at any time.' Yet fate allowed this coat to become a steel-hard casing (*stahlhartes Gehäuse*). To the extent that asceticism undertook to transform and influence the world, the world's material goods acquired an increasing and, in the end, inescapable power over people—as never before in history.[22]

The answer to the question who can live in the *steel-hard casing* is both no one and everyone. On this catastrophic note, human beings are but meat for the grinder, shoved into a steel hard casing. Weber writes, "Victorious capitalism, in any case, ever since it came to rest on a mechanical foundation, no longer needs asceticism as a supporting pillar." Having extruded its Protestantism, the spirit of capitalism now sheds its ascetism. The pursuit of wealth and capital has now become an end, in and of itself, especially in the United States.[23]

Weber anticipated the encapsulation of all modern life by victorious capitalism. But he could not have anticipated Madison Avenue. Where Weber saw the disenchantment of capitalism growing out of Protestantism, Barton shows the re-enchantment of religion growing out of capitalism. In this recursive circle, capitalism attains a spirit and religion a role in the marketplace. As discussed later in this chapter, Roland Marchand's *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* examines Barton's work. Marchand paraphrases one of Barton's advertisements for the Interchurch World Movement (IWM). "[B]oth churches and 'hard-headed business men' agreed, the text added, that economic problems ultimately called for a spiritual solution. But 'spiritual problems,' as Barton

[22] Weber, 177.
[23] Ibid. Weber's sense of catastrophism continues to grow and becomes clear in his Essays in Sociology. His essays on "Politics as a Vocation" and "Science as a Vocation" provide a sober and sobering picture of interwar life.

had already assured the IWM, also had business solutions."[24] Therein lies Barton's life's work Christianizing capitalism and capitalizing Christianity. He refuses to draw the distinction between the two. Capitalism now makes life better. By providing a Norman Rockwell painting of a genteel simplicity Barton sold more than the soul of corporations to themselves and their customers he sold them Christianity. Trust GE and GM they are family, and their customer service is as miraculous as Jesus Christ was. They will get you fixed right up. Reading Barton's advertisements alongside *The Man Nobody Knows* reveals that as Barton is divinizing capitalism, he is also capitalizing religion.[25] Where Weber saw a disenchanted ethos, Barton reenchants modern life which reassures people that life inside *stahlhartes Gehäuse* (steel-hard casing) is warm and happy place, with electricity and creature comforts.

Giving capitalism a soul and religious heart transforms capitalism. One of the great paradoxes of Barton is that he is critical of what he sees as the heartless and cruel commercialism of his day, corporations selling low quality products, and products consumers do not need. For him a Christian approach to capital means making and selling products that people want and need and providing them with what they really need, and that is excellent customer service. *The Man Nobody Knows* and Barton's advertisements reveal a deep investment in customer service. For Barton going the extra-mile, giving the benefit of the doubt, and other maxims were vital Christian business principles. He sought to transform business by helping corporate executives understand that customer service is nothing short of miraculous. Throughout the text, Jesus Christ is cast in the image of iconic men like Henry Ford and Alfred P. Sloan. For Barton, Jesus

[24] Marchand, 136.
[25] Craig Martin's *Capitalizing Religion* places Weber in conversation with contemporary self-help books and manuals. Making a lot of sense of Barton, Martin's book serves as an examination of contemporary interstices between religion, capitalism, and ideology. He writes, "self-help and spirituality manuals serve an ideological function within this iron cage. If we cannot escape from it, perhaps we can consume ideologies that assist us in acclimating to our prison." This chapter seeks to fill the lacuna between Weber and contemporary self-help manuals by turning to Bruce Barton, who one could argue is one of founders of the spiritual self-help genre in the United States. Cf. Craig Martin, *Capitalizing Religion: Ideology and the Opiate of the Bourgeoisie* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 125–26.

set goals like those of any CEO. Jesus' goal was to save the world, which was to accomplished through methodical hard work, miraculous customer service, charismatic leadership, patience, and virtuous conduct.

Marketing Messianism

Writing against "the myth of disenchantment," Jason Josephson-Storm has argued that modern capitalism and society were never truly disenchanted. He writes, "the narrative of disenchantment was self-refuting insofar as it reinvigorated the very thing it described as endangered Ironically for Josephson-Storm, Weber's notion of disenchantment reenchants modern capitalism.[26] Josephson-Storm's reading Weber illustrates how perhaps the iron cage/steel-hard casing might not be as secular and free from religion as Weber and his interpreters suggest. In fact, even as disenchantment and (re)enchantment might appear as opposites, they reinforce and amplify the mythological and religious dimensions of Weber's analysis. Josephson-Storm's argument for the (re)enchantment of modernity explains how Bruce Barton was able to successfully use capitalism to revitalize religion, and religion to revitalize capitalism.[27]

The elements of apocalypticism and catastrophism, which were so popular with Christian fundamentalists, are elided by Barton's irrepressible American optimism. As historian Kristin Kobes Du Mez notes in *Jesus and John Wayne*, after World War I the hypermasculinity of Teddy Roosevelt and Christianity began to be called into question. She writes, "In the wake of this disillusionment, the more militant model of Christian masculinity lost much of its luster. In its place, the ideal of the Christian businessman resurfaced as a prototype of Christian manhood.

---

[26] Cf. Jason Ananda Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 1-ff, http://chicago.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.7208/chicago/9780226403533.001.0001/upso-9780226403229.
[27] Josephson-Storm, 20.

Bruce Barton's *The Man Nobody Knows* (1925) exemplified this shift." Du Mez writes, "strength remained vital, but aggression and violence gave way to efficiency and magnetism." Barton's Jesus is hale, hearty, and heroic in the boardroom. Gone are the complicated elements of Jesus Christ's story. Salvation, crucifixion, death, and resurrection are still present in the narrative, but they are no longer the primary focus of the story.[28]

Finally, Max Weber helps to contextualize an important element of Barton's contribution to the messianic idea. Weber's analysis serves as a necessary reminder that it is not only distance and authority which grant an aura to messianic icons but also charisma. Charisma, power, and a sense of trans-immanence are vital elements of Barton's re-enchantment of capitalism in the "American" cosmovision. Barton had an uncanny ability to present the deeply uncharismatic titans of industry who seemed distant and far removed from the regular people of the day, Barton helped make them seem relatable and friendly, just like he did with Jesus. For Barton, Jesus and CEOs succeed through their use of charisma, their ability to gain a following, and their ability to use their charisma what people need. Salvation then becomes about meeting needs. But they are powerless to save anyone in the face of the true catastrophes to come. Charismatic capitalism collapses in the face of the Great Depression and world war.

I. *The Man Nobody Knows*[29]

Published in 1925, *The Man Nobody Knows* was Bruce Barton's second and most successful attempt at publishing a book on the life of Jesus. *The Man Nobody Knows* would go on to become one of the best-selling books of the twentieth century. Examining the life of Jesus, Barton reveals that Jesus is the founder of the first modern business (Christianity). Barton recasts the present corporate world back into the biblical text to reclaim Christ, Christianity, Capitalism,

[28] Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne,* 20.
[29] This dissertation is concerned with the original 1925 edition and not the highly editorialized 1956 or later editions.

and corporations from progressive reforms. Barton finds the secrets to success in business and religion through character profiles of Jesus, Buddha, Aristotle, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, corporate icons Henry Ford and Alfred P. Sloan, and hundreds of famous men like them. These profiles show the secret to Jesus' success was excellent "high frequency messaging." Jesus was a storyteller with a hook and a twist, spoke plainly to everyday people in a genuine way. These were the skills of the trade employed by Barton in his advertising and marketing work.[30] Both Barton and Jesus unlock the power of myth.

Devotional books on Jesus were a staple of U.S. literature at the time and continue to be so today as noted by Stephen Prothero.[31] The popularity of Jesus books, like Thomas De Witt Talmage *From Manger to Throne* (1890), Charles Sheldon's *In His Steps* (1897), Bouck White's *The Call of the Carpenter* (1911), Barton's *A Young Man's Jesus* (1914), and *The Man Nobody Knows* (1925) to name a few. Talmage presents Jesus as the industrious workman who works with his hands. Sheldon preaches Jesus as a social reformer. White presents what Curtis calls, "Jesus as a radical populist." And so on and so on. As historian Susan Curtis remarks the goal of this genre was to represent Jesus as a modern man's man.[32] All of these books, Barton included and maybe most radically, read the present into the past more than vice versa; and that is the nature of the icon, iconography, and iconology.

Barton's *A Young Man's Jesus* (1914) serves as a first draft to *The Man Nobody Knows*. Ultimately, *A Young Man's Jesus* was unsuccessful in terms of sales figures but serve as a proving ground for the later book. As Curtis, Fried, Morgan, and Prothero emphasize, for better and for worse, *The Man Nobody Knows* captures and reflects the twentieth century imagination,

[30] Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows,* 146-154.
[31] Stephen R. Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 97.
[32] Curtis, *A Consuming Faith*, 82–83.

in ways Barton's earlier and later books would never replicate.[33] Barton's image of Christ is still so popular that it was revitalized in Laurie Beth Jones' 1996 classic, *Jesus CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership.*[34] Barton's beloved text is famous for the same reasons it was reviled by Niebuhr. He portrays Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Son of Mammon, and he thought this was a good thing.

Plumbing the life of Jesus for business and marketing advice Barton suggest that the secret to Jesus' success was 1) being an excellent storyteller, 2) telling stories with a hook or a twist, 3) speaking plainly to everyday people, 4) being genuine, and 5) using repetition. These were the skills of the trade employed by Barton in his advertising and marketing work.[35]

Dissatisfied with the other books on Jesus and his earlier attempt at writing a book on Jesus, Barton writes *The Man Nobody Knows* in order to argue that the whole world is sacred, and everyone has a vocational calling. Barton wants to re-enchant capitalism and to assuage his own guilt about not entering the ministry by seeing all labor and work as a vocational calling, in this way being an advertising executive is on par with being a minister. The difference for Barton between sacred and secular labor becomes not about the job but about the individual doing the job. All Christians labor in the vineyard of the Lord with their vocational calling. Christian labor is sacred when it embraces the principles of Christ's labor by embracing the serving of others. There are of course other ways to serve others, as witnessed by Barton's impassioned fundraising plea for Berea College but the primary method of serving others and doing sacred work is by providing award winning customer service.

[33] Curtis, *A Consuming Faith*, 82–83; Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew*, 89–104; Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 111–14; Prothero, *American Jesus*, 98–99.
[34] Laurie Beth Jones, *Jesus, CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership*, 2021.
[35] Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows,* 146-154.

The only graphic image present in *"The Man Nobody Knows"* is the full-color frontispiece.[36] This frontispiece is N.C. Wyeth's painting titled *The Boy Jesus* (1924). While the book is not as visually engaging as Barton's advertisements, the frontispiece creates a vivid mental image for the reader. Wyeth's painting sets the visual image for the Jesus Christ that Barton will present: the "Son of Man" not the "Son of God." In Wyeth's painting, the ruddy young man Jesus stands in the foreground with his lathe as his earthly father Joseph labors behind him, and mother Mary fades into the background. In this image, a strong, savvy young man understands the value and importance of laboring in his heavenly father's business, Christianity. Using this visual reference Barton builds his mental image of Jesus for the reader. Jesus conquers the carpentry workshop, the synagogue, the boxing rink, and the most dangerous arena of all, the board room. In this idealized conception of Jesus is shown the strength and beauty of youth and the sanctification of all work. The suffering servant dying humiliated upon the cross is nowhere to be seen in *The Man Nobody Knows*. Ironically, this portrait of Jesus as a young boy is also soft and gentle. *The Boy Jesus* is not a chiseled man but a child with arms that show no musculature.[37]

Wyeth's *The Boy Jesus* has an advertising quality to the painting. Strong yet contemplative, illuminated by a heavenly light, and standing on the threshold between his earthly and heavenly fathers' realms. A man caught betwixt two vocational callings. Only Barton is able to offer a resolution to the young man's dilemma. David Morgan, citing Warren Sussman, notes that *The Boy Jesus* underscores personality, which in advertising allows a figure or product to stand out from the crowd. Jesus, framed by the doorway and standing front and center, gazing

[36] The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* defines frontispiece as "an illustration facing the title page of a book." Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., "Frontispiece," *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2008, https://www.proquest.com/encyclopedias-reference-works/frontispiece/docview/2138016654/se-2?accountid=14214
[37] Morgan, *Protestants & Pictures*, 315–45.

softly into the distance, stands out from his father in the foreground and his mother blurred into the background. Morgan rightly argues that this portrait is the perfect frontispiece for Barton because it sets Jesus apart from the crowd.[38]

Showcasing his integrative approach to the life of Jesus, Barton provides a cheeky epigraph from Luke 2:49 "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's *business*?" (KJV, emphasis added by Barton).[39] With this epigraph, Barton shows tween Jesus rebuking his parents for fretting over his whereabouts while he was in the Temple studying the law. Barton places the word *business* in italics on purpose. It makes the point that Jesus' business was in the Temple but that this business is not appreciably different from our business today. Here is Barton's set up of Jesus as a very modern and savvy businessman, skilled in the arts of marketing and advertising with nothing but the best executive skills, doing the business of God. The disciples are Christ's employees, parables are marketing campaigns, sermons, and healings show great business sense. Charles Sheldon's Jesus was a compassionate social reformer. Billy Sunday's Jesus was an all-star athlete. Barton's Jesus was an advertising executive who was equal parts boxer, Abraham Lincoln, and Henry Ford.[40] Each of these interpretations of Jesus illustrates a desire to contextualize "the ancient discipleship practice of *imitatio Christi* to modern America," according to Prothero.[41]

Barton's theologizing business advice through a reinterpretation of Christ's life was a new twist for publishers and audiences alike. In concocting this twist, Barton would go on to establish the genre of Christian business advice/theology books, a genre and category that continues to perform well to this day and, like Barton's text, often swerves into the genre of self-help.

---

[38] Ibid., 340.
[39] Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows*, 1.
[40] Stephen R. Prothero, *American Jesus*, 102.
[41] Ibid., 97.

Hofstadter situates Barton's book squarely in the genre of "inspirational books." Agreeing with Louis Schneider and Sanford M. Dornbusch, Hofstadter sees *The Man Nobody Knows* as offering a "spiritual technology." Hofstadter explains:

> One of the striking things that has occurred in the inspirational literature is that the voluntaristic and subjective impulses…seem to have come into complete possession and to have run wild…The inspirational cult [*sic*] has completed this process, for it has largely eliminated doctrine—at least it has eliminated most doctrine that could be called Christian. Nothing, then, is left but the subjective experience of the individual, and even this is reduced in the main to an assertion of his [*sic*] will. [42]

Hofstadter correctly notes that the Jesus of *The Man Nobody Knows* is all style without content. Hofstadter's point concerns the mental and visual image. Hofstadter understands that Barton is giving Jesus what is called today a public relations makeover focused on style, not doctrinal and theological Christian content. Recast in the iconography of capitalism, the messianic theme has been supplanted by leadership maxims.

The preface to the 1925 edition of *The Man Nobody Knows* is truly remarkable. Building on Wyeth's *The Boy Jesus*, Barton paints his own mental picture of Jesus as an icon of American masculinity and capitalism. A young man as comfortable in the board room as the church, Jesus is God's pugilistic gentleman stepping into the corporate arena reading to battle royale for the cause of capitalist Christianity/Christian capitalism. Completely lacking in subtlety, Barton explains his anxieties and the need for his book. Barton narrates in omniscient third person, telling the story of a young boy who goes to Sunday school faithfully and who is frustrated by the way the unnamed female Sunday school teacher presents Jesus. The little boy loves strong men like David, Samson, and Moses who were portraits of strength. The little boy fantasizes about Samson and David fighting the great boxer (of the little boy's time) James J. Jeffries. The little boy knows that Samson will win and speculates that David will also probably win as well.

[42] Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, 300-301.

He thinks that Jesus called the "lamb of God" sounds too much like the nursery rhyme “Mary Had a Little Lamb.” For the little boy, no messiah could be little and looked after by a woman. He is convinced that the lamb of God sounds like “Something meant for girls—sissified.”[43] As Prothero reminds readers, the obsession with masculinizing Jesus was not merely the province of fundamentalists and Barton: social gospellers also participated.[44]

When the little boy grows up and becomes a businessman, he has an epiphany that Jesus is not "[a] physical weakling!" because Jesus was a "successful carpenter."[45] Instead, this boy’s image of a muscular Jesus has “the personal magnetism which begets loyalty and commands respect.”[46] Part of what makes Barton’s text peculiar is that he wants it all: a prizefighting, charismatic, humble, magnetic, and respectful savior of industry. The irresolvable juxtaposition provided by Barton is part of what makes his portrait of Jesus so enigmatic yet emblematic. Only the Son of God could be all those things at once. These irresolvable tensions speak to the double layers of Barton’s text. Writing to the worker Barton wants workers to be humble, respectful, and deferential to the God given vocational calling of the corporate titans. Writing to the saintly capitalists, Barton wants them to eat some humble pie and realize the importance of customer service and providing high quality products that people want. In Barton’s constant emphasis on service, humility, respect, and honesty one sees Barton the incremental reformer who wants to reign in the largess of capitalism.

In the obsession with boxing, strength, masculinity, etc. one sees Barton’s fear and anxieties about the Progressive Era, women entering the workplace, and managerial labor making men not as ruddy and outdoorsy as he wishes men to be. What makes these

[43] Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows*, unnumbered preface.
[44] Prothero, *American Jesus*, 94.
[45] Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows*, 17–20.
[46] Ibid., 19.

juxtapositions work is the image of Jesus, only the Son of God could be all those things which means that those imitating Christ only have to *try* and be all those things and if they fall short that is ok after all they are not Jesus only a follower of Jesus. The impossibly high standard gives the CEOs and workers a goal to attain and work towards. Barton's hagiography of Jesus, Abraham Lincoln, Henry Ford, and all the other men of his book fuels the fantasy. The unobtainability of these goals is the engine that drives capitalism forward. If one tries hard enough, one will succeed. The triumphalist rhetoric and naïve optimism of Barton spurs readers onward and forward in their quixotic desire to have it all. This is the power found in weaving Christianity and capitalism together as unobtainable and impossible religious goals animate the marketplace and increase the bottom line. Such is the "American" cosmovision under capitalism. It will take a depression and world war to challenge this artifice.

In Chapter 1, Barton transforms Jesus from a messianic figure seeking to save souls into a study in charismatic leadership lessons. Barton learns from Jesus that success and successful people are always exciting and interesting. Barton concludes that Jesus' power over humanity stems from Jesus' charisma, which was conveyed primarily to his followers via Jesus' voice and mannerisms. For Barton, Jesus' magnetism was communicated through feelings and emotions. The other way to convey charisma is through authenticity. Authenticity is like charisma, innate and genuine. Both can be gained through the careful study of Jesus' life and through reading Barton's book, learning how to apply the lessons of Jesus to your life. A savior who wants to win your soul and your business through providing service with a smile. Barton transforms the Levantine time and space into modern U.S. industrialized capitalist space. He wants to baptize industrialized capitalism and consumer culture in the Sea of Galilee.

The magnetic pull of *The Man Nobody Knows* stems from the success of the mental image/icon of Jesus created by Barton. The image is as compelling and desirous to obtain as it is unobtainable. By focusing the human side of Jesus and not the divine and supernational parts of Jesus it lets the reader feel like they can accomplish these goals that a full imitation of Jesus is not only possible but desirable. If one is able to imitate Jesus enough and if imitation is the highest form of flattery than surely some of the divine blessing of Jesus and the supernatural nature of one's own vocational calling will grant one enough charisma to pull off becoming a capitalist success who will be remembered in the annals of time. Moving quickly between Jesus and a rogues' gallery of businessman, politicians, and iconic historical figures, Barton is able to keep the reader walking around the iconic figures dealership and engaged in buying the fantasy of Christian capitalism and capitalist Christianity being sold.

For Barton, Jesus' authenticity and certainty about everything, his speaking with clarity and certainty of his convictions (and thus having excessive certainty about one's business or organization) is to be like Jesus. Confidence and charisma go hand in hand, regardless of content it doesn't necessarily matter what one is confident. Barton is stretching the extra-textual life of Jesus to be about lessons for the modern businessperson; thus, these formal characteristics are overemphasized. One of the things that Barton's Jesus offers to readers is a sense of excessive certainty and clarity. If one follows Jesus and imitates Jesus, one is no longer a bifurcated self, but now following someone who possesses the truth and a deep clarity of conviction that they are in the right job. No, they are following Jesus, so they are in the right job, and they are certain of what to do because of Jesus' same certainty. For Barton, total clarity and commitment are critical qualities of a Christian.

For those familiar with the story of Jesus popularized by the social gospellers, Barton's Jesus is surprising. Gone is the man who threatens authority by preaching the transformation of the social order, speaking truth to power, and condemning the Roman state. He is replaced by a man who is comfortable with power and charisma, who likes proper order, and supports state power. For Barton, Jesus' power comes from his powerful belief in himself. Jesus' power strips away others' agency. His power and charisma speak to people at the level of instinct.

For Barton, the first part of Jesus' power is his charisma and faith in himself. The second part of Jesus' power was Jesus' ability to pick disciples. This discernment stemmed from his ability to see others' raw untapped potential, whether one was a fisherman, a small business owner, or a tax collector. Jesus could find the diamonds in the rough and know that he would be able to unlock their potential. The third aspect of Jesus' power is his executive leadership. Using his vast executive abilities, Jesus can transform Jesus' tag group of small business owners and tax collectors into powerful and strong executives who can fulfill and actualize his plans. In short, Barton remakes Jesus in his own image. The brand is so successful that it transforms how Americans think about Jesus.

Continuing to examine the slowly crystalizing image of Barton's Capitalist Christ and what it means for a messianic figure to become yet another visual cultural reference in the marketing and advertising arsenal, I turn to chapters two and three.[47] Chapter 2, "The Outdoor Man" focuses on Jesus' apprenticeship in carpentry under his father Joseph.[48] As David Morgan highlights, Barton saw a problem in the veneration of Mary which sidelined the masculine and manly natures of Jesus and Joseph. Morgan writes, "The feminine influence of the mother needed to be displaced by the physical culture and strenuous life of young men. Barton and many

[47] Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew*, 92.
[48] The chapter not only provides a hagiographical lament of muscular Jesus but also of Joseph.

of his contemporaries mapped their own desires over the Scriptures to find their authorization for the social changes they sought to effect in the contemporary world."[49] Chapter two and also chapter three highlight Jesus living outside, fishing, recruiting fishermen, the temptation and fast in the wilderness, and driving the money changers out of the Temple. In Barton's retelling of all these stories, Jesus is strong, charismatic, industrious, and manly. Those who oppose him are depicted as weak, sniveling, lazy, and lacking in manly virtue. The chapter's leitmotif is masculinity's superiority to femininity, as Barton writes, "The same theology which has painted the son as soft and gentle to the point of weakness, has exalted the feminine influence in its worship, and denied any large place to the masculine."[50] For Barton it was Jesus' strength and power which stemmed from his masculinity that drew people to follow Jesus. Barton collapses the past, present, and future.

In Chapter three, "The Sociable Man," Barton paints Jesus as the ultimate socialite and networker.[51] Unlike fundamentalists and social gospelers, Barton's messianic expectations led him to the Bible where he sought to legitimize the social order and his desire to transform it He seeks no cataclysmic social change, no dramatic rethinking of the social order; all he wants is businessmen to be their best Christian selves and to move a few units of Christianity, just as they sell their other products. Now Jesus is the man who loves crowds and "was the most popular dinner guest in Jerusalem." The goal of this chapter is to paint a portrait of Jesus as the antithesis of "the man of sorrows acquainted with grief." Jesus knew how to work a crowd, make a sale, and close a deal. He was gregarious and kind. And he was here to have fun, like at the wedding feast of Cana. For Barton then the tensions between Jesus and the Pharisees existed because "His God was no Bureau, no Rule Maker, no Accountant." Jesus was neither a Pharisee nor a Puritan.

[49] Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 114.
[50] Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows*, 40–41.
[51] Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew*, 92.

Barton sells his vision by arguing that early theologians "lived in sad days" so they could not understand the joy and simplicity of Jesus' day. Thus, it took until the Roaring Twenties to uncover the joy once more.[52]

In chapter four, "His Method," Barton analyzes Jesus' methods and presents a blueprint for one to follow to imitate capitalist Christ as a way to attain success. This is where Barton provides a concrete way to perform the imitation of Christ and achieve material and spiritual success. In this chapter Barton is transforming Jesus Christ into a messianic container which can be inhabited by the faithful to achieve success. In this way Jesus moves from becoming an unobtainable goal to becoming a container and imagistic style which will help one obtain their goals. Here Barton instrumentalizes Christ even further transforming him into the mass-marketed messiah.[53] In Jesus' ministry, Barton sees all "the principles of modern salesmanship." According to Barton Jesus was pitching salvation as a product and sanctification as a service was:

> He invited frail bewildered humanity to stand upright and look at God face to face! He called upon men to throw away fear, disregard the limitations of their mortality, and claim the Lord of Creation as Father. It is the basis of all revolt, all democracy. For if God is the Father of *all* men, then all are his children and hence the commonest is equally as precious as the king. No wonder the authorities trembled.[54]

In this chapter, Jesus' method is to treat religion as a product and to really pitch it to the masses. Here he is calling on humanity to rid itself of awe and reverence for God, to look directly upon God face to face, and to discard their fear of mortality, death, and divine wrath. Here in looking at God straight on and claiming a familial kinship relationship, Barton sees the basis of democracy and revolution.[55] In Christianity he sees modern capitalism and politics. All of

[52] Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows*, Preface, 59, 72.
[53] Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew*, 92–93.
[54] Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows*, 104.
[55] Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew*, 92–93.

humanity are the children of God and thus all are equal which for Barton sounds a lot like the preamble to the Declaration of Independence. Therefore kings, despots, and bureaucrats should tremble before the corporate might of Christianity, and the unifying power of its Messiah, Jesus. Likewise, Barton sees modern capitalism in the gospels as well, there is a product (eternal life) and a service (salvation). These products and services are so powerful that one will want to overthrow monarchs and bureaucrats to experience the pure joy of Christianity.[56]

For Barton, if there is one thing that Jesus understood, it is sales. Jesus had contacts and sales leads. Barton argues that modern businessmen draw from Jesus. Barton imagines Jesus' walking along the lake one day and seeing two fishermen hard at work, their hands are working, their mouths are working (they were talking business), and Jesus saw their minds working as well. Seeing how hard these men were working with their hands, language, and minds, Jesus interrupts their conversation, but instead of offering them a job, he gives them a subtle sales pitch. Jesus' sales pitch starts by chit-chatting about fishing, showing them that he understands their industry, and then Jesus pivots to asking them, so how would you like to become fishers of men? Using vernacular and colloquial language, Jesus can capture their attention. These men understand fishing and catching fish, but they probably don't understand who or what a disciple is or why they would be interested in becoming one. However, the phrase "fishers of men" is a hook that gains their interest. They still don't know what it means, but it seems to build on their current skill sets so they are intrigued. After these men are hooked, Jesus reels them in and sells them on the idea of following him and becoming a disciple. Imitate Jesus and use these strategies in your own sales and corporate recruiting efforts, Barton espouses.

Additionally, Jesus promotes his services not in synagogues but out in the marketplace. He understands the importance and power of being in the marketplace. For Barton, the primary

[56] Barton, *The Man Nobody Knew,* 72-74, 96.

marketplace of our contemporary era is naturally advertisements. Jesus understands that the best advertisements come in the form of news. People do pay attention to traditional advertisements but not nearly as much attention as they pay to the news, so the best advertisement executives understand that they need to be creating and writing news. Jesus stays in the news by avoiding routine, by not being common, and by constantly changing it up while also staying on message. Jesus understands the power of good advertisements and news so much that every one of his words and actions are newsworthy enough to cause people to follow him. To update Jesus for modern times, Jesus would not advertise his sermons but instead his services. Likewise, churches, corporations, and people should advertise their services. Thus, for Barton, while Jesus would be preaching, promoting his services on Wall Street, and having the news breathlessly cover him, Jesus would also be running advertisements and employing all the best marketing techniques.

Barton's critics reserve most of their ire for this chapter because they see it as self-serving and the most garish portrait of Jesus possible, painted in Barton's own image. Barton seems to anticipate this critique and opens the chapter by arguing essentially that everyone sees the Jesus that they want to see; doctors would see Jesus as a great physician and lawyers would see Jesus as a great rhetorician. According to Fried, "The agitator remembers only that he denounced the rich; and the communist that his disciples carried a common purse."[57] Naturally Barton prefers his own portrait of Jesus, and quickly returns to universalizing his experience, writing, "I am not a doctor, or lawyer or critic but an advertising man. As a profession advertising is young; as a force it is as old as the world." To prove his point, Barton takes the words "let there be light" as the foundational charter of advertising. Having returned to a

[57] Ibid., 93, 124.

universalizing position, Barton highlights the ways in which Jesus marketed himself by imagining the newspaper headlines that Jesus might have generated in his day. [58]

The quintessentially imagistic parables about how the Kingdom of God is like a pearl of great price become a pedagogical tool for Barton. Jesus' parables become lessons in writing advertising copy. Thus, while each profession and person might have their personal Jesus, it is the Jesus of advertising who stands alone. Thus, like in our modern era it is the advertiser who sets the style and creates the brand for the other portraits of Jesus. Jesus' brand as executive, outdoorsman, and socialite would be most effectively communicated through a branding guide and style. The advertisements Jesus would run would have the following characteristics for Barton: they would be clear and concise; they would use simple language; they would appear sincere; they would hold to the adage that reputation is repetition. Barton encapsulates Jesus' style in the maxim, "Jesus hated prosy dullness."[59]

Barton argues that advertisements need to be simplistic and clear and have a parable to them. Advertisements that have a parable sell something greater than a product they sell an idea and an idea. For Barton Keep it crystal clear and iconic. Advertisements need to be iconic and stick in a person's mind. They need to continue to do the work even after they have been set aside. Here Barton's advice is to eschew adjectives, use mostly one and two-syllable words, and steadfastly avoid words of three-syllable and longer. For Barton, the three great literary masterpieces that most embody these principles are The Lord's Prayer, The 23rd Psalm, and the Gettysburg Address. These three pieces of literature have no three-syllable words, only a nominal number of two-syllable words, and focus primarily on one-syllable words, which are the most important things in life according to advertising logic. Life, in this scheme, is comprised of

[58] Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows*, 124–25.
[59] Ibid., 124-58.

powerful one-syllable words like "love, joy, hope, home, child, wife, trust, faith, God." The most effective advertisements always focus on these important factors. According to Fried, “To potential clients, to friends, even to foes, he [Barton] glistened with ‘sincerity’.”[60] Charisma is also an important part of Barton’s conveying sincerity and authenticity because looking the part and having people feel the authenticity conveys the sincerity.

The messianism of Jesus Christ totally slips out of Barton's book in that the relentless focus on the humanity of Jesus Christ overlooks the divinity of Christ. While he mentions them, the miracles, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus are not the most important parts of the narrative. On the one hand, the Messiah is to be imitated. Condensing “the philosophy of Christianity into a half dozen unforgettable paragraphs,” the parable of the Good Samaritan “is the greatest advertisement of all time.”[61] On the other hand, now that the whole world is sacred and all work is holy and the emphasis is on selling Christianity and capitalism, Barton’s Jesus ironically winds up being not that special or unique, because he can be imitated by everyone from Abraham Lincoln to Henry Ford to the reader of the book. The book does not really introduce people to the historical Jesus, the Jesus Christ of theology, or anything resembling a Messiah who has entered history at just the right moment to provide salvation and transformation. In fact, by the end of *The Man Nobody Knows*, one does not really know Jesus or anything/anyone resembling what previous eras would recognize as a messiah. If the Jesus of this text is a Messiah, then he is pure charisma and not much different than Ford, et. al. Barton's messianism imagines a messiah who is pure charisma. The only difference between Jesus and a con man is the socially accepted nature of their work and its “worthiness.” Prothero said it best. Barton titled his book *The Man Nobody Knows* and now decades after its publication, Barton’s

[60] Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew*, 63.

[61] Barton, 148.

rebranding and mass-marketing of Jesus was so successful that "today he is the man nobody hates."[62]

II. Barton and Marketing Christianity in The Age of Advertising

While *The Man Nobody Knows* certainly left a lasting impression upon the United States, Barton's writings were secondary to his career in advertising and public relations. Where Barton the advertiser meets Barton the writer is in his stylistic ability for "building bridges of prose between tradition and modernity." It is here in these fields that Barton perhaps leaves an even longer lasting imprint upon the country. Barton's advertisements combine word and image to create a soft and reassuring message in the spirit of Christianity. His advertisements are known for their use of light to provide a warmth and honesty that match the simple authenticity and clear prose of the copy. In each of these ads he uses religious imagery to frame faith in capitalism. In a profession known for cynical misrepresentations of products, he provided clients and customers with earnestness and honesty Barton himself becomes a brand, so much so that the agency joked about needing to expand to make room for all the "Bruce Bartons" who were writing Barton's copy.[63]

Rebranding General Electric and Electric Christianity (1920s)

Divided into multiple brands and fighting with itself, General Electric seemed less like a brand and corporation and more like an embattled dysfunctional family.[64] Before Barton arrived on the scene, General Motors was an unwieldy corporate hydra without a unified identity. It was comprised of numerous brands which functioned as competing fiefdoms constantly fighting each other in the market. Chief Executive Officer Alfred P. Sloan understood that the company

[62] Prothero, *American Jesus*, 11.

[63] Ibid., 47-58.

[64] General Electric Company, ""Initials of a friend" advertisement, 1923." *Image from miSci- Museum of Innovation & Science*, https://g.co/arts/vAFjss1f9DX61HkS7.

needed to be unified lest it break apart. It was Barton who held the answer to what ailed them. General Motors is a family, he decided, whose strength was in being “more” than just a place of work.[65] The 1927 ad campaign announced a “Family of PRODUCTS and PEOPLE.” In the advertisement, General Motors Company was shortened to become General Motors. These two words are like a person’s first name and a last name, without the additional and added distance of drawing attention to it also being a "corporation" in truth.[66] Sloan, recognized that regardless of Barton, to make G.M. a family could have a twofold impact – first internally for the company and then also for customers.

General Electric contracted with Barton’s agency, BBDO, for help creating a corporate spirit. General Electric also wanted to become a household name under a unified brand. Barton and BBDO revitalized General Electric from top to bottom, starting with their logo. General Electric's logo is revitalized classic art nouveau and art deco elements, an aesthetic that helped to symbolize trustworthiness and excellence. The cursive font of the General Electric logo helped to personalize the brand. The application of the logo looks like it was personally signed and endorsed by a person. The cursive font with its flourishes helped to give it an air of humanity and personality. General Electric is more than just a holding company; now, it is a signature and icon. To make the company even more personal, General Electric is abbreviated to “G.E.” Like a friend, G.E. is a strong signature that one can trust. Barton's campaign for G.E. declared the G.E. brand and logo as "the initials of a friend."[67] Likewise, Barton also helped General Motors find a strong two-letter brand with G.M. Both companies have a strong art nouveau style, which help establish their authority and trustworthiness.

[65] Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew*, 60–62.
[66] Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*, 140.
[67] Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*, 130.

Part of Barton's appeal and genius as an advertiser was his sincerity. Barton was optimistic, enthusiastic; he believed in the corporations and the brands he created. Barton's advertising work involved crafting positive and uplifting corporate memos, writing biographical sketches for newspapers and magazines, human interest stories, and creating a new genre, which G.E. executives called "business sermonettes." These business sermonettes encouraged customers to put their faith in God and G.E. Barton's more controversial claim was that business problems had spiritual solutions and spiritual problems had business solutions. Barton believed that "Institutions have souls, just as men and nations have souls." For its part, G.M. became a "family of PRODUCTS and PEOPLE."[68] As a family, G.M. is an icon of faith and trust. He transforms both Christianity and corporations into an iconic language of signs, symbols, and significations which can be used for branding, marketing, and reputational repair. As historian Susan Curtis highlights about Barton, Jesus' success was derived from his charismatic leadership abilities, "his ability to organize and manipulate men."[69] The supernatural and miraculous nature of messianism is ancillary to what Barton sees as the true nature of Jesus. Just as one puts their faith in Jesus so too should one put their faith in G.E. to light their home with the supernatural gift of electricity and in G.M. to keep one safe and get one home just in time to spend time with the family.

Christianity Sells Capitalism

I want to underscore the following shift. In *The Man Nobody Knows,* Barton used capitalism to sell Christianity, whereas in his advertisement work he used Christianity to sell capitalism. In this version of the "American" cosmovision, customers put their faith and trust into General Electric and General Motors because they provide quality products that make life

[68] Ibid.
[69] Curtis, *A Consuming Faith*, 85.

better. Historian T.J. Jackson Lears helps us to understand this shift. Lears argues that there was a shift from salvation to self-realization during this era, brought about in no small part by the work of Bruce Barton.[70] As shown below, perhaps the clearest example of Barton using Christian faith to sell a corporate faith was an advertisement he did for Edison with Norman Rockwell. What drew together Bruce Barton and the iconic American painter is how both men sold a particularized version of "America" that is reliably white, male, and Christian in its material, commercial form.

The Rockwell and Barton collaboration advertisements sold a world of safe electricity, divinely illuminated images, and color advertisements. The light is transcendent, restful, and soothing, a divine light that comes from inside the home, warming and protecting the family, soothing the anxious child, and calming the worried parents' nerves. Thanks to the miracle of lightbulbs, the evening home is now illuminated, and the older generation can read to the younger generation. Electricity is changing human life on a permanent basis. Out with the old, dangerous candles and gas lamps, and in with the genteel glow of electric light. The message is clear: do not worry about the out of work lamplighters, the cost of electricity, the cost of electrical appliances, or the danger of electricity in the home; instead, bask in the restful transcendent light of the lamp. Even in Rockwell's timeless tableaus of Americana, electric light is eternally existent, standing in for God, lighting the home with His presence.

Barton understood that corporations had a problem; they appeared to be soulless, corrupt monopolies with vast, unwieldy, and indecipherable product as historian Roland Marchand highlights in *Creating a Corporate Soul*.[71] Corporations needed rehabilitation and transformation of their images to get away from these problems. Thus, the brilliance of Barton was that he

[70] T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: The Quest for Alternatives to Modern American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization."
[71] Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*, 131.

helped to humanize and theologize corporations. No longer a corporation, corporations became people and gods. People with families and people who are families. In their corporate divinized personhood, they have a caring and compassionate soul. Barton and his firm just helped to sell that soul to save the more important soul (of profits), naturally. His success at humanizing corporations and breathing life into their souls via his essayistic advertisements were called "business sermonettes" by G.E. Despite the business sermonettes "secular" nature, G.E. understood them for what they were, a sermonic sanctification of their corporate expansion.[72]

General Motors Minister

Barton and G.M.'s "Goodwill Ads of 1924 and 1925" were a huge success both internally and externally as these ads helped to personalize and humanize G.M. One of the most interesting ads of the series is "Through the Eyes of Faith."[73] In this double-page magazine advertisement, Barton draws upon a kindly paternalistic ministerial figure who is reminiscent of his own minister's father. Barton's "Through the Eyes of Faith" advertisement for G.M. opens with one of many hundreds of letters from pastors and priests. In this melodramatic version, as per Carrasco, the "American" cosmovision "[integrates] the structure of space and rhythms of time into a unified whole."[74] Barton tells the story of a country minister who is trying to build a church and a community in a rural area. Thanks to the reliability of his General Motors automobile the pastor can visit the community providing pastoral care, fundraise for a church, and help the community undergo a "wonderful change." Barton wraps up the story: "And no man performs a nobler service than the minister, who never doubts that men and women and towns can be some-thing better than they are; who, holding up a high ideal, looks forward through the

[72] Ibid., 134.
[73] Image from Ibid., 132-133, 142, fig. 4.5.
[74] Carrasco, 200.

eyes of faith."[75] Then at the bottom of the double page illustrated advertisement are inch high letters reading GENERAL MOTORS. The second page is comprised entirely of a minister sitting in the foreground gazing wistfully into the middle-distance upon an old country church up a long winding road, nary a car in sight. Using the universally relatable but still vague story of a minster in Anytown, USA Barton praises all ministers, especially those forward-thinking ministers who have faith that their town can blossom into a community. Ministers put their faith in God and G.M. to get the job done.

General Motors Medicine

The GM advertisement "that the doctor shall arrive *in time*" tugs on the heartstrings of parents and provides a sense of relief that if the country doctor is part of G.M. family, then their family will be safe as the country doctor shall arrive *in time* to their home. The primary image is of a worried mother looking on as a doctor treats her sickly daughter. In this advertisement *pathos* abounds. Tugging at the heartstrings, Barton's prose tells the story of the car as a vital part of the lifesaving services provided by a country doctor. Thanks to the miracle of the automobile a doctor can arrive just in time to save a life. Once again, the central focal image of the advertisement is not the product but the concepts of trust and faith. The mother places her trust in the doctor, her faith in God. The doctor trusts in G.M. and has faith in his God given abilities.

Together as a united force, G.M. and doctors can bring the dead back to life. Corporate and medical messianism working together. Once again, this ad draws on Barton's own life experience, again reinscribing his own life into the story of American life, as Barton's grandfather was a pharmacist and country doctor.[76] The beguiling authenticity of the ads helps

[75] Marchand, 132-142.
[76] Ibid., 142-143.

to give General Motors the appearance of a soul and really tugs on people's heartstrings in a way that feels good. The ad is hopeful; the doctor arrives in time. Technology helps to avert the crisis. The brilliance of these advertisements rests in the limitless possibilities of faith and trust.

Historian David Farber, in his biography of Alfred P. Sloan (of G.M.), writes that Barton "like the great romantic poets, knew how to imbue bloodless entities with great human emotion and spirituality."[77] Through the fusion of religion, family, pathos, and the automobile, Barton once more creates a "spiritual technology" with similar valences to those he created in *The Man Nobody Knows* which caught the attention of Hofstadter "spiritual technology."[78] Barton's spiritual technologies animate and give life to lifeless entities. He imbues General Motors and their executives with messianism. Doctors may save lives and ministers may sanctify life, but it is General Motors and Alfred P. Sloan who get them there to make it all happen. The spiritual technology which animates Barton's General Electric advertisements is what Barton called an "electric consciousness." In Marchand's analysis of this phrase he notes, "As GE's electrical consciousness campaign took shape from 1923 through 1926, it adopted a consistent style while addressing several audiences. One series defined 'what electricity is doing for human life' and attributed this progress to the efforts of General Electric's largest customers: the railroads, the central power stations, and the street railways. Another series, which included 'The Suffrage and the Switch,' reminded women that their civic and political progress was intertwined with electrical progress. All these ads sustained a single pattern: a dominant illustration, lots of white space to enhance visibility, a concise 'editorial' in a single block of large type, and the GE signature."[79] The corporation is created with a consciousness and soul through the use of color

[77] David Farber as quoted in Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew*, 62; David. Farber, *Sloan Rules: Alfred P. Sloan and the Triumph of General Motors.* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 69–70.
[78] Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, 300.
[79] Marchand, 157.

advertisements; careful use of lighting has transposed electric light out of the old iconography of candlelight, sunlight, and divine light.

Electrifying Corporate Consciousness

Building on his 1920 advertising campaign with Norman Rockwell for Edison Lamp Works, Barton continues his strategy of re-enchanting light. The "The party *after* the party" advertisement shows a grandmother and granddaughter clasping their hands together after a party and praying together celebrating and living in the moment. "A friendly lamp invites confidences. In every such family it plays a silent part." The soft warm glow of the electric light highlights the lamp and illuminates an intimate conversation between grandmother and granddaughter. One can imagine the granddaughter telling her grandmother exciting news. Norman Rockwell's brush, coupled with Barton's pen, reveals that within electric light, magic still dwells. Rockwell imbues electric light with the same aura that was previously bestowed by candlelight and the divine Light provides the backdrop for "The Stuff of Which Memories Are Made." Barton's vision, in his own words, is that electric light is with you "from the first candle of youth to the twilight of life" and that "a friendly lamp invites confidences" [80]

Barton's pitch to General Electric was what Marchand calls an "electric consciousness" to General Electric. Barton pushed to market "human progress" and couples this human progress specifically with electricity. One of Barton's key advertisements during this campaign for General Electric was marketing an ideal with which he had an intimidating familiarity: ambition. General Electric is your ambitious friend who illuminates and facilitates your dreams. Barton reminded customers to not take electricity and light for granted and that there is a mysterious

[80] Image from Marchand, 152, fig. 4.11.

quasi-religious aura surrounding how light is transmitted into the home via electricity and an almost spirituality to what electric light makes possible.[81]

After their 1911 antitrust ruling, General Electric faced a backlash of criticism from the public due to its enormity and size. But Barton's campaign focused the public's attention instead upon G.E.'s ideals, reminding people of the virtues of electricity. He achieved this by focusing on electricity while softening the presence of G.E. in the ad, adding warmth to the advertisement. Barton's shift to electricity's role in improving human life moved the spotlight away from General Electric's enormity and onto the value of the electricity it provides. [82] Barton helped G.E. humble brag by creating a report – which is really an advertisement campaign – highlighting social progress and connecting it to electricity. Barton and General Electric keep seeking an angle to really drive home the progress brought about by electricity. Finally, they find a winning formula when they connect electricity to women's suffrage. The "Suffrage and the Switch" campaign focuses on the daily drudgery of homemaking vs. the nominal cost of operating individual electronic appliances. The ad-campaign celebrates how electricity frees married women from the menial labor which their husbands refuse to do. [83]

The ad reads: "Any woman who does anything which a little electric motor can do is working for 3¢ an hour!" The illustration, as dramatic as the text is pithy, casts the electricity-deficient housewife as a stunted menial, entombed in the looming shadow of her own drudgery (Fig. 4.15). "Suffrage and the Switch" makes women's domestic labor visible to men. The ads also hide the total cost of electricity by focusing on the individual device to be operated. Buying a washer could reduce the drudgery of housework in a budget-friendly way, even if the ad failed

[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] The "Suffrage and the Switch" advertisements were so popular people referred to them as the popularly known "Any woman" advertisements. Marchand, 158.

to mention that reality that women's domestic labor frequently was already uncompensated. Evoking the specters of drudgery, menial labor, and low pay proves to be a winning formula and leads to accolades, like the 1926 Harvard Advertising Award for the campaign for Barton and BBDO. Barton finds a winning formula; pitching electricity providing liberation from drudgery. Barton quickly develops a formula, "Any woman who irons by hand …Any woman who beats a rug…Any industrial worker who moves things by hand …"[84] These ads revealed the devaluation of labor under capital but in a non-threatening (to the managerial class) manner.

In the General Electric advertisements, the concept of electric consciousness seems to be defined by an awareness of electricity's abilities to bring people together across vast distances through the railroads, through illuminating cities via central power stations, and by illuminating homes with a warmth reminiscent of candles. Life and progress continue to thrive thanks to electricity, and the lesson for the public and General Electric is to be conscious not only of the progress that electricity brings but also of the "initials of a friend" who make this progress happen.[85] Like a personal and individual savior, General Electric, a large company, becomes personified as a dear friend. Lacking the spectral and flickering quality of fire, the consistent and trustworthy electrical spiritual presence of General Electric makes a house into a home. The electric lamp illuminates the familial nightly devotional reading. If General Motors' automobiles are a spiritual technology moving lifeless corporations forward, then electricity is the spiritual technology which animates and gives life to these corporate golems.

[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., 155; *Fried, The Man Everybody Knew*, 61.

Divinizing labor

Barton's work with General Electric, weaves Christianity and capitalism together.[86] Barton's Any woman/Any worker ads provide nuance to his thoughts on divinized labor. *The Man Nobody Knows* emphasizes that work is divine. Working, and by extension, working and selling one's labor for capital, is to do the work of the Lord. On the other hand, one must work smarter, not harder. Wasting time doing repetitive tasks is wasting God's time. Efficiency allows the worker to get more done in the same amount of time. Barton's theory of labor here focuses on increasing productivity and increasing profits.

His ads are not concerned with making goods and services like electricity and washing machines more affordable. Electrical appliances free the masses to have more time to sell their labor for capital. By recasting corporations as friend and family, Barton reinvigorates corporate headquarters, centralizing power, and control for the managerial class, and gives corporations and their managers an idealized image which infuses their work with purpose. Vertical integration and increased market share feel good when pitched by Barton and painted by Norman Rockwell. BBDO still proudly proclaims a work-focused mantra, written in a large, bold-header font, where their "About" webpage proudly proclaims "The Work. The Work. The Work." [87]

Corporatized capitalism has replaced the engine of catastrophic utopianism with the hope of a secure middle-class existence replete with vacations to New England, time saving technology, and the warm glow of electric light which illuminates a modern Norman Rockwell painting. The horrors of World War I and the looming threat of World War II remain just outside

[86] Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*, 157.
[87] Ibid., 162; BBDO, "About." Emphasis in the original.

the frame. If you focus on doing the work, with a little luck, you might be able to secure a better future for yourself and your family.[88]

What Barton sells to the managerial class, in *The Man Nobody Knows*, is godlike power and a matching mindset. Being a manager and/or an ad man is just like being a rough and rugged carpenter and prizefighting Jesus. Jesus is just like Henry Ford and George Perkins. Authoritarianism and monopolies are perfectly fine so long as the leaders are good church-going men who occasionally give money to good causes. Providing customer support, service with a smile, and going the extra mile to help good customers will paper over a multitude of sins. At a time filled with the advocates of modernity squaring off against its discontents, Barton sides firmly with the pre-modernists, with only a slight nod to the critiques of the worst abuses of modernism of his day. Barton shares some of the concerns of the anti-modernists. He and they worry that office men aren't as manly as the men who work out in the fields, he holds racialized fears of progress and anxiety about the en masse relocation of African Americans and other persons of color into the cities, and additionally he holds sexist concerns about the women's rights movement, but this does not stop him from selling washing machines to women and calling it to progress.[89]

V. Conclusion

Excoriated by both H.L. Mencken and H. Reinhold Niebuhr, Barton's book *The Man Nobody Knows* was undoubtedly a best seller. Both Mencken and Niebuhr saw the book as corporate boosterism and lacking in substance.[90] While Mencken mocked the book, he did not proffer a serious critique of the book as he found the entire project absurd and laughable. He did

[88] Fried's biography emphasizes that luck was a common theme in Barton's life and work. Perhaps luck is part of why Barton was so invested in service and advertising because one never knows what will be helpful to a customer or will keep an employee at the company. Fried, The Man Everybody Knew, 61–65.
[89] Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows*, 159-192.
[90] Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew,* 100.

not deign to spend his time providing a critique to what he saw as an unserious take on Jesus. In contradistinction to Menken, Niebuhr as a theologian and minister saw the book as a direct affront to Christianity. critique as seriously as Niebuhr. Writing anonymously in "Jesus as Efficiency Expert," Niebuhr condemns the book for its sermon on service and the importance of customer service for churches and businesses. Niebuhr underscores the main problem. "The frank scorn of the nineteenth century businessman for religious principles and Christian ethics is preferable to the unconscious insincerity...of the modern captain of industry who veils the most predatory practices of industrial and commercial life with phrases of moral idealism." [91] In the face of economic exploitation and the cynical manipulation of religiosity by the capitalist classes, Niebuhr sees Barton's book as the work of naivete or a cynicism or perhaps both.

I see Barton as a naïve optimist who believed the BBDO slogan that it is all about "The Work. The Work. The Work." However, this naïve optimism can only go so far and Niebuhr is correct Barton's intent matters far less than his impact. Looking at the impact of *The Man Nobody Knows* and Barton's advertisements one can see that he certainly was successful in so many of the ways he desired success. *The Man Nobody Knows* also contains a glowing hagiographical portrait of noted antisemite Henry Ford. The 1956 second edition of the book would remove many of the men profiled in the first edition as revelations of their racism and sexism became more visible. Barton's legacy is that of the public relations image consultant who washed away the sins of "great men" by comparing them with the greatest of men, Jesus Christ.

Thus, Barton's naivete is at the same time a naïve cynicism, as Niebuhr suggested. As a true believer, Barton was the perfect public relations image consultant. Barton's advocacy for capitalism and capitalist, under the aegis of Christianity speaks to the normalization of hucksterism, a pathway for the salvation and redemption of a tycoon's public image and the way

[91] "Jesus as Efficiency Expert" *Christian Century*, July 2, 1925, 851-852 and as quoted in. Fox, *Jesus in America*, 321.

to save themselves and their corporations. In this way, cynical naivete and hucksterism are embedded into the "American" cosmovision. Thanks to men like Barton capitalism and capitalists become imminently more likeable to the American public. Perhaps Barton's most lasting gift is the con/fusion of Christianity and capitalism. While few may remember Barton or his book today, the figures of a Capitalist Christ and Christian capital have become iconic. Barton's legacy of naïve cynicism lives on in *The Wizard of Oz.*

Chapter 4
The Messianic of Cosmovision Oz

The Wizard of Oz (1939) provides a lush technicolor to the fantastical world of Oz, one that is in stark contrast to the bleak sepia tones of Dorothy's Kansas. The shift from sepia tones to technicolor follow the film's madcap leap into the campy utopian fantasy of Oz, a fantastical world beloved by fans for its magical whimsy and bright colors. The world of Oz reveals in the play of camp and imagining what a life lived somewhere over the rainbow could be in the image of redeemed human existence based on fellowship of creatures. Under the illusion of a liberative fantasy, I will argue that the film *The Wizard of Oz* is quite conservative and reactionary. On closer inspection, I will argue that Dorothy (Judy Garland) is not the messiah of the film, the woman who saves the people. Instead, it is the huckster and humbug Wizard/Professor Marvel (Frank Morgan) holds all the power; he is the man behind the curtain leering through the frame while maintaining a critical distance with auratic authority all the way through the final scene.

As an iconic part of the "American" cosmovision, *The Wizard of Oz* explores the motifs of catastrophism, utopia, populism, and authoritarianism. The joy of watching *Oz* is watching Dorothy journey through a tornado and over the rainbow into the technicolor world of Oz and following her journey of self-discovery and enlightenment through Oz. The journey through Oz, however, is anchored by the reactionary and conservative nature of the film, cued by the bleakness of sepia-toned Kansas and the precarity of the 1930s. Dorothy is scarcely able to enjoy her time in Oz as she constantly utters the shibboleth "there's no place like home." Once she is able to return home her experience of the reality of Oz is dismissed by her family who glibly discount her experience as just a dream. In the final heartbreaking scene, Dorothy makes two

paradoxical affirmations: first, that Oz and her experiences there were real and, second, that there is *no place* like home and she will never leave home again.

This is the paradox of the messianic idea in the "American" cosmovision. The messianic idea offers a utopia on the other side of the catastrophe if one can survive it. The "Americanness" of the messianic idea transforms the utopia being imagined so much so that the United States is already the Utopia and the best of all possible worlds so in fact there is no reason to leave home because there is quite literally *no place* like the U.S. and not even utopian Oz can compare to it. The myth of "American" exceptionalism forecloses the possibility of imagining new relationships between religion, politics, and the economy that even the unimaginable becomes imaginable.

Indeed, the key to understanding the iconicity of *The Wizard of Oz* is understanding just how important cynical naivete, imagination, memory, and forgetting are to the Oz experience. As a film, *The Wizard of Oz* captures the cynical suspicion of politics that is emblematic of L. Frank Baum and the era. The titular character is revealed to be both huckster and humbug, someone who seems himself a "good man" but a terrible Wizard, someone who gets in over his head and is unwilling to let go of his power. The naïve conceit of the film is that Dorothy can indeed go home again after having gone to Oz and that she will be satisfied. The constant refrain of "there is no place like homie" highlights a conservative reactionary nostalgia that seeks to remake the "utopia" which lives over the rainbow into the imagined image of a rural agrarian ascetic existence. In the film's valorization of Kansas and the return home to a kindler gentler non-existent space is as much a dream/reality as is Oz.

The ideal viewer's first experience of Oz exists as a dream and a memory. That first time watching, sensing, and feeling Oz becomes lodged in one's memory. What Dorothy remembers

are iconic moments of raw simplicity: the people and animals, skipping down the Yellow Brick Road, and the gasp at seeing the Emerald City just down the road. Just as important to the memory of Oz is what Salman Rushdie calls the "forgettery."[1] To love Oz is to passionately embrace the memories and the parts that are loved and to forget the parts that are unloved. Oz captures one's memory and then flourishes in the imagination. The sensorial experience of watching Oz is further enhanced by discussing it with your friends as well as replaying your favorite scenes over and over in your mind's eye. This is because the mental image of Oz is absolutely Oz at its most iconic. While iconic, Oz is not the promotional posters or movie or book covers, but those moments when Oz becomes, however temporarily or in whatever form of thought, a part of oneself. Those images where one finds oneself during or after reading or viewing and has been lost and immersed entirely in the story. That moment when Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, the Wizard, or the Wicked Witch of the West tell one a deep truth about oneself, imbuing life with the mythic.

Like the dream state experienced by Dorothy, Oz is a film that runs through the memory as much as it runs on the screen. The dreamlike quality of the film begins with the opening credits and becomes a dream state mise-en-scène when Dorothy collapses during the whirlwind flight to Oz and ends when Dorothy awakes back home on her bed in the farmhouse, with the Wizard/Professor Marvel peering through the windows disrupting the dream state narrative. The dreamlike state makes it easier for adults in the audience to confront what Rushdie sees as "the driving force of the film," which is the crushing "inadequacy of adults, even of good adults." In the face of the looming threat of Toto's death, Aunt Em and Uncle Henry lack the courage, heart, and brains, to stand up to Miss Gulch (who becomes the Wicked Witch). Dorothy's aunt and uncle's acquiescence to Miss Gulch's demands breaks Dorothy's heart and unleashes a

[1] Salman Rushdie, *The Wizard of Oz* (London: British Film Institute, 2019), 7.

whirlwind of emotions as she realizes that home is unsafe. As Dorothy runs away to recover Toto, they are dog are flung into a tumultuous storm where dreams, memory, and myth fold in upon each other. Dorothy's catch phrase of "there's no place like home" and her song "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" are emblematic examples of how dream, fantasy, and memory fold in upon each other. Dorothy imagines a safe home where she and Toto were protected, a world before Miss Gulch and tornados. She experiences the reality of Oz which others want her to remember only as a dream. In between memory and forgetting, dreaming and waking, myth and reality, rests the "American" cosmovision.[2]

The original book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum (1856-1919) and illustrated by W.W. Denslow (1956-1915) is a beloved classic childhood fairytale. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was published in 1900, which helped to give the Baum family financial stability and to establish L. Frank Baum as a household name. Baum had previously published *Mother Goose in Prose* (1897) and *Father Goose, His Book* (1899), the latter with illustrations by W.W. Denslow. The success of these books allowed Baum the stability to quit his jobs and focus on writing *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, which would be illustrated by Denslow. Father Goose's success as a best-selling children's book gave Baum a brush with fame and encouraged him to publish his next book.[3] The book would go on to be the foundation of an entire universe set in the land of Oz. Baum would go on to write thirteen sequels, in addition to numerous collections of short stories and plays. His estate continued to publish his writing posthumously and licensed continuing adaptations of his work. The book, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, launched an entire sprawling Oz universe that continued to expand even after Baum's passing. The emerald, so to speak, of this universe is to be found in the 1939 technicolor film *The Wizard*

[2] Ibid., 4.
[3] C.f. Riley, *Oz and Beyond: The Fantasy World of L. Frank Baum*.

of Oz, directed by Victor Fleming, and starring Judy Garland as Dorothy. Adapting children's books to the Silver Screen was not new for Hollywood in the 1930s; however, fantasy films, had generally struggled at the box office. As a genre, fantasy seemed out of synch with the stark realities that audiences faced -- for example: significant social tensions, such as the Great Depression, the rise of fascism, the rise of Nazism, and concerns about national unrest. In 1939, cinema occupied a paradoxical space where it both had no need for, and yet every need of, a messiah.

The screenwriter's adaptation of Baum's literary work embraces the fantasy-based genre elements of the original in a way that highlights their fantastical power.[4] At its heart, the cinematic treatment of the *Wizard of Oz* tells a story of awe and wonder. Ultimately, the fantastical, magical, and fantasy elements of Oz turn out to be precisely what audiences of this era need. However, its full high fantasy adaptation into film was still a bit too much for a world that struggles with so much bleakness and disenchantment. In the film, it is revealed that the fantastical world of Oz is just the dream of a young girl who has been knocked unconscious by a tornado. The film brackets Oz in technicolor between sepia-toned scenes of a much gloomier reality.[5]

In this chapter, I will argue that by situating *The Wizard of Oz* within a chiasmus where the fantastical power of the messianic spirals out of Oz's tornado and melts into a dream, *The Wizard of Oz* provides a counterpart to the previous market messianism of Barton; to the messianic regime of Superman; and to the fetishized messianic of fundamentalism. Through the

[4] Screenwriters Noel Langley, Florence Ryerson, Edgar Allan Woolf along with many other uncredited writers worked on the film. Victor Fleming, *The Wizard of Oz*, DVD (Burbank, CA: Warner Video, 1939), https://catalog.afi.com/Film/7892-THE-WIZARDOFOZ?sid=ad30b37d-6d0a-45ff-a5d2-1e64537cf9b1&sr=89.74068&cp=1&pos=0.

[5] Michael Patrick Hearn, "Preface and Introduction to The Annotated Wizard of Oz," in *The Annotated Wizard of Oz: The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (New York; London: Norton, 2000), xi–ci; Katharine M. Rogers, L. *Frank Baum: Creator of Oz* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013); Evan I. Schwartz, *Finding Oz: How L. Frank Baum Discovered the Great American Story* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), http://site.ebrary.com/id/10463315.

embrace of new and old technology, *The Wizard of Oz* presents the once unrealized possibility of a technicolor messianism, one that could disrupt sepia-toned Kansas. Kansas here represents rural, quotidian existence one with slightly more life and color than the book's joyless and gray Kansas. With *The Wizard of Oz,* the messianic idea in America acquires its iconic technicolor, hyper-saturated, and campy flair. *The Wizard of Oz* successfully illustrates that messianism in the U.S. is reduced to nothing more than an aesthetic and the dream of or hope for salvation; messianism requires power and authority. The film takes an iconic "American" myth and updates this myth to extract and embrace Oz as part of the "American" cosmovision.[6]

The larger "Oz universe" is comprised of the numerous books, plays, and films written by L. Frank Baum and the extensions of this universe by other writers, playwrights, and filmmakers. The expansive and freewheeling nature of the Oz illustrates how L. Frank Baum's book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) quickly became a contribution to the country's mythology. The 1939 film, *The Wizard of Oz* remains the most iconographic and influential representation of Oz, a vital part of the "American" cosmovision. As I introduced him in the preface, Carrasco defines *cosmovision* as "a world view that is charged with religious forces, stories, divinities, and ancestors who create the world and assist in its maintenance and renewal."[7] As a cosmovision, *The Wizard of Oz* film provides a distinctively "American" *mythopoesis*. The witches, the wizard, and Dorothy (especially Judy Garland's Dorothy) serve as divine emissaries. The collective of Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodsman, the Cowardly Lion, and Toto are the ancestors. The cosmovision is renewed and maintained through fandom and devotion (scholars included). As a cosmovision saturated in U.S. history, religion, and politics, the Oz universe raises the question of what kind of messianic figures a culture or society invests in and, for that

[6] Davíd Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2014), 15.
[7] Carrasco, 15.

matter, should invest in. Among the many facets of cosmovision, is the question of liberation, which I foreground here.

The cosmovision of *The Wizard of Oz* embraces the messianic in all of its high fantasy, catastrophic-utopianism, and authoritarian-populism, thus reclaiming the messianic and offering a new encounter with it. The film reveals that it is the Wizard who is the true power of the story. Dorothy's arrival challenges the Wizard's populist authoritarian control, so he sends Dorothy on a quest to kill the Wicked Witch of the West, whose power and authority threaten the Wizard's power and authority. If the Wicked Witch kills Dorothy, or if Dorothy kills the Wicked Witch, either way the Wizard loses a rival. Because he fears what he cannot control, he seems surprised when Dorothy kills the witch. In killing her nemesis, Dorothy saves Oz, through the help of her interspecies collective: the Scarecrow, Tin Man, the Cowardly Lion, and Toto, her dog. From the time that Dorothy enters Oz until she leaves, the film suggests that Dorothy might play the role of the reluctant messiah. This is not to say that Dorothy is messianic so much as that she performs cinematic Camp: she collects followers, casts down the Wicked Witches, and takes people on a quest to find what they need to be their best selves. But Dorothy never embraces the messianic role or the potentially liberative elements of Oz. Instead she remains consistently focused on returning home Dorothy never fully embraces her power and authority, during her time in Oz. She prefers home over Oz, and that's the problem.

Messianic Populism in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900)

The book, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, serves as a discreet myth itself and part of the larger mythic "Oz universe" and participates in the larger authority structure of the "American" cosmovision. The more authorial power Baum tried to exert over the Oz universe, the less people engaged with those materials, underscoring how Baum's vision differed so greatly from the

general public's interests. He loved vaudeville, minstrel shows, and carnivalesque absurdity, but his passions did not translate well to either the stage or to silent film. However, people loved the high fantasy and mythological elements of his story. The Oz sequels did not sell as well as the original book, and the plays/musicals, and his L. Frank Baum-produced silent films were all critically panned and commercial flops. The plays/musicals were absurdist in scope and vaudevillian in nature; each featured numerous minstrel performers and performances. They also contained plotlines and characters neither in the original book nor in its sequels, along with pop cultural jokes and references. Despite Baum's constant tampering with his own creation, the Oz universe endured well after his death thanks to the success of Victor Fleming's 1939 recuperative film, *The Wizard of Oz*. The technicolor and the songwriting genius of Yip Harburg in Fleming's film provided Oz fans with a visual and cinematic experience, one that not even Baum himself could provide.

Famously, historian Henry Littlefield argued that L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* serves as an allegory for Populism (with a capital "P"), defined as the political movement that was part of the socio-cultural milieu in which Baum was writing. Others also see lower case populist themes at play in Baum's work, or in other words, a more generic focus on the people versus the elites within the book.[8] Published in 1900, Baum's story reflects some of the important leitmotifs of the nation as it both looks backwards to the nineteenth century and also forwards to the twentieth century. Following Martin Gardiner and Russel B. Nye, Littlefield argues that during Baum's time living in South Dakota, he became aware of the growing tensions between rural agrarian life and the lure of the big city. Also, during this time, Baum very likely encounters Populist party organizers and sees the importance of their policies for farmers. Then again when his family moved to Chicago in 1891, Baum likely encountered the Populist Party

[8] Littlefield, "The Wizard of Oz."

once more.[9] In Littlefield's populist-framed interpretation, Dorothy's unhappy and bleak existence on a sad gray Kansas farm, where she and her Aunt and Uncle have just enough to get by, highlights the material plight of farmers in the West.[10] Landing in Oz, Dorothy encounters the Munchkins, who are enslaved by the Wicked Witch of the East and the Tin Man who works with little rest for the Witch. Each time the Tin Man is injured chopping wood, the Wicked Witch of the East replaces more and more of his body with tin to keep him working hard.[11] Littlefield interprets both of these narrative elements as revealing populist subcurrents, writing "here is a Populist view of evil Eastern influences on honest labor which could hardly be more pointed."[12] These narrative elements also highlight the exploitation faced by Oz residents and point towards the book, as well as towards Baum's racism as illustrated by historian Robin Bernstein, in *Racial Innocence*, which I will discuss in detail in the next section.[13]

Moving beyond Populism, Littlefield sees *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* as examining the burgeoning rural versus urban divide in the United States. Additionally, he also perceives the text as a coded morality tale about the triumph of "goodness and innocence" over "evil and delusion."[14] Littlefield sees the Emerald City as being analogous to other major metropolitan centers of the era: beautiful from a distance, but evil and delusional when viewed up close. But Dorothy and company's irrepressible optimism ensure that goodness and innocence triumph over evil and delusion, which identifies the Oz universe, for Littlefield, as deeply "American—and Midwestern."

---

[9] Ibid., 47–49.
[10] Littlefield, "The Wizard of Oz," 48–49.
[11] L. Frank Baum Denslow, W. W., *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Orinda, CA: Sea Wolf Press, 2019), 1–42.
[12] Littlefield, "The Wizard of Oz," 52.
[13] Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood and Race from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 146–93.
[14] Ibid.

Littlefield's essay, while widely criticized, still enjoys wide circulation because it hits upon an important issue: the political indeterminacy of Oz.[15] Perhaps Baum's Oz retains traces of Populism/populism along with its broader references to political and cultural struggles. As Martin Gardner, "The Royal Historian of Oz," and historian Russel B. Nye suggest in *The Wizard of Oz and Who He Was*, while Baum's *oeuvre* does reflect on U.S. politics and culture, its commentary should not be overdetermined.[16] For Nye, the quintessential "American" elements of politics and culture are as much a reflection of its socio-cultural milieu as are its utopian themes like love, kindness, harmony, and friendship.[17] Nye writes:

> Baum's books have an indigenous [*sic*] flavor, reflecting American attitudes and ideals with as much accuracy and validity as the English classics reflected England's. The virtues of Oz are the homely American virtues of family love, friendliness for the stranger, sympathy for the underdog, practicality and common sense in facing life, reliance on one's self for solutions to one's problems.[18]

Literature scholars Michael O. Riley and Jack Zipes focus their analysis on Baum's writing as critiquing the excesses of the Gilded Age, expressing concern about the plight of farmers, and most importantly offering a fantastical escapist utopia.[19] For Riley and Zipes, the Land of Oz represents a class-less social utopia, a point which they believe becomes clearer in the sequels.[20]

Taking a more balanced approach than Littlefield, Americanist Fred Erisman sees *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* as reifying some of the problems not only of Populism but also of Progressivism. Erisman sees in Baum's work a "progressivism, … grounded in the traditional

---

[15] Littlefield, "The Wizard of Oz," 53–58.
[16] Russel B. Nye, "An Appreciation," in *The Wizard of Oz and Who He Was*, ed. Russel B. Nye and Martin Gardner (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), 1–18; Martin Gardner, "The Royal Historian of Oz," in *The Wizard of Oz and Who He Was*, ed. Martin Gardner and Russel B. Nye (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), 19–46; Maurice Hungiville, "Introduction," in *The Wizard of Oz and Who He Was*, ed. Martin Gardner and Russel B. Nye (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), ix–xvi.
[17] Nye, "An Appreciation," 10–18.
[18] Ibid., 15. Considering Baum's anti-Indigenous sentiments, the misuse of the word indigenous here is particularly injudicious.
[19] Michael O. Riley, *Oz and beyond: The Fantasy World of L. Frank Baum* (Lawrence, K.S.: University Press of Kansas, 1998), xi, 9; Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, 126–32.
[20] Riley, *Oz and Beyond*, 9; Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, 128–34.

ideals of an unsophisticated America."[21] Both Baum and progressives are enjoying the benefits of urbanization and big city life while gazing nostalgically at rural agrarian societies. Likewise both Baum and progressives have a naively optimistic view about the industrial and technological future.[22] While Erisman sees elements of the story of progressivism's idealism in the works of Baum, he does not go so far as to suggest that the Oz universe is a protracted "parable of progressive reform idealism."[23] The populism of the early twentieth century flourishes as people feel discarded and left behind by the Gilded age.[24] In the decades following the publication of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, the book continued to resonate with children and adults alike, but especially those living in metropolises like New York and also those who had remained behind to work the family farm. Each of these groups "saw themselves as innocent victims of the urban and industrial world. Their suffering was due to a conspiracy of eastern financiers and capitalists."[25]

Perhaps the biggest problem with the symbolic economic and political readings of the book is the author himself. Baum's interest in politics would wax and wane. He followed politicians and topics that were interesting to him in a meandering fashion. Highlighting Baum's contradictions, political scientist Gretchen Ritter points out that Baum supported women's suffrage while also supporting the denial of suffrage to Native Americans who became U.S. citizens.[26] Baum's interests would shift since he was not so much a deeply political man but a showman who followed the stage lights. He liked politicians who had charisma, rhetorical

[21] Fred Erisman, "L. Frank Baum and the Progressive Dilemma," *American Quarterly 20*, no. 3 (1968): 616, https://doi.org/10.2307/2711021.
[22] Ibid.; Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (Vintage Books: New York, 1955), 139–42.
[23] Erisman, "L. Frank Baum and the Progressive Dilemma," 622.
[24] Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, 507–8.
[25] Nathanson, *Over the Rainbow*, 167.
[26] Ritter, 179n7.

flourish, and who could capture his imagination and brief attention.[27] As Ranjit Dighe highlights, as the century wears on, Baum would become less political and more cynical about politics. Perhaps tempering the cynicism, a bit, Dighe suggests that for Baum "winning a campaign [was] 'child's play,' which seems an adept description of how Baum felt about politics in general."[28] Perhaps one can see the nascent beginnings of Baum's cynicism about politics in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and the rest of the Oz books; those in charge like the wizards and witches are hucksters and humbugs.

Historian Douglas Horlock reminds scholars that allegory and symbolism are in a "minor key," and that the book is a fairytale.[29] Thus the most compelling approach to reading *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is to read it not as a mere allegory but as myth. His story became part of the mythological cultural tapestry of the United States. Historian of religion Bruce Lincoln argues that "whenever someone calls something a 'myth,' powerful—and highly consequential—assertions are being made about its relative level of validity and authority vis-à-vis other sots of discourse."[30] Overdetermined, politically symbolic, and allegorical readings demythologize the fairytale. There are elements of populism, political, and economic elements. However perhaps these are refractions of US history and politics through the lenses of money, color, and geography, and not a secret code.[31] Scholars like Alissa Burger, Paul Nathanson, Jack Zipes agree *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* provides a new mythology for the United States.[32]

---

[27] Nye, "An Appreciation," 1–18; Gardner, 19-46.
[28] Dighe, 8n16.
[29] Douglas Horlock, "The Wonderful Land of Oz," *Historian*, no. 68 (Winter 2000): 4.
[30] Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), ix.
[31] Littlefield, "The Wizard of Oz"; Hugh Rockoff, "The 'Wizard of Oz' as a Monetary Allegory," *Journal of Political Economy* 98, no. 4 (1990): 739–60; Ranjit S. Dighe, *The Historian's Wizard of Oz: Reading L. Frank Baum's Classic as a Political and Monetary Allegory* (Westport, C.T.: Praeger, 2002); Gretchen Ritter, "Silver Slippers and a Golden Cap: L. Frank Baum's 'The Wonderful Wizard of Oz' and Historical Memory in American Politics," *Journal of American Studies* 31, no. 2 (1997): 171–202.
[32] Alissa Burger, *The Wizard of Oz as American Myth: A Critical Study of Six Versions of the Story, 1900-2007* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2012); Paul Nathanson, *Over the Rainbow: The Wizard of Oz as a Secular Myth of America* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1991); Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

Zipes is convinced that "it is not by chance that the most notable and memorable American fairy tale was produced right at the end of the 19th century." Baum's fairytale emerges from the chrysalis of the Gilded Age and looks out upon "the gray bleakness of Kansas."[33] It is a myth filled with awe and wonder, one which reflects bourgeois social norms and morality, and the racism, sexism, and ableism of Baum and much of the rest of society. What the Grimm brothers did for Europe, Baum did for the United States.

For Nye, "beyond humor, or moral lessons, or adventure, the heart of the Oz books lies in the Land of Oz itself, which, as others have pointed out, is really an American Utopia."[34] The fundamental problem with trying to discern Baum's authorial intent and to use the book as a mirror on society is that one has to be able to discern and interpret what is being reflected in that mirror. All of these readings illustrate the deep investments that fans and scholars have in Oz. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* serves as a mirror reflecting the socio-cultural milieu in which it emerged. But the true meanings of the text will remain opaque because Baum was not writing allegory; he was creating a new mythology and folklore. He certainly succeeded in that respect. This level of investment further highlights how the Oz universe functions as a mythological space.

Racism in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and Its Sequels

Forgetting or more accurately ignoring the racism within the Oz universe is part of keeping the universe "fun" for white audiences. The racism goes into the memory hole. All is not well in the utopian merry old land of Oz. Ritter examines the text "as a window onto late nineteenth-century political culture and historical memory." She sees the text as a socio-cultural and political product that has elements of "political satire that was neither simply pro Populist

[33] Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, 32.
[34] Nye, "An Appreciation," 10.

nor pro-capitalist." By situating Baum within his socio-cultural milieu and comparing his text to other texts of the time, his politics and cultural values grow clearer, especially his anti-Indigeneity. The novel's Flying Monkeys reflect Baum's anti-Indigenous sentiment, also displayed in his South Dakota editorials which were written around the time of the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890.[35] Ritter highlights Baum's racism by situating *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and its sequels alongside Baum's journalism and various Oz books, especially *The Patchwork Girl of Oz.* Unfortunately, Baum was not as reflective about politics as one might wish considering that his wife, Maud Gage Baum, and his mother-in-law, Matilda Joslyn Gage, were suffragists and Gage was deeply invested in learning from the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.[36]

Baum's wife, Maud Gage Baum, and her mother, Matilda Joslyn Gage, were leaders in the women's rights movement. Matilda Joslyn Gage has been elided for far too long from histories of the suffragist movement, despite having been one of its more important leaders.[37] Both Baum's wife and mother-in-law pushed him to be more progressive with his earlier books. Later, his novels imagine the land of Oz as a matriarchy.[38] However, L. Frank Baum's books strongly correlate a woman's beauty and whiteness with her virtues: the more beautiful the woman, the more virtuous she is. In the books, the Wicked Witches are ugly and black whereas Glinda the Good Witch is white and therefore beautiful. Baum creates a monochromatic color-coded world, where identity and virtue are tied to gender and color.[39] As evidence, historian and screenwriter, Mark Evan Swartz, examines the artistic style of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*'s

---

[35] Ritter, "Silver Slippers and a Golden Cap."
[36] Sally Roesch-Wagner, "Dorothy Gage and Dorothy Gale," Blog, *Theosophical Society* (blog), n.d., https://www.theosophical.org/publications/quest-magazine/1580; Sally Roesch. Wagner, *The Wonderful Mother of Oz* (Fayetteville, NY: Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation, 2003); Sally Roesch. Wagner, *Matilda Joslyn Gage: She Who Holds the Sky* (Aberdeen, S.D.: Sky Carrier Press, 2002); Sally Roesch Wagner, *Sisters in Spirit: Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Influence on Early American Feminists*, 2001; Sally Roesch-Wagner, "Oral History as a Biographical Tool," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 2, no. 2 (1977): 87–92.
[37] Rogers, *L. Frank Baum: Creator of Oz*, 10–12.
[38] Cf book three of the series. L. Frank Baum, *Ozma of Oz: A Record of Her Adventures*. Illustrated by John R. Neill. (Chicago: Reilly & Britton, 1907).
[39] Ritter, "Silver Slippers and a Golden Cap," 202.

illustrator, W.W. Denslow. Denslow draws the Wicked Witch of the West in a blackface pastiche style, a style which reflects Baum's writing. When Dorothy melts the Wicked Witch of the West, Baum writes, "the Witch fell down in a brown, melted, shapeless mass and began to spread over the clean board of the kitchen floor."[40] As Gretchen Ritter and Robin Bernstein demonstrate, Baum had a deep and abiding obsession with slavery, minstrel shows, and his journalism trafficked in anti-Black and anti-Indigenous stereotypes. Both Ritter and Bernstein note that the more one engages with Baum's *oeuvre*, the clearer his obsessions with slavery, minstrel shows, and his anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity become.[41] Baum's and the illustrator's descriptions and depictions of the Flying Monkeys are part of a long literary and visual tradition of dehumanizing Indigenous peoples by portraying them as animals. The Flying Monkeys are red and are described as brutal savages, serving as a generic stand-in for Indigenous peoples of the Americas. Ritter writes, "the Flying Monkeys represent the plight (and threat) of Native Americans."[42] Race is thickly encoded throughout the Oz books through the descriptions and the illustrations.[43] The racism of the Oz universe does not end with the first book. It continues in the book's sequels, plays, and films made by Baum.

To build on Ritter's point would mean this. If a utopia is a space where social conflict is resolved, and that would include racism and sexism, then Oz does not deliver. For the land of Oz to work as a utopia it requires transforming one's memory into a "forgettery" and the more one learns about the socio-cultural and historical context of Oz the more the sins of omission proliferate. If Oz is utopian, it is one of omission which is in and of itself dystopian. Once more the conservative and reactionary elements are revealed. The world of Oz is quirky and campy.

[40] Ibid., 21; Cf. Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, 113.
[41] Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, 183fn88.
[42] Ritter, "Silver Slippers and a Golden Cap," 176.
[43] Ibid., 202.

But to enjoy Oz, one must bolt on their emerald goggles and never remove them inside the Emerald City, lest the illusion crumble. Viewing Oz requires looking through emerald tinted glasses which give the illusion of utopian vision.[44] Its reality is virtual at best, not actual.

Capitalizing on the success of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Baum wastes no time adapting the book for his first love, the stage. Baum chose to work with noted vaudevillian Fred R. Hamlin. Baum's choice of a vaudevillian director highlights the deep vaudevillian roots of the Land of Oz. The real spiritual sequels to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* are not the books in the series but Baum's plays and silent films. Also, about Oz, the plays and silent films portray madcap absurdism with occasional ham-fisted social commentary. The plays and films revel in Baum's lifelong obsession with circuses, vaudeville, and blackface minstrel shows. Baum loved carnivalesque caricatures especially of racialized others.[45] Racism and the vaudevillian of Oz are intertwined components of the "American" cosmovision.

As illustrated by legal scholar Annette Gordon-Reed's edited volume *Racism in America*, sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's *Racism without Racists*, and the disciplines of African American Studies, Native American Studies, and Asian-American Studies, and the lived experience of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) racism (in both individual and systemic forms) is woven into the fabric of America.[46] As an artform, vaudeville was refined in the United States. Some of its most iconic elements are the racist elements of blackface and minstrel shows. As Bernstein illustrates:

---

[44] In *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* when Dorothy and her companions visit the Emerald City, they are required to wear bolted on green goggles 24/7 lest they face the wrath of the Wizard. This moment serves as a powerful illustration of the illusory nature of Oz.

[45] Schwartz, *Finding Oz*, 24–27, 60; Mark Evan Swartz, Before the *Rainbow: L. Frank Baum's The Wonderful Wizard of Oz on Stage and Screen to 1939* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 57.

[46] Annette Gordon-Reed, ed., *Racism in America: A Reader* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674251687; Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, 5th ed. (Lanaham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

> Minstrelsy lingers, too, in contemporary adult culture (the structure of Saturday Night Live is roughly that of a minstrel show); but children's culture has a special ability to preserve (even as it distorts) and transmit (even as it fragments) the blackface mask and styles of movement, which persist not only in Raggedy Ann and the Scarecrow but also in the faces and gloved hands of Mickey Mouse and Bugs Bunny.[47]

In 1902, before any sequels to the book were released, *The Wizard of Oz: Fred R. Hamlin's Musical Extravaganza* debuted in Chicago, before moving to Broadway in 1903 and touring until 1911. The play was an absurdist mishmash of vaudeville, minstrel shows, and opera. Having little to do with the book, the play transforms Toto into a cow and cuts out The Wicked Witch of the West and some of the original plot. Despite these shortcomings, there are several iconic Oz moments which come from the play. The original cast of the stage production features a famous blackface duo, Fred Stone, (as the Scarecrow) and David Montgomery (as the Tin Woodsman). Stone was famous for his exaggerated caricatures of blackness demonstrated through his dancing. Stone's vaudevillian "wobbly-walk" also quickly established the iconic visual portrayal of the Scarecrow, so definitively that several decades later, in 1939, when he was preparing for the film role, Ray Bolger assumed that he would have to imitate Stone's "wobbly walk." It was not only through Stone and Montgomery's portrayals of the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodsman, but also through the story, songs, directing and other performances, that minstrel songs and blackface were significant elements of the play. Many of these elements made their way into the subsequent Oz books and into Victor Fleming's 1939 film.[48]

Embracing blackface and racialized caricatures, Baum hired John R. Neill to illustrate *The Marvelous Land of Oz*. Best known for his illustrations of *Little Black Sambo* (1899), Neill would incorporate problematically racialized caricatures into his illustrations for Baum.[49] The traces of blackface and minstrel elements continue not only through the books and plays but also

[47] Bernstein, 18-19.
[48] Bernstein, *Racial Innocence,* 161–62.
[49] Ibid., 66-67.

into the emerging silent films that Baum produces.[50] Baum's silent films embrace the amplified vaudevillian absurdism of the Broadway stage play, removing major characters like Toto and replacing them with absurdist and madcap characters like Imogene the Cow, whose only contribution is to further amplify the absurdism of it all. Like the play and book which inspired the 1939 film, Baum's silent films are highly fantastical and absurdist pieces of cinema. These silent films also maintain Stone's Scarecrow's "wobbly walk" style.[51] Due to the success and ubiquity of these racist elements, audiences would have encoded these associations with the characters of Scarecrow, the Tin Woodsman, and the Cowardly Lion styles and performances.

Examining the sequels written by Baum, Bernstein argues, "For Baum, slavery and freedom, thingness, and humanity are finite in quantity but tremulously volatile in quality: one always threatens to transform, topsy-turvy, into the other."[52] In Baum's plays and writings, slavery and freedom are certainly popular themes for him to explore briefly before the next madcap adventures. Characteristically Baum references serious topics and matters of great importance without any moral seriousness or deep engagement. When Baum presents an argument about racism and freedom, he often undermines his own arguments through his utilization of racist tropes like blackface and minstrel shows. Additionally, Baum's choice of collaborators, from actors to illustrators, reveals the joy and entertainment he found within racialized caricatures. [53] Having seen commercial success with an explicit incorporation of blackface and minstrel styles in the book (1913), the silent film version of *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* (1914) depicts an Africanized group of Indigenous peoples called the Jolly Tottenhots (*sic*).[54]

---

[50] David J. Hogan, *The Wizard of Oz FAQ: All That's Left to Know about Life According to Oz* (Milwaukee: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, An Imprint of Hal Leonard Corporation, 2014), 31–32.
[51] Swartz, *Before the Rainbow*, x.
[52] Ibid., 183.
[53] Bernstein, *Racial Innocence,* 66-67.
[54] L. Frank Baum, *The Patchwork Girl of Oz, Book, Whole* (Illinois: Reilly & Britton, 1913), 244, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044011809845; Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, 166.

The title character, *The Patchwork Girl*, aka Scraps, was performed in blackface style by Pierre Couderc. Along with the pejoratively named Indigenous peoples, Couderc's performance as Scraps, Herbert Glennon's Scarecrow continues in the racist caricature tradition and preserves Fred Stone's Scarecrow's iconic "Wobbly Walk."[55]

In 1939, Victor Fleming's *The Wizard of Oz* film enters this very socio-cultural milieu steeped in vaudevillian Camp, minstrel shows, and blackface —one in which Baum's books, plays, and silent films play a significant role in reifying these tropes. The visual and aural elements of *The Wizard of Oz* must be interpreted within their historical/cultural frame and with regards to the prior source material they are drawing upon. Not only were many of the writers, cast, and directors familiar with Baum's *oeuvre* but some of the cast and crew also got their start in vaudeville and minstrel shows. For example, the Tin Man (played by Jack Haley), the Cowardly Lion (played by Bert Lahr), and Glinda the Good Witch (played by Billie Burke), were all vaudevillians. As a young man, Ray Bolger was inspired to become a vaudevillian after watching Fred Stone's performance as the Scarecrow on stage. When Bolger was cast in the film, he successfully lobbied to play the Scarecrow. Once in the role, Bolger drew upon his icon Stone's "wobbly walk" for his interpretation of the Scarecrow character.[56]

The homage to vaudeville does not stop with the visual but is also part of the aural landscape of the film. To give one important example, anticipating being granted courage by the Wizard, Bert Lahr, as the Cowardly Lion, sings, "If I Were King of the Forest" (written by E.Y. Harburg). The penultimate verse is, "Courage! What makes the Hottentot [*sic*] so hot? / What

[55] Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, 163–65. For a cast list see, AFI, "The Patchwork Girl of Oz," *AFI Catalog of Feature Films The First 100 Years (1893-1993)* (blog), n.d., http://catalog.afi.com/Film/16525-THE-PATCHWORKGIRLOFOZ?sid=ab33cef8-ec28-43ca-9bbe-f512130e78ee&sr=11.957068&cp=1&pos=0.
[56] Holly Van Leuven, *Ray Bolger: More than a Scarecrow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 10–12, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190639044.001.0001.

puts the "ape" in apricot? / What have they got that I ain't got?" Here this verse explicitly relies on racist stereotypes of Sarah Baartman.

Sarah Baartman, a.k.a. "the Hottentot Venus," was an indigenous African Khoikhoi woman born roughly in the late 1770s to 1780's, dying young in 1815. She spent most of her life touring Europe and North America in what Janell Hobson, Raymond Corbey, and Carol Henderson call "ethnographic showcases."[57] Baartman was taken from her home and paraded in these showcases because under colonialism and enslavement her body was seen as an object of curiosity for white audiences. She was "groped, leered, and prodded" by a white public who was obsessed with her body in general and her large buttocks in particular.[58] As biographer Rachel Holmes notes, Baartman was seen as beautiful, a living black Venus whose body was to be envied and studied.[59] Upon Baartman's death, a cast was made of her body, and she was dissected with her genitals, brain, and skeleton preserved. These parts of her body were displayed in France until 1974, yet her body was not interred in her native homeland (which would now be South Africa) until 2002.[60] As Henderson argues, Baartman as the "Hottentot Venus" became part of the "mythos" of the dominant culture's anti-Blackness. She writes, "In this operating system, myths and images become the operating tools (the structural scaffolding if you will) of oppressive tactics that control how histories are recorded, remembered—how people are seen and/or not seen—humanized, dehumanized."[61] Baartman becomes an iconic part of the mythos and as such is rendered an object, not a person. Stripped of personhood, she becomes a

---

[57] Cf. Carol E. Henderson, "AKA: Sarah Baartman, The Hottentot Venus, and Black Women's Identity," *Women's Studies* 43, no. 7 (October 3, 2014): 946–59, https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2014.938191; Janell Hobson., *Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture* (Routledge, 2018); Raymond Corbey, "Ethnographic Showcases, 1870–1930," *Cultural Anthropology* 8, no. 3 (August 1, 1993): 338–69, https://doi.org/10.1525/can.1993.8.3.02a00040.
[58] Henderson, "AKA: Sarah Baartman, The Hottentot Venus, and Black Women's Identity," 948.
[59] For more on Sarah Baartman see: Rachel Holmes, *The Hottentot Venus: The Life and Death of Saartjie Baartman; Born 1789 - Buried 2002* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008); Deborah Willis, ed., "Introduction: The Notion of Venus," in *Black Venus 2010 They Called Her "Hottentot"* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 3–14.
[60] Justin Parkinson, "The Significance of Sarah Baartman," *BBC Magazine*, January 7, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35240987.
[61] Henderson, "AKA: Sarah Baartman, The Hottentot Venus, and Black Women's Identity," 949.

symbol and signifier within *The Wizard of Oz* film. The film's mention of Baartman by her stage name refracts the racism of then-contemporary American culture and Baum's caricature and obsession with her.[62]

Despite the beauty and the glamour of the film's technicolor, its racism and sexism shine through just as vividly. The visual and aural landscapes work together to not only refract but also to encode the socio-cultural environment from which they emerge. Image, icon, and imagination work together within the Oz universe to create a continuous through line of cultural caricature and distortion -- one that is rooted in the racism and sexism of not only its progenitor but also of the larger white society. Bernstein underscores this point by illustrating how "the idea of childhood innocence and the bodies of living children have historically mystified racial ideology by hiding it in plain sight. Thus, blackface imagery, which has long been banished from polite society, thrives under the light cover of children's culture and its penumbra of racial innocence."[63] Here in the shaded corners of technicolor lurks the ever-present reality that the Oz universe and its iconic film refract society and culture back to the viewer through a vaudevillian and carnival fun house mirror. In the Oz universe, caricature is deployed to elide the insidiousness of the racism and sexism lurking within this world. These evils will go unvanquished.

Clarifying the ambiguity between the bleakness of Kansas as home, the utopianism of Oz and the surrealist dreamlike quality of the film, Rushdie is correct that the primary tension of the film is between two dreams and desires of utopian "no places" that do not exist, neither at "home" nor "elsewhere." The former is a bleak reactionary dream to return "home" to an imagined agrarianism, a kinder, simpler, and more "authentic" way of life that lacks the diversity

[62] Baum mentions her frequently in the Oz books, plays, and silent films.
[63] Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood and Race from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 19.

and complexity of the Emerald City. As Rushdie notes, the film valorizes Kansas as home using safe, simple geometric shapes that emphasize safety and stability. Elsewhere as in Oz, twisty, curvy, asymmetrical lines and shapes convey danger and mystery. Evil is "twisty, irregular, and misshapen." Even as Oz is presented as a lush verdant technicolor paradise, the viewer knows that everything is not right and that one cannot remain in a land beset by witches and wizards.

To this I would only add that the twin dreams of home and elsewhere tear through the film like the tornado which transports Dorothy. It is this chaotic tension which provides the dreamlike and surrealist quality to Oz and the film. The vibrant technicolor future of cinema is bookended by the teleological bleakness and despair of the inevitable return home. Viewers know that the return to Kansas is impossible and potentially deadly for Black and Indigenous peoples. Additionally, migrants and refugees like Rushdie know that ethnonationalists visions of "home" are never safe.

Likewise, for the LGBTQIA fans of Oz the return home is a matter of life and death. Despite the films favoritism for home over elsewhere Rushdie finds within the reprise of "Over the rainbow" a yearning to still be over the rainbow and remain elsewhere.

> In its most potent emotional moment this is unarguably a film about the joys of going away, of leaving the greyness and entering the colour, of making a new life in 'the place where there isn't any trouble'. 'Over the Rainbow' is, or ought to be, the anthem of all the world's migrants, all those who go in search of the place where 'the dreams that you dare to dream really do come true'. It is a celebration of Escape, a grand paean to the uprooted self, a hymn – the hymn – to Elsewhere.[64]

In Garland's singing Rushdie hears a yearning and longing for that precious escape to elsewhere. However, the reality for Dorothy is far different. She returns home to a world that denies her insistence that Oz is real and tells her that it was a dream all while demanding from her the affirmation that life in Kansas is so exceptional that it far exceeds all other possibilities.

[64] Ibid, 23.

Emerging from a book written during the Gilded Age, the film version of *The Wizard of Oz* explores magic, technology, and urbanization. Dorothy travels to a magical land with an enchanting Emerald City. She begins her sojourn among the Munchkins in their thriving and colorful town located far away from the technological utopia of Oz, which is run by the great and powerful wizard.[65] Nathanson writes, "*The Wizard (of Oz)* is about Dorothy's passage from Kansas, through Oz (growing up), and back to Kansas (going home)." Using a psychological approach, Nathanson sees the trajectory of Dorothy in the film as being rooted "in the unconscious development of individuals." Channeling historian of religion Mircea Eliade's *The Sacred and Profane* and *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Nathanson suggests that this kind of psychology also happens on a collective national level; he sees that "the nation passes from utopia, through history ("growing up"), and back to utopia ("going home").[66] History is thus a passage from the agrarian order and harmony of antebellum America, through history, and then back to the agrarian order and harmony of millennial America." Here millennial America harkens back to the millenarian apocalyptic movements which are pointing out the dystopia around them and saying the end is (hopefully) coming soon. The appeal of such millennial movements resides in the fact that they are not romanticizing breadlines. [67] Historian Michael O'Neal Riley agrees that the 1939 film retains the mythical and fairytale elements of its source material.[68]

"No Place Like Home"

For those who wish to read Dorothy as a messianic figure or an anti-messianic messianic figure, a problem quickly emerges in the film's indeterminacy, not only about Dorothy but also

[65] Nathanson, *Over the Rainbow*, 180–82.
[66] Ibid.; Cf. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard Trask (New York: Harvest, 1987); Mircea Eliade, *Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).
[67] Nathanson, *Over the Rainbow*, 180.
[68] Michael O. Riley, *Oz and beyond: The Fantasy World of L. Frank Baum* (Lawrence, K.S..: University Press of Kansas, 1998).

the film's larger message. As previously noted, the film oscillates between two dreams: the dream of a life over the rainbow and the dream of the good life at home. Both leaving and returning are catastrophic. To leave requires a tornado of emotion and crisis. To return requires technological achievements or magical slippers. Whether coming or going, Dorothy remains stuck insisting that she must return home or that her experiences are real and were not just a dream. All these challenges suggest to Rushdie that Dorothy is a mythical archetype. An empty container one meant to carry the viewer and be filed in by the film as needed.[69] As an archetype, Dorothy exists for readers to find themselves within the story and to fill in the half-empty portrait of the young heroine with elements of their own selves.

Rushdie complains "against the scriptwriters, and the sentimental moralising [*sic*] of the entire Hollywood studio system. '*It wasn't a dream, it was a place*,' she cries piteously. '*A real, truly live place! Doesn't anyone believe me?* '" Here in Dorothy's defiance and insistence that Oz is real, Rushdie finds himself as Dorothy. For Rushdie, the iconoclastic migrant, returning home is impossible. For him, "There's no place like home" is a disavowal of the entire Oz experience. It is a conservative denial of the reality and necessity of migration, immigration, and of refugees fleeing from violence. Reading the film against itself, Rushdie suggests that "the real secret of the ruby slippers is not that 'there's no place like home' but rather that there is no longer any such place *as* home."[70] For him, home and Oz are both fantasies, mere mental images of safety and support. Home becomes the place that one makes inside oneself rather than the locale of one's birth. Home is the house that is carried with us through the tornadoes and into our utopian spaces, where we find our chosen families. Kansas is also a no-place, a negated space. Unlike

[69] Rushdie, 12.
[70] Ibid., 53-54.

Kansas, Oz is a dynamic and indeterminate utopia that is always everywhere and nowhere at once. The yellow brick road always spirals outward.

The film's oscillation between utopian, visionary, and moralizing fiction refracts a tendency that Alfred Kazin sees in the "American" fiction tradition which had developed in the 1890s to 1930s. Kazin, like Rushdie, resents naturalism and the reification of the rural over the urban. Writing in the 1940s (though looking at the 1930s), Kazin skewers the same literary tradition he just defined:

> Yes, the American writer had certainly come of age; but if one looked carefully into this violent naturalism which slick Broadway reporters and proletarian novelists now adopted with the same half-naive, half-cynical fatalism, a naturalism that embodied the discovery of Hollywood as well as the docks and the logging camps, the tabloid murder along with the sharecroppers, he seemed almost overripe.[71]

Following Kazin, what Rushdie might be reacting to is the "American" cosmovision as it is represented through the fiction of the era. Thus, *The Wizard of Oz* reveals the humbuggery of big city life while relishing in the naïve yet cynical (and for Rushdie, fatal) naturalism. Kansas becomes a singular and unique place; there is no place like life on the farm, even though that life may be filled with dog murderers and chaotic tornados. There is a cruel irony that as the U.S. was in the midst of a great depression with rising anti-immigrant, anti-Jewish, anti-LGBTQ, and racism in the U.S. the film recommends staying home. For many during that time and perhaps even still that message could be fatal. Perhaps rightly, Rushdie is concerned for the many people who are unsafe in their homes watching a film that tells them yes there is a utopia "Somewhere over the rainbow" but perhaps home is better. Thus, the refrain and conclusion of the film feel naïve and cynical for Rushdie. Remaining on the farm in Kansas and not feeling for a better life

[71] Alfred. Kazin, *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature. With a Preface to The Fiftieth Anniversary Edition*, 3rd Harvest edition (San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1995).

can have fatal consequences, especially for those who suffer under kyriarchal oppression in their homes and homelands.

In my view argued here, the ultimate messianic power rests with the Wizard's technological power. The Wizard is revealed to be a humbug pretending to have harnessed the magic and power of women. However, his power is precisely the power of technological humbuggery. He pretends to harness women's magical power, but he is all smoke and mirrors. He uses technology to create illusions and to control the populace of The Emerald City. The Wizard is the literal gatekeeper, surveilling all who come to the city. He grants Dorothy and her collective admission. He continues his surveillance regime as the (only?) carriage driver, escorting them around the city. In the city, they experience urban technological marvels like "The Wash and Brush Up." The Wizard once more exerts his power as the guard, but he is literally guarding himself. Once the travelers are let into his inner sanctum, he seeks to intimidate them with orange smoke and fire (which is the signature symbol of the Wicked Witch of the West), along with his display of a terrifying visage. Even when Toto exposes him, forcing him to confess that he is indeed a humbug, he does not actually give up either his authority or his power; rather his authority to rule the city is transferred to the Scarecrow. The Wizard returns to Kansas via his hot air balloon. His technological power gives him authority to rule Oz and allows him to travel back to Kansas. Unlike Miss Gulch/the Wicked Witch, we see the Wizard once more in the final scene of the film. Now he has transformed into Professor Marvel --he walks up to the side of Dorothy's room and peers in through her window.

Against all surface appearance to the contrary, the Wizard of Oz is the messiah. He's the authoritarian who the people (the populace) invest in. His folksiness represents the full embrace of the vernacular folk-art tradition by messianism. Through a homespun coyness, he subtly and

uses his power to blend the catastrophic and utopian elements. In him Scholem's restorative and utopian catastrophic strands reach their fullest potential as they are blended forming one unified American messianic icon. A nostalgic desire for a past utopia is a quintessentially catastrophic impulse.

According to legend, the frocked coat worn by Professor Marvel/The Wizard was Frank Baum's own old coat.[72] While there is little merit to this legend, mythologically, the jacket becomes a holy relic, transubstantiating The Wizard of Oz/Professor Morgan into the author/creator himself. This myth further illustrates how the ultimate source of power is the author himself, L. Frank Baum. The sly old man stands at the windowsill exercising his narrative power and escaping judgment. The Wizard/Professor Morgan would then be the narrative manifestation of L. Frank Baum himself. After all, both the Wizard and Baum told a story that quickly got away from themselves. In their quest for money, fame, and authority, the Wizard of OZ/Professor Morgan and L. Frank Baum are about something more powerful than themselves. They speak to the messianic idea in America. The messianic impulse never really goes away; it just hides behind the curtain or slips on a familiar coat.

Cinematic Messianism and Camp in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939)

In the 1920s and 1930s, Alfred Kazin sees a distinctively "American" literary tradition being established and exported globally. This tradition uses fiction to tell the truth about oneself and to plumb the depths of human finitude. For Kazin, this vernacular tradition is quintessentially modern, steeped in the triumphalism of the 1920s, the despair of the 1930s, and the "spectacle of successive creativity" of artistic and technology achievement. Kazin argues, "The period decisively turned our writers from 'the last of the provincials' into the desperately

[72] Rushdie, 13 and 43.

sophisticated, spiritually rootless satirists and elegists."[73] While Nathanson sees *The Wizard of Oz* as shrugging off Puritanism for secularism, following Kazin, I argue that the film instead reflects the already waning influence of a particular Protestant influence over the United States. In its place emerges a spiritually hollowed out and rootless, a generalized Christianity. One where the signs, symbols, and significations that historically connect mental images and ideas to theological dicta instead become the markers of a mass-marketed Christianity. In this way, *The Wizard of Oz* is not a secular myth but instead a spiritually hollow mythologization of messianism, sutured from the weight of the messianic tradition. Due to the film's indeterminacy and inability to situate itself—within either utopian fiction or visionary fiction, within reality or surreality, within naturalism or urbanism—it oscillates between categorizations to asking someone, anyone, to imbue the film with a "modern spirit" and "modern hope," to borrow phrases from Kazin.[74]

Over determinate in terms of content, what I am calling "cinematic messianism" contains both "modern spirit" and "modern hope." Film audiences respond to the film by filling the hollow characters not only with overdetermined and symbolic readings; they also project themselves into the film. One can find hope and/or themselves in Dorothy and/or her friends. Or one can imagine being whisked away to Oz and making a life for oneself in the Emerald City. Perhaps one ignores the constant refrain that "there is no place like home," or one imagines a new home in Oz or somewhere else. The vibrant, hyper-saturated and colorful world has almost irrepressible allure that is at the heart of cinematic messianism, which is the aura of something more suspended on the screen. As empty containers, the characters provide a Campy costume in

[73] Kazin, xvii.
[74] Ibid, xvi-xx.

which one can play. Embracing the vaudevillian nature of the screenplay, audiences begin to play with the film by embracing the modern spirit and making it their own.[75]

Susan Sontag in her work "Notes on 'Camp'" recasts cinematic messianism in the "American" cosmovision as the shift away from naturalism to artifice. Camp is an aesthetic sensibility in popular art which she associates with "homosexual irony," not "Jewish seriousness." With roots in Baroque and Art Nouveau, Camp places the emphasis on aestheticism and style over content. For Sontag, "Camp is its love of the unnatural: of the artifice and exaggeration."[76] She posits a relationship between the "high-spiritedness" of film and Camp and in doing so illustrates the "Americanization" of messianism in comic books, advertisements, and on the silver screen. "Camp sees everything in quotation marks…To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a Role."[77] Camp in cinematic messianism invites one to play the role, to imitate a messiah, if only for a moment. Not "morally serious," the alluring artifice of messianism distracts viewers from the powerful machinations occurring behind the curtain.

Sontag's essay underscores the seriousness of imitation and devotion to an icon. Sontag's essay takes its inspiration from Christopher Isherwood's *The World in the Evening* and its brief gloss on Camp. If, as Isherwood suggest, "Baroque art is Camp about religion" and "ballet is Camp about love," then I would argue that *The Wizard of Oz* is Camp about messianism. To become Dorothy is to explore Camp within the liminality of the film. In this way, *The Wizard of Oz* is Camp about religion, love, hope, and messianism. Inhabiting the cinematic character even for a moment grants one access to the aura of the modern spirit

[75] Ibid.
[76] Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" in *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1990), 274.
[77] Ibid, 276, 280.

allowing one to reenchant the world with a sense of religious and mythic power, just for a moment. However, the artifice of Camp in cinematic messianism glitches each time Dorothy "utters there's no place like home" and it collapses when Dorothy returns home.[78]

Sontag, sees in Camp a "love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration."[79] Building on Sontag's analysis, film critic Richard Dyer argues that the film is Camp, Judy Garland as Dorothy is Camp, and Judy Garland, the diva, is the very essence of Camp.[80] Camp is an "unmistakably modern" "sensibility" and "love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration. And Camp is esoteric—something of a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques."[81] The film has all the trappings of Camp; it is modern, earnest, naïve, and it has an aesthetic sensibility which relies on exaggeration. In these ways, *The Wizard of Oz* is Camp par-excellence[82] From the moment the title card rolls, everything about the film is artificial. Oz and the Emerald City are shot in technicolor, excessively stylized to the point of absurdity. Munchkinland serves as the orienting point to the disorienting world of Oz, which spirals out upon a yellow brick road. The *joie de vivre* of Oz overwhelms the threadbare content. Light and sound matter more than narrative. For Sontag, Camp is "disengaged," "depoliticized," and "apolitical," much like *The Wizard of Oz* and its antecedents. Even though Camp is disengaged, it still has "the power to transform experience."[83] No casual fandom is allowed. One must get carried away.

Camp preserves the rural and urban divide. There is no natural Camp for Sontag, who notes that "Rural Camp is still man-made, and most Campy objects are urban." Thus, Kansas

[78] Christopher Isherwood, *The World in the Evening* (London: Vintage Classic, 2012), 10.
[79] Following Sontag, I write Camp with a capital C. Sontag, "Notes on Camp," 275.
[80] Richard Dyer, "Judy Garland and Gay Men," in *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London: Routledge, 2011), 138; Staples, "Why Is Judy Garland the Ultimate Gay Icon?"
[81] Sontag, 275.
[82] Ibid., 277.
[83] Ibid., 279.

must be artificially produced on a soundstage and painted in sepia tones, with just as much artifice as the Emerald City. Both are "exaggerated," something is "off," the artifice concealing as much as it reveals. The element of Camp is only amplified as the film unfolds. The rural Camp of Kansas's "nature" appears only slightly more real than the "nature" Dorothy and Toto encounter on The Yellow Brick Road. Also, as the film progresses, the more earnest the dialogue becomes and thus the Campier the film becomes. Sontag asks, "When does travesty, impersonation, theatricality acquire the special flavor of Camp?"[84] When the house falls on your witch of a sister.

Camp serves as a caricature of the past. Normally for an object to pass from sentimental nostalgia to Campy sentimentality it takes time and distance for this transformation to occur; Sontag uses the example of the late 17th and early 18th century, which by the 20th century is sentimentality, seriousness, and nostalgia that are quintessentially Camp for her. *The Wizard of Oz* passes so quickly into Camp because of modern technology which speeds up the process of modern technology which speeds up the process. From the beginning, Oz is paradoxical, ironic, detached from the overdetermined historical readings of the book, the film embraces its colorful "pure artifice." Oz, like pure Camp, has always been naïve -- never intending to be Camp yet always winding up being Camp -- as it earnestly courts fame and public opinion. The film sets out to be the most serious adaptation of Oz yet, more earnest than even Baum's own adaptations. Victor Fleming and the MGM studio seek to create a lethally serious fantastical world of Oz, one that proves Sontag's point that "In naïve, or pure, Camp, the essential element is seriousness, a seriousness that fails."[85] The film takes itself so seriously that it cannot be taken seriously.

[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., 280-283.

The film in all its big budget seriousness does something magical: it makes Oz "glamourous" through the creation of a vibrant and colorful fantasy. Owing to the film's excessive colors, it actualizes a fantasy that is so fanciful and fantastical that its audience can escape into it. *The Wizard of Oz* therefore becomes emblematic of the "pure Camp" escapist fantasy. Like the messianic idea itself, it is naïve and serious. It does not know it is Camp and yet it is Camp. Likewise, as per Sontag, the film "incarnates a victory of 'style' over 'content,' 'aesthetics' over 'morality' of irony over tragedy."[86] Reading Sontag's appraisal, the power of the film becomes clearer, even if it is difficult to situate messianism within the film's content. The film was always much more invested in the aesthetics of the epic than it is in the content of the fantasy. The script was continually being revised by far too many voices for there to be a coherent narrative. Thus, the film's technicolor style eclipses its disjunct narrative. Additionally, the morality of the film is as jumbled as that of its source materials.

A major source of power of *The Wizard of Oz* comes from its *pathos*. The film is serious without being tragic. This is important because for Sontag Camp and tragedy are antitheses. Because Toto is never in any real danger, and all of the other deaths in the film are accidental, these are not necessarily tragedies in any grand sense either. Everything is always kept upbeat. Slipping into tragedy would cause the walls of the messianic fantasy to collapse. The film arrives in a moment already oversaturated with tragedy (e.g., The Great Depression, The Rise of Fascism) and yet more tragedy looms on the horizon (e.g., World War II). For Sontag, in moments like these, irony and satire are tools too feeble to joust against tragedy and the catastrophic, and thus a Camp sensibility is born. In these "oversaturated" moments, Sontag's Camp "introduces a new standard: artifice as an ideal, theatricality." [87] Which is why *The Wizard*

[86] Ibid., 287.
[87] Ibid., 288.

of Oz had to be filmed in technicolor. Technicolor finds new visual heights in an already visually saturated world. The vaudevillian and theatrical nature of the film now becomes part of its strength. This alternative world is so excessive in every sense that one can escape into its cosmovision and get lost there, completely. Dorothy exits from her repressive sepia world and steps into a vibrant technicolor world where she meets Glinda who starts singing, "Come out, come out wherever you are," as the munchkins emerge in all their regalia. For those with a Camp sensibility, they are able to find appreciation in the adorable cuteness and deadpan seriousness of Munchkinland because the experience lasts only for a moment. In assuming a Camp sensibility, one can relish in the extravagant costumes and the iconic ruby red slippers.

All these messianic figurations offer an elongated present into which one can escape for a moment. The fundamentalists escape into the apocalyptic, gazing upon their eschatological charts, graphs, and paratextual apparatus. The Superman fan escapes into the strip. Capitalist Christ sells a corporate conscience (service with a smile) and washing machines that will redeem your time. *The Wizard of Oz* offers an elongated escapist present as well. One that is more cinematic and colorful than comic strips, one that continues to be marketed and sold. One that is less terrifying than the end of the world. One that feels like home. If you stay long enough, you can be granted a title “Royal Historian of Oz” or should you be a dandy you can wear the authentic ruby red slippers or perhaps slip into the Lion’s costume. Here in the fantastical magical world of Oz, one can escape. Along the way one might find brains, heart, courage, or a community. The risks of remaining are getting lost in Oz or staying so long that you become the humbug.

Dorothy’s failure echoes Marx’s famous dictum detailed in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* writing about Napoleon I and his nephew Napoleon III: “the first time as

tragedy, the second time as farce."[88] The messianic is no longer part of the mythic structure; it is now a style, sentimentality, or taste for the transmission of the myth. Emptied of moral seriousness, the messianic idea in the cinematic messianism in Oz now exists only as "pure Camp," one with excessive sights and sounds that are haunted by a yearning that there is more over the rainbow. Stuck between leaving and returning, messiahs risk becoming humbugs.

Supersaturated with sound and color, "America" re-enchants technology, hoping against hope, for a hot-air balloon of transformation. The catastrophic utopianism of messianism has become the escapist fantasy of *The Wizard of Oz*. Oz allows the audience and fans to perform and become part of an escapist fantasy. This film becomes the key for understanding the telos of "American" messianism. Dorothy is not the messiah. The wizard maintains his technological power and he is far too narcissistic to save anyone but himself. This is the face of American messianism, self-interested, observing, watching waiting, intervening only when it suits them. Taking Sontag, Rushdie, and Oz fans reveals that what matters with *The Wizard of Oz* is not so much the characters themselves but the sensorial experience of being part of Oz. It is the escape into the utopian world of the film. Its unreality of a super-real world is saturated by color and sound. Vibrant and otherworldly flora and fauna alongside nonsensical rhymes and skipping down the road singing together. Building on Sontag, Oz is a rejection of the "Jewish moral seriousness" of messianic thinking in the face of catastrophe. Oz sublimates messianism into camp. Messianism becomes yet another American style, like the fundamentalist style, the paranoid style, comic book realist style, and the Madison Avenue style. "Camp is (to repeat) the relation to style in a time in which the adoption of style—as such—has become altogether

[88] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 10.

questionable."[89] All that remains of the messianic idea in "America" are escapist trips into the utopia of our dreams.

Camp in cinematic messianism would be "religion." It is a hollowed-out spirituality where the imagination may dwell. Even without theological dicta at its core, cinematic messianism is still a serious style. However, without a well of theological content to draw from, the seriousness of Camp in cinematic messianism collapses and fails under its own weight. Rudderless and lacking in direction, cinematic messianism constantly pivots to seek the calm shores of a utopia in which it will nonetheless not remain (much like *The Wizard of Oz*). Camp dethrones seriousness by constantly escalating and then pushing seriousness to the point of absurdity. Seriousness and sincerity alone cannot fill the lacuna of theological content. Bracketed off from rooted theology, Camp in cinematic messianism is empty and devoid of form and content, a stylistic sensibility which fills the lacuna of theology with an aesthetic apotheosis. *The Wizard of* Oz reveals the humbuggery of messianism in America writ large. What starts as pietistic devotional imitation of Christ becomes shown up as farce through the charismatic avatars of Christian fundamentalism like Jimmy Swaggert, Jerry Falwell, Jim Bakker, and Ted Haggard. Even after some spectacular public debacle, like the Wizard of Oz, they never go away; they always remain in the frame. In America, the messianic idea is one in which salvation is supplanted by artifice and caricature.

[89] Ibid., 290-291.

Conclusion

Cosmovision and American Iconic Messianism

In this dissertation, I have discussed four ways in which putatively Protestant understandings of messianism were transformed by their encounters with social, cultural, political, and aesthetic currents in the United States during the 1900s-40s. The first transformation was that of the strong messianism of fundamentalism. The second transformation was the libidinal messianism of Superman comic books. The third transformation was the genteel and market-tested messianism of Bruce Barton's *The Man Nobody Knew* and his advertising work. The final transformation was the technicolor of cinematic messianism in *The Wizard of Oz*. Throughout all of these disparate case studies, there are important throughlines. They all highlight how a minoritarian or even sectarian approach to messianic thinking, like premillennial dispensationalist fundamentalism, can spread rapidly through mass culture due to industrialized mass printing being incorporated into the Bible, Sunday school room charts, and a freely available theological resource. Grounded in social reality and fantasy, "American" messianism of this period reflects four features: authoritarianism, populism, catastrophism, and utopianism. These four features lend a comic book quality to the messianic idea in America, transforming the iconic image of putatively protestant messianism.

"American" messianism is a spiritual technology designed to protect the "American" cosmovision. As a spiritual technology, it has four primary nodes: authoritarianism, populism, catastrophism, and utopianism. Upon the appearance of a perceived external threat or catastrophe, messianism activates to protect the elongated present (status quo). Messianism's primary purpose is to maintain and preserve the status quo and the nostalgic yearning for a

utopia. Whether that utopia is the mental image of a bygone era, like the Roaring Twenties, Heaven, Metropolis, or even Oz, the utopia must be defended. The catastrophe provides the occasion for activation. Catastrophism and utopianism remain bound inextricably to one another in a mutually reinforcing tie. The utopian fantasy makes the unending ceaselessness of catastrophe endurable. The utopian fantasy also staves off the necessary social transformation to end the catastrophe and protect the cosmovision; messianism activates an authoritarian populist response. The populace defers communal action and responsibility to the messianic figure, thus creating a recursive monstrous messianic loop. Instead of the messiah appearing precisely in the hour of need to stop the crisis and then leaving, an elongated catastrophic present begins. The messiah never leaves, and the catastrophism never ends.

In its iconic and deeply "American" form, messianism creates a continual present and catastrophic moment in which messianic figures seek to deny the past, shirking responsibility for the conditions that created the current catastrophe. The past becomes ripe for caricature. Stereotypes are used in images of moral imagining or as cudgels wielded by vaudevillian salesmen.[1] American messianism embraces immanence by bracketing the supernatural, the miraculous, and the past in order to focus on the catastrophism of the present moment. The miracles of Jesus or the superpowers of Superman overwhelm the moment and feel like fantasy. To act in the present moment is to act without the supernatural. There are no gods, only monsters. The elongated present allows for the suturing of *Kairos* from *Chronos*. The *Kairotic* experience of the extended present then becomes one of an escape into a libidinal fantasy world like Superman and *The Wizard of Oz*, as spaces of *jouissance* and an exploration of a fragile

[1] Cf. Ken Koltun-Fromm, *Drawing on Religion: Reading and the Moral Imagination in Comics and Graphic Novels* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020), 10.

utopia where all is not as well as it seems. Still, all will resolve by the end of the film or comic book.

Escaping into the cinematic world of the page or the screen allows for the briefest experience of utopia, which sustains the individual and the public through the quotidian existence inside a catastrophic moment. These experiences are not dissimilar from those of fundamentalists who escape into the end times prophecy cartography, dispensationalist theological tractates, and hyper-textualist reading of the Bible. All these approaches emphasize the present as a catastrophe, the past as a set of overdetermined referents that tell a story not about the past but about the present. They differ only slightly in how to resolve the catastrophe of the present moment. For the fundamentalist, staying ready for the rapture allows one to anticipate the moment of one's escape just before things go from bad to worse. For fans of Superman comics, the joy is in the anticipation of knowing that some horrible catastrophe lurks just inside the next issue. Reading the next issue, which must always unfold in the not-so-distant present, tells the story of good triumphing over evil. Superman does indeed appear and save the day.

As Eco and other "postwar mavericks" argue, readers tend to imagine themselves not as the victims of the catastrophe or as a bystander, but either as the hero Superman or occasionally as the villain.[2] The reader takes an inverse path to Superman as the reader imagines themselves as Clark Kent turned Superman. This is the moment when the everyday office worker transforms into a superhero who can save the world. Not unlike Barton's introduction to *The Man Nobody Knows* where an “anonymous” child imagines what is happening with Jesus through Jesus Christ, the prized boxer, the star of the ring and the boardroom. For those who never get the chance to be the star of the ring or the boardroom, starring in Superman is close enough. As a

[2] To use Heer and Worchester’s constellation. Cf. Umberto Eco, “The Myth of Superman,” in *Arguing Comics, ed. Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 146–64; Jeet Herr and Kent Worcester, “The Postwar Mavericks,” in *Arguing Comics*, ed. Jeet. Heer and Kent Worcester (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 85–87.

container, Superman contains multitudes and is ready for the reader to place themselves inside the suit.[3] For fans of Superman, disappearing into the fantastical world provides an escapist experience. Narratively, Superman's world suspends in a solipsistic aspic between issues. Whereas the fan returns to a world of chronological time, waiting for the next issue until they can resume living inside the *to be continued*…

Temporally, Bruce Barton's oeuvre, especially his advertisements, provide a similar experience to that of comics. In the space of one or two pages (occasionally longer), Barton attempts to sell ideas and ideals to corporations and their customers. A cursive G and E are the initials of a friend – electricity will save you time and provide you with the warm glow of Norman Rockwell moments with one's family. Electrical salvation from quotidian household labor. General Motors is a family, and their family of cars may help doctors, ministers, and working parents with the possibility of arriving just in time. The car facilitates salvific moments, which too often pass unremarked (unless recorded in advertisement copy). The country doctor arrives just in time to save a life, and the parson arrives just in time to save a soul. These salvific moments are facilitated by the new messiahs, the corporate titans for whom Barton pens hagiographies.

Like Superman, *The Wizard of Oz* sells a fantastical and utopian world where one can escape to go on a quest to find oneself. Thanks to a chaotic whirlwind of biblical proportions, Oz is where messianism enters the scene. Stepping into a technicolor utopia, Dorothy is quickly hailed as a populist hero, moving through Oz along with her merry band of friends, and killing the Wicked Witch of the West and exposing the Wizard as a "humbug" and showman. As Dorothy is leaving Oz, she appoints the Scarecrow as the ruler of the Emerald City. One ruler

[3] For more on Superman as a container see, A. David Lewis, "Superman Graveside: Superhero Salvation beyond Jesus," in *Graven Images: Religion in Comic Books and Graphic Novels*, ed. A. David Lewis and Christine Hoff. Kraemer (New York: Continuum, 2010), 166–87.

exchanged for another. Awakening from a dream state, Dorothy is finally home, surrounded by her family, the farmhands, and Professor Marvel/The Wizard. Standing in the window of Dorothy's bedroom, there he is, Professor Marvel (a.k.a. The Wizard) looming large in the frame, still asserting his authority as he surveys the scene. Dorothy lies in bed, insisting simultaneously that her experience is real and that she will never leave again. The Wizard/Professor Marvel charlatanry and showmanship remain unexposed. Against all odds, The Wizard/Professor Marvel gets everything he wants: the death of a rival, avoiding judgment, and returning home. The messianic force resides with him. For fans of *The Wizard of Oz*, they can find some peace of mind "somewhere over the rainbow." Then, after spending time over the rainbow, the lights come up, the movie ends, and it is time to go home.

Monstrosity of Messianism

Etymologically speaking, the word “monster” comes from the Latin *monstrum*, which means "to show or to warn."[4] Expanding the definition, anthropologist David Gilmore writes, "The Latin *monstrum* refers etymologically to that which reveals, that which warns, a glyph in search of a hierophant.”[5] For the historian of religion, Mircea Eliade, a hierophany, is "the manifestation of the sacred, ontologically founds the world."[6] Thus, monsters are an iconic image that must always be connected to a hierophant. Within the "American" cosmovision, which emerged in the 1900s-40s, messianic figures are the hierophant not only for monsters but also for the sacred.[7] Through their functions as images and hierophanies, messianic figurations become iconic linchpins which (re)orient the world, or in this case, the United States.

[4] David D. Gilmore, *Monsters, Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 9.
[5] Gilmore, 9.
[6] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard Trask (New York: Harvest, 1987), 9.
[7] For more on cosmovision see, David Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2014), 15.

Functionally, messiahs like monsters serve as warnings of the looming catastrophes, often the apocalyptic world-ending kind of apocalypse. The sort of event horizons that the arrival of the messianic instantiates in and through the monster's appearance. Which comes first, the warning or the apocalypse? They have a recursive relationship. According to Gilmore, monsters:

> …embod[y] the existential threat to social life, the chaos, atavism, and negativism that symbolize destructiveness…Yet the monster, in all its guises, is also and paradoxically awe-inspiring, admirable in a perverse way. As depicted in folklore and fiction, terrible monsters are impressive because they break the rules and do what humans can only imagine and dream of. Since they observe no limits, respect no boundaries, and attack and kill without compunction monsters, are also the spirit that says 'yes'—to all that is forbidden.[8]

Gilmore evokes for us how messianic figures function within U.S. mythologies and folklore. Messiahs, like monsters, are awe-inspiring, chaotic, call into question, break the rules, have no limits, have no boundaries, kill, and say "yes" to that which is libidinal and repressed.

According to Gilmore, there are three phases to the monstrous apparition cycle in mythology and folklore. First is the sudden appearance of a monster. The second is the monster's destruction. Third, the community responds by driving off the monster and then repairing the damage done.[9] American messianic figures follow a similar trajectory. First, there appears a messianic figure like charismatic religious leaders, Superman, a CEO, or a Wizard. Then comes the catastrophe of the appearance of the antichrist, alien invasion, lagging sales, or a tornado. Where the cycle short circuits is in the lack of a communal response to the messianic. For the fundamentalists, the communal response is to stay ready for the rapture and prepare to leave. In Superman comics, the scene resets upon completion of the comic book. For the capitalist CEO, if Barton and BDO cannot help you, there isn't much you can do. Upon the conclusion of the Oz journey, Dorothy returns home to Kansas, and that is that.

---

[8] Gilmore, *Monsters*, 10.
[9] Ibid., 13.

The communal response to the monster is what is most often lacking. Lyman and Milton Stewart are benevolent "Christian laymen" appearing on the covers of *The Fundamentals*. Premillennial dispensationalist theology circulates as a cartographical schema in whose external incoherence rests its internal coherence. *The Fundamentals* circulate more as a holy icon consecrated to an imagined unified community. They venerate not one large tent fundamentalism but a legion of fundamentalisms. Superman never stays around to clean up or to face accountability for his actions. The Wizard escapes accountability in Oz and gets to return home. The lessons taught are that religious, technological, or corporate charisma allows one to escape moral or political accountability. During the 1920s and 1930s, General Electric and General Motors managed to fend off anti-trust legislation. The maintenance and the cleanup in the wake of the monster and the messiah happens outside the frame of the dispensationalist chart, the comic book, the advertisement, and the film. The collective power and response of the community always remain outside the frame.

The monstrosity of messianism is a feature, not a bug of the messianic idea in America. American messianism relies on the valorization of catastrophe and the desire to look for an authoritarian leader to fix the problem. Authoritarianism earns respect. Those with the money, strength, and support to accomplish their goals can always do it, and thanks to men like Barton, they are often lauded for their efforts. Lyman and Milton Stewart did not need to put their names on the cover of *The Fundamentals* to be known as its architects and backers. Like the Wizard of Oz, they understand that true power often rests behind the curtain, especially if one is trying to create a movement. It made sense to have *The Fundamentals* edited by ministers and academics, filled with essays by educated clergy, and testimonies from successful leaders in the pews, like Howard Atwood Kelly. Put the more charismatic and appealing faces out front. The valorization

of catastrophism is part of how the cosmovision of "America" gets built. The mythopoesis tells the story of a nation whose people in a time of crisis band together behind a leader to overcome an existential threat to the country and to its civil religion. These include men like Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Henry Ford, J.P. Morgan, Alfred P. Sloan, and others fêted by Barton. Fundamentalists seek to claim civil religion and desire everyone to get in line behind them as they accelerate towards the rapture. Superman provides an iconic template for how to make these claims even as an outsider, to lead only in moments of crisis and let others handle the rest. *The Wizard of Oz* serves as a reminder that true power may sometimes rest just out of sight.

Populist anxiety about catastrophism is fueled by paranoia, as captured famously by Hofstadter in his iconic text, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*.[10] This anxious paranoia immobilizes the people from acting, so that the active force now rests in the hand of an authoritarian leader, as easily as Superman, the Wizard, and the Scarecrow rise to power. The yearning for a better future, a new heaven, and a new earth has parallel echoes with longing for the lands of Metropolis and Oz. Utopias that are just out of reach can be visited thanks to the iconic function of the mental image. Study the premillennial dispensationalist charts, Scofield references, and *The Fundamentals* until they become a mental and spiritual cosmology. The word made flesh. Superman is an alluring but empty libidinal container.[11] *The Wizard of Oz* paints an even more vibrant and hyperreal world, inviting one to wander in awe and wonder, paying no attention to the man behind the curtain. The carnivalesque charlatan who never surrenders power only moves on to the next grift. If these fantastical realms prove too elusive, market-tested messianism offers the promise of purchasing the better tomorrow, today.

[10] Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life: The Paranoid Style in American Politics Uncollected Essays 1956-1965*, eds. Sean Wilentz and Nicolaus A. Huber (New York: Library of America, 2020).
[11] Lewis, "Superman Graveside: Superhero Salvation beyond Jesus."

Electricity, cars, washing machines, and electricity are about more than the things themselves. You are buying an idea and not a product.[12]

These four case studies highlight how messianism expands beyond Christology while maintaining a primarily Christian orientation. The expansion of messianism happens in four ways: first through a systematization of messianic expectation via fundamentalism's premillennial dispensationalism; second through the growth of messianism into more than an anticipation of the return of the Messiah but also about a capacious notion of messianic imitation (building on the imitation of Christ). The messianic style in America is pugilistic in presentation, paranoid in nature, and anti-intellectual in rhetoric. It centers around amassing power and building counter-cultural empires, thus challenging, and sometimes changing denominational, educational, civic, and cultural institutions. The paranoid style allows messianism to leverage an expansive conceptualization of populism to gain support, circulate ideas, and consolidate power and control around a religious frame.

Another change proffered by messianism is a challenge to the temporal order. Past and future become unimportant if one lives in the catastrophic last days and if rapture into heaven looms just around the corner. The past becomes a cipher that must be decoded to anticipate the rapture. The weight of history and the need to confront systemic problems become unimportant. The deeds are done, and they may as well have been inevitable, as the world is getting worse, not better. Making the world a better place and preparing a better future for the coming generations also becomes unnecessary. What matters most is the elongated present, bracketed off from past and future. One must stay ready for the rapture. Rapture preparedness justifies falling in line,

[12] Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 155–60.

following the leaders, and preparing simultaneously for the world to worsen and to leave it behind. In the "American" messianic idea, there has always been a courting of catastrophe.

The Problem with Radical Messianism

In the wake of postmodernism, radical Christian theologians return to messianism as a vehicle power to reshape and re-create the world. One postmodernist approach may be seen in the weak messianic tradition of Jacques Derrida in his reading of Walter Benjamin in *Spectres of Marx*. The weak messianic thinking of Derrida, and by extension Benjamin, was popularized in religion and theology by John D. Caputo. In Caputo's influential, *Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, he argues that Derrida's "messianicity" and Benjamin's "weak messianic power" are interchangeable expressions of the same idea.[13] In Caputo's reading of Derrida, the messiah's arrival is always imminent. But for Caputo, Derrida's weak messianism, or a "*messianicity without messianism,*" differs from the more strong or concrete messianic traditions in Judaism and Christianity. "Weak messianism" is arguably an attempt to empty messianism of the kind of terror in traditions like premillennial dispensational theology.

Caputo's reading of Derrida seeks to make messianism safer by presenting a weaker, more peaceful messianism. Caputo and Derrida agree that many of the wars in the Middle East are fought over competing "messianic eschatologies." In Caputo's estimation, Derrida's messianicity solves the problems of traditional messianism by presenting an indeterminate messianic hope and expectation, one that is anticipatory of an imminent incoming figure, and furthermore a figure who is Other. But Hägglund notes that the incoming Other could be a messiah, a friend, a villain, or the antichrist. The core problem with weak messianism is that it does not do what it says it does. It does not empty messianism of the catastrophism and terror

[13] Philosophers like Martin Hägglund have since argued there are, of course, key differences between Benjamin and Derrida's messianic qualities and that Caputo overlooks the radical atheistic potential of Derrida's thought.

which concerns Scholem, for instance. Derrida/Caputo's weak messianism is still excessive, and anticipatory of an unknown Other who will herald the end of history (perhaps gently).[14]

But what if the weak messiah comes and never leaves? This would mean that the catastrophic remaking of the world must happen continually. The messianic temporality becomes, as Derrida would say, "always already."[15] Each moment brings about a predictable, yet catastrophic restructuring of everything. One wonders how can there be creation when the destruction of what was never ends? New Others arrive and need hospitality, but how can they receive hospitality when those who would offer it are already dead? In turn, they become the ones who shall face the next deluge. The messiah is made monstrous by attempts to lessen the messianic catastrophic force through society trying to evade the religious elements of messianism (aka "messianicity"). Often messiahs are like golems, they are summoned to protect the community, but their power soon overwhelms, and they destroy the community they were meant to protect. The Golem who was summoned to protect the community now becomes a force of destruction.[16]

Scholem rightly points out that messianic traditions summon the agent of their own demise. If the messiah appears, things are no longer the same. If the messiah does not appear, the messianic promise goes unfulfilled. Both risk disappointment and both options change the

---

[14] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, eds. Harry Zohn and Hannah Arendt, (New York: Schocken Books, 2013), 253–64; John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), xix–xxviii, 162, 352n1; John D. Caputo, "Unprotected Religion: Radical Theology, Radical Atheism, and the Return of Anti-Religion," in *The Trace of God* (Fordham University Press, 2014), https://doi.org/10.5422/fordham/9780823262090.003.0009; Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 24, 211, 220–28; Jacques Derrida, "The Villanova Roundtable: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida," in *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, ed. Jacques Derrida and John D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 3–28; Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2008), 1-ff.

[15] Iris van der Tuin (2011) The New Materialist "Always Already": On an A-Human Humanities, *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 19:4, 285-290, DOI: 10.1080/08038740.2011.620575.

[16] Golems are anthropomorphic beings which can be summoned through magic to protect the Jewish community. Cf. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "The Golem of Scholem - Messianism and Zionism in the Writings of Rabbi Avraham Isaac HaKohen Kook and Gershom Scholem," in *Politik Und Religion Im Judentum*, ed. Christoph Miething (Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2012), 223–38, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110922172.223.

contours of the messianic movement. Such is the self-reinforcing contradictory nature of messianism. There is an immense risk situated within messianic thinking. The messiah cannot arrive too early or too late but only in the hour of need and the messiah must arrive in the hour of need. But the messiah's arrival might just kill us all. For Scholem and in America, messianism is a theory of catastrophe. For the fundamentalists, messianism reminds one of the doomed natures of the present and the urgent need for escape. Early twentieth century U.S. messianism preserves the catastrophic and paradoxical nature of messianism highlighted by Scholem, while incorporating anti-intellectual, individualistic, and modernist anti-modern sentiments. Until the ultimate appearance of the final messiah, penultimate messianic leaders point the way. But in the U.S., everyone gets to be their own messiah.

For her part, Marcella Althaus-Reid in her *Indecent Theology* argues that "Christianity is the religion of the Messiah."[17] During times of crisis, many Christians pray for the messiah to appear. When the messiah appears, the community finds out that the messiah subverts expectations and exceeds the community's ability to contain the figure. Therefore, we must consider messianic figures as dynamic rather than static. For Althaus-Reid, Jesus Christ had to learn the "messianic codes and expectations." It is incumbent upon the community to teach the messiah these messianic codes and to ensure that the messiah offers liberation for all. However, injustice, exclusion, and terror are present within messianism. For example, Althaus-Reid highlights that even Jesus was at times an "*unjust* messiah" like his encounter with the Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30 NRSV). Whenever a messiah appears, there is always a risk: the messiah *might* save us all. But there is never any guarantee.

Queer and feminist strains of radical theology provide potentially recuperative and reparative reimagining's of messianisms, as in Althaus-Reid's Xena-Warrior, where Christ hangs

[17] Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology* (Routledge, 2002), 155.

on the cross in leathers and demands justice, swearing and cursing at her divine and human oppressors. When Lisa Isherwood looks at the Xena-Warrior Christ, she wonders, "what does it mean if God is this aggressive, warrior woman who will fight to the end for the one she loves but ultimately in her last breath declares she cannot even save the one she loves?"[18] Another messianic figure presented by Althaus-Reid is Bi-Christ, a messianic figure who intentionally embraces the fluidity and contradictory elements of messianism -- the Prince of Peace who fiercely drives the money changers out of the Temple. For Althaus-Reid, embracing the paradoxical nature of messianism rather than shying away from it offers a long way towards opening the liberative potential of messianism and also towards embracing the catastrophes which follow the messiah. These are some examples of how contemporary feminist and queer radical theologians are rethinking messianism, trying to confront the challenges proffered not only by messianism in general but also, and more particularly, by weak messianism and American iconic messianism.[19]

Contemporary radical theology in all its expressions still tends to avert its gaze away from mass cultural messianic thinking, continuing to focus on the potential messiahs instead of the already present messiahs.[20] Radical theologians still valorize the interwar French and German philosophers, Walter Benjamin, as well as theologians, when they analyze messianic figures in the contemporary moment. However, their analysis of mass cultural messianic figures in the United States elucidates just how different the present moment in the United States is from

[18] Lisa Isherwood, "Feminist Theologies," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Radical Theology*, ed. Christopher D. Rodkey and Jordan E. Miller (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 572, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96595-6_37
[19] Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology* (Routledge, 2002), 155–57; Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (London: Routledge, 2007), 112–16; Lisa Isherwood, "Feminist Theologies," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Radical Theology*, ed. Christopher D. Rodkey and Jordan E. Miller (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 567–78, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96595-6_37. For more on contemporary approaches to radical theology and messianism see Christopher D. Rodkey and Jordan E. Miller, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Radical Theology*. (Cham, CH: Springer International Publishing, 2018).
[20] For a representative index of the important thinkers in Christian radical theology and messianism see, Christopher D. Rodkey and Jordan E. Miller, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Radical Theology*. (Cham, CH: Springer International Publishing, 2018).

Europe. In Europe, messianism is a niche conversation while in the United States, messianism is a mass-market phenomenon backed by multi-million-dollar sales. I argue that the United States, showcases a "strong messianism" rooted in premillennial dispensational Fundamentalist theology, which is packaged and sold as a commodity through corporatist self-help literature and marketed as a devotional style for the imitation of Christ. Running in parallel, but un/consciously drawn from Protestant Christian messianic thought, exist mass culture messianic figures like Superman and Dorothy Gale (as played by Judy Garland in *The Wizard of Oz*).

Bibliography

Abrams, Douglas Carl. *Selling the Old-Time Religion: American Fundamentalists and Mass Culture, 1920-1940*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001.

AFI. "The Patchwork Girl of Oz." *AFI Catalog Of Feature Films The First 100 Years (1893-1993)* (blog), n.d. http://catalog.afi.com/Film/16525-THE-PATCHWORKGIRLOFOZ?sid=ab33cef8-ec28-43ca-9bbe-f512130e78ee&sr=11.957068&cp=1&pos=0.

Akenson, Donald H. *Exporting the Rapture: John Nelson Darby and the Victorian Conquest of North-American Evangelicalism*, 2018.

Almond, Gabriel A., R. Scott. Appleby, and Emmanuel. Sivan. *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Althaus-Reid, Marcella. *Indecent Theology*. Routledge, 2002.

Althaus-Reid, Marcella. *The Queer God*. London: Routledge, 2007.

Ammerman, Nancy T. "North American Protestant Fundamentalism." In *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, edited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, 1–65. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Ammerman, Nancy Tatom. *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995.

Anderson, Benedict R. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso Books, 2016.

Anderson, Robert. "Christ and Criticism." In *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to Truth*, Second Printing., 1:89–101. Rio, WI: AGES Software, 2000.

Andrae, Thomas. "From Menace to Messiah: The History and Historicity of Superman." In *American Media and Mass Culture.*, edited by Donald Lazere, 124–38. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=21257.

Andrae, Tom, Geoffrey Blum, and Gary Coddington. "Of Superman and Kids With Dreams." *Nemo, the Classic Comics Library* 2 (1983): 6–19.

Anker, Elisabeth R. *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

Appleby, R. Scott, and Martin E. Marty. *Fundamentalisms Observed*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

———. "Introduction: The Fundamentalism Project: A User's Guide." In *Fundamentalisms Observed*, edited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004.

Arendt, Hannah. "The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition." *Jewish Social Studies* 6, no. 2 (1944): 99–122.

Ariel, Yaakov S. *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to Jews in America, 1880-2000*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Arnold, Philip P. *The Gift of Sports: Indigenous Ceremonial Dimensions of the Games We Love*. San Diego: Cognella, 2012.

Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.

Baaren, Theodorus Petrus. *Iconography of Religions*. Leiden: Brill, 1973.
Babka, Susie Paulik. "Arius, Superman, and the Tertium Quid: When Popular Culture Meets Christology." *Irish Theological Quarterly* 73, no. 1–2 (February 1, 2008): 113–32. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021140008091695.
Babuscio, Jack. "The Cinema of Camp: AKA Camp and the Gay Sensibility." In *Camp: queer aesthetics and the performing subject: a reader*, edited by Fabio Cleto, 117–35. Ann Arbor MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1999.
Bailey, Ferriss Clay. "Bruce Barton's American Jesus: A Brave New Man Nobody Knows." Vanderbilt University, 1991.
Baker, Kelly. *The Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915-1930*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2011.
Baker, Kelly J. "Evangelizing Klansmen, Nationalizing the South: Faith, Fraternity, and Lost Cause Religion in the 1920s Klan." *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 39, no. 3 (September 2012): 261–73.
Balmer, Randall. "Critical Junctures in American Evangelicalism: II The Transition from Postmillennialism to Premillennialism." *Ashland Theological Journal* 38 (2006): 51–58.
Bare, Daniel R. "Whitewashed Fundamentalism: Reassessing the Fundamentalist Movement Across Racial Lines." *Fides et Historia* 52, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2020): 28–49.
Barrett, Laura. "From Wonderland to Wasteland: The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, The Great Gatsby, and the New American Fairy Tale." *Papers on Language and Literature* 42, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 150–80.
Bart, Gary. Gary Bart's Oral History. Interview by Christa Whitney. Video, November 21, 2014. The Yiddish Book Center's Wexler Oral History Project. https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/oral-histories/interviews/woh-fi-0000638/gary-bart-2014.
Barton, Bruce. *The Man Nobody Knows: A Discovery of Jesus*. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1925.
Baum, L. Frank. *The Marvelous Land of Oz: Being an Account of the Further Adventures of the Scarecrow and Tim Woodman a Sequel to the Wizard of Oz*. Book, Whole. Illinois: The Reilly & Britton co., 1904, 1904. https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044009873605.
———. *Ozma of Oz. A Record of Her Adventures. Illustrated by John R. Neill.* Chicago: Reilly & Britton, 1907.
———. *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*. Book, Whole. Illinois: Reilly & Britton, 1913. https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044011809845.
———. *The Road to Oz*. Book, Whole. Illinois: The Reilly & Lee, c1909, 1909. https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo1.ark:/13960/t3dz0tg63.
Baum, L. Frank, Denslow, W. W. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Orinda, CA: Sea Wolf Press, 2019.
BBDO. "About." Corporation. *BBDO* (blog), n.d. https://bbdo.com/about.
Beebe, John. "The Wizard of Oz: A Vision of Development in the American Political Psyche." In *The Vision Thing: Myth, Politics, and Psyche in the World*, edited by Thomas Singer, 62–83. New York: Routledge, 2000.
Bendroth, Margaret Lamberts. *Fundamentalists in the City: Conflict and Division in Boston's Churches, 1885-1950*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
———. *Fundamentalism and Gender: 1875 to the Present.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.

Benjamin, Walter. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, 217–53. New York: Schocken Books, 2013.

———.. “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, 253–64. New York: Schocken Books, 2013.

Bernstein, Robin. *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood and Race from Slavery to Civil Rights*. New York: New York University Press, 2012.

Bier, Jesse. “A Comment on ‘(Re)-Teaching Hemingway: Anti-Semitism as a Thematic Device in the Sun Also Rises.’” *College English* 53, no. 4 (1991): 478–80. https://doi.org/10.2307/378024.

Bodner, Allen. *When Boxing Was a Jewish Sport*. Albany: Excelsior Editions, State University of New York Press, 2011.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. 5th ed. Lanaham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018.

Braiterman, Zachary. *The Shape of Revelation: Aesthetics and Modern Jewish Thought*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.

Braude, Ann D. “Women’s History Is American Religious History.” In *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, edited by Thomas A. Tweed, 87–107. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

Breitbart, William. “The Strongman.” *Palliative and Supportive Care* 1, no. 2 (2003): 189–90. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478951503030219.

Brereton, Virginia Lieson. *The Formation of American Bible Schools, 1880-1940*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Buchanan, Ian. “Archetype,” 2018. https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780198794790.013.0046.

Burger, Alissa. *The Wizard of Oz as American Myth: A Critical Study of Six Versions of the Story, 1900-2007*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2012.

Bytwerk, Randall. “Das Schwarze Korps, 25 April 1940, p. 8.” German Propaganda Archive at Calvin College, 1998. https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/superman.htm.

Calvin, John. “Prefatory Address to His Most Christian Majesty, the Most Mighty and Illustrious Monarch, Francis, King of the French.” In *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Henry Beveridge. Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1845. https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes/institutes.

Campbell, Gordon. *Bible: The Story of the King James Version, 1611-2011*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. New York: Penguin Books, 1979.

Cantwell, Christopher D. “The Bible Class Teacher: Piety and Politics in the Age of Fundamentalism.” *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*. Ph.D., Cornell University, 2012. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (1013853776). https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/bible-class-teacher-piety-politics-age/docview/1013853776/se-2?accountid=14214.

Canovan, Margaret. *Populism*. New York; London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981.

Caputo, John D. *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.

Caputo, John D. “Unprotected Religion: Radical Theology, Radical Atheism, and the Return of Anti-Religion.” In *The Trace of God*. Fordham University Press, 2014. https://doi.org/10.5422/fordham/9780823262090.003.0009.
Carile, Maria Cristina, Izak Cornelius, and Eelco Nagelsmit. “Iconography, Iconology.” Edited by Constance M. Furey, Joel Marcus LeMon, Brian Matz, Thomas Chr. Römer, Jens Schröter, Barry Dov Walfish, and Eric Ziolkowski. De Gruyter, 2010. Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception. https://www.degruyter.com/document/database/EBR/entry/MainLemma_14011/html.
Carpenter, Joel A. *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
Carrasco, David. *Religions of Mesoamerica*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2014.
Caven, William. “The Testimony of Christ to the Old Testament.” In *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to Truth*, Second printing., 1:167–89. Rio, WI: AGES Software, 2000.
Caviness, Madeline H. “Iconoclasm and Iconophobia: Four Historical Case Studies.” *Diogenes* 50, no. 3 (August 1, 2003): 99–114. https://doi.org/10.1177/03921921030503008.
Center for the Study of Material and Visual Cultures of Religion (MAVCOR). “About.” *Journal* (blog), n.d. https://mavcor.yale.edu/mavcor-journal/about.
The Rev. Clarence Larkin Estate. “Clarence Larkin (1850 - 1924).” Blog, n.d. http://www.larkinestate.com/about/rev-clarence-larkin.html.
Coates, A.T. "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth." Object Narrative. In Conversations: An Online Journal of the Center for the Study of Material and Visual Cultures of Religion (2014). doi:10.22332/con.obj.2014.28
Coates, Paul. *Cinema and Colour; The Saturated Image*. British Film Institute. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
Cook, John Frank. “Messiah of Business: A Study of Bruce Barton.” University of Wisconsin--Madison, 1962.
Cooper, John Milton. *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight over the League of Nations*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
Couch, Mal, and Floyd Elmore, eds. “Darby, John Nelson.” In *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology: A Practical Guide to the People, Viewpoints, and History of Prophetic Studies*, 82–84. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996.
Creekmur, Corey. "17 George Herriman: Krazy Kat" In *Handbook of Comics and Graphic Narratives* edited by Sebastian Domsch, Dan Hassler-Forest and Dirk Vanderbeke, 379-386. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110446968-021
Crowther, Paul. *Geneses of Postmodern Art: Technology as Iconology*. New York: Routledge, 2019.
Curtis, Susan. *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture*. Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2001.
Dan, Joseph. “Scholem’s View of Jewish Messianism.” *Modern Judaism* 12, no. 2 (1992): 117–28.
Daniels, Les. *Superman: The Complete History: The Life and Times of the Man of Steel*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2004.
De Haven, Tom. *Our Hero: Superman on Earth*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011.
Derrida, Jacques. “Faith and Knowledge: Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone.” In *Religion*, edited by Jacques Derrida, and Gianni Vattimo, 1–78. Cambridge: Polity Press, n.d.

———. “Marx & Sons.” In *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida’s Specters of Marx*, edited by Michael Sprinker, 213–69. New York: Verso, 1999.
———. *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. Translated by Michael Naas and Pascale-Anne Brault. Meridian. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.
———. *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 1994.
Derrida, Jacques. “The Villanova Roundtable: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida.” In *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, edited by Jacques Derrida and John D. Caputo, 3–28. New York: Fordham University Press, 1997.
Di Angi, Philip Guy. “The Lost Alliance: A Study of the Social Gospellers and the American Labor Movement, 1877-1918.” Master’s Thesis, Kent State University, 1972.
Didi-Huberman, Georges. *Atlas, or The Anxious Gay Science*. Translated by Shane B. Lillis, 2018.
Dighe, Ranjit S. *The Historian’s Wizard of Oz: Reading L. Frank Baum’s Classic as a Political and Monetary Allegory*. Westport, C.T.: Praeger, 2002.
Dixon, A. C. “The Scriptures.” In *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to Truth*, Second printing., 4:224–31. Rio, WI: AGES Software, 2000.
Dochuk, Darren. *Anointed with Oil: How Christianity and Crude Made Modern America*, 2019.
Doniger, Wendy. *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
Du Mez, Kristin Kobes. *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation.* New York: Liveright Publishing, 2021.
Dyer, Richard. “Judy Garland and Gay Men.” In *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, 137–200. London: Routledge, 2011.
Earle, Neil. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz in American Popular Culture: Uneasy in Eden*. Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993.
Eco, Umberto. “The Myth of Superman.” In *Arguing Comics*, edited by Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester, 146–64. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2004.
Editorial. “The Capitalists and the Premillenarians.” *Christian Century*, April 14, 1921. Disciples Divinity House of the University of Chicago and The Internet Archive.
“Editorial Statement.” *Material Religion* 1, no. 1 (2005): 4–8. https://doi.org/10.2752/174322005778054474.
Eisen, George. “Jewish History and the Ideology of Modern Sport: Approaches and Interpretations.” *Journal of Sport History* 25, no. 3 (1998): 482–531.
Eisner, Will. *Comics and Sequential Art: Principles and Practices from the Legendary Cartoonist; [Incl. New and Updated Material]*. New York, NY: Norton, 2008.
Eliade, Mircea. *Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018.
———. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Translated by Willard Trask. New York: Harvest, 1987.
Eliade, Mircea, and Jonathan Z. Smith. *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.
Elzey, Wayne. “Jesus the Salesman: A Reassessment of The Man Nobody Knows.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* XLVI, no. 2 (June 1, 1978): 151–77. https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/XLVI.2.151.

Enns, Peter. "The Benefit of Doubt: Coming to Terms with Faith in a Postmodern Era." Personal. *Peter Enns Online* (blog), November 24, 2010. https://web.archive.org/web/20170825193703/http://peterennsonline.com:80/2010/11/24/the-benefit-of-doubt-coming-to-terms-with-faith-in-a-post-modern-era/.
Erisman, Fred. "L. Frank Baum and the Progressive Dilemma." *American Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (1968): 616–23. https://doi.org/10.2307/2711021.
Evans, Christopher Hodge. *The Social Gospel in American Religion: A History*. New York: NYU Press, 2017.
Farber, David. *Sloan Rules: Alfred P. Sloan and the Triumph of General Motors.* University of Chicago Press, 2015.
Farber, Manny. "Comic Strips." In *Arguing Comics*, edited by Jeet. Heer and Kent Worcester, 91–93. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005.
Fiedler, Leslie. "The Middle Against Both Ends." In *Arguing Comics*, edited by Jeet. Heer and Kent Worcester, 122–33. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005.
Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schüssler. *Wisdom Ways Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006.
Fleming, Victor. *The Wizard of Oz*. DVD. Burbank, CA: Warner Video, 1939. https://catalog.afi.com/Film/7892-THE-WIZARDOFOZ?sid=ad30b37d-6d0a-45ff-a5d2-1e64537cf9b1&sr=89.74068&cp=1&pos=0.
Fox, Richard Wightman. *Jesus in America: Personal Savior, Cultural Hero, National Obsession*. HarperSanFrancisco, 2005.
Fraas, Mitch. "A Taste of Recent Acquisitions." Blog. *Unique at Penn, a Penn Libraries Blog* (blog), October 1, 2013. https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=uniqueatpenn.
Freeden, Michael. "Is Nationalism a Distinct Ideology?" *Political Studies* 46, no. 4 (September 1, 1998): 748–65. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.00165.
Freeman, Matthew. "Up, Up and Across: Superman, the Second World War and the Historical Development of Transmedia Storytelling." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 35, no. 2 (April 3, 2015): 215–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/01439685.2014.941564.
Frey, Rebecca Joyce. *Fundamentalism (Global Issues)*. New York: Facts on File, 2007.
Fried, Richard M. *The Man Everybody Knew: Bruce Barton and the Making of Modern America*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005.
Gabilliet, Jean-Paul. *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*. Translated by Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2013.
Gaebelein, Arno Clemens. *The History of the Scofield Reference Bible*. New York: Our Hope Publications, 1943.
Gardner, Martin. "The Royal Historian of Oz." In *The Wizard of Oz and Who He Was*, edited by Martin Gardner and Russel B. Nye, 19–46. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994.
Gardner, Todd. "The Wizard of Oz: Responses to Littlefield." Fan site. *Turn Me on Deadman* (blog). Accessed April 16, 2013. https://archive.ph/20130416002454/http://turnmeondeadman.org/OZ/Responses.php.
Gillerman, Sharon. "Samson in Vienna: The Theatrics of Jewish Masculinity." *Jewish Social Studies* 9, no. 2 (2003): 65–98.

Gombrich, E. H. *The Story of Art*. London: Phaidon, 2021.
Gombrich, Ernst. *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*. Translated by Hans Josef. New York: Phaidon, 2014.
Gordon, Rosemary. "A Very Private World." In *The Function and Nature of Imagery*, edited by Peter W. Sheehan, 63–80. New York: Academic Press, 1981.
Gordon-Reed, Annette, ed. *Racism in America: A Reader*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020. https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674251687.
Grattan, Laura. *Populism's Power: Radical Grassroots Democracy in America*, 2016.
Gray, Mary L., Colin R. Johnson, and Brian Joseph Gilley, eds. "Snorting the Powder of Life: Transgender Migration in the Land of Oz." In *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies*, 126–45. New York: New York University Press, 2016.
Green, William Brent, Jr. Review of "THE FUNDAMENTALS. A Testimony to the Truth. vols. I and II. 8v0., 126 and 125. Testimony Publishing Company, 808 La Salle Ave. Chicago, Ill., U.S.A." in *The Princeton Theological Review*, vol 9. no. 1. 1911, 130-131 http://journals.ptsem.edu/id/BR191191.
Griessman, B Eugene. "Philo-Semitism and Protestant Fundamentalism: The Unlikely Zionists." *Phylon (1960-)* 37, no. 3 (1976): 197–211.
Griswold, Jerry. "There's No Place but Home: The Wizard of Oz." *The Antioch Review* 45, no. 4 (1987): 462–75. https://doi.org/10.2307/4611799.
Guasti, Petra, and Lenka Bustikova. "Populism." In *Oxford Bibliographies in Political Science*, edited by Sandy Maisel. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. doi: 10.1093/OBO/9780199756223-0300.
Hägglund, Martin. *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2008.
Hangen, Tona J. *Redeeming the Dial: Radio, Religion & Popular Culture in America*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003.
Hankins, Barry. *God's Rascal: J. Frank Norris & the Beginnings of Southern Fundamentalism*. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996.
Harmetz, Aljean. *The Making of The Wizard of Oz*. Chicago: Illinois Chicago Review Press, 2013.
Harpine, William D. "Bryan's 'A Cross of Gold:' The Rhetoric of Polarization at the 1896 Democratic Convention." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 87, no. 3 (August 1, 2001): 291–304. https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630109384338.
Hart, Darryl G. *Defending the Faith J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.
Hearn, Michael Patrick. "Preface and Introduction to The Annotated Wizard of Oz." In *The Annotated Wizard of Oz: The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, xi–ci. New York; London: Norton, 2000.
Herr, Jeet, and Kent Worcester. "Early Twentieth-Century Voices." In *Arguing Comics*, edited by Jeet. Heer and Kent Worcester, 2–3. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005.
———. "Introduction." In *Arguing Comics*, edited by Jeet. Heer and Kent Worcester, vii–xxiii. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005.
———. "The Postwar Mavericks." In *Arguing Comics*, edited by Jeet. Heer and Kent Worcester, 85–87. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua. “Preface.” In *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays*, edited by Susannah Heschel, vii–xxx. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001.
Hoffmeister, Andrew Charles. “Fundamentalism and Modernity: A Critique of the ‘Anti-Modern’ Conception of Fundamentalism.” M.A. Thesis, Georgia State University, 2006. https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/rs_theses/3/.
Hofstadter, Richard. *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life: The Paranoid Style in American Politics Uncollected Essays 1956-1965*. Edited by Sean Wilentz and Nicolaus A. Huber. New York: Library of America, 2020.
———. *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* Vintage Books: New York, 1955. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=732946.
Hogan, David J. *The Wizard of Oz FAQ: All That’s Left to Know about Life According to Oz*. Milwaukee: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, An Imprint of Hal Leonard Corporation, 2014.
Horlock, Douglas. “The Wonderful Land of Oz.” *Historian*, no. 68 (Winter 2000): 4.
Horwitz, Simi. “At 92, Mike Greenstein Is Still One of the World’s Strongest Jews.” *The Forward*, September 4, 2013. https://forward.com/culture/182284/at-92-mike-greenstein-is-still-one-of-the-worlds-s/.
House, Boyce. “Bryan the Orator.” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1908-1984)* 53, no. 3 (1960): 266–82.
“How Superman Would End The War.” *Look*, February 27, 1940.
Howe, Irving. “Notes on Mass Culture.” In *Arguing Comics*, edited by Jeet. Heer and Kent Worcester, 43–51. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005.
Hungiville, Maurice. “Introduction.” In *The Wizard of Oz and Who He Was*, edited by Martin Gardner and Russel B. Nye, ix–xvi. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994.
Imarisha, Walidah. “Other Worlds Are Possible: Visionary Fiction, Culture, and Organizing.” *Left Turn: Notes from the Global Intifada* (blog), February 2010. http://www.leftturn.org/others-worlds-are-possible.
———. “To Build a Future Without Police and Prisons, We Have to Imagine It First.” Federated Blog. *OneZero* (blog), October 22, 2020. https://onezero.medium.com/black-lives-matter-is-science-fiction-how-envisioning-a-better-future-makes-it-possible-5e14d35154e3.
Imhoff, Sarah. *Masculinity and the Making of American Judaism*, 2017.
Isherwood, Christopher. *The World in the Evening*. London: Vintage Classic, 2012.
Isherwood, Lisa. “Feminist Theologies.” In *The Palgrave Handbook of Radical Theology*, edited by Christopher D. Rodkey and Jordan E. Miller, 567–78. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96595-6_37.
Israel, E O. “‘Sickly Son of Rabbi Became Mighty Atom’ of Stage Fame; Now He’s Subject of a Book.” *The New York Jewish Week (1973-1985)*. September 16, 1979, Manhattan edition. 371520491; SFLNSNYJW0979JWJS061011733. Ethnic NewsWatch.
James, C.L.R. “C.L.R. James on Comic Strips.” In *Arguing Comics*, edited by Jeet. Heer and Kent Worcester, 142–43. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005.
Jensen, Richard J. *The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888-1896*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971.
Jones, Laurie Beth. *Jesus, CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership*, 2021.
Josephson-Storm, Jason Ananda. *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018.

http://chicago.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.7208/chicago/9780226403533.001.0001/upso-9780226403229.
K, David. “The Presbyterian Beginnings of Fundamentalism.” Blog. *Presbyterian Historical Society, The National Archives of the PC(USA)* (blog), April 13, 2015. https://www.history.pcusa.org/blog/2015/04/presbyterian-beginnings-fundamentalism.
Kalberg, Stephen. “Introduction to The Protestant Ethic.” In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: The Revised 1920 Edition, Translation and Introduction by Stephen Kalberg*, translated by Stephen Kalberg, 8–64. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
Kaltwasser, Franz Georg, H. B. Gardner-McTaggart, Paulina. Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre. Ostiguy. *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.
Kazin, Alfred. *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature. With a Preface to The Fiftieth Anniversary Edition*. 3rd Harvest edition. San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1995.
Kazin, Michael. *The Populist Persuasion: An American History.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017.
Kippenberg, Hans Gerhard. *Visible Religion Annual for Religious Iconography*. 43 vols. State University Groningen. Institute of Religious Iconography. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982.
Knopf, Christina. “Superman, A Super Freak: Returning the Man of Steel to the Circle in ‘DC Bombshells.’” In *Adapting Superman: Essays on the Transmedia Man of Steel*, edited by John Darowski, 207–16. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2021.
Knowles, Christopher. *Our Gods Wear Spandex: The Secret History of Comic Book Heroes*. San Francisco: Weiser Books, 2007.
Kolko, Gabriel. *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Re-Interpretation of American History, 1900-1916*. New York: Free Press, 1977.
Koltun-Fromm, Ken. *Drawing on Religion: Reading and the Moral Imagination in Comics and Graphic Novels*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020.
Larkin, Clarence. “Ages and Dispensations.” *Clarence Larkin Charts* (blog), 2007. http://clarencelarkincharts.com/Clarence_Larkin_2.html.
———. *Dispensational Truth: Or God’s Plan and Purpose in the Ages*. Philadelphia: Rev. Clarence Larkin Est., 1920. https://archive.org/details/dispensationaltr0000lark.
———. *Rightly Dividing the Word.* New York: Cosimo Classics, 1920.
———. “The Second Coming,” http://clarencelarkincharts.com/Clarence_Larkin_1.html.
Laws, Curtis Lee. “Convention Side Lights.” *Watchman-Examiner* VIII (July 1, 1920): 834.
Lears, T. J. Jackson. “From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930.” In *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*, edited by Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, 1–38. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.
———. *No Place of Grace: The Quest for Alternatives to Modern American Culture, 1880-1920*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.
Legman, Gershon. “‘From Love and Death:’ A Study in Censorship.” In *Arguing Comics*, edited by Jeet. Heer and Kent Worcester, 112–21. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005.
Lentfer, Nathan V. “A History of the World’s Christian Fundamentals Association (1919-1952).” Bob Jones University, 2011.

Levin, Meyer, and Toby K Kurzband. *The Story of the Jewish Way of Life*. Jewish Heritage Series. New York: Behrman House, 1959. https://books.google.com/books?id=9B9aAAAAYAAJ.
Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Savage Mind: (La Pensée Sauvage)*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966.
Lewis, A. David. "Superman Graveside: Superhero Salvation Beyond Jesus." In *Graven Images: Religion in Comic Books and Graphic Novels*, edited by A. David Lewis and Christine Hoff. Kraemer, 166–87. New York: Continuum, 2010.
Lewis, A. David, and Christine Hoff. Kraemer. *Graven Images: Religion in Comic Books and Graphic Novels*. New York: Continuum, 2010.
———. "Introduction." In *Graven Images: Religion in Comic Books and Graphic Novels*, edited by A. David Lewis and Christine Hoff. Kraemer, 1–14. New York: Continuum, 2010.
Liebman, Robert Leslie. "Rabbis or Rakes, Schlemiels or Supermen? Jewish Identity in Charles Chaplin, Jerry Lewis and Woody Allen." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (1984): 195–201.
Ligorski, Mark. "The Masked Superhero." *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis* 22, no. 3 (September 1, 1994): 449–64. https://doi.org/10.1521/jaap.1.1994.22.3.449.
Lincoln, Bruce. *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
Lincoln, C. Eric. *Race, Religion, and the Continuing American Dilemma*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1984.
Littlefield, Henry M. "The Wizard of Oz: Parable on Populism." *American Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (1964): 47–58. https://doi.org/10.2307/2710826.
Lofton, Kathryn. *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011.
Lotterman, Andrew. "Superman as a Male Latency Stage Myth." *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic* 45, no. 6 (November 1, 1981): 491.
Lowndes, Joseph. "Populism in the United States." In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, edited by Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre Ostiguy. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.11.
Maciak, Phillip Jon. "The Resurrection Is in Technicolor: Bruce Barton's American Life of Jesus." University of Virginia, 2007.
Mangum, R. Todd, and Mark S. Sweetnam. *Scofield Bible: Its History and Impact on the Evangelical Church.* Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2012.
Marchand, Roland. *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.
Marsden, George M. *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
Martin, Craig. *Capitalizing Religion: Ideology and the Opiate of the Bourgeoisie*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014.
Marty, Martin E. *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
———. "America's Iconic Book." Presented at the 1980: Centennial of Society of Biblical Literature), 1980. http://www.illuminos.com/mem/selectPapers/contentsSelectList.html.
———. *Righteous Empire Revisited*. Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 2007.

———. *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America*. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.
Marty, Martin E., R. Scott Appleby, and American Academy of Arts and Sciences. *Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
———. *Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Polities, Economies, and Militance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
———. *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2010.
McGerr, Michael. *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
McKinnon, Andrew M. "Jesus, the American Advertising Man: Bruce Barton, The Man Nobody Knows, and Faith in Consumer Capitalism." University of Toronto, 2007. Library and Archives Canada = Bibliothéque et Archives Canada.
McLuhan, Marshall. "Comics: 'Mad' Vestibule to TV." In *Arguing Comics*, edited by Jeet. Heer and Kent Worcester, 107–11. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005.
———. *Understanding media: the extensions of man*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994.
Meacham, Joseph R. "Bruce Barton: Editor, Author, Executive." University of Wisconsin--Madison, 1964.
Mencken, H. L. "William Jennings Bryan." *Menckeniana*, no. 193 (2010): 12–16.
Meyer, Birgit, David Morgan, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate. "Introduction: Key Words in Material Religion." *Material Religion* 7, no. 1 (March 1, 2011): 4–8. https://doi.org/10.2752/175183411X12968355481737.
Miles, Margaret R. "Image." In *Critical Terms for Religious Studie*, edited by Mark C. Taylor, 160–72. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
Misek, Richard. *Chromatic Cinema: A History of Screen Color*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
Mitchell, W. J. T. *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.
Montgomery, Edrene Stephens. *Bruce Barton and the Twentieth Century Menace of Unreality*. Fayetteville, Ark, 1984.
Morgan, David. *Icons of American Protestantism: The Art of Warner Sallman*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1996.
———. *Keywords in Religion, Media, and Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
———. *Protestants & Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture and the Age of American Mass Production*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
Morgan, David. *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*. London: Routledge, 2010.
Morgan, David. *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.
———. *The Forge of Vision: A Visual History of Modern Christianity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015.
———. *The Lure of Images: A History of Religion and Visual Media in America*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Morgan, David. *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.
Morgan, David. *Visual Piety a History and Theory of Popular Religious Images*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.
Morgan, David. "Image." In *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture*, edited by David Morgan, 96–110. New York: Routledge, 2008.
Morgan, David, and Sally M. Promey. *The Visual Culture of American Religions*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
Moynihan, Daniel Patrick. "Introduction." In *The Torment of Secrecy: The Background and Consequences of American Security Policies*, by Edward Shils, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 1669. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996.
Mudde, Cas. "The Populist Zeitgeist." *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 541–63. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x.
Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. "Studying Populism in Comparative Perspective: Reflections on the Contemporary and Future Research Agenda." *Comparative Political Studies* 51, no. 13 (July 26, 2018): 1667–93. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018789490.
n.a. "Jesus as Efficiency Expert." *Christian Century*, 42:27 (July 2, 1925), 851. Google Books.
_____. "Booming Religion as a Business Proposition." *Christian Century*, May 21, 1925.
Nathanson, Paul. *Over the Rainbow: The Wizard of Oz as a Secular Myth of America*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1991.
Noll, Mark A. *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
_____. *History of Christianity in the United States and Canada.* Grand Rapids: MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019.
Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart. *Cultural Backlash Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
Nweze, Ikenna, MD, Swapna Munnangi PhD, Sally Shukry BA, and L D George Angus MD, MPH. "Howard Atwood Kelly: Man of Science, Man of God." *The American Surgeon* 83, no. 5 (May 2017): E171–75.
Nye, Russel B. "An Appreciation." In *The Wizard of Oz and Who He Was*, edited by Russel B. Nye and Martin Gardner, 1–18. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994.
O'Neil, Dennis. "The Crimson Viper Versus the Maniacal Morphing Meme." In *Superheroes and Philosophy Truth, Justice, and the Socratic Way*, edited by Tom Morris and Matt Morris. Chicago, Ill: Open Court, 2012.
Ong, Walter. "The Comics and the Super State." In *The Superhero Reader*, edited by Jeet Heer, Kent Worcester, and Charles Hatfield, 34–45. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2013.
Orcutt, Darby. "Comics and Religion: Theoretical Connections." In *Graven Images: Religion in Comic Books and Graphic Novels*, edited by A. David Lewis and Christine Hoff. Kraemer, 93–96. New York: Continuum, 2010.
Orsi, Robert A. *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.
———. "Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live in? Special Presidential Plenary Address, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Salt Lake City, November 2, 2002." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42, no. 2 (2003): 169–74.

———. *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.
Ostiguy, Pierre. "Populism: A Socio-Cultural Approach." In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, edited by Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre Ostiguy. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.11.
Panofsky, Erwin. *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*. New York; London: Icon Editions, 1975.
———. *Meaning in the Visual Arts*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
———. *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance.* New York: Routledge, 2019.
Perkinson, James W. *Messianism Against Christology: Resistance Movements, Folk Arts, and Empire.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
Pietsch, B. M. *Dispensational Modernism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
Plantinga, Alvin. *Warranted Christian Belief*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
Pohlman, Michael E. *Broadcasting the Faith: Protestant Religious Radio and Theology in America, 192050*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2021.
Prothero, Stephen R. *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006.
———. *The American Bible: How Our Words Unite, Divide, and Define a Nation*. New York: HarperOne, 2012.
Raz-Krakotzkin, Amnon. "The Golem of Scholem - Messianism and Zionism in the Writings of Rabbi Avraham Isaac HaKohen Kook and Gershom Scholem" In *Politik und Religion im Judentum* edited by Christoph Miething, 223-238. Berlin, New York: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2012. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110922172.223.
Ribuffo, Leo P. "Jesus Christ as Business Statesman: Bruce Barton and the Selling of Corporate Capitalism." *American Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1981): 206–31. https://doi.org/10.2307/2712316.
Riley, Michael O. *Oz and beyond: The Fantasy World of L. Frank Baum*. Lawrence, K.S.: University Press of Kansas, 1998.
———. *Oz and Beyond: The Fantasy World of L. Frank Baum*. Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1998.
Ritter, Gretchen. "Silver Slippers and a Golden Cap: L. Frank Baum's 'The Wonderful Wizard of Oz' and Historical Memory in American Politics." *Journal of American Studies* 31, no. 2 (1997): 171–202.
Robb, Brian. *A Brief History of Superheroes*. London: Constable & Robinson, 2014.
Robinson, George L. "One Isaiah." In *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to Truth*, Second printing., 1:201–16. Rio, WI: AGES Software, 2000.
Rockoff, Hugh. "The 'Wizard of Oz' as a Monetary Allegory." *Journal of Political Economy* 98, no. 4 (1990): 739–60.
Rodkey, Christopher D., and Jordan E. Miller, eds. *The Palgrave Handbook of Radical Theology.* Cham, CH: Springer International Publishing, 2018.
Roesch-Wagner, Sally. "Dorothy Gage and Dorothy Gale." Blog. *Theosophical Society* (blog), n.d. https://www.theosophical.org/publications/quest-magazine/1580.
———. *Matilda Joslyn Gage: She Who Holds the Sky*. Aberdeen, S.D.: Sky Carrier Press, 2002.
———. "Oral History as a Biographical Tool." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 2, no. 2 (1977): 87–92.

———. *Sisters in Spirit: Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Influence on Early American Feminists*, 2001.
———. *The Wonderful Mother of Oz*. Fayetteville, NY: Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation, 2003.
Rogers, Katharine M. *L. Frank Baum: Creator of Oz*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013.
Rood, Paul W. *Remembering the Fundamentals Project, 1909-1915.* Vol. 1. La Mirada, CA: Biola University, 2014. http://elibrary.biola.edu/ebooks/Rood_Remember_2014.
Rushdie, Salman. *The Wizard of Oz*. London: British Film Institute, 2019.
Russell, Charles Allyn. *J. Frank Norris: Violent Fundamentalist*. Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1972.
Ruthven, Malise. *Fundamentalism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
Sandeen, Ernest Robert. *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
Schaff, Philip. "The Westminster Confession of Faith. A.D. 1647." In *The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches.*, Reprinted 4th., Volume III:601–73. Creeds of Christendom. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1977. https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds3/creeds3.iv.xvii.ii.html.
Schenck, Ken. "Superman: A Popular Culture Messiah." In *The Gospel According to Superheroes: Religion and Pop Culture*, edited by B. J. Oropeza, 33–48. New York: Peter Lang, 2008.
Schleier, Curt. "The Mighty Atom." *The Jewish Standard*, November 23, 2017. https://jewishstandard.timesofisrael.com/the-mighty-atom/.
Scholem, Gershom Gerhard. *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*. New York: Schocken, 2006.
Schwartz, Evan I. *Finding Oz: How L. Frank Baum Discovered the Great American Story*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009. http://site.ebrary.com/id/10463315.
Scofield, C. I. *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth (2 Tim. 2:15): Ten Outline Studies of the More Important Divisions of Scripture*. Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1885.
———. "The Grace of God." In *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to Truth*, Second Printing., 3:82–91. Rio, WI: AGES Software, 2000.
Scofield, C.I., ed. *The Scofield Reference Bible ... With a New System of Connected Topical References to All the Greater Themes of Scripture, with Annotations, Revised Marginal Readings, Summaries, Definitions, and Index.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1909.
Seldes, Gilbert. "The Krazy Kat That Walks by Himself." In *Arguing Comics*, edited by Jeet. Heer and Kent Worcester, 22–29. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005.
Sheldon, Charles M. *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?* Reprint. Chicago: Grosset & Dunlap, 1935.
_____. *"Jesus Is Here* New York: Hodder & Stoughton: George H. Doran Co., 1914.
Shils, Edward. *The Torment of Secrecy: The Background and Consequences of American Security Policies*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996.
Siegel, Jerry. "The Reign of the Superman." *Science Fiction: The Vanguard of Future Civilization*, January 1933. The Sol and Penny Davidson Collection. https://ufl-flvc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01FALSC_UFL/175ga98/alma990214369280306597.
———. *The Reign of the Superman*. Video Recording, 1933. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RzX88gT0R3U.

Smith, Andrew Christopher. *Fundamentalism, Fundraising, and the Transformation of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1919-1925*, 2016.
Smith, David John. "Using the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits of Ignatius Loyola to Critique the Methodology for the Discernment of Spirits within the Writings of Mrs. Jessie Penn-Lewis." Th.M. Thesis, Regis College, 2001. https://go.exlibris.link/7srzgnDN.
Smith, John E. "Time, Times, and the 'Right Time'; 'Chronos' and 'Kairos.'" *The Monist* 53, no. 1 (1969): 1–13.
Smith, Robert O. "Systematizing the Jew: John Nelson Darby and the Putative Paternity of Christian Zionism." In *More Desired than Our Owne Salvation: The Roots of Christian Zionism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. Oxford Scholarship Online, 2013. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199993246.003.0008.
Simon, Taryn, and Aaron Schwartz. "Image Atlas," 2012. http://www.imageatlas.org/.
Soanes, Catherine, and Angus Stevenson, eds. "Frontispiece." *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2008. https://www.proquest.com/encyclopedias-reference-works/frontispiece/docview/2138016654/se-2?accountid=14214.
Sontag, Susan. "Notes on 'Camp.'" In *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays*, 275–92. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1990.
Spielman, Ed. *The Mighty Atom: The Life and Times of Joseph L. Greenstein*. New York: Viking Press, 1979. https://archive.org/details/mightyatomlifeti00spie.
Staples, Louis. "Why Is Judy Garland the Ultimate Gay Icon?" *BBC Culture*, September 24, 2019. https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20190923-why-is-judy-garland-the-ultimate-gay-icon.
Stokes, David R. *The Shooting Salvationist: J. Frank Norris and the Murder Trial That Captivated America*. Hanover, N.H.: Steerforth Press, 2012.
Stunt, Timothy C. F. "John Nelson Darby." In *Protestant Millennialism, Evangelicalism, and Irish Society, 1790–2005*, edited by Crawford Gribben and Andrew R. Holmes, 83–98. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2006. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230595941_4.
Sutton, Matthew Avery. *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017.
Swartz, Mark Evan. *Before the Rainbow: L. Frank Baum's The Wonderful Wizard of Oz on Stage and Screen to 1939*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.
Taggart, Paul. *Populism*. Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000. doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.11.
———. *Populism: Concepts in the Social Sciences*. Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000.
Taguieff, Pierre-André. "Political Science Confronts Populism: From a Conceptual Mirage to a Real Problem." *Telos* 1995, no. 103 (1995): 9–43.
Taylor, Mark C. *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion*. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
Thomas, Roy. *Superman: The War Years 1938-1945*. Vol. 2. Burbank, CA: Chartwell Books, 2015.
Thomas, W. H. Griffith. "Old Testament Criticism And New Testament Christianity." In *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to Truth*, Second printing., 1:102–20. Rio, WI: AGES Software, 2000.
Torrey, R. A. *The Importance and Value of Proper Bible Study*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1921.

Torrey, R. A., and A. C. Dixon, eds. *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*. Vol. 1. 4 vols. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 2008.
Trollinger, William Vance. *God's Empire: William Bell Riley and Midwestern Fundamentalism*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990.
Tuin, Iris van der. "The New Materialist 'Always Already': On an A-Human Humanities." *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 19, no. 4 (December 1, 2011): 285–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2011.620575.
Tweed, Thomas A. *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.
Tye, Larry. *Superman: The High-Flying History of America's Most Enduring Hero*. New York: Random House, 2012.
Uehlinger, Christoph. "Approaches to Visual Culture and Religion: Disciplinary Trajectories, Interdisciplinary Connections, and Some Suggestions for Further Progress." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 27, no. 4–5 (October 29, 2015): 384–422. https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-12341362.
University, Biola. "From Acorn to Oak: The Story of Bible Institute of Los Angeles." *History of Biola* 5 (1916). https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/hist-biola/5.
———. "History and Heritage." University Website. *Biola University* (blog), n.d. https://www.biola.edu/about/history.
Waid, Mark. "The Real Truth About Superman: And the Rest of Us Too." In *Superheroes and Philosophy Truth, Justice, and the Socratic Way*, edited by Tom Morris and Matt Morris, 3–10. Chicago, Ill: Open Court, 2012.
Wang, Tiffany R. "Devout Pedagogies: A Textual Analysis of Late Nineteenth Century Christian Women." *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*. Ph.D., Bowling Green State University, 2017. ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (1943343192). https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/devout-pedagogies-textual-analysis-late/docview/1943343192/se-2?accountid=14214.
Warburg, Aby. *Aby Warburg: Bilderatlas Mnemosyne: The Original*. The Warburg Institute. Berlin: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2020.
Warburg, Aby, Kurt Forster, and David Britt. *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 2006.
Watt, David Harrington. *A Transforming Faith Explorations of Twentieth Century American Evangelicalism*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991.
———. "Fundamentalists of the 1920s and 1930s." In *Fundamentalism: Perspectives on a Contested History*, edited by Simon A. Wood and David Harrington Watt, 18–35. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2014.
Watts, James W. *Iconic Books and Texts*. Sheffield, UK: Equinox Publishing, 2015.
Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: The Revised 1920 Edition, Translation and Introduction by Stephen Kalberg*. Translated by Stephen Kalberg. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
Weinstein, Simcha. *Up, up, and Oy Vey!: How Jewish History, Culture, and Values Shaped the Comic Book Superhero*. Fort Lee, NJ: Barricade Books, 2014.
Wenger, Robert Elwood. "Social Thought In American Fundamentalism, 1918-1933." *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*. Ph.D., The University of Nebraska - Lincoln, 1973. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (287990914). https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-

theses/social-thought-american-fundamentalism-1918-1933/docview/287990914/se-2?accountid=14214.
———. *Social Thought in American Fundamentalism, 1918-1933*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007.
Westerman, Pauline. "The Modernity of Fundamentalism: Fundamentalisms Observed, Vol. 1 by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby." *Journal of Religion* 74, no. 1 (1994): 77–85.
Whalen, Robert K. "'Christians Love the Jews!' The Development of American Philo-Semitism, 1790-1860." *Religion and American Culture* 6, no. 2 (1996): 225–59.
White, Richard. *The Republic for Which It Stands: The United States during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865-1896*. Oxford History of the United States. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.
Wilkinson, Paul Richard. *For Zion's Sake: Christian Zionism and the Role of John Nelson Darby*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008.
Willcox, M. A. "Theories of Inspiration." *The Biblical World* 5, no. 3 (1895): 169–80.
Wisse, Ruth. "War Is No Joke A West Point Baccalaureate Address." *The Weekly Standard*, May 31, 2010. https://web.archive.org/web/20120202120549/https://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/war-no-joke.
Wisse, Ruth R. *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971.
Wolfe, Kathi. "'The Wizard of Oz' Turns 80 This Year"." *Washington Blade: America's LGBT News Source*, February 25, 2019. https://www.washingtonblade.com/2019/02/25/the-wizard-of-oz-turns-80-this-year/.
Wood, Simon A., and David Harrington Watt. *Fundamentalism: Perspectives on a Contested History*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2014.
———. "Introduction." In *Fundamentalism: Perspectives on a Contested History*, edited by David Harrington Watt and Simon A. Wood, 1–17. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2014.
Wuthnow, Robert, and Matthew P. Larson. "Sources of Fundamentalism in the United States." In *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, edited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, 18–56. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
Yogerst, Chris. "Superhero Films: A Fascist National Complex or Exemplars of Moral Virtue?" *Journal of Religion & Film* 21, no. 1 (2017): 1–34.
Zipes, Jack. *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization*. New York: Routledge, 2015.
n.a. *The Presbyterian of the South: [combining the] Southwestern Presbyterian, Central Presbyterian, Southern Presbyterian.* (Atlanta, Ga.), 06 April 1910. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/10021978/1910-04-06/ed-1/seq-27/>

VITA

NAME OF AUTHOR: Adam DJ Brett

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York
Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas
Warner University, Lake Wales, Florida

DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Philosophy, 2022, Syracuse University
Master of Philosophy, 2014, Syracuse University
Certificate of Advanced Studies, Women's & Gender Studies, 2013, Syracuse University
Master of Theology, 2011, Brite Divinity School
Graduate Certificate, Women's & Gender Studies, 2011 Texas Christian University
Master of Theological Studies, 2009, Brite Divinity School
Bachelor of Arts in History and Biblical Studies, 2006, Warner University

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Religion Instructor 2014-Present Department of Religion, Syracuse University.
Teaching Assistant 2011-2020 Department of Religion, Syracuse University.