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**“Contentment in My Heart”:
Evangelical Women and Spiritual Journeys**

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Senior Honors Thesis
Department of Sociology
Colby College
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Elizabeth Doran has successfully completed the Senior Honors Thesis in Sociology,
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Professor Teresa Arendell, advisor

Professor Debra Campbell, reader

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Abstract:

This honors thesis is an in-depth, qualitative study of a central Maine evangelical church. My focus is on five women and their religious journeys and experiences as Christian women. I explore a number of issues: the appeal of this church community to contemporary women; the connections and the contrasts between what the church leaders espouse and what ordinary female members believe; the ways in which the women develop their own personal relationships with Christ, the evangelical tradition, and other members of the community; and my own journey as a student of sociology and a qualitative researcher.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction 1
 2. “Where oh Where Have you Been Pastor Bob?” (B 9/23/05): Historical and Sociological Roots of American Evangelicalism 8
 3. “A Whole Lot a Shakin Goin On . . .” (B 10/26/06): Theoretical Frameworks, Methodologies, and Methods 24
 4. Trinity Evangelical Free Church: History, Site, Leadership, Worship, and Recurring Messages 46
 5. Spiritual Journeys and Religious Experience: Five Women’s Stories 80
 6. Conclusions 118
- Appendix: Abbreviations 126
- Bibliography 127

Chapter 1 Introduction

I first came into contact with the Trinity Evangelical Free Church¹ (TEF) as part of an assignment in a qualitative sociological research methods course. I chose to step outside of my comfort zone and attend the Sunday service at this evangelical church in a central Maine community as part of an assignment on participant observation in a particular subculture. The first service sparked my interest, and I then decided to do in-depth observation as part of an independent study on the evangelical movement in Maine. For that initial study, I attended TEF for seven weeks, seven Sunday services, and fully participated in the services to the extent I felt comfortable, while taking notes as discretely as I could.

In listening to sermons and observing various activities during services, I was not surprised to hear reinforced what I have since learned are key characteristics of evangelicalism, “belief in the centrality of a conversion or ‘born again’ experience as the criterion for entering the kingdom of heaven” and “taking the Bible seriously . . . to the point of interpreting literally” (Balmer and Winner 2002: 22). The Bible is the word of God. Other emphases, regarding gender, abortion, homosexuality, and Jews disquieted me and were counter to my own core beliefs.

My attention was drawn, in particular, to attitudes expressed in sermons concerning women and marriage, with their emphasis on wives’ submission to their husbands. As an outside observer, I was, at first, horrified by such pronouncements, which seemed to drip with patriarchal condescension, justified by what is regarded as the holy word of God. I wanted to know more about these people. Why would modern

¹ All names of places and people have been changed.

women, many of them my own age, who sang along appreciatively in the church and listened attentively to the sermons of the pastors, be drawn to TEF?

The role of women at TEF, attitudes toward women, and the women members' own sense of identity seemed, in particular, to offer me an exciting topic for a senior honors thesis that would beautifully combine various areas of my study at Colby in sociology, women's, gender, and sexuality studies, and religion. Building on the work of Brenda Brasher, R. Marie Griffith, Jody Davie, Judith Stacey, and others, I would explore the appeal of this church and its pastors to contemporary women. Like these scholars, I would interview individual women and hear about their spiritual journeys in their own voices. What worldviews do the women express and why is the church apparently a positive source of support and self-identification for some women? Is the church an extreme example of post-feminist culture or simply an example of reactionary religious fundamentalism or something else? As my study continued, I was able to approach these questions with more nuance and empathy and the questions themselves began to change as is inevitable in qualitative work. My interest in the women's particular religious journeys grew as did my desire to understand the worldview of the charismatic head pastor of TEF, Pastor Bob, within the larger history of evangelicalism and its varied contemporary spectrum.

I approach these questions as a consummate outsider. In reading the work of scholars of evangelical Christianity, I have been struck by how many have grown up in the tradition they study. A good example of an evangelical scholar from within the tradition and who is at peace with it is Kenneth J. Collins, who teaches at the conservative Methodist Asbury Theological Seminary. Collins is completely at home

and comfortable in the tradition he studies, an intelligent spokesman for it from within. Randall Balmer, who teaches American religion at Barnard College, has followed a different path. He discusses his own spiritual journey and his discomfort with certain aspects of the evangelical pastors and churches that he studies. Raised as an evangelical, he describes an early memory of “witnessing” to a childhood friend (Balmer 1989: 3). His study of evangelical churches across the United States is a “personal odyssey of sorts,” as he notes that “some of what follows . . . is self-disclosure” (Balmer 1989: 5-7). He expresses honest discomfort with his own tradition and maintains a critical stance; he has come to regard fellow evangelicals as intolerant and some of their views as embarrassing. He tells readers where he comes from and that way includes them in his journey. I myself am at the opposite end of this insider/outsider trajectory that Ninian Smart, the well-known scholar of comparative religion, calls “being religion” versus “studying religion” (Smart 1983: 4).

My own childhood household was definitely culturally Jewish but of a non-observant quality. We never ate ham or bacon but we did not keep strictly kosher. We celebrated major holidays like Passover. I attended Hebrew school and became a Bat Mitzvah when I was thirteen. I taught at first grade Hebrew school when I was in high school and worked at the Jewish Community Center. I self-identify as Jewish. At Colby, I try to celebrate major holidays and my eating habits are similar to those with which I was raised. I go to Hillel events occasionally. I should also mention that my family and the college town where I was raised are extremely liberal, politically and socially. In my public high school, I was able to take courses in women’s studies, African-American studies, and gay and lesbian studies, all taught from a decidedly

progressive perspective. This background gave me a particular insider's view of Judaism and a liberal political outlook, but I came to my study of evangelical Protestantism with little or no knowledge.

Initially, I thought I would be unfettered by not having been raised in a church like those of Balmer or Collins. I would have no feelings of guilt or rebellion or a tendency to apologize. However, I quickly learned that this lack of personal acquaintance did not necessarily guarantee scholarly objectivity. In fact, attending TEF's services and listening to the pastors' sermons sometimes shocked me on a very visceral level. I would be less than honest if I did not admit that this project has at times been a source of anxiety as well as a constant source of fascination. My work with TEF has also forced me to examine my own religious and spiritual identity. My understanding of those whom I have met from TEF has developed, and my views have tempered over time.

This fall and winter, I once again attended Sunday services, but my goal was to get in touch with a smaller church group, which I could attend regularly. Professor Debra Campbell also suggested that getting to know more about Pastor Bob was critical to the project. Given that many evangelical churches are, as she noted, "entirely independent of denominational ties and governance," the views of the head pastor were central to understanding official religion at the church (email communication 9/9/08). It turned out to be rather difficult to make personal contact with Pastor Bob, which is significant in and of itself. After Sunday services, Pastor Bob was surrounded by dozens of the hundreds and hundreds of congregants that attend each week, veritable groupies. He is a superstar in his world, and it was not possible to interject myself in order to ask for an appointment. I left emails and phone messages to no avail. I am not sure whether my

messages ever reached him or not, but then one morning I finally reached his secretary via phone and she connected me directly to him. I told him who I was and about my senior thesis. He was gracious and welcoming, and we made an appointment for an interview. I interviewed him once more toward the end of the project. These conversations are important to my study as I try to situate his worldview within evangelicalism, to understand his appeal to his parishioners, and to have a basis for comparing his views with those of the women that I interviewed.

Pastor Bob put me in touch with others active in the church who, in turn, led me to a Bible study group for young adults. The group meets every Wednesday night in a private home located in a small central Maine town, about twenty minutes from TEF. I became a member of the group and attended weekly for most of the fall of 2008, about two and a half months. Members of this group, composed of men and women, and their interactions in the reading and interpreting of Scripture have provided further insight into the TEF community and its female members. Analysis of these small group experiences will also figure in my work. The young women who attend the group, most of whom are about my age, in turn, connected me with other women from TEF to form my set of interview subjects.

Certain themes inform my study: the question with which I began about the appeal of TEF to women and an understanding of their religious worldviews; an understanding of where official religion preached at TEF stands in relation to the wider and varied evangelical movement and its history; attention to the connections and the contrasts between what Pastor Bob and the other all-male leaders espouse and what ordinary female members believe; an understanding of the ways in which the women

develop their own personal relationships with Christ, the evangelical tradition, other members of the community, and TEF as a whole; and my own journey as a student of sociology and a qualitative researcher. It should come as no surprise that the majority of people from TEF who I encountered wanted to save me, wanted me to find Jesus and salvation, all of which made for an interesting and sometimes disturbing adventure.

My work is qualitative in nature and rooted in participant observation and in-depth, one-on-one interviews. My analysis relies upon a grounded theory approach by which the researcher builds the categories for analysis from the data as she goes – data collection and analysis inform one another. Models are provided by a number of previous studies of evangelical and non-evangelical women discussed below. The most helpful of these studies undertake a thickly descriptive analysis, to use terminology coined by Clifford Geertz (1973: 3-30). Such approaches avoid the wooden superimposition of particular scholarly paradigms and record what the subjects themselves do and reveal, allowing them to speak in their own voices. Analysis within a thick theoretical framework uncovers complexity, multivalence, and often-unexpected messages; it explores the complicated and variegated interplay between individuals and the various social worlds to which they belong. A full discussion of methodology, scholarly models, and methods is found in chapter 3. Chapter 4 deals with “official religion” as it emerges in church services, groups, and activities and in interviews with Pastor Bob and dinner with an elder of the church and his wife, who is also one of the women I interviewed. Chapter 5 provides an analysis of my interviews of five women associated with TEF. Chapter 6 concludes with a reflection upon my own journey as an ethnographer.

I begin in chapter 2 with an overview of evangelical Christianity in America to set the stage for my work with TEF. What are key themes in the contemporary scholarly discussion of American evangelicalism and how is its history presented and understood? This overview will allow for an analysis of the place of TEF church, its pastor, and its congregants within a spectrum of American evangelicalism.

Chapter 2

“Where oh Where Have you Been Pastor Bob?” (B 9/23/05): Historical and Sociological Roots of American Evangelicalism

Trinity Evangelical Free Church, located in a rural college town in central Maine, is a small part of a wider movement, one contemporary example of a long history of evangelicalism in America. This history is complicated, and scholarship on the roots of evangelicalism is substantial and complex. The very terminology employed by scholars and believers in regards to evangelicalism introduces confusion. The following brief discussion provides necessary background material and has four basic components: an overview of five stages in the broad history of evangelicalism as outlined by historian William G. McLoughlin; a more detailed discussion of scholarly treatments of evangelicalism that emphasizes the development of important theological themes; attention to the origins and meanings of recurring terms, such as “postmillennialism,” “premillennialism,” “dispensationalism,” and “fundamentalism”; and a discussion of the varieties of contemporary evangelicalism.

Revivals, Awakenings, and Evangelicalism

The definition of the terms “evangelical” and “evangelicalism” poses challenges having to do with the various ways in which Christians have defined themselves and with the evolution of important threads in the history of American Protestantism. The term evangelical has ancient roots in the Greek word for “the good news” or “gospel.” In the English-speaking world, however, evangelicalism relates to a long series of events in American Protestantism that historian William G. McLoughlin describes as “revivals” or “awakenings” (1978: xiii-xiv, 2). Revivals are periods of heightened religious fervor and

revitalization manifested in the springing up of new movements, leaders, and forms of ritual expression that are nevertheless grounded in the group's sense of its past. Such movements or religious waves, which can arise in any culture, reflect and help to bring about cultural transformation; they are means of renewal that offer hope and a sense of community identity in times of change, uncertainty, or displacement (McLoughlin 1978: 8-23).

McLoughlin demarcates five revivals integral to critical turning points and challenges in American history: the Puritan Revitalization of the 17th century that relates to the founding of America (1978: 24-44); the First Great Awakening of 1730-1760 that relates to the pre-Revolutionary period of new challenges and ideas (1978: 45-97); the Second Great Awakening of 1800-1830 that McLoughlin connects to a loss of early American self-confidence after the success of the Revolution (1978: 98-140); the Third Great Awakening from 1890-1920 that responds to urbanization and immigration (1978: 141-178); the Fourth Great Awakening, beginning in 1960 and perhaps continuing into the present, that responds to “a crisis of legitimacy” (1978: 179). This so-called crisis arises from the political and social turmoil surrounding the War in Vietnam, the rise of technology, the Watergate scandal, the Civil Rights movement for African-Americans, the Women's Movement, and Gay Rights Movement. These broad strokes are important to keep in mind, for even TEF and its pastor might be seen as participants in a contemporary form of Christian revitalization in response to perceived present-day sources of political and social chaos. A more detailed context for evangelicalism emerges by zeroing in on themes in McLoughlin's formative 18th and 19th century stages. It is in these periods that important concepts take shape.

Postmillennialism and Premillennialism in Socio-Historical Contexts

The literature on evangelicalism frequently makes reference to postmillennialism and premillennialism. How do these theological concepts about the course of human history relate to the worldviews of American Protestants who self-identify as evangelical? Randall Balmer and Lauren F. Winner, scholars of contemporary American Protestantism, note that even as early as the middle of the 18th century, in the time of Jonathan Edwards,

[T]he majority of evangelicals had subscribed to the doctrine of postmillennialism, the 1,000 years of peace and righteousness predicted in the book of Revelation. The theology was essentially optimistic, because it held that the millennium, a time of joy and happiness, would occur before Christ's return, and in fact could be happening now. It was the duty of evangelicals, therefore, to reform the world according to the norms of godliness in order to usher in the millennium and prepare for the return of Christ (2002: 57-58).

The postmillennial worldview, the view that Christ's second coming would be *after* the creation of this wonderful millennial order, is related to the development of a concept of the "Social Gospel" (Balmer and Winner 2002: 84). The Social Gospel urges believers to help individuals and reform institutions in order to help bring about the Millennium, the predicted period of godly happiness, or to affirm that it had indeed already arrived.

Similarly, Kenneth Collins, a scholar of historical theology whose personal roots are in evangelicalism, describes the up-beat, reform-minded orientation of the evangelists of the Second Great Awakening, revivalists of the first half of the 19th century, "who were remarkably optimistic about the prospects for reform and for ushering in nothing less than the kingdom of God in America" (2005: 35).

A new pessimism, however, set in after the Civil War with an accompanying paradigm shift in the way many evangelicals viewed the world and their place in it. As Balmer and Winner write,

Social and economic factors, particularly the industrialization and urbanization of American culture in the decades following the Civil War, exaggerated the divisions within American Protestantism. Earlier in the century, evangelical optimism about the perfectibility of both the individual and society had unleashed various reform efforts toward establishing the biblical millennium in America. By the close of the century, though, teeming, squalid tenements populated by immigrants, most of them non-Protestant, hardly looked like the precincts of Zion. In the face of such squalor and the frustrated ambitions for a Protestant empire, disappointed evangelicals adjusted their eschatology. No longer did they believe that their efforts could bring about the millennium (2002: 19).

How could such a world anticipate or model the kingdom of God? Instead of holding to the postmillennial worldview that allowed for the perfectibility of the world in preparation for the return of Jesus, evangelicals adopted a new doctrine of dispensationalist premillennialism, preached by the mid-nineteenth century British evangelical, John Nelson Darby.

Darby and his followers grounded their worldview in a particular schematic interpretation of the Bible, suggesting that the sacred texts of the Old and New Testaments present a cosmic historical pattern that reveals significant truths about the past and future of the world. As historian Ernest R. Sandeen writes, “Dispensationalism refers primarily to the division of history into periods of time, dispensations, seven of which are usually named” (1968: 4). The *Scofield Reference Bible*, first published in 1909, which Sandeen refers to as “the most influential dispenser of dispensationalism in America,” suggests that people are currently living in the next to the last of these dispensations, the period of Grace (1968: 4). This period, believed to run from the birth

of Christ through the present to the judgment of the world, will be followed by the final dispensation, the Kingdom or Millennium (Sandeen 1968: 4). According to this orientation to history, grounded in biblical texts, such as Revelations 20, “Christ would come at any moment” to rescue and save true Christians, while “unleash[ing] his judgment against a sinful world” (Balmer and Winner 2002: 19). Balmer and Winner observe,

This scheme was especially attractive to evangelicals in America because it offered an explanation for why the postmillennial kingdom so confidently predicted earlier in the nineteenth century had failed to materialize. Instead, dispensational premillennialism insisted that that the world was growing more and more sinful, and that the imminent return of Jesus offered the only escape from the scourge of cities, overrun, in the opinion of evangelicals, by non-protestants (2002: 75).

The premillennial view of history emphasized that “American culture would simply deteriorate until the second coming of Christ” (Collins 2005: 35). Only the few could be saved before the end-time came. As Sandeen notes, these Christians “looked for a literal, imminent second coming of Christ as the next event before God judged the world and brought in the next dispensation, the Millennium, and therefore referred to their eschatology as premillennialism” (1968: 5).

The Rapture

A discussion of premillennialism in context would not be complete without explaining “the rapture,” another of the frequently found terms that relate to the essential prophetic structure of the history discussed above. As described by Amy Frykholm, a scholar of contemporary American religions, Darby added an important element to this scheme, which was rooted in particular readings of the biblical prophets. He believed

that before the trouble-filled and violent end-time preceding the return of Christ and the Millennium, “all true believers would be taken up to heaven in a ‘secret rapture’” (Frykholm 2004: 15). Frykholm continues, “Called by Christ, they would rise through the clouds, leaving behind a world soon to be plunged in chaos. Darby’s assertion of the secret rapture became a crucial part of apocalyptic belief for many of those who came to call themselves ‘fundamentalists’ in the twentieth century” (2004: 15-16). The term “fundamentalist” and its context also require special attention.

Biblical Literalism and Fundamentalism

The background for the emergence of modern evangelicalism includes critical cultural and scientific issues, in addition to the socio-historical and economic factors discussed above. In the early 20th century, American evangelicals felt increasingly threatened by Charles Darwin’s theories of evolution and a divide opened between liberal evangelicals who “remained a part of the progressive movement, focused almost exclusively on social reforms” and conservative evangelicals (Collins 2005: 35). The latter feared any “compromise of the faith” and thought of themselves as ministering not to social well-being but to the well-being of the soul (Collins 2005: 35). The Scopes trial of 1925, which centered around the teaching of evolution in the Tennessee public schools, exemplified this tension. Increasingly, these Christians, the “fundamentalists,” parted ways not only from the so-called modernists who believed, for example, in evolution, but also “from those Bible-believing Christians who dared to retain ties with theological liberals” (Collins 2005: 36). The theory of evolution challenged literalist approaches to the Bible, which described the world as created in six days by God and

thus could be understood as a challenge to the divine word itself and to fundamental religious belief. The very term, “fundamentalist,” which is often associated with evangelicalism by evangelicals themselves or by those who study them, has origins in these debates about the nature of biblical truth in the context of perceived modernist threats. Some scholars do not see fundamentalism as integral to the history of evangelicalism, which they regard as originating in more pietistic, revivalist Protestant traditions, but many, such as Joel A. Carpenter, a social historian and scholar of American religions, view fundamentalism as “the most influential evangelical movement in the United States during the second quarter of the twentieth century” (1997: 237).

The term “fundamentalism” derives from a twelve volume series of writings produced between 1910 and 1915 by a host of conservative Protestant thinkers. Their writings delineated the principles that these theologians regarded as the “fundamentals,” the heart of true Christianity. The majority of the contributors were dispensationalists or at least premillennialist in orientation but as Gary Dorrien, religious historian, notes, the interests reflected in these volumes is less a discussion of events leading to the end time than a proclaiming of the inerrancy of Scripture (1998: 16). They sought to combat what they viewed as the subversive influence of modern biblical scholarship. Increasingly, courses taught in mainstream American Protestant seminaries were denying the absolute historicity of biblical events as described in the Bible and were using literary critical techniques to explore and date the various layers and sources of the Bible. Thus in these would-be fundamentalists’ view, the Bible itself was under threat by liberal and/or secular elements in American culture. Carpenter writes of these conservative Protestants’ “deep-seated feelings of dispossession, resentment, and alienation” (1997: 242).

Five essential points of fundamentalism emerged early in the twentieth century. In addition to the inerrancy of Scripture, the fundamentals included the belief in the virgin birth of Jesus, the centrality of Christ's atonement and resurrection, the authenticity of miracles, and the belief in the premillennial timeline discussed above (Balmer and Winner 2002: 19; 73-74). Contemporary evangelical groups tend to share these fundamental beliefs, but the two that are most consistently emphasized are the literal reading of the Bible as the true word of God and the "centrality of a conversion or 'born-again' experience as the criterion for entering the kingdom of heaven" (Balmer and Winner 2002: 22-23; see also Collins 2005: 36-37, 41).

There are important implications to a literalist and historicizing reading of ancient prophetic biblical texts and an emphasis on conversion. First, biblical texts have a virtual divinatory or predictive capacity. As Carpenter notes, a literal reading of the Bible implies that it is "scientifically accurate in matters of detail, and all its prophetic passages must be intended to be literally fulfilled" (1997: 71). Thus, certain events of the twentieth century, such as Hitler's persecution of the Jews and the founding of the State of Israel, could be seen as a fulfillment of the prophets (Carpenter 1997: 71, 93). This way of reading Scripture is, paradoxically, both narrowly closed and infinitely open. The Bible is set and true and yet the possibility of various applications implies great creativity and flexibility: "The distinction between modern times and the Bible's pages, between ordinary events and the cosmic drama of the books of Daniel and Revelation, thus became blurred, as modern Christians felt that they were living in the 'shadow of the Second Coming'" (Carpenter 1997: 71). The fact that the words of Scripture were infinitely applicable to modern situations and events "could make sense out of the chaos"

of ordinary life, reassuring “troubled people that God was still in charge of the world and would intervene again, very soon, in a world that was careening out of control” (Carpenter 1997: 71). This message, moreover, took on added vitality and was confirmed by convincing others of its truth, that is, by evangelizing or witnessing. Winning converts became a central mission of Christian fundamentalism (Carpenter 1997: 78-79).

Some scholars have approached fundamentalism as an anti-modernist relic of the past that reflects a tension between rural and urban cultures in America, in which the rural Protestants were culturally left behind and backward. The well-known theologian, H. Richard Niebuhr, viewed fundamentalism as “most prevalent in those isolated communities in which the traditions of pioneer society had been most effectively preserved and which were least subject to the influence of modern science and industrial civilization” (1931: 527). Indeed Niebuhr’s implied hope was that this variety of Protestantism would eventually fade away along with primitive superstitions. Sandeen notes, however, that the intellectual roots of fundamentalist theology were Northern and urban, promulgated by professors at Princeton Theological Seminary and other respected Protestant thinkers (1968: 26). Niebuhr was not correct about the limited appeal of fundamentalist varieties of evangelicalism or about its thorough anti-modernism. Modern conservative and/or fundamentalist evangelical communities of many varieties have expanded in their numbers and their influence all over the United States in the last several decades. As Carpenter notes, many “evangelicals emulate many trends of popular culture while continuing to denounce America’s transgressions” (1997: 242).

It is important to note, however, that evangelicals themselves may or may not describe themselves as fundamentalist. Jerry Falwell, the late conservative political

activist who led and founded the Moral Majority, “insisted that he [was] a *fundamentalist*, not an *evangelical*” (Balmer and Winner 2002: 74). He thereby sought to distinguish himself from the less militant “Jesus loves you” variety of evangelicals. Carpenter writes, “Fundamentalist evangelization could be seen as arrogantly exclusive or imperialistic, but the ideal was to be inclusive, to bring into warm and intense fellowship anyone who would take the plunge” (1997: 79). Some historians have remarked, however, that fundamentalists are evangelicals “who are mad about something” (Balmer and Winner 2002: 74). Such tensions in the ways others define evangelicals and in their own self-definition leads to another important thread in contemporary scholarship, the exploration of the complex varieties of contemporary evangelicalism.

Multiplicity in Contemporary Evangelicalism: “Is Your Pastor Preaching the TRUTH?” (B 12/19/06)

Fundamentalism versus Pentecostalism under the Canopy of Evangelicalism

According to Balmer and Winner, “polling data suggests that anywhere from 25 to 46 percent of the population in the United States would fit the definition of evangelical,” but there is enormous diversity under the umbrella heading of evangelicalism, and each group that self-identifies as evangelical “maintain[s] its own identity” (2002: 71). Two ends of the evangelical spectrum might be seen to be fundamentalism, as described above, and Pentecostalism, the roots of which are in the holiness movement of the nineteenth century in which the emphasis was on the attainment of personal holiness. Balmer and Winner delineate the two orientations: “Whereas fundamentalist theology tends to be highly racionated, Pentecostals emphasize

the importance of the affections. Pentecostal worship can be very enthusiastic, with individuals speaking in tongues or even dancing in ecstasy under the influence of the Holy Spirit” (2002: 77). Balmer observes that fundamentalist preachers are often preoccupied with “rationalistic arguments in defense of evangelical Christianity,” whereas “Pentecostals understand that the essence of religion lies not in mere intellectual assent, but in religious experience” (2006: 137).

Contemporary Pentecostal worship “is characterized by ecstasy and the familiar posture of raised arms, a gesture of openness to the Holy Spirit” (Balmer and Winner 2002: 77). The “gifts” of the Holy Spirit may include divine healing as well as glossolalia, that is, speaking in tongues. Denominations rooted in Pentecostalism include the Church of Christ and the Assemblies of God, the affiliation of former vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin. Considerable variations and overlap in belief and practice, however, lie under the headings of various denominations and the broader categories of fundamentalist and Pentecostal. There is resistance to labels among evangelicals themselves.

Self-Definition and Variety among Evangelicals

Balmer’s work *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory* and Donald E. Miller’s *Reinventing American Protestantism* both offer tours of varieties of evangelicalism in America, allowing the pastors and congregants they interview to describe their own views of their religious identities as evangelicals. The centrality of Scripture and the born-again experience are shared by all, but there is tremendous variation on these themes and forms of religious engagement. Some, like the students and teachers at the

Multnomah School of the Bible in Portland, Oregon, or the older Dallas Theological Seminary, are deeply steeped in inerrancy and dispensationalism, paragons of a staunchly fundamentalist variety of evangelical orthodoxy. They regard training at Bible Colleges to be a part of their identity (Balmer 2006: 31; 136-139; 142). Other pastors do not attend Bible College at all (Miller 1997: 40). So-called neo-evangelicals, perhaps the most famous of whom was Billy Graham, engage cautiously with modern scholarship within the framework of inerrancy (Balmer and Winner 2002: 81). Pentecostalism offers similar variations in practice and self-identification. While some of the pastors of evangelical churches emphasize “gifts of the spirit,” others, such as Chuck Smith, pastor and founder of the Calvary Chapel Movement that originated in Costa Mesa, California, express some discomfort “with the emotionalism of such experiences” (Miller 1997: 94). A colleague reports Smith saying, “Let’s stop this falling down emotional stuff. Let’s get down to finding out what the Bible says, and then we’ll go on with the gifts” (Miller 1997: 94). Chuck Smith describes his church as fitting “somewhere between Baptists and Pentecostals” (Miller 1997: 36).

There are other variations as well. Some of the congregations, for example, are fully independent, whereas others are loosely affiliated with denominations or with evangelical movements that began at a particular church. Calvary Chapel, mentioned above, for example, has inspired and generated offshoots all over the U.S., and some 550 Calvary Chapel congregations have taken root (Brasher 1998: 10).

Attitudes toward the *Left Behind* Series provide another example of variation among evangelicals. Many individual evangelical Christians read and enjoy this enormously popular set of sixteen novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, which has

generated sales of 65 million copies. Underlying the plot of the series is the concept of the rapture discussed above in the context of dispensational premillennialism. The first novel in the series opens with the sudden disappearance of scores of people worldwide. We learn that those who have disappeared from off of planes or from shopping malls are the faithful, called back by Jesus before the end-time. The on-going narrative explores what happens on an increasingly chaotic earth when the rest of us remain behind. The books stress the possibility for true believers to be raised up to Christ at any moment, even before the end-time or final days of the world as we know it. Not all evangelicals, however, believe theologically in the notion of the rapture, even if many enjoy the action-packed books with their star villain, the anti-Christ (Frykholm 2004: 1-29). Moreover, not all evangelical ministers embrace the concept of the rapture even though they know that their members' worldviews are informed by these books. Yet, some churches form reading groups around the series within the contours of the official religion.

Relationships to this example of popular culture is, as Amy Frykholm has shown, an interesting indicator of variation among evangelicals' own sense of their religious identity.

The style and structure of evangelical church services provide another source of variation and complexity. Worship services at contemporary evangelical churches, which Miller describes as "new paradigm churches," typically involve a set pattern: singing, often referred to as "worship"; a formal sermon with an emphasis on the Bible; and prayer. While the music is an important, even essential component in many of the churches, the particular kind of music can vary considerably (Miller 1997: 86, 91). As Balmer notes, "experimentation in evangelicalism, worship styles in particular, has given

rise to something akin to a cult of novelty. Evangelicals, generally suspicious of tradition and largely untethered by creeds, liturgical rubrics, or ecclesiastical hierarchies, are not afraid to try new approaches” (2006: 328). Some worshippers raise their hands during worship, others not. Churches often boast one or more Bible study groups, and a plethora of activities related to the church community extend beyond the Sunday service (Miller 1997: 13-15).

Typical contemporary evangelical churches meet in rented school auditoriums, converted warehouses, or spaces in shopping malls where “folding chairs are more common than pews” (Miller 1997: 13). Such diverse settings serve practical and symbolic purposes. A school auditorium or a former theater often accommodates sound equipment better than a formal church building; these spaces, which have been converted into churches, may have no stained glass but ample sound equipment. When the community outgrows its present meeting space, it can easily move on to a bigger venue without leaving a physical church behind. Such meeting spaces, moreover, symbolically and visually offer an array of alternatives to old establishment or mainline forms of Christianity, practiced in particular kinds of sacred spaces long assumed to be central to church life.

The members of these churches tend to share a particular conservative set of “family values” with political implications, such as disapproval of premarital sex, anti-abortion positions, anti-homosexuality and gay marriage, and a strong association of women with the home and education of the children, even if the wife works outside the home (Miller 1997: 117-118). Not all pastors or their congregations, however, are politically active and assertive. Balmer’s qualitative work (2006), for example, points to

the differences between evangelicals who worked fervently for the campaigns of conservative Republicans Jack Kemp and Pat Robertson, former head of the Christian Broadcasting Network who ran for the presidency in 1988, versus those who attend the sermons of Rick Warren at Saddleback Church with its emphases on “the purpose-driven life,” brotherly love, Christian community, and care for the world’s poor. Much has been made of Warren’s recent (2008) publicly expressed position against California Proposition 8, which reversed a state’s Supreme Court ruling that legalized gay marriage. Warren shares a conservative worldview with other evangelicals that includes, as expected, strong opposition to gay marriage, but he is not as separatist as some evangelical preachers or as militantly divisive. Warren is also a Christian environmentalist, a proponent of saving God’s green earth, in contrast, for example, to the Pentecostals interviewed in the film *Jesus Camp*, who regard global warming as an anti-Christian idea, which their home-schooled children are taught to deny. The militancy of those interviewed in *Jesus Camp* contrasts sharply with the inclusiveness of other evangelicals.

Finally, Christian Smith’s interview and survey-based study of the worldviews of ordinary American evangelicals points to several fallacies concerning the supposedly normative evangelical identity (2002: 2). Smith reveals that, in fact, often evangelical leaders do not speak for ordinary evangelicals. Commonly cited public opinion surveys do not accurately reflect their beliefs, and there is much less ideological consistency among evangelical beliefs than commonly assumed. Smith describes “complexity, ambivalence, multivocality, and other messy inconsistencies that exist in the ‘worldviews’ of real people” (2002: 12). The analyses of Balmer and Winner, Balmer,

Miller, and Smith thus point to a varied spectrum, a rich tapestry in the ways of being evangelical, that needs to be kept in mind in approaching Trinity Evangelical Free Church, its pastor, and the women I interviewed.

Chapter 3

“A Whole Lot a Shakin Goin On...” (B 10/26/06): Theoretical Frameworks, Methodologies, and Methods

Five Methodological Models

An examination of works by Brenda Brasher, Judith Stacey, Jody Davie, R. Marie Griffith, and Julie Ingersoll contributes to choices in method and to the theoretical framework and methodology of this project. The findings of these scholars, moreover, provide key themes to consider in approaching women at TEF. While Davie deals with a women’s Bible reading group in a mainline Protestant church, the others explore the beliefs of women who participate in the life of fundamentalist or evangelical congregations. All of the scholars, some from the field of sociology, some from religion, and some from both, do qualitative research using methods of participant observation and interviews. The ways they go about their fieldwork, do interviews, transcribe and code fieldnotes, and undertake analysis provide excellent models of how to approach studying and understanding ordinary contemporary evangelical women.

In her ethnographic study, *Godly Women*, sociologist of religion Brenda Brasher studies the women involved in all-female Bible study women’s ministry programs in two Californian evangelical churches, Mount Olive and Bay Chapel. She wants to understand “how and why women get involved with these highly gendered religious worlds” (Brasher 1998: 5). She explores how women “construct and exercise power within their religious group” and grapples with the paradox “that fundamentalist women could be powerful people in a religious community generally conceded to be organized around their disempowerment” (Brasher 1998: 3-5). Her work would thus appear to be a good model for my project.

Brasher bases her conclusions on observations made during extensive participant observation of Bible study meetings, Sunday sermons, and other Church-related events, and the responses she gathered during semi-structured interviews. She attended female only study groups, whereas my participant observation took place in a mixed gender setting. Her interview questions are generally less open-ended than those employed by Davie and others. Brasher asks her subjects specifically, for example, about their views of submission in marriage, getting right to the heart of what she wants to know. This semi-structured interview method tends to direct the information in certain ways and may cut off unexpected, fruitful pathways. Her work does provide a model for the sort of information I too hoped to learn about the women at TEF. Yet, a less tightly controlled path to revelations about these issues, especially the use of open-ended questions and many fewer specific questions, leads, in my view, to greater depth and unexpected insights.

Brasher mentions two other features of her participant observer work very briefly, and both were models of what I did *not* want to do. At the very beginning of her study, she notes that the women she observed actively wanted to convert her, implying this was a constant theme in her work. She writes, “Rather than rejecting these overtures, I treated them as an enriching contribution to my research” (Brasher 1998: 6). And yet, she does not discuss this contribution again in any sustained way. I think the informants’ interest in converting the researcher is an important feature of her project and my own. Relevant in this regard is the classic study by Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails*. Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter explore, in part, how the researcher may alter his or her own results by being a part of the fieldwork

situation. In Festinger's study, the presence of the sociologists assures the actual believers that others share their worldview. Festinger and his colleagues were not honest about their purely academic interest in the religious group they studied, leading their informants to believe that their message was attracting converts. In contrast to Festinger, I have been absolutely honest with the members of TEF about my interest in them and my project. Nevertheless, I have experienced the ways in which sociologists engaged in qualitative fieldwork settings become a part of their own study, possibly affecting the results.

A second indicator of what not to do relates to Brasher's self-revelation and reflexivity. Only at the very end of the work does she reveal that she herself is a "liberal Christian" and indicate that while she respects the choices and compromises these women have made concerning their identities and their power, she does "not believe they are the best long-term strategies for women" (Brasher 1998: 180). I would have liked to know Brasher's own religious and cultural orientation at the outset, and wonder in retrospect how or if her particular bias informed or shaped her research. Brasher's work convinced me that it is important to reveal my own background and worldview before presenting my research.

Brasher's theoretical framework relies on a number of works. The work of sociologist of religion Peter Berger (1967) provides her with the concept of the sacred canopy, an idea not unlike Ninian Smart's notion of worldview (1983) or Clifford Geertz's use of ethos and worldview (1973). Berger suggests that human beings set in particular cultural contexts inherit certain images and ideas, which provide assurance that reality has an order. Berger believes human beings need to know that all is not random or

chaotic and that the way things seem to be is, in fact, the way things ought to be. This concept maintains that reality on earth is framed and validated by a larger cosmic reality, the sacred canopy. This canopy, a religious framework, is encapsulated in webs of symbols and images, whose patterns recur in sacred story and ritual action or worship. Religion, as sacred canopy, thus is an important way in which humans make and understand meaning.

Brasher seeks to understand how these women perceive their status and location within the sacred canopy of evangelical Christianity, and in fact, suggests that the canopy is split into gendered realms, “two parallel religious worlds” (1998: 5). Brasher also finds Dorothy Smith’s work on “women’s standpoint theory” useful in order to ask how women view themselves and present themselves to one another (1998: 23-25). She employs Susan Palmer’s study of women in new religious movements to explore the operation of sexual polarities, sexual dominance, and sexual unity in different aspects of the women’s religious lives (Brasher: 1998: 59). Finally, she takes issue both with simplistic notions that fundamentalist women are merely anti-feminist, a view she attributes to Jerome Himmelstein, and with Judith Stacey’s more nuanced conclusion that evangelical women are post-feminist in a variety of complex ways (Brasher 1998: 171-172). Like Christian Smith and others, Brasher points to the diversity among evangelical women (1998: 20-21). In fact, a number of her subjects self-identify as feminist (Brasher 1998: 178). She finds significant differences in worldview between older and younger women, noting, for example, that although younger women and older women employ similar gender language, the former “appear to interpret that language in a different, more egalitarian way” (Brasher 1998: 174).

Brasher pays special attention to the women's various conversion narratives and their significance. For many, "the conversion process is a bridge that spanned potentially dangerous gaps in life" (Brasher 1998: 56). In addition to conversion, these women report a variety of direct religious experiences, including sensory experiences such as special feelings about a divine message or presence (Brasher 1998: 92-102). The most frequent previous Christian affiliation among these women is Roman Catholicism, although born-again women come from many religious backgrounds, including former non-believers (Brasher 1998: 39).

Brasher finds that her subjects do not describe their source of identity and meaning to be merely "religion," but rather, their relationships with God and/or Christ. For the women Brasher interviewed, life revolves around this relationship, a very personal, one-on-one relationship with God or Christ (1998: 109). For all of Brasher's participants, participation in Bible study is central to their lives, as is the case for many if not most evangelicals, but each interprets the sacred texts in ways that are relevant to her own experiences and life situations. The encounter with God's word is personal. Brasher concludes that these women do find sources of empowerment within the heavily gendered environment of their church communities (1998: 61, 64, 82). They find, moreover, a means of coping with a range of life's difficulties, especially those cultural "fault-lines that leave women notably vulnerable to personal trauma," such as, divorce rates, and the burden of childrearing (Brasher 1998: 30).

Family sociologist Judith Stacey's sensitively written and carefully researched study of the American family in the late twentieth-century, *Brave New Families*, provides another model. Stacey concentrates on the life histories and experiences of the members

of two extended working class families or “kin groups” in the Silicon Valley of Santa Clara County in California (1990: 5-6). One of these groups, “Pam’s kin,” becomes heavily involved in the Global Ministries of Love, a new-wave evangelical movement founded by a charismatic female preacher, Eleanor Morrison Garrett, to whom Pam introduces Stacey. An important thread in Stacey’s work explores the interplay and tension between views of family, attitudes to women’s roles, and evangelicalism. Like Brasher and myself, Stacey seeks to understand why and how evangelicalism, in this case the version offered by Garrett, so engages Pam and other women. Her work also explores issues in feminism, anti-feminism, and post-feminism, attempting to define these stances in political, social, and religious frameworks and to understand views of various contemporary evangelical women, such as Pam and Eleanor, in terms of such categories.

Stacey’s variety of participant observation and interviewing is intensely personal and subjective; she becomes a close friend and confidante of the women she studies. Conversations that take place over more than two years are open-ended and lead to deep self-revelation on the part of the subjects about their often traumatic lives and relationships. The women end up becoming much more to Stacey than mere research subjects and their relationships are reciprocal as in any genuine friendship. For her part, Stacey is completely honest from the outset about her orientation to life, both to Pam, the other women whose lives and views she explores, and to the readers of her book. She writes,

This is a book about the unpredictable, often incongruous, and contested character of contemporary family practices in the postindustrial United States. It is written by a feminist who has learned to respect and understand some of the social appeals of widespread nostalgia for eroding

family forms, even though I oppose the conservative gender, class, and sexual politics of the profamily movement (Stacey 1990: 5).

In contrast to Brasher, Stacey lets the reader know in detail how the relationships with her subjects affect her and how she feels in particular research settings. I can fully identify with her anxieties, her expressions of embarrassment, and the full range of emotions and inner conflicts she experiences, and I think that these are important to include in writing about the project.

Stacey is almost painfully honest about her reaction, for example, to the way in which Eleanor and her husband Paul pray for the success of her book:

A flushed face and arrhythmic heartbeat registered my acute embarrassment and anxiety as Eleanor and Paul Garrett concluded our four hour visit by praying for this book . . . Eleanor could empathize . . . she herself was seeking a publisher for an autobiographic manuscript . . . [and] was eager to have me read and advise her (1990: 113-114).

Stacey agrees to help but writes with ambivalence, “I was deeply uncertain whether my disloyalty to my feminist convictions or to my fundamentalist research informants was my greater treachery . . . Eleanor and Paul had extended toward me their infectious warmth, trust, and generosity. I felt gratitude, and shame” (1990: 113-114). Later in this memoir-like ethnography she recalls,

The prayer embarrassed me, but its simple words of encouragement and praise warmed me as well, and made me wistful. How rare it is in the deeply secular academic and political worlds that I most frequently inhabit to give or receive such unsolicited expressions of support. My flushed face may have betrayed more than discomfort (Stacey 1990: 138-139).

Another example of Stacey’s self-reflection relates to her response to a Global Ministries fundraising event. She describes her extreme discomfort when the preacher successfully prevails upon economically stressed congregants to contribute more than they could possibly afford. She writes, “Most intimately, it upset me to recognize how deeply

involved Pam had become in a world I found so alien” (Stacey 1990: 127). She also expresses unease, informed by her own worldview, concerning Eleanor, the charismatic and notably female founder of Global Ministries. She writes with overt regret that Eleanor could have been such a great political feminist had her social world encouraged or suggested it (Stacey 1990: 137-138).

This insertion of self leads to some condescension in her analysis, and is a warning to try to keep my empathy “structured,” as Ninian Smart describes the scholarly goal and difficulty of retaining objectivity while attempting to identify with the subject of study (Smart 1983: 16, 175, 175). Stacey concludes, for example, about Eleanor that, due to her circumstances, “she was seeking a community of interdependence and affirmation rather than one of opposition and resistance” (1990: 138). Eleanor was, in Stacey’s view, “more exhausted than outraged” (1990: 138). On the other hand, Stacey’s sensitivity and capacity to empathize allow her to produce exquisite observations concerning the various settings and scenes in which she finds herself and to reach thoughtful conclusions about the appeal of varieties of evangelicalism to the women she meets. She comes to realize that evangelicalism itself is a varied phenomenon and simple generalizations about profamily conservatives are not adequate. These women *choose* to become a part of their congregations. She comes to believe that Pam “was no passive victim or dupe” (Stacey 1990: 57). Pam had always considered herself a feminist of sorts, but, as Pam tells Stacey, her “life was a total mess,” with “chronic bouts of depression,” economic woes, and severe marital problems (Stacey 1990: 58). In Pam’s view, conversion and accepting a personal relationship with Jesus allowed for a new life and a new better relationship

with her husband. If these were only possible through evangelical wifely submission, so be it (Stacey 1990: 55).

In Stacey's view, Paul and Eleanor have an egalitarian marriage, even though both believe themselves to practice what they refer to as "patriarchy in the last instance," in which the woman is ultimately submissive to the husband (1990: 133). They describe their relationship as "loving teamwork" in which both are submissive to God (Stacey 1990: 134). Stacey concludes, "Eleanor rejected feminism but she propagated a gender ideology that had been deeply informed by it" (1990: 137). This post-feminist point of view, in Stacey's assessment, is "generated partly in reaction to feminism, [but] selectively incorporates and adapts many feminist family reforms" (1990: 145). Later portions of this study explore where the women of TEF stand in relation to feminism and post-feminism as Stacey defines them and also tries to explain their understanding of this juxtaposition of submission and equality, which seems to be such a self-contradiction.

Finally, Stacey admits that before undertaking her fieldwork, she had not worked extensively with evangelicalism (1990: 139). This, no doubt, affects the nature of her research. I would have liked to have learned more about her respondents' views concerning the rapture or the millennium. Stacey mentions the importance of Scripture to those she studied, but might have been done more to explore their method of interpretation or the ways in which this group contrasts with other evangelicals. The female leadership role evident in Global Ministries is especially interesting and unusual. These critical features of worldview will be explored in more detail in my work with the members of TEF.

Another model of employing qualitative methods to study Christian women is offered by Jody Davie's work with the members of a women's Bible study group at a mainline Presbyterian Church in suburban Bridgeton, New Jersey. Davie, a folklorist clearly informed by sociology of religion, is interested in the women's pursuit of spirituality. Davie's method of fieldwork involves attendance at the Church's Sunday services, participation in the group, and extensive one-on-one interviews with eighteen of its members, a pattern my own work traces. Trained as a folklorist, Davie notes she is especially sensitive to the concept of reflexivity and the challenges of doing fieldwork. She notes,

[B]y means of the reflexive gaze we – researcher, reader, participant, teacher, student – meet, create, and interpret others and ourselves through lenses that change with each reading, that both reveal and conceal, as part of a process that is continually suggestive and never complete. This refractivity suggests a variety of presentational approaches for the scholar, each one fraught with the difficulties and the dangers of such a sometimes excruciatingly self-conscious enterprise is bound to nourish (Davie 1995: 31).

She alerts her readers to matters of subjectivity, incompleteness, the power of the researcher to frame and present what informants say, and to the ways in which the field situation and informants' self-presentation is mediated through the interviewer (Davie 1995: 6). She agrees with anthropologist Karen Brown's observation that "ethnographic research . . . is a form of human relationship" (Davie 1995: 32).

Davie is very open about her own background and interest in her topic, both to her subjects of study and to readers. In her fieldwork at the Bible study group, she does not use a tape recorder or take notes, finding both to be too intrusive. Rather, she takes notes after each meeting. I have done the same with my fieldwork in the small group Bible study meetings. Davie describes the ways in which the members engage with the

biblical text, how it is rendered meaningful in their own lives. Major themes that emerge are personal change and healing. She explores the ways in which individuals “recenter” the shared sacred texts in quite personal ways, “from out of the page and into the personal interpretation and inner and outer life experience of the individuals in the group” (Davie 1995: 57). Ambiguities in the Scripture are purposefully left unresolved to accommodate a wide range of interpretations.

In her interviews, Davie asks only one question: “Tell me about your spiritual journey” and notes that her subjects are surprised that she does not have a questionnaire (Davie 1995: 79). Her style and method is thus totally open-ended; the women interview her as she interviews them. I wonder if the challenge of engaging with evangelical Christians who have a strong interest in a person’s salvation is somewhat different than engaging with liberal Protestants. Perhaps it is easier to be so open in Davie’s research setting, in a group that does not claim to read the Bible literally or to have the key to salvation. The thematic narrative that emerges from her qualitative work is upon faith narratives, and she notes, “what one looks for is not always what one finds” (Davie 1995: 33). She is surprised, for example, by the supernatural experiences reported by 15 of her 18 interviewees. Many of the women are quite emotional in their interviews, crying as they recall certain episodes.

Not unexpectedly, Davie notices some important differences between older and younger members of the group in their responses to her and in their views of their own spiritual journeys (1995: 79). Davie emphasizes the ways in which the women negotiate “that which is personal with that which is of the group” (1995: 1). She notes further how spiritual life stories are based on personal experiences and traditional expectations at the

same time, how the women follow certain “scripts” (Davie 1995: 81). While Davie does not mention Erving Goffman’s work, her folklorist’s interest in the ways in which culturally set human beings see and express themselves in certain shared, recurring narrative patterns and meanings is evocative of Goffman’s *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

Several themes uncovered and explored by Davie relate well to my work with the women of TEF. I too seek to learn if my subjects have cultural scripts and their own variations upon them. How do they negotiate their personal religious identities as women within the contours of the small group, TEF at large, and evangelical Christianity, as they understand it? Drawing methodologically upon the work of Margaret Brady with Mormon women and Elaine Lawless with female Pentecostal preachers, Davie points to the ways in which women negotiate power and their sense of self within their tradition (1995: 134), another theme relevant to my study.

Perhaps the most influential and well-known among works that deal specifically with gender, the construction of identity, and negotiation of power among evangelical women is R. Marie Griffith’s *God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission*. During a two year period, Griffith, a scholar of American religions, participated in nearly 100 meetings of local Northeastern chapters of the Aglow movement and conducted extensive interviews with individual members. Aglow is a transdenominational women’s movement rooted in Pentecostal and charismatic varieties of evangelicalism. The members who meet in local chapters all over the world describe themselves as “a network of praying women working to evangelize the world” (Griffith 2000: 33). Members generally accept the premillennial timeline and notion of rapture

(discussed in chapter 2). While they wait for salvation and negotiate the realities of this world, however, the women attend to one another's spiritual needs in a kind of Christian sisterhood (Griffith 2000: 64).

Aglow meetings and the worldview that informs interactions at the meetings combine a number of cultural threads in interesting ways: Pentecostal and charismatic forms of Christianity; the therapeutic culture of self-help groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous; and an awareness of “middle-class women's ‘eerie restlessness’” in a time of supposed liberation and full possibility for women (Griffith 2000: 46). The meetings in which Griffith participates combine aspects of a revival meeting, a self-help group, and a therapy session. The women, who are largely white and middle class, support one another, share personal narratives about their trials, traumas, and guilt, and comfort and heal one another, all under the sacred canopy of salvation through Jesus. They express themselves in “spiritual life stories” that are both individual and communal. Their shared scripts about salvation and self-transformation are reconfigured both to capture individual experience and to evoke the expected or traditional pattern with which all the women can identify (Griffith 2000: 18-19). In this respect, the life stories are similar to the conversion narratives collected by Brasher. Griffith's work prompts me to explore if and how the women of TEF describe their lives, their relationships with Christ, and their community in terms of recurring narrative patterns.

Griffith's experience with the women of the Aglow movement leads her to conclude that they consider themselves to be “liberated through submission” (2000: 45). This “model of evangelical womanhood” (Griffith 2000: 10) has a number of components:

Arguing against the kind of twentieth-century feminism that from an evangelical perspective conceptualizes gender equality in worldly terms – promoting women’s equal right to money and status and pushing women to join the economic scramble of the market – religious women like those in Aglow claim to have found the true path to liberation and this-worldly fulfillment in a committed relationship with a Jesus who is at once father figure and lover, a relationship sustained and nurtured in communicative prayer (Griffith 2000: 207).

Such liberation relates “to practical strategies for inverting conventional hierarchies and enabling women to influence husbands – perhaps even change or save them – and alter their family lives, as well as to create newly whole and joyful selves” (Griffith 2000: 202). The women Griffith studies regard themselves as “true women, feminine, valuable, mighty, and unique” who play a critical role in the “sacred drama of redemption” (Griffith 2000: 202-203), and they believe that God has the capacity to “transform men into tender creatures more closely resembling the tender Jesus whom they adore” (Griffith 2000: 207). Griffith thus explores the unexpected ways in which the women “redraw and negotiate the boundaries of power and authority” (2000: 6). Griffith’s study suggests a range of areas of inquiry relevant to the women of TEF, regarding their own sense of sisterhood, feminism, and gender roles. Her work also dovetails in interesting ways with research on the evangelical men’s association, the Promise Keepers, studied by John Bartkowski (2000). His research also serves as a background to my work with gender at TEF.

Griffith’s work provides an additional model for what methods to employ in my qualitative, ethnographic study. Like Davie and Stacey, her interactions with the women she studied are conversational, interactive, and open-ended. She forms a relationship with the Aglow women. Griffith describes herself as a liberal Episcopalian interested in prayer and spirituality on a personal as well as academic level. In fact, she first learned

about the Aglow movement from the member of a prayer group she herself attended as a graduate student at Harvard. She confesses to awkwardness concerning the women's desires to save her and have her join them as a dues-paying member. Unlike them, she does not viscerally feel the power of God and is never overcome by the intense spirit of God, as the others in the charismatic tradition are. She is even somewhat embarrassed by this seeming deficit of spirit. Griffith tries to let the women's own voices emerge and empathizes with them respectfully, acknowledging the "limits of [her] own vision" (2000: 12). I found it interesting that in response to the women's questions, Griffith openly shares her own stories and troubles with them, establishing a mutual, reciprocal relationship. She writes, "Just as I was sometimes asked for my own opinions about how to solve a particular relational problem or for my prayers, I asked others in turn for advice and prayers as well" (Griffith 2000: 8). Again, although Griffith belongs to much different denominational orientation than the people she studies, she is a Christian; my own background as a non-Orthodox Jew, knowledgeable about my own tradition but raised in a secular home, makes me less able to identify with and to interact with the members of TEF in the sort of relationship described by Griffith.

Julie Ingersoll, a scholar of contemporary American Christianity, undertook a study of evangelical Christian women in 1993-1995 and published in 2003, which provides an interesting contrast with the work of R. Marie Griffith and Brenda Brasher. Instead of exploring broadly as they do "women's empowerment amid structural limitations" (Ingersoll 2003: 1), Ingersoll is interested specifically in the experiences of women who seek leadership roles in conservative Protestant ministries and educational institutions. She points to the considerable challenges they face. Her informants do not

insist that “submission is really freedom, that in actuality it is empowerment” (Ingersoll 2003: 4). Rather, they feel limited by the patriarchy around them (Ingersoll 2003: 5). Ingersoll’s subjects express dissatisfaction with their position and do not overwhelmingly find power in submission. She critiques Griffith and Brasher for perhaps not listening carefully enough to informants who may not be all that content with their situation. Ingersoll suggests that the analyses of Brasher and Griffith do not allow for sufficient complication and nuance (2003: 4-8).

Rather than study the members of a particular church or churches, Ingersoll interviews women in various cities and settings including conferences, seminars, churches, seminaries, and Bible colleges where they study or teach. Many of her contacts are personal friends; she is comfortable in negotiating the evangelical world. She explores the women’s responses on both institutional levels and on personal and emotional levels, examining the ways in which they negotiate power, make compromises, protest, or even decide to leave their jobs or churches. The women have in common leadership roles or interest in assuming such roles within an evangelical context. They are all well-educated in what Ingersoll calls “conservative Protestant” traditions and belong to a different demographic in terms of class, for example, than the women with whom Judith Stacey worked. Their professional status as leaders and educators may explain some of the differences between Ingersoll’s results and those of other studies of evangelical women and are important to keep in mind in assessing the study and its applicability to the women of TEF.

Like Stacey and Davie, Ingersoll is very honest about her own background and involvement in the project. From the early 1980s through the early 1990s, Ingersoll had

what she describes as “a sojourn through the conservative Christian world” (2003: 9). She was a student at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, a bastion of Protestant conservatism, and maintains many friendships from within the evangelical world. She describes some of the pros and cons of her status as a researcher, issues discussed at the opening of this chapter:

I recognize that my position as a former insider means that I inevitably bring my own experience to bear on my research. On the other hand, the experiences out of which these studies flow are pervasive in the conservative Protestant subculture, and I wonder whether an outsider with no insider experience could come to see the problems as these women do (Ingersoll 2003: 11).

Ingersoll’s background as a former self-identifying evangelical Christian, like that of Balmer, thus frames her approach and requires awareness of her own complex relationship to the topic of study.

Ingersoll, like all the scholars discussed above, points to the overlap, ambiguities, and varieties among evangelicals having to do with worldviews and terminology itself. In fact, she generally chooses to describe those she studies as belonging to a “conservative Christian subculture” and tends to avoid terms such as “fundamentalist” versus “evangelical” due to the different ways in which these terms are often used among Christians themselves (Ingersoll 2003: 12-14). It comes as no surprise that gender is a hotly contested category among conservative Christians and that the subculture is divided over the issue of women’s roles. Among the women themselves, there is great diversity in their responses to issues of gender, with differences in particular between older and younger women leaders.

Ingersoll makes use of a number of theoretical approaches drawn from the field of sociology, including Robert Wuthnow’s version of “cultural-production theory” (2003:

101) and Foucault's emphasis on "the power of little things" (2003: 109). The latter leads Ingersoll to an interesting discussion of the ways in which material culture reflects gender in evangelical settings. Wuthnow's work points to the often messy internal structure of cultures, such as those of conservative Protestants, which do not easily fit just one worldview. This theoretical framework also involves interest in the everyday, lived aspects of religious life and in the culture that results from the interaction between "elites and people in the pews" (Ingersoll 2003: 102).

"What Moral Values? Whose Moral Values?" (B 1/29/08): Implications and Directions

The overview of literature in chapters 2 and 3 sets the stage for subsequent chapters in my study of women at Trinity Evangelical Free Church. Socio-historical treatments of evangelicalism and a discussion of the many threads and varieties within this religious tradition create a backdrop against which to measure and explore TEF. In assessing my fieldwork at Sunday services and the small group, I try to gauge where Pastor Bob and the culture of TEF fit in the complex spectrum of evangelicalism. It is in this context that the women's views of self and religious identity can be understood.

The various examples of qualitative, ethnographic work explored above provide excellent models. Aspects of the methods, theoretical frameworks, and methodologies applied by Brasher, Stacey, Griffith, Davie, and Ingersoll contribute to my own approach. I find the most useful examples of qualitative work to be those which want to present the women in their own voices and that employ open-ended questions and conversation rather than tightly constructed questionnaires and interviews. They begin with the women rather than with theories about women. The most fruitful realizations seem to

emerge when the researchers allow for messiness, multiplicity, and variety in exploring worldviews and when they expect the unexpected in responses. The models influenced by Geertz, Berger, and others encourage me to ask how these women are shaped by culture on various levels – both in response to secular culture and to their own religious culture and community – and how they, in turn, shape these cultures to themselves in terms of their own individual needs. How do their identities reflect a conforming and a conflicting with certain norms?

The works I have reviewed suggest questions and areas of inquiry pursued in my study, while the findings of these various studies are a source of contrast and comparison. Some of these areas of inquiry include: the role of women's personal narratives of various kinds; questions about feminism and post-feminism, submission and rebellion; the interplay between individuals and community in the context of gender; the relationship between the worldviews of church leadership vis a vis gender and those of ordinary members of the congregation; possible differences in views between older and younger women; matters of female identity, empowerment, and self-transformation as they relate to Christian identity; and my own role within the field setting.

On Method and Methodology

Like the work of the scholars discussed above, my qualitative research relies heavily on participant observation. I attended Sunday services in the spring of 2007 and the fall of 2008 and after introducing myself to Pastor Bob and explaining my project to him, attended a weekly young adult small group meeting, also known as a Bible study, in the fall of 2008. I sang along in services, even raised my arms from time to time,

although I did not take communion. In the spring of 2007, I took copious notes discretely, sitting towards the back of the church. In the fall of 2008, I waited to write up my findings and impressions until after I had left. I felt by then that people might know me and notice me and feared that my sitting in the back writing might bother people. I participated in the Bible discussion at small group to some degree but primarily I listened and watched. All the members knew that my interest was academic, and the leader, in particular, took it upon himself to teach me about the Bible and its messages, perhaps hoping along the way that my academic interest would be a pathway to Christ. I did participate in the prayer circle that occurred at the end of every Bible study session and shared, as much as I was comfortable, my own current concerns about work or family. I wrote up impressions and recollections of these meetings after returning home.

Participant observation was especially important to me as an outsider. This method of research situated me in the project and made it more possible for me to understand the environments that support the worldviews of the evangelical women I would interview. As one of these women later mentioned to me, there is a “virtual language” all its own among the born-again Christians. With this statement, she perfectly articulated the sociological concept of in vivo codes, words and terminology specific to the group of people studied, and the importance of understanding and using this language to allow the subjects to speak for themselves in their real voices. Participant observation allowed me to learn this language, to better understand the people I met and whose orientations to life I explored.²

² For a thorough discussion of the qualitative methodology that informs my work see Charmaz (1988), Dey (1993), Ely (1991), Emerson (1988), Reinharz (1992), and Strauss (1987).

I conducted two in-depth interviews with the head pastor, Bob Creed, one in October 2008 and the second in February 2009. I took notes in our first interview, but tape recorded the entirety of the second, and found it better to be able interact with the pastor without worrying that I might miss some of his comments. I had dinner in December 2008 with the leader of the small group, Phil, and his wife, Tecla, who warmly welcomed me into their home and told me about their lives. Their concern and Pastor Bob's concern for my spiritual life and my own reactions to their interest in saving me are recurring themes in my work and similar to experiences reported by Judith Stacey and others.

The capstone of my research was a series of one-on-one, in-depth interviews, recorded on tape, with women members of the small group and/or TEF. These interviews raised questions and suggest complex answers about the women's spiritual journeys and religious identities as evangelical women. I will have more to say about my own responses to the outsider researcher experience and about the development of my ideas in relation to these interactions at the end of my study. I appreciated the way in which people took the time to talk with me, sometimes even cooking me a meal. I tried to listen to their ideas with the utmost respect; I admire all of them for facing various trials in their lives with courage and faith, and realize that they meant me well. My qualitative fieldwork did sensitize me enormously to the difficult balance ethnographers must maintain between the roles of researcher and empathetic human being. People share precious thoughts, special experiences, and intimate feelings, and the researcher becomes a recorder, keeper, and interpreter of these valuable tokens of personal identity.

Like Jody Davie, I used an open-ended technique in the interviews, beginning by asking the person to tell me a bit about herself or with a broad question about her religious journey. As the interview progressed, I sometimes asked for more information about specific aspects of their lives, such as their marriage or their roles at church, but the interviews generally flowed well, providing me with thoughtful material. I tape-recorded each interview, while also taking notes, and transcribed each interview in full. I began to code and analyze the data before completing all of the interviews, employing a grounded theory approach. As is typical in this method of analysis, certain categories began to emerge that captured key components of the women's worldviews and vital concerns. I became interested in the ways in which the women's worldviews paralleled or in some cases contrasted with conclusions drawn from my analysis of fieldwork at the church and small group meetings. My findings concerning "official religion" at TEF are presented in the following chapter with a close look at the congregation's history, the physical site of the church, its leadership, the style, pattern, and content of its worship, and the recurring messages offered.

Chapter 4

Trinity Evangelical Free Church: History, Site, Leadership, Worship, and Recurring Messages

Fieldwork at TEF involved several interrelated components: attendance at Sunday services in the spring of 2007 and the fall of 2008; attendance at a weekly young adult small group meeting, also known as a Bible study group, in the fall of 2008; two in-depth interviews with the head pastor, Bob Creed, in 2008-2009; dinner in December 2008 with the leader of the small group, Phil, and his wife, Tecla; and a series of one-on-one, in-depth interviews with women members of the small group and/or TEF, which delved into questions about their spiritual journeys and religious identities as evangelical women. Each experience had its own setting and ambiance and each involved differing degrees of intimacy. The following discussion, based upon the first four sources listed above, places TEF among the varieties of evangelicalism discussed in chapter 2 and provides important information about the history of the church, the physical setting of meeting spaces, ritual patterns and behaviors, governance of the church, demography of membership, the church's head pastor, and key beliefs. In a sense, this chapter describes "official religion" at TEF, a background within which to explore the particular religious journeys and experiences of the five women whom I interviewed.

History and Development of TEF

Like many contemporary evangelical churches, Trinity Evangelical Free Church is not a member of an official denomination. TEF is, however, affiliated with the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA) whose website (efca.org) describes itself as follows: "United by a mutual commitment to serve our Lord Jesus Christ with the

guidance of the Holy Spirit and obedience to the Word of God, the Evangelical Free Church of America is an association of nearly 1,500 autonomous churches in a growing ministry that currently extends to some 75 countries of the world.” Pastor Bob hedges a bit: “technically, we’re not a denomination but we are” (PB 10/15/08, p. 2). An EFCA statement of faith, also available online (<http://www.efca.org/about-efca/statement-faith>), lists certain shared theological convictions which include the centrality and inerrancy of Scripture, the belief in salvation through Jesus who was crucified for mankind’s sins, belief in the trinity, and a premillennial orientation to history. This statement of faith also mentions serving as a witness for Christ, caring for the poor, and practicing compassion.

As Pastor Bob relates the history of his church, TEF began as a small congregation in the 1980s that met in the basement of the local Unitarian Universalist Church, and as the congregation grew, it moved into a party room at the town’s YMCA. Next they moved to Rolling Ridge Road, meeting in a duplex that is now occupied by the Alive Earth Church. Pastor Bob arrived in 1991, and the church “started growing like crazy” (PB 10/15/08, p. 2). They then thoroughly renovated the duplex. With the membership still growing, TEF bought and renovated the town’s former cinema complex when the movie theater went out of business in 2002 (PB 10/15/08, p. 2). The church’s pattern of growth and its affiliation status is thus very much like those of a number of the new autonomous evangelical churches discussed in chapter 2.

Physical Description of the Church

Little attempt has been made to alter the architecture of this former movie theater, which has the quality of a warehouse with big windows and tan siding. Like so many of

the evangelical churches that Donald Miller calls, “new paradigm churches,” TEF is housed in a building converted from some previous secular use. Members acknowledge some limitations of the physical structure. As Tecla noted during our meal together, TEF is perhaps not the idyllic setting for wedding photos. The large, open parking lot remains, as does the movie theater’s old marquis sign, which now serves as both an advertising space for TEF and a place for often thought-provoking, evangelizing, and sometimes witty sayings, such as “Can’t sleep? Don’t count sheep. Talk to the shepherd.”

The physical space inside TEF is one of the first things that struck me as an outsider. Unlike most other religious spaces I have visited, TEF is extremely modern – it has remained relatively true to the form of a movie theater. The large, white movie screen remains at the front of the auditorium-like hall, with a stage in front of it. The screen is used in a power-point fashion and displays diagrams, photographs, lyrics, instructions, and quotes from the Bible. The church is equipped with surround-sound speakers, microphones, and large stage lights. Indeed, the front of the church is much better described as a stage than, for example, as a pulpit. Smaller, white Christmas lights line parts of the perimeter of the stage and decorate various plants that are on the sides of the auditorium.

The stage where the podium and Pastor Bob stand is also where TEF’s rock band, the “Worship Team,” performs throughout the services. The stage and band are complete with drums, guitars, a piano, back-up singers and their microphones, bongo drums, at which Pastor Bob is especially adept, and a number of other musical instruments and accessories. The combining of modern technology with expressions of conservative

Christian theology are features of worldview and worship discussed below and also exemplify the “experimentation in evangelicalism” to which Balmer points (2006: 323). The high technology which is very much a part of TEF’s physical space implies an engagement with modernism and popular culture and provides an example of the way in which, as Jay Carpenter notes, “evangelicals emulate many trends of popular culture while continuing to denounce America’s transgressions” (1997: 242).

Description of the Congregation and Governance

With pride, Pastor Bob noted that about 1,400 people regularly attend weekly Sunday services, which are held at 8:30 and 10:30am. About 450 families are in the congregation, and the church population is young, with many children in attendance. He added that about half of the members previously “had Catholicism in their lives, my wife and I did too” (PB 10/15/08, p. 2). My own observations at services suggest that the vast majority of members are white, with an equal number of men and women. Leadership, however, is strictly for men.

A visible gender hierarchy is very much a part of the culture at TEF. Men dominate the church service in terms of leadership and direction. The church “elders” consist of seven white, middle-aged men. It is these men who, once a month, pass out to congregants communion offered on silver trays. The secondary pastors, who make announcements about daily activities and who run particular groups, such as the youth group, are also white men. Except for two women, the “Worship Team” consists of all men who play the instruments. The two women, however, are strictly back-up singers to Pastor Bob, who is also the lead singer in the band. Two women are also listed as

“greeters” in the church. Women serve only as the leaders of all-women groups and activities and as providers of childcare.

Groups, Activities, and Special Events

The church has an array of groups, activities, and “teams” listed on its website. Some address the needs of children and teens, encouraging adult members to volunteer in teaching and leading. Other groups coordinate events, maintain email chains and prayer chains, and still others provide tech support for the lively audio and visual aspects of worship, to be discussed below. Creative arts and drama teams exist “to enhance adult worship.” I myself saw a 2007 Easter-time puppet show extravaganza (CS 4/8/07, p. 2). Pastor Bob told me about a parody of the TV sitcom “The Office” prepared by church members of the creative arts team “in order to enter the world of real people with a show, that even if you’ve never watched ‘The Office,’ it was still humorous” (PB 2/26/09, p. 6). Of special interest is the “assimilation team” which “bridges the gap from being a guest to enrolling in new believers classes, membership, and small groups.” The emphasis is clearly on evangelizing and conversion as would be expected in a born-again, evangelical church context (Balmer and Winner 2002: 23, 71, 76; Miller 1997: 71-79).

The church organizes gender-segregated events, perhaps suggesting the kind of doctrine of separate spheres espoused by the Promise Keepers, a national Christian organization, where women are treated as the “other,” and men are encouraged to bond together in a kind of homosocial intimacy (Bartkowski 2000). Men have their own retreats, from which women are excluded, while women, too, have organized women-only events, that are described and promoted in stereotypically feminine terms by Pastor

Ben, the associate pastor at the church: “Ladies, your Secret Pal banquet will be held Monday night. You can count on one thing, it will be girly – it’s gonna be great, for you, for me, not so much” (CS 4/22/07, p. 2-3).

The small group that I attended was for young adults, men and women, and met once a week, focused on the reading of a particular text of Scripture. Phil, an elder in the church and a close personal friend of Pastor Bob, led the group. While the members of this small group all had some connection with TEF, several regularly attended other area churches. A core set of members came each week, but attendance varied somewhat from week to week. Many such groups of different kinds meet every week, including groups designed especially for, for example, women, men, singles, married couples, retirees, and teens.

Pastor Bob in His Own Words

Pastor Bob, the charismatic senior pastor of TEF, is originally from the Chicago area, but later lived in Georgia. He told me, “I was not raised in a Christian home. I went to convert to Catholicism for my wife, but we were both questioning it” (PB 10/15/08, p. 2). He and his wife, high school sweethearts, left the Catholic Church but the journey to Pastor was a “long process.” Bob became a Christian in the army. He had had a lifetime interest in medicine and studied at Georgia State University to become a medical technician and served as a military trained medic in the army. Bob alluded to the number of divorces in the medical community, and said that for him, “life’s priorities were changing; it was difficult to be the kind of father and husband I wanted to be” (PB 10/15/08, p. 2). Even though he had some doubts about entering medicine as a

profession, he applied to medical school and left the decision in God's hands. If he got in, he would take it as a sign that medicine was his path. He was not accepted, however, and took a job as an assistant hospital administrator in Seattle:

I had to wear a three-piece suit, I was miserable, and I thought, 'What am I doing here God?' Nail in the coffin. I was asked to commit a felony by a new administrator, and this was a *Christian* hospital, asked to hide records. I wouldn't, was fired, got my severance pay, and I was done and gone. At this point, I had been a Christian for 10 years but I decided to go to seminary. God said 'I'm cutting the strings, you're free to go to seminary' (PB 10/15/08, p. 2).

Bob went back to Chicago to Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and then in 1991, TEF became "the first 'real' church I was the pastor of. Eighteen years here, and we went from 35 people in a basement to this" (PB 10/15/08, p. 2).

Pastor Bob views his life as a journey from no religion to Christianity, from the search for a meaningful profession to ministry, from a modest church of 35 people to a thriving, stable, and large congregation. He is filled with humor and charisma, an engaging and successful performer in the wholesale setting of the church, and an intense, charming, magnetic presence in the more intimate setting of his office. A huge deer head hangs on the wall in his office and the surface of his desk and the walls are adorned with photos of his many children and grandchildren. In our two interview sessions, I questioned Pastor Bob in detail about his role as pastor and musician and about his own theology and Christian outlook. Much of that material is included below in my discussion of worship and worldview at TEF.

Recurring themes in our interviews that are critical to Pastor Bob's worldview are the centrality of the Bible, its absolute truth as the word of God, and his own identity as a fundamentalist. For Pastor Bob, as for the fundamentalists of the early twentieth century,

to be a fundamentalist means accepting and living by “the fundamentals of the Christian faith” (PB 10/15/08), such as the inerrancy of Scripture and salvation through Jesus alone. He said in our second interview “I am absolutely a fundamentalist. Right? Except, cause now fundamentalist means fundamental Muslim, which means you’re ready to cut of people’s heads if they don’t agree with you. And that’s how a lot of people think of Christians” (PB 2/26/09). Note that for him “evangelical,” the name of his Church, and “fundamentalist,” and “Christian” are equivalent. I asked again “But, you are a tried and true fundamentalist?” Pastor Bob nodded his head fervently.

Pastor Bob is, in some respects, utterly at home with himself, confident, and, frankly, full of fun. As I arrived at the church, before our second interview, he was giving a dancing lesson on the jitterbug to Pastor Ben’s three adorable young daughters. That scene seemed to capture a side of his personality – a loving paternal figure. On the other hand, there is a hard side. Theologically, he believes that those who do not accept Christ in the way he understands and defines that acceptance are going to hell, pure and simple. He said, “God doesn’t consign anyone to hell, we earn our way because we are inherently sinful” (PB 10/15/08, p. 1). Christians get to heaven only “because of Jesus’ perfection.” Jesus is “the way, the truth” (PB 10/15/08, p. 1). There is also an abiding distrust and resentment of the non-Christian world, which in his view demeans and misrepresents his faith: “fundamentalism gets a bad rap today – half-wit, anti-intellect, etc., long list of prohibitions, that’s not biblical Christianity” (PB 10/15/08). He alluded to rumors he has heard about TEF: “We’ve heard we send people to your house to collect offerings, we sacrifice goats” (PB 10/15/08, p. 3). Pastor Bob thus exudes, in a

complicated way, a sense of being simultaneously both completely self-assured and a persecuted victim of enemies.

Worship at TEF

The pattern of worship at TEF is reminiscent of that at many evangelical churches with its combination of music and interpretations of Scripture (Miller 1997: 86, 89). A typical service at TEF begins with music played by the Worship Team. A quick introduction or segue is offered by the pastor, such as Pastor Bob's comments on his success in hunting the previous day or on the weather. The initial announcement and music is often followed by longer announcements, the introduction of a visiting guest, for example, someone associated with one of the missions supported by congregational contributions, and more music. Throughout this musical section, lyrics and background images are projected on a large screen, enhancing participation. A mix of slow, serious songs and upbeat praise-the-lord rock tunes is played on a variety of musical instruments.

Following the live music comes the centerpiece of the service, the sermon by Pastor Bob. The sermon is always based upon and entails interpretations of scriptural material, generally on a verse-by-verse, schematic, chronological basis. Pastor Bob often goes through an entire book of the Bible, for example, the Book of Amos or 1 Corinthians, over the course of many weekly services, explaining the meaning and relevance of God's word. A final prayer by the Pastor closes the service. This final prayer, like the sermon, usually includes a very overt link between the here and now and the scriptural text of the day, as relevant to the life of the congregation today. Sometimes

a variation upon this concluding formula occurs, for instance the serving of communion, which happens the first Sunday of every month.

Part of Pastor Bob's charisma is his ability as a rock musician. While I was waiting for the service to begin every week, I actually felt as if I were waiting for a real, live concert to begin. The lights dim or heighten. The lights mark transitions between portions of the service, indicating, for example, the beginning of a song, but the lighting also creates mood and expectation, and is part of the emotion-inducing qualities of this service as a participatory, shared performance. All of the congregants know the tunes. They sing with gusto and feeling, their hands sway in the air as if they are filled with joy that transcends workaday experience, and I myself came to know the lyrics and rhythms of the catchy tunes as the weeks and months of my observations went on. When one of the leaders of the Church, wearing a headset and holding a guitar declares, "I feel anticipation in the air," (CS 3/4/07, p. 2), he projects assurance and believability. The same is true when a child shouts, "Today is going to be a super day!" (CS 3/4/07 p. 3). When a teen begins to sob during one of the stirring songs, the emotional display does not feel out of the ordinary. The emotion in the auditorium is palpable (CS 3/4/07, p. 7).

Occasionally a congregant becomes extremely spirited, for example, the young woman in the front row I observed whose arms were flailing about, caught up in the spirit of the music (CS 11/9/08). There is, however, no speaking in tongues; there are no spiritual healings or handling of snakes. The church is clearly not Pentecostal in orientation, although Pastor Bob himself mentioned that the Pentecostal churches were pioneering the use contemporary music as he was, when he began his ministry eighteen years ago (PB 2/26/09).

Pastor Bob pointed out that some Christians initially resisted the use of contemporary music, and that “people were steeped in the *holy* [sarcastic, emphatic] music, which was music that was 100 and 150 years old which is why somehow, why it somehow became holy I guess through longevity but I had to keep taking people back to fact that, in the day that it was written, it was controversial” (PB 2/26/09. p. 5). He noted that some of the great hymns of today, such as “Our Mighty Fortress,” were set to secular music and that Martin Luther himself set hymns “to the tune of a bar song” (PB 2/26/09. p. 5).

Pastor Bob insisted that the church and its services need to remain relevant to contemporary worshipers, saying,

Now, you know, so my point is, look you gotta, don't check your brains at the door, okay, as a Christian. So, my contention was, look, the truth of Christianity must not ever change, okay, because it's called the once for all delivered to the saints, that's you know, in the New Testament here somewhere . . . but the package in which that truth comes, and this is where I'll use music, if the package doesn't change to reflect a different era, to reflect culture, the package becomes irrelevant. And so what was happening was as our civilization was progressing . . . but we still had these musical forms that were a century or more old which were irrelevant . . . I was a 60s rocker, I mean I cut my teeth as a teenager in the 60s. Well, so contemporary music started coming on the scene, taking still truth, but putting it to a more relevant musical form, and it's gonna click, it's gotta click and that's all on that (PB 2/26/09, p. 5).

Pastor Bob's own words beautifully capture the combination of conservative fundamentalist, evangelical theology and the capacity for innovation with an appreciation for aspects of modern popular culture. This kind of combination is typical of many of the autonomous evangelical churches, as discussed by Balmer (2006), Miller (1997), and Carpenter (1997).

The Small Group

The young adult small group I attended on Wednesday evenings meets at the home of a seemingly middle-class married couple in their thirties. They have two daughters, aged five and two. Their home, built in a wooded area of a rural town in Maine about 20 minutes from TEF, has a beautiful kitchen, and the couple has two nice cars. The home is tastefully decorated. I did not see a good deal of Christian material except that a number of Bibles and bits of TEF literature were scattered around the kitchen and the living room where we met. The home has a nicely lived-in feeling with toys everywhere and a lazy-boy chair as part of the comfortable furnishings in the living room. Construction is underway on the bathroom. The kitchen boasts a selection of tea and other food. It is, in short, what feels like a typical, middle-class, young family's home.

The ages of the young adult participants in the Bible study range from early 20s to mid-30s, but the group leader, Phil, is a middle-aged man and is, as mentioned above, an elder at TEF. Phil himself has two children who would be considered young adults. As noted previously, the group includes men and women, usually an even distribution of each, and the number of people at the meetings ranged between five and ten. Although the small group meetings have a greater quality of informality and intimacy than Sunday services at the church, like Church services themselves, these meetings, centered on the discussion of a scriptural text, have a set pattern, and are framed within a clearly evangelical, born-again Christian religious framework. That is to say, the meetings are quite different from a book club or the like and have a distinctive character.

The routine of the small group meeting is as follows. The meeting begins with a transition in, as people arrive and we engage in small talk, frequently the women in one area, generally the kitchen, and the men in another. At around 7:00pm, we gather in the living room where Phil introduces the biblical text for the evening. He sets the passage in its historical context, always understood within an expressly Christian religious framework. Bible study follows, marking the central section of the evening, which has its own format. We go through a portion of Scripture line-by-line, and Phil essentially asks us to interpret it, almost like a teacher asking his students for comments, and he offers his exegesis if we do not “get it” or touch on all of the issues he wants us to touch on. The Bible study is less a wide-ranging discussion than an exercise in exegesis and the close reading of Scripture, although sometimes we do stray off topic, leading to a discussion of issues beyond the text itself. After Bible study, we each make prayer requests. In this portion of the meeting, we go around the circle and each of us talks a bit about our current concerns, worries, and hopes – what we want to pray for or have prayed for us. Phil then leads a closing prayer circle, and relates the Bible study discussion of the week to our various prayer requests. We have snacks and make the transition out. Ideas and orientations to life expressed during small group largely parallel and reinforce those that emerge in Church sermons and in my conversations with Pastor Bob.

Beliefs, Meanings, and Messages

The Centrality of Scripture

Whether observing Church services, participating in small group, interacting with Pastor Bob, or having dinner with Phil and his wife, I was struck by the critical centrality

of the Bible to worldview at TEF. With emphases on the inerrancy of Scripture, the applicability of the Bible to believers' daily lives, and its relevance to understanding the very history of the world, TEF is clearly in the orbit of fundamentalist orientations, that is within the conservative wing of evangelicalism, as discussed in chapter 2. The emphasis placed on reading the Bible literally, "allowing the Bible to speak for itself," (CS 11/19/06, p. 6) is an important and self-defining marker of American fundamentalism, as it emerged and was defined in the early twentieth century and as it continues today. Pastor Bob thus told me, "The Bible is God's inspired, infallible, authoritative word of God. God breathed nothing in the Bible that He did not intend to be there, but worked through human authors, so there are different styles etc but that doesn't preclude God's oversight, it *is* God's breathed word" (PB 10/15/08, p. 1). The Bible "is to be read literally in the context of the whole and figuratively . . . Jonah *could* have been swallowed by a whale" (PB 10/15/08, p. 1).

In our second interview, in the context of a discussion of the meaning of "traditional values," Pastor Bob commented on how difficult some of the passages pertaining to women in 1 Corinthians are to understand, but he has to persevere to try to teach the literal word of God. He said:

I refer to the truth as determined and defined, not by me, not by culture, not by era or epic or by personality but by God Himself. You know, I am big on teaching the entirety and making the entire truth of the Bible clear, and saying this is clear, you know, I know some things don't always go down well in our society and you should've been here last Sunday. I would call one of the worst sermons I've ever preached because it was a difficult passage, but I said right upfront, this is difficult, I'm not even sure what it means in the long run, I'm not sure what the application of it is, but and I wanted to skip it and I'd rather skip it, but that's not the way we do things here, so I'll do the best I can with it (PB 2/26/09, p. 6).

Pastor Bob's words and his demeanor reflected a real struggle to see the Bible as relevant and to be true to what he regards as an eternal truth.

Pastor Bob frames centrality of Scripture by asking, "What is the timeless principle? What are the timeless principles? And then applying them where appropriate" (4/29/07, p. 3). At small group, Phil and the others also engaged in very literalist readings of the text. My fieldnotes emphasize, "This is the word of God. We know the Bible happened" (SG 10/29/08 p. 1). This belief in the absolute truth and eternal applicability of the Bible serves as the context for all other beliefs.

Concerns with the End-Time and Premillennialism

This process of the literal reading of the Word in its actual historical context and applying the text to contemporary situations paradoxically and richly moves way beyond the literally "literal" – at least in the perceptions of an outsider like myself. Views expressed at TEF suggest a streamlined or simplified version of a premillennialist interpretation of history and human beings' place within history, rooted in a reading of the Scripture. No concepts or interpretations emerge in my observations as elaborate as John Nelson Darby's complex scheme of dispensations, which was variously understood by subsequent evangelical Christians. Nevertheless, an emphasis on an end-time, on a remnant, and the presence of various other motifs suggest that members of TEF believe themselves to be living in a premillennial age, that things will get worse and worse until Christ returns to usher in the Kingdom of God, and they will be among the saved.

Pastor Bob concluded one powerful Sunday sermon by equating the evils of the generation of the biblical Amos with the evils of our own time, saying, "We are in for

days of storms. If you don't know the savior, you're not a part of the remnant and the judgment will fall – there is an escape – His name is Jesus Christ. Amen” (CS 4/15/07, p. 8). Similarly, several times, the discussion at small group turned to questions about the end-time. For example, in comments on a passage from 1 Peter, Phil said that we have been in the last days for 2,000 years, but the end could come any time – even tomorrow! At a subsequent meeting, we discussed the Millennium and different views of what the concept means. I was struck, in fact, by the participants' lack of clarity on the issue, which involved as much confusion as I experienced as an outsider at that point. It makes sense, however, that such a complex, variously interpreted theological concept would not be at the fingertips of ordinary church and Bible study-goers. One young woman described the end-time as one when “thousands and thousands of people will die” (SG 11/19/08, p. 2).

In response to my question about our discussion of the Book of Revelations, Phil brought up the *Left Behind* series, mentioned in chapter 2. He said he does not agree with its whole theology and timeline entirely, describing it as a new fad. But, he finds it interesting and suggested that some of LaHaye's ideas have some truth in them. Phil describes himself as old-fashioned in his evangelicalism (D 12/1/08, p. 2). He and his wife do treat the Bible as a veritable code, and talked about the way in which numbers mentioned in the Bible may predict current events. The Bible, they believe, predicted Israel's 1948 statehood and the 1967 war, which gave Israel Jerusalem. He mentioned the importance of the Jews as markers for our own history; their history is a kind of blueprint or prediction, and he concluded, “We don't know what the end of the end-time

will be, but we'll know it when we see it. We are now in the end-time, since Jesus" (D 12/1/08, p. 2).

The longest and most theologically sophisticated explanation of views of the end-time and premillennial thought as preached at TEF was offered, not surprisingly, by Pastor Bob himself in response to my questions about the subject. Pastor Bob not only provided his own definitions of these difficult concepts, but also suggested that he and many other pastors who operate in real-life, church community settings would be happy to do away with the terminology of premillennialism in the doctrinal statement of the EFCA of which TEF is a member-church. It is also interesting that Pastor Bob referred to the EFCA as a "denomination," or "our denomination," whereas the EFCA website suggests an affiliation, "an association of autonomous churches." He had been a bit more equivocal in our first conversation about whether EFCA was a technically denomination or not. In response to my question about the definition of premillennialism, Pastor Bob laughed, and said

Now I have been a studied Christian for 35 years and if I still find this stuff confusing, it's confusing. And by all this stuff, you mean "the end times." And sometimes I just wish it'd go away, the whole discussion of it . . . Well, let me start, our denomination has an official view on the Millennium, okay? . . . Right now, as of today, in our official doctrinal statement, it states that we are, and in order to be a member of this church you are supposed to be premillennial, okay? . . . It means that the second coming of Christ will occur before, premillennial, before the millennial kingdom, or the thousand year reign of Christ, okay? Here's how the order of events goes according to premillennialism. The Church Age ends, and that's what we're currently in and we've been in the Church Age since Christ rose from the dead and says to Peter, on you Peter I will build my church, okay? So this whole long period of time is called the church age. Alright? The Church Age will come to an end in a time of Tribulation, okay? And all that that means. And Christ will return to the earth, remember, premillennial, before the thousand-year reign, so he will come to this earth and establish his kingdom, which will last for a literal thousand years, okay? And at the end of this is the resurrection of the

dead and the judgment of the unsaved will occur and then after that thousand-year kingdom, then eternity begins, okay? (PB 2/16/09, p. 1).

Pastor Bob thus provides a timeline with the following order of events: Resurrection of Christ; Church Age, which we are presently in, and all who are born-again through faith in Jesus, have the status as “saved”; Return or Second Coming of Christ; Millennium/Kingdom of God lasting a full one-thousand years; Resurrection of Dead; Judgment of Unsaved; Eternity. For Pastor Bob, this pattern operates on a cosmic level, and he describes himself as premillennial in belief, and yet, his primary interest and that of his congregants is in the day-to-day salvation of individuals who live their lives and die.

I asked further about the meaning and nature of the doctrine of premillennialism in terms of its significance to individual Christians, and Pastor Bob responded,

It’s [premillennial doctrine] not critical to somebody being a good Christian, you know, a faithful person, going to heaven and that sort of thing, based on your view of how that confusing stuff is all going to pan out, okay? And I was, and many others, were strongly in favor of seeing it pulled out and actually our national leadership wanted it pulled out (PB 2/26/09, p. 1).

Pastor Bob encourages his congregation to live the Christian life and wants them to know that they will reach heaven when they die. They can receive support with the trials of life and need not fear death itself. Not all evangelical preachers or evangelicals would agree with his de-emphasis on premillennialism, as Balmer and Miller’s overviews suggest. Even Phil, the leader of the small group I attended, seems more taken with such theological premillennial concerns. But Pastor Bob takes very seriously working in the trenches with real people who face divorces, illness, and job loss. Similarly, in the prayers expressed after small group and during dinner with Phil and his wife, Tecla, the

challenges of coping with the uncontrollable aspects daily life were clearly of central importance. I asked Pastor Bob if he thought the members of his congregation were concerned with such theological timelines and he responded, “If you were, honestly, candidly, if you were to ask, to poll just the members, the official card-carrying members, I doubt that they’d be able to tell you what premillennial even means” (PB 2/26/09, p. 2).

I also asked Pastor Bob about his views on the *Left Behind* series, mentioned above, and he was critical, describing it as entertaining fiction. He expressed sadness that people derive their theology from author Tim LaHaye rather than from Scripture itself:

Tim LaHaye when he wrote *Left Behind* wrote it as a fictional work . . . Well, it’s fiction, but man, you know, you’d think, and I know that that is where Christians have derived their views on the end times from, far more so than this [the Bible]. And that’s, to me, that’s sad and it’s also really flimsy to say the least (PB 2/26/09, p. 2).

Pastor Bob’s emphasis on Scripture thus turns him away from this popular work, which he implies does not engage seriously enough with the Word of God. On the other hand, Pastor Bob does share of the more sectarian approaches to the world typical of those who focus on the end-time. In spite of the practicality and genuine caring for members of his congregation mentioned above, Pastor Bob believes that we are living in a satanic world. We are all sinners, to be sure, but only those who have accepted Jesus have hopes of salvation. The world thus divides up in a sectarian way into those who are saved and those who are not.

A Satanic World

Meredith B. McGuire and Robert Bellah, both sociologists of religion with special interests in American religions, each provide a framework in which to understand

perceived dichotomies between the saved and the unsaved that seem to inform worldviews at TEF. Noting that contemporary American society “remains divided into ethnic groups,” Bellah suggests that Americans have always divided society into saints and sinners: “The repression of evil, regardless of the means, is a simple duty to the classic American,” and thus a part of national myth (1992: 101-102). Bellah is concerned about the ways in which this us/them mentality affects race relations in American society, but the implicit dualism may be relevant to the messages delivered at TEF, too.

Similarly, McGuire describes a particular religious orientation, the sectarian. Sectarianism is characterized by “‘virtuoso’ religiosity,” the striving toward perfection, and “negative tension with the ‘world’” (McGuire 2002: 162). She notes that, “persons with a sectarian orientation are less tolerant of those who do not likewise strive for perfection according to the same norm” and that “the sectarian orientation is . . . prone to religious extremism precisely because of its characteristic emphasis on applying a virtuoso religious norm in all spheres of social life” (McGuire 2002:163). She continues, “The sectarian orientation thrives on a sense of opposition” (McGuire 2002: 184).

Pastor Bob and others I observed or interviewed draw a clear distinction between those they perceive to be true Christians and others, often assuming the stance of a persecuted minority, even though they belong to a church of 1,400 people which itself is part of an even larger movement of American evangelicals consisting of millions and millions of people. Pastor Bob sees himself and his congregation as the victims of the indignities and decline experienced by “this once great nation” (CS 4/15/07, p. 8). He describes the marginality they face as true believers: “And as long as we maintain that Jesus is the only way, we will be despised and hated. We are living and fighting in a

satanic world” (CS 4/8/07, p. 6). He sees the “liberal media” as liars and manipulators: “You can be watching ABC, NBC, of course, not Fox, [everyone laughs] and it can be totally fake, but you think you’re watching the news. Look how they manipulate our minds and attitudes and things” (CS 4/29/07, p. 1). It is clear that there are specific issues that are a sign to Pastor Bob of what has gone wrong in this country, including, for example, abortion, acceptance of homosexuality, and tolerant religious attitudes, all issues mentioned in church and in his own blog and all indicators of a quite conservative, fundamentalist variety of evangelicalism as described by Balmer and others.

A part of this sectarian view of the world is belief in the damnation of most Christians, or, as Pastor Bob might see it, those who like to call themselves Christians. Pastor Bob’s passion is directed against “liberal types of theologians and scholars” (CS 4/8/07, p. 6), against “liberal Baptists” and “liberal Presbyterians”: “All of these modern liberal denominations are splitting on issues of neo-natal sacrifice, calling it abortion, and legalized sexual perversion, homosexuality . . . they must repent, or God’s judgment will fall” (CS 4/15/07, p. 6).

Phil and his wife, Tecla, expressed a view of their own persecution. Phil and Tecla have been devoted members of TEF for fifteen years, and are best friends with Pastor Bob and his wife, Kitty. Over dinner, they spoke about the role of the Church in “the community,” which I understood to mean the role of TEF in the town at large. Tecla, in particular, said that they feel like victims, as if being a Christian is pushed aside in the public schools. She noted the public schools talk about Judaism and Kwanza, which she referred to as “black religion,” but isolate Christians. This issue came up again. For Phil, Western civilization is Christianity and he feels that Western civilization

is being swept under the rug. He mentioned that the professors at the town's college sometimes write into the local papers with scathing letters about the Church. He feels there is a lot of resistance to them and seemed to be saying that they are treated like the "Other" (D 12/1/08, p. 1). Tecla says that she has encountered opposition and stigma in connection with her decision to home-school. They both mentioned that their own families are Catholic. Their families think "they are nuts," and Phil and Tecla have been unsuccessful in witnessing to them (D 12/1/08, p 1). The Church has thus become their new family, a safe haven in a world of sin and rejection. In this world, Jews, homosexuals, and women are of special interest and concern.

About the Jews

Evangelicals have a complex relationship to Judaism and Jews. This attitude defies easy generalization or characterization. As noted in chapter 2, some regard events, such as the Holocaust and the founding of Israel, as key markers on the pattern that leads to the Kingdom, although there is debate about what happens to Jews who have not accepted Jesus as savior at the end of the cosmic process. A number of prominent evangelical leaders have publicly expressed enormous love for Israel, taking its side in all disputes, recognizing Jews as the people of Jesus and the founders of Israel, where the events of the end-time will unfold (Balmer and Winner: 86). The late Jerry Falwell, head of the "Moral Majority," and for several decades the face of American Televangelism, espoused such views, as do the members of Calvary Chapel, one of the mega-churches studied by Balmer. Balmer describes how on one Friday night during his observation period, "Calvary's Messianic Jewish Fellowship celebrated thirty-nine years of Israel's

independence” (Balmer 2006: 17). For the Calvary congregation, the survival of Israel is seen as a critical step in the march to the Millennium, but Pastor Bob did not allude to the importance of Israel in any the sermons I heard or in our conversations.

Pastor Bob’s close reading of Scripture does grapple with the portrayal of biblical Israel in ways that I found to be disquieting from my perspective as an outsider who also is Jewish. In a 3-week, 3-part sermon series on the Book of Amos, Pastor Bob used his interpretation of the Jews’ role in the Book of Amos to paint them as an example, an example of going down the “wrong” path. He discussed the plight of the tribes of Israel and Judah, who were,

[S]pecifically and specially chosen by God to be His special people, but they blew it over and over again, throughout their history. Israel had been given so much, and so much was required in return from them . . . God’s discipline of his favorite people was to be a spectacle to the unbelieving neighbors . . . the scandalous spectacle of Israel’s crimes . . . trampling that unique and special relationship. Why is God so angry? Verse 10 spells it out . . . ‘cause my people have forgotten what it means to do right.’ How did that come about? They did it by being open-minded and tolerant . . . They didn’t just not do right, they forgot what right meant . . . truth becomes whatever they determined it to be. Religion and sexual preoccupation became a part of one package and they called it good (CS 4/22/07, p. 5-6).

Pastor Bob joked about a certain translation where the Jews are referred to as “you fat cows” and he attributes this by saying, “You see, Hebrew is a very loose language, but it is a picture of a spoiled people” (CS 4/22/07, p. 6). Pastor Bob used what he sees as the Jews’ “mistakes” to warn his congregation what can go wrong, and, in this way, a distinctive anti-Semitism emerges. The Jews are painted as the unbelieving others, those whose ways should not be replicated.

The very literalism of the Pastor’s reading indicts modern-day Jews. In describing the sins of the ancient Israelites, Pastor Bob declared, “the prophets came and

warned the Jews, they use the same language in the Hebrew – history repeats itself – and the Jews told the Prophets to shut up” (CS 4/15/07, p. 7). In the same sermon, Pastor Bob discussed Haiti and their religion of voodoo, of which he is clearly not fond: “the incorporation is the downfall” (CS 4/15/07, p. 6). In a slip of the tongue, though, he once refers to voodoo as “voodooism.” Upon realizing this linguistic error, he jokes, “voodooism . . . Judaism . . . [laughs] . . . anyway, I mean voodoo, but really . . .” (CS 4/15/07, p. 6). Again, the Jews are seen as the other, as less loving and appreciative of God.

During the 2007 Easter Sunday service I attended, there was a special puppet show put on by TEF’s own puppet troupe, Bread and Butter Kidz. The first of two shows they performed was called “The Case of the Missing Messiah.” In it, one puppet was dressed as a detective, and the other identified himself as a representative of the Jews. To my surprise, there was little overt, physical stereotyping of the “Jew,” in terms of dress or physical features. The puppet representing the Jew, however, was shown to tell the detective that they were missing Jesus, and said, “We charged him with blasphemy” for claiming to be the Son of God “and the council sentenced him to die” (CS 4/8/07, p. 2). After some witty banter between the puppets, the detective puppet kicked the Jew out of his office, exclaiming, “The Messiah Jesus isn’t missing. I found him and you can, too!” (CS 4/8/07, p. 2). The Jew was portrayed as ignorant and misguided. The detective puppet ended the show by speaking to the audience, “Have you found Jesus? If you haven’t, you don’t know what you’re missing!” (CS 4/8/07, p. 2). The play was especially designed to educate and entertain the children, and a particular negative view of Jews was presented to impressionable children. As Pastor Bob said shortly after the

performance, quoting Scripture, “No one comes to the Father but by Jesus” (CS 4/8/07, p. 6). Thus, salvation comes only through acceptance of Jesus as Messiah.

Jews’ perceived rejection of Jesus throughout history does make modern-day Jews a particularly appealing target for evangelizing, a real prize. Phil and Tecla seemed to perk up when they heard my mother was Jewish and that I was raised in a somewhat Jewish home. Tecla told me that when her son was five years old, he had really wanted to study Hebrew. The local Rabbi let him come to Hebrew School and he went for a year and, according to Tecla, he was the best in the class. Tecla mentioned that the Rabbi had said to her, “We have very different traditions,” and she had responded, “You have Old Testament and we have Old Testament and New Testament, so we are on the same page” (D 12/1/08, p. 2). I think that perhaps this was a move in a more ecumenical direction than Pastor Bob might express, but I am not sure.

In both small group and at dinner, Phil’s attitude seemed to be that the Jews were, of course, very important to Christians, but more as “markers for our own history” than as cultural and religious equals. He called Jewish history a “kind of blueprint or prediction” (D 12/1/08, p.2). In the small group, my impression from Phil was that to him, the poor Jews just sort of missed the boat (SG 11/12/08, p. 1; 11/19/08, p. 1). My fieldnotes of the discussions suggest the view that the prophets tried to tell the Jews about Jesus but they could not put two and two together; there were all these obvious signs, but they did not understand. Even once Jesus showed up, they did not recognize him as Messiah; it was not enough for them, even though his arrival had been predicted in Scripture. Phil commented, “The Jews knew and were waiting and waiting on something, and even when that something came, it wasn’t enough” (SG 11/19/08, p. 1).

Homosexuality

As much of the literature on evangelical Christianity notes, homosexuality is seen as a sign of the moral decline of our culture and the coming of the apocalypse, the work of Satan (Balmer 2006: 44, 81, 205). The theme of homosexuality as an iconic sin runs throughout the many sermons I attended. Pastor Bob mentioned Barney Frank, a gay Congressman from Massachusetts, as a “*stellar* congressmen [sarcastically],” whom he says is running a “homosexual brothel” (CS 4/22/07, p. 7). The following week, Pastor Bob mentioned another pro-gay rights politician, Gavin Newsom, mayor of San Francisco whom he said, “unilaterally trampled on the law a few years ago, and to this day, performing homosexual marriages. He said, ‘the heck with the law’” (CS 4/29/07, p. 3-4). Pastor Bob spoke of transgender people as the ultimate sinners, saying “God doesn’t believe in civil rights for all” (CS 4/22/07, p. 6). The congregation palpably gasped at this comment. In a worldview that valorizes many rigidly defined categories, gays, lesbians, and especially transgendered people are treated as an affront to God’s orderly world.

Regarding Women

In formal, public settings at TEF, sustained focus is placed on women’s roles and rules, particularly within the content of heterosexual marriage. Problems in relationships between men and women are central to the concerns of congregants and to the ministry at TEF. Such issues are regularly linked to the reading of Scripture, which provides a model for behavior and answers to pressing contemporary problems in the ethics of

gender. The subject of divorce and abuse were featured in the sermons delivered by Pastor Bob and also came up in small group and in my interviews with Pastor Bob. The beginning assumption from Pastor Bob's perspective is that men and women belong to clearly defined and separate categories, both biologically and socially, each with its own characteristics and obligations under Christ.

Pastor Bob and the other pastors often attempt to assert masculinity and subsequent authority over and distance from women and all things feminine. Pastor Bob talks about his love of hunting and golf, while Pastor Ben, the associate pastor, jokes about how impossible it is to understand women: "Now you guys, I know you're saying, how can I know and understand what women are like?" (CS 3/4/07, p. 9). One Sunday, Pastor Bob joked to the congregation about wanting to play golf instead of visiting his newborn granddaughter and Pastor Ben encouraged him. Pastor Bob said, "I haven't seen her yet, and I'm supposed to go down to Boston right after the service this morning, but you know, the golf courses are screaming . . . This is a dilemma . . . I asked Pastor Ben what to do, and he said, 'you know Pastor Bob, you're gonna have your granddaughter your whole life . . .'" (CS 4/22/07, p. 1).

One service in particular I attended in March of 2007, with a sermon entitled "Until Dissatisfaction do Us Part? 2: Ephesians 5:15-33," focused exclusively and explicitly on marriage and gender roles within the heterosexual marriage. Pastor Ben led this sermon, as Pastor Bob was away on vacation. Pastor Ben outlined how women are to submit to their husbands, as the Church submitted to Christ, and husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the Church: "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord . . . Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church" (CS 3/4/07,

p. 7-8). It is of particular importance in understanding the worldview at TEF and at evangelical churches in general to note how deeply rooted the theme of female submission and subservience is in the biblical myth itself.

Pastor Ben used various metaphors for marriage but again the key metaphor rooted in biblical tradition suggests that the husband is as God/Christ and the wife is as the church: “The husband is depicting God . . . God is head, husband is to be the most responsible in his home. As savior, he must be sacrificial. Nobody laid it down more than Jesus did. As lover, the most giving, like Jesus, a love that gives back . . . the command to love is given to the husbands” (CS 3/4/07, p. 8). As for the wife, Pastor Ben said, she “portrays the church, subject to her husband in everything, cooperating with goals rather than holding him back . . . respectful” (CS 3/4/07, p. 8). He described the importance of husbands getting to know their wives: “Jesus is all-knowing and we are not. The husband must set up on a path to get to know his wife . . . what God is calling husbands to be is to be a learner of their wives” (CS 3/4/07, p. 8-9). He then quoted another biblical passage, where women are described as weaker. Pastor Ben explains this quote to the congregation: “I don’t think Scripture is talking about physical strength. I’ve seen my wife when she’s been giving birth. It is a command to live and dwell with your wife, a challenge, goal, path of study to get to know our wives” (CS 3/4/07, p. 9).

On the one hand, Pastor Ben’s interpretations of Scripture suggest the need for bonding and closeness between spouses, and a respect for women’s strength. This strength is, of course, rooted in biology, and the husband is equated with God Himself. Pastor Ben developed this line of thought saying, “Maybe she is weaker, emotionally. Guys, understand that your wives are weaker” (CS 3/4/07, p. 9). He continued, “who we

represent as husbands, it's Christ, we are the leaders in the home . . . Wives, live in submission to their husbands, this is a beauty that is asked of you" (CS 3/4/07, p. 10). He described the danger of not submitting, equating such behavior with the devil: "The first person to challenge submission is the devil. Lack of submission began with Satan himself" (CS 3/4/07, p. 10). He argued that submission is a good quality since it is written in the Bible that, "Jesus submitted to the will of his father. When you submit, it does not mean you're inferior" (CS 3/4/07, p. 10). He makes another analogy: "There are different amounts of responsibility in a marriage . . . like the military . . . that's what's worked so well in the United States military" (CS 3/4/07, p. 10). The need for female submission, the fear of Satan, and the parallel with the military combine to create images of an eerie sort of civil religion that equates patriotism with a particular hierarchy of marriage, where husbands are in charge and wives submit.

Pastor Bob's sermons on 1 Corinthians 7 emphasize the goodness of marital sex which "is God-given, but has been perverted by Satan. It is a godly act" (CS 11/2/08, p. 2). Pastor Bob says, "I love sex," but he hates what Satan has done with it (CS 11/2/08, p. 2). For Pastor Bob and TEF, good sex is safely circumscribed within heterosexual marriage. He makes fun of the politically correct word "partner" and thus manages to condemn gay relationships without expressly mentioning them. He also manages to condemn the Roman Catholic Church with its emphasis on celibacy, implying that road leads to pedophilia. He makes it clear that even though Jesus condemns divorce, it is an option in cases of serious spousal abuse. He is passionate and extremely heated when he speaks of men who beat their wives or pastors who counsel the wives that "they can change the man both to be a Christian and to put up with the abuse 'til it stops"

(CS11/9/08, p. 2). My conversations with Pastor Bob himself introduced additional nuance into the discussion of gender and submission.

Like Pastor Ben, Pastor Bob draws clear distinctions between the genders, saying, “There are fundamental, obvious differences between men and women” (PB 10/15/08, p. 3). This emphasis came up twice during the interview. He speaks in terms of scripturally validated male authority: “Paul says ‘I do not permit a woman to exercise authority over a man,’” even though “it rubs against our culture of feminism” (PB 10/15/08, p. 3). The “husband of one wife” is what qualifies a man to be an elder, shepherd, teacher, pastor (PB 10/15/08, p. 3). That is, heterosexual marriage is a prerequisite for leadership. Interestingly, Pastor Bob interprets the story of Genesis 2-3 about Adam, Eve, and the serpent as portraying the man as “just a knucklehead,” whereas Eve at least was deceived by the devil (PB 10/15/08, p. 3). In other words, in his view, “women are far more studious, intelligent, diligent, leadership-oriented, take initiative, abide by the word. Men resist it, they sit back and wait, are slow to do, they botch commitments” (PB 10/15/08, p. 3). And, so, why then can’t women be pastors in his view? Pastor Bob returns to the Scripture saying, “God did not ask my opinion.” He adds, “The Word of God is the order of male headship within the home and the church. That headship is offensive to our culture largely because of its abuses, the way Christian men have abused their wives ‘in the name of God’” (PB 10/15/08, p. 3). Thus hierarchy appears to be fine as long as there is mutual respect and caring between husband and wife.

Pastor Bob described a church that he and his wife attended in Seattle as overdrawn such hierarchies between men and women. It was in his view “perverse” because women “had to be silent in church” (PB 10/15/08, p. 3). Pastor Bob thus

expresses some real tensions around the issue of authority and women's rights, an issue he seems to have resolved in his own mind by saying, "I have the inherent authority to prescribe authority, but there's very little she [his wife] can't do other than be a pastor. My wife is a small group leader" (PB 10/15/08, p. 3). The notion of mutuality is also part of his understanding.

Like Pastor Ben, Pastor Bob spoke of submission, but he equated the wife's submission and the husband's authority with a kind of mutual selfless love. This concept is somewhat reminiscent of Judith Stacey's report of attitudes concerning mutuality and submission expressed by minister Eleanor Morrison Garrett. Garrett and her husband insist to Stacey that they have an egalitarian marriage. They use the phrase "patriarchy in the last instance" to allow that while the woman is submissive to the husband, the ideal relationship should operate as "loving teamwork" in which husband and wife support one another (Stacey 1990: 133-134). Pastor Bob's metaphors, in contrast to Pastor Ben's, are not at all related to the military. His reflection on women, submission, and mutuality is worth quoting at length:

The key that I cannot underscore enough is from Ephesians chapter 5 where, here's what it comes down to, husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, okay? ... He didn't say, "and husbands now you are to, you know, use that as a club and say, 'wife shut up and submit to me because thus sayeth the Lord,'" which completely violates what God has said to the men which is love your wives like Christ loved the church. Well, Jesus doesn't love his church by browbeating them and beating up on them and abusing them and you know what I mean? He came and selflessly gave up everything for the one that he loved. That's what my role is supposed to be toward my wife. Now, in that scenario, I would contend that there is not a woman alive, including the most hardened feminist, okay, that experiencing a scenario like that where she truly had a man who loved her the way that Christ loves his church that that would in any way shape or form be offensive to her that she is supposed to be in subjection to this man, you see? Because it isn't something that he imposes on her, it's something she wants to do

and desires to do because how can you not with somebody who loves me that selflessly, you see? Now obviously there's no human being, human marriage that does that perfectly. Um, but Kitty and I are one of the best models I can give and I say that you know with all candor but also with all humility. And it works. This idea of, which drives me up a wall, of [whiny voice] "well marriage is a 50/50 proposition." No, it isn't! ...That's not the biblical perspective. The biblical perspective is the men, you need to worry about one thing, and that's giving 100% to this marriage with the expectation, Jesus is the goal and the model, right?, of getting zero percent in return because that's exactly, what did Jesus get? He got crucified! You see? Yeah, and to the wife it's the same thing, no you put 100% in this marriage and don't worry about what you're getting or not getting in return. If that's your viewpoint, all of a sudden, all of these comparisons, and "it's not fair and I'm getting the short end of the stick here," that's out the window. It works (PB 2/26/09, p 3-4).

For Pastor Bob, the concept of mutuality and the true meaning of the wife's submitting to her husband are modeled in the example of Christ's love. Christ loved the church so much he was willing to give his life for its well-being. He would never act in a way that "is offensive to her" or forces her or imposes upon her. That is how a husband should love his wife, and she should love him and submit to him not because it is her duty to submit, but because she wants to submit, out of love for him. Neither should worry "about what [they] are getting or not getting in return" (PB 2/26/09, p. 4). Is Pastor Bob simply espousing and justifying a 1950s "father knows best" version of relationships in which the husband is a most caring and benevolent despot or is something else at play?

While some would argue that there is a degree of "mutuality" in such Christian marriages and that through submission some women find positive fulfillment in the private realm, it becomes more difficult to argue that mutual degrees of power flow from male headship and female submission. Imbalances of power are even clearer in the

public sphere. There are no women pastors or elders at TEF as discussed above, and women play a gender-circumscribed role in the governance of the church.

TEF in Context

My fieldwork locates TEF within the wide spectrum of modern evangelical churches. Its pattern of growth, its current physical space, its forms and patterns of worship, and its governing autonomy set it within a typical array of “new paradigm” evangelical churches. The use of rock music, technology, and the contemporary setting combine with a conservative Bible-centered fundamentalism and are again typical of the sort of experimentation and innovation described by Balmer, Miller, and others who observe contemporary evangelical congregations. While officially Pastor Bob and the statement of doctrine to which TEF subscribe are premillennial, there is little practical engagement with such theological timelines. Some members express interest in the notion of the rapture, but it is not a central concern. Rather, the emphasis is on the truth of Scripture, which is to be applied to the challenges of daily life, and born-again status, a special relationship with Christ as the one true savior, which promises a place in heaven upon death. As Pastor Bob said to me as I left his office after our first one-on-one meeting, “If you died tonight, what would happen to you? Where are you at? I want to see you in heaven” (PB 10/15/08, p. 4).

A sectarian worldview is, however, evident at TEF with neatly divided categories of saved and unsaved. In the latter category are gays, liberal Christians, Jews and other non-Christians, Catholics, and many others. At the same time, the message is that true Christians are victims who are hated and misunderstood by the world at large, a

persecuted minority. Regarding women and their relationships with men, the concepts of mutuality and submission are critical and frequently invoked. How do the women whom I interviewed approach female submission and male headship, recurring themes in the discussion of gender roles within the contemporary evangelical community? How do these women assess and approach their roles, both in their families and at TEF? An analysis of core interviews with five women associated with TEF reveals ways in which these ideas, critical to religious and personal identity, are individually and variously negotiated by evangelical women.

Chapter 5

Spiritual Journeys and Religious Experience: Five Women's Stories

In January-March 2009, I conducted in-depth, one-on-one interviews with five women associated with TEF. Lori is a lively, humorous, and spirited 68-year-old woman, who was recently widowed. She worked in the dean's office at the local college for 28 years, and is now retired. She has four grown children, who are all also members of TEF, and devotes quite a bit of time to church activities. Tecla, in her late 40s, is a woman whose husband, an elder, leads the small group I attended. She herself has been involved in youth work at the church and home-schooled her two now-grown children. She has a vivacious and warm-hearted demeanor, and is presently recovering from breast cancer and treatment, an issue very much on her mind. Kimberly is a perky, pretty woman in her late 30s who grew up in central Maine. She is married to her high school sweetheart whom she met when she was fifteen. She has two children, ages 19 and 12, and has worked as a hairdresser, although she now describes herself as a full-time mom. She is involved in Christian teaching activities and is very active in the church. Tricia, a shy, soft-spoken girl 22-year-old, is the only one of the group who was born and raised in an evangelical home. She was home-schooled and attended a Bible college, and currently teaches with Kimberly at a Christian after-school program. She is engaged to a fellow evangelical and plans to be a stay-at-home mom. Pamela, another 22-year-old, received her BA from the local college last year and now works there in the administration. She describes her own family as ecumenical and is still searching for the right church, although she attends TEF from sporadically and finds the evangelical faith offered at Trinity welcoming in many ways.

The women described their relationships to this specific church and, more broadly, shared thoughts about their spiritual journeys and their identities as Christian women. My analysis explores how their sense of self reflects and is shaped by participation in TEF. I also examine the various ways in which the women's views of their religion, relationships, and roles diverge from the views expressed by the leadership and reinforced by official religion as it emerges in formal worship, study groups, and meetings. Finally, I am interested in the ways in which individuals negotiate their evangelical identities as women, in differences between the women, and in the role played by factors, such as personality, family background, and individual life experience.

Like Brasher (1998), Ingersoll (2003), Griffith (2000), and others who have studied the worldviews of evangelical women, I grapple with questions that arise from some of the women's reported feelings of liberation in submission. Such women feel empowered by membership at TEF and by their particular Christian identity. They say that their lives are enriched rather than limited by participation in a conservative version of Protestantism that seems to place women in very traditional roles clearly informed by patriarchal attitudes. Do some of the women at TEF actually feel disempowered by these constraints? Do they differentiate themselves from official positions, however subtly? Do they, in fact, express a non-official version of the faith preached by their pastor?

Information gleaned from the interviews falls under four broad categories: identity/belonging as Christians, a section that explores both us/them attitudes and the appeal of TEF itself; core beliefs, such as the personal relationship with Christ and the centrality of Scripture; family and marriage, a section that explores the concept of mutual

submission, sexual purity, gendered roles, and other related issues, including roles of women within the church and beyond; and finally, the women's views of Pastor Bob.

Identity and Belonging as Christians

Us and Them

All of the women I interviewed expressed an intriguing doubleness in their views of “self” and the “other.” They felt they were special or different from the world at large because of their particular Christian orientation to life and its effect on their emotional lives, their everyday activities, and their interactions. At the same time, they indicated that they were just like everyone else in the problems they faced in life, in their capacity for enjoyment, and in the condition of being a sinner, which they considered common to all human beings.

Tecla, who has faced life-threatening illness and debilitating treatment, summed up this duality in describing her attitude to death:

I can truly say that I had no fear of death, I still have no fear of death. In fact, I selfishly welcome death because I know that I'll be with the Lord. And that will be cool. What I don't welcome is the thought of my husband or my kids going, any more than they would welcome it with me. You know, as we say, we don't grieve as the world does, as Christians we don't grieve as the world grieves, but we do grieve, we grieve in that we miss this person that we love deeply, but we're so excited for them too because we just know [gasp] they are sitting at the feet of the Lord (1/27/09, p. 2).

Tecla suggested that born-again Christians miss their loved ones who die, as any of us would, but they have an assurance that the person is with God. Similarly, Tricia said,

Well like if I hear like someone had someone die in their family and they're not a Christian, it's just like who do, who do they turn to? Like, the funeral must be so empty, not knowing that you know you don't know

where the person has gone. Or, it's just so nice when you're a Christian just to have this, you know, you just know that God's gonna take care of everything, that He's looking out for you, that He's gonna be there for you and you can just like grab ahold of that and it's just I don't know what it'd be just like to have nothing there (2/3/09, p. 9).

Thus we all have to face death, but true Christians have comfort in knowing their loved one is taken care of. The women also noted that as human beings, we all have the capacity, even the tendency, to sin. As Tecla noted, "I sin every day. Everyday one of us sins, and I wish I could do that a little less [laughs] . . . Christians are not perfect, there's not a single person in the world that's perfect" (1/27/09, p. 10). On a less theological level, the women emphasized to me how much fun the Christian life offers, for example, Tecla's comment that, "People think *boring*, but there's a lot of fun in being a Christian" (1/27/09, p. 7). Lori finds the spirit of joy at TEF, and she appreciates Pastor Bob's allowance, for example, of wine at weddings, a custom that some conservative Protestants prohibit, even though it is mentioned in the Bible itself (3/13/09, p. 7). The implication is that all people are alike: our loved ones die and we mourn their loss, we all sin, and all of us are capable of enjoyment, but the women suggested that they experienced these shared features of human existence in uniquely Christian ways.

Some lines of demarcation between "us" and "them" are drawn more sharply and suggest the sectarianism which Meredith B. McGuire ascribes to some fundamentalist Christian groups (2001: 156-157). As Tecla noted in discussing the all-male leadership at TEF, "These are our rules if you want to be a part of the club [laughs] and this is what the rule is, and if you don't like it, then that's fine (1/27/09, p. 7). Pamela, too, commented that the messages preached at TEF are very "black and white," a feature she particularly likes (2/12/09, p. 8). They provide her with a center, although later in our conversation

she pointed to some of the negative sides of this extreme clarity, another area of ambivalence to be discussed later.

Some means of differentiation as Christians have to do with presentation of self, for example, dress and demeanor. Tricia noted,

[Y]ou know we look at our clothing like, how should I be presenting myself as a Christian? You know, I wanna be different cause I want people to notice my difference cause I love the Lord. So, um, my parents, you would say are very strict Christians. They don't believe in going to the movies, they, I don't have pierced ears because my dad does not like pierced ears, but I don't even think that like it has to do with like, that's not in the Bible. It's just as a Christian he's got really strong like, you know, everyone has their own standards and his are even stricter than most people's, so I just feel like that's where he felt like the lord wanted him to have for standards, but He leads every different Christian to have different standards. So, I, I think like we will have stricter standards than some people, but you know, I feel like as long as we're glorifying God in what we do, so (2/3/09, p. 6).

Clothing, the lack of piercings, and the choice of entertainment activities thus announce and help to form strict Christian identity, setting believers apart from non-believers. In a conversation about marriage, Tecla observed how husbands on television are always portrayed as fools or dummies, suggesting that this lack of respect is typical of the non-Christian world (1/27/09, p. 3). Similarly, Tricia expressed concern about the message Christians might send by attending "bad movies" and mentioned that her siblings had struggled with questions surrounding their participation in aspects of popular culture (2/3/09, p.6). She also noted that true Christians virtually have their own language: "[A]most as a Christian you'd say we have a different lingo. We use different words and sometimes we don't think about it cause we're used to it" (2/3/09, p. 7). Such basic features of speech and dress can be important identifiers, ways of differentiating us from them.

In discussing ways in which the women view themselves as set apart, it is also important to mention their relationships with their parents and siblings and to the religious traditions into which they were born. Tecla, Lori, and Kimberly's parents and extended families are Catholic, as is Pamela's father and one sister. The older women described being brought up Catholic, and Kimberly, in particular, mentioned how her aunt tired "to cram it down her throat" (3/9/09, p. 3). Lori said the nuns at the Catholic school she attended as a young girl "must have been trained by the Viet Cong" (3/13/09, p. 1). None of the women felt fulfilled by the variety of Christianity they grew up with.

Reflecting on her inherited religious tradition, Kimberly said, "I was brought up Catholic and I always knew, knew the stories and I knew what it you know about God and everything but I didn't, I didn't, I really, they take you, they take you to Jesus dying on the cross but that's it" (3/9/09, p. 3). Her halting language conveyed her discomfort and dissatisfaction with Catholicism. At the opening of our conversation she said, "I was brought up Catholic and um you know I did all the traditional rules and classes that you do but never really, never really had too much of a close relationship with the Lord" (3/9/09, p. 1).

Some, but not all, experienced tensions in their families because of their break with the family religious tradition. Tecla described being cut off from relatives who do not understand her and her husband's evangelical faith: "You know, our families are not saved and they would call, Phil's sister would call and she would cry and cry and say 'how are you going through this, this is so unfair.' And before the cancer, she said I just talked all day long about how great God is but now?" (1/27/09, p. 8). Lori's mother, who was a devout Catholic, "was crushed" that her daughter had converted and would attend

church with Lori when she visited, but “would sit there pinch-lipped and you know bear it because she didn’t wanna be alone” (3/13/09, p. 4). Lori humorously suggested that her mother, who died some time ago, must be in heaven complaining to God about her daughter’s conversion right now (3/13/09 p. 4). I found it surprising, in fact, that her mother’s Catholicism did not, in Lori’s view, confine her to hell upon death. Lori’s evangelicalism thus perhaps allows for a softness in dividing us from them, which is less evident in Pastor Bob’s views.

The process of conversion is experienced by each of the women and is extremely important to their identities. Meredith B. McGuire delineates stages and factors in the conversion process that are relevant to the women in this study. She describes certain predispositions to conversion such as, “the desire for a more satisfactory meaning system as a vague tension, a malaise” or a “crisis that they felt was a turning point in their lives” (McGuire 2002: 80). She notes that people tend to be drawn to a group by friends or relatives and explores the way in which new “recruits” are “resocialized into that group’s way of life” (McGuire 2002: 81). She describes the way in which converts see and experience the world and themselves in a new way and often break with old relationships and patterns of behavior. McGuire points out that converts then validate their conversion by proselytizing or witnessing to others (2002: 83).

Tecla responded to my question about her religious journey by describing a gradual conversion process in ways that relate well to McGuire’s comments:

Um so we went to the church that the next door neighbors belong to and as soon as we went there, there’s just something that clicked. I didn’t know what it was but it was just a feeling, almost contentment and I would think about whatever the preacher had talked about Sunday all throughout the week and it was just kinda neat. And you know, slowly but surely, and I don’t have any kind of moment that was like bang, I’m a Christian, or I

don't have one born-again moment, I don't have that moment, um, but I do know that you know several things happened in my life that particular year with a friend my age who died suddenly, you know, left two kids, the same ages as my children, five and seven at the time, and that affected me greatly (1/27/09, p. 1).

Neighbors were involved in introducing Tecla to the church, and a friend with whom she could identify had recently and suddenly died. Her own commitment was later strengthened by health a crisis, her battle with cancer. Kimberly recalls beginning to attend an evangelical church with her sister-in-law when she was about 25 years old. She recalls, "It just all hit me right there" (3/9/09, p. 1). Kimberly was later introduced to her present church community, TEF, by neighbors who also influenced her husband's acceptance of Jesus, although he had been slower to join: "And this couple that took care of our kids really kinda had a hand in my husband because they prayed with him, they talked with him about it, where it would be more receiving from them than me, so that's how it happened with him. He just knew that this is real" (3/9/09, p. 4). Kimberly also alluded to health problems and a child with a significant learning disability as related to her continuing commitment to her faith.

Lori's conversion had a quality of immediacy and divine intervention. Her son had been the first in the family to leave Catholicism for a variety of Protestantism after trying what Lori described as "Satanism, Wiccan" (3/13/09, p. 1). She thinks he had attended a Baptist church initially, and the attraction for him was the reading of the Bible itself and the direct connection with God, rather than one mediated by the Pope and the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Lori initially resisted his attempts to witness to her and her husband. During a particular time of crisis involving her relationship with her youngest daughter, a time when she could not sleep for worry and when her dreams were filled

with stressful thoughts about her daughter, she listened to her son's suggestion that Satan was invading her life. Her son prayed with her and she was transformed:

And it was like, have you ever heard of the experience of Paul being knocked off the horse? It was almost that for me. It was that kind of an awakening. It's kind of like a light bulb came on. I got hit in the head and I thought, oh my word, it's true, I have a relationship with the church, not with God, and so um it was no more than two or three nights, I started really praying to God and asking him to lead me in the right direction. And I all of a sudden stopped crying, I gave [my daughter] to Him, I said 'she's Yours. Do with her as you wish. I miss her terribly, so did her father, but it's yours Lord.' And within a week she came back to us (3/13/09, p. 2).

Her conversion was followed by the eventual conversion of her husband and the rest of her children. Lori saw the acceptance of Jesus as integral to the transformation of her family members, to their capacity to break with unhealthy patterns of behavior, for example, the way in which her son-in-law overcame an addiction to pornography and her daughter ended her battle with alcoholism. All members of Lori's large family now attend TEF.

For Pamela, conversion was connected to her relationship with a high school boyfriend whose family were members of TEF. She noted that he did not pressure her to go to church with him, and that she continued to attend services after he went off to college and they broke up. She felt that her relationship with TEF was solidified while she was a student at the local college when her sister became ill with cancer. Once again, the friend as witness and the personal crisis were integral to the process of conversion and commitment.

Tricia's case is unique among the women I interviewed in that she was raised among committed, conservative evangelical Christians. The evangelical orientation, however, in a sense requires conversion of everyone as they consciously accept Jesus and

become “born-again.” For Tricia, the born-again moment was quite specific and happened at the early age of six. I found it particularly noteworthy that this soft-spoken, rather reticent person remembered and related this story in detail:

Well, since I’d grown up in church, I’d always hear Bible stories, and I think at that age I’d heard my brother had accepted Christ and it hit me what it meant that like this God that I’d heard all these Bible stories about could actually, He actually cared about me so much that He wanted to like save me so I could go to heaven. So that’s when all of a sudden I realized it. It was at night right before I went to bed and I asked my mom if I could accept Christ, too, and she was like, ‘Go talk to your dad,’ so I went downstairs and I talked to my dad, and he led, you’d say he led me to the Lord, he talked to me about what it meant and stuff. So he talked to me about that. It was just kinda like at home, at night, you know, just very, in a casual setting, but it meant a lot to me and I can remember it vividly even though I was young (2/3/09, p. 1).

For Tricia, being born-again meant full acceptance into the intimate circle of the family and the approval of her parents. She recalled having been “rebellious at the age of four” and that her parents “like spanked me a lot” (2/3/09, p. 6). To an outsider, she appears to be pretty tough on herself, to say the least, but her comments express how she has internalized her parents’ worldview. Tricia, like Lori, conveyed some of the excitement about the moment when she knew and understood Christ. This sort of sudden realization relates to another feature of the women’s description of being set apart, the occasional reference to a direct and visceral experience of the presence of the divine.

Pamela described a kind of experiential after-glow from her boyfriend’s baptism. His description of a powerful feeling in the ritual moment made a huge impression on her. Kimberly also described an incident that for her was evidence that the word of God was being delivered to her husband. At the time, he was not yet a Christian and a particular experience, she said, brought about his conversion. As she tells the story,

Well, just before I had my son, Ted, my husband's name is Ted [laughs], Ted um was almost 30 and it wasn't anything that I did or I said, in fact it was a stranger at work. Um, my husband works on elevators so he was working and a stranger just out of the blue one day said, "So, have you asked Jesus Christ to be your savior?" He didn't know this guy and just out of the blue, just boom and it hit him. He went out in his truck and he called me and he said "you're never gonna believe this, but the light came on" [laughs] (3/9/09, p. 1).

These powerful conversion experiences have a kind of arresting immediacy that alters perception and indicates the presence of God. It should be mentioned that the women all use the words God and Jesus or Christ interchangeably.

Lori, who seems particularly attuned to signs of divine presence, told an unusual story about her prayer for a message that her husband, who had recently died, was safe with God:

Now, when our kids were little, he had a song that he sang to them. It was a turkey song and he would sing it to them and he taught them that song. That was probably one of the first songs all of the kids learned . . . Um so during that week in the hospital, when the kids would come down to visit, they would sit by his bedside and sing in his ear the turkey song so this has some relevance on what happened that Friday morning. So . . . we're getting ready to go to town to write the obituary. And I'm in the bathroom really having a good cry and saying, 'Oh God if I only knew he was safe with you, I could accept anything that's happened. Oh how would I know? Can I only know that he's safe with you?' So my older daughter who is not a hunter and is not an animal lover, she was in the living room, and hollered, 'come here you guys, come see the turkeys! . . . I kid you not, Liz, there was sixteen turkeys out there, I think a dozen of them headed up for the deck . . . And they lined up like they were marching on parade, one behind the other. They'd never done that . . . they all lined up one behind the other and marched by the deck and looked up at the picture window like they were saluting us and um wandered off into that field, which they'd never, which was not their pattern. I'd been watching them all fall um and then [my daughter] said, 'Well that's unusual,' and she said, 'there's one lone turkey roosting under the pear tree.' They usually roost in a tree but not under it. She said 'look at that lone turkey under that pear tree just sitting there roosting. Mom that's got to be a message from Dad or from God.' And I said, 'well Dad can't talk to us, he's happy somewhere else, probably from God.' And that turkey went out into the

field all by itself and disappeared and the turkeys have never come back.
Isn't that fascinating (3/13/09, p. 6)?

Lori took the unusual behavior of the turkeys after the death of her dear husband, a time of extreme crisis, to be a sign sent from the Lord. This message further confirmed her faith in God's presence and care.

The most moving to me of these accounts is that of Tecla who received a direct indication of God's intervention at a particularly stressful time in her life, when she was driving to the hospital to undergo painful chemotherapy in connection with her treatment for breast cancer:

One day, we were driving to Portland, Phil and I, it was seven in the morning and I was having these three-day treatments, and this was the third day, the third day was a horrible day. And I would have so much pain that I would be out of my mind. And so as we're driving up to the hospital, and I'd worked really hard at having a positive attitude the whole time, and I didn't worry about what happened at the last treatment because I wanted every treatment to experience it as it was, not as it had been. This is a new treatment and who knows it's a new day. So I was getting into my place, my mental place, and I saw the hospital, Maine General, up on the hill there as we're getting into Portland and I'm praying and I just get this get this instant clarity and this vision. And this had never happened to me before and in big block letters, that's how specific it was, and I had my eyes closed and I could read, "Because I am, you can"
(1/27/08, p. 8).

Tecla went on to say that the words she had received kept her going during the difficult treatment she received at the hospital. She really felt the words she had seen were a promise from God to make it possible for her to survive the day, that God's intervention made sure that the doctor looked in upon her frequently, and that the nurses stayed by her side all day. She recalled that the nurses could not believe the way in which she was able to withstand the pain: "And later in the day I heard the nurses outside saying 'I don't know how she's doing this. I don't know where the power she has is coming from'"

(1/27/09, p. 9). Tecla's account is almost reminiscent of martyr accounts of late antiquity, and her faith, like theirs, is reinforced by a visceral and immediate experience of God that sets her apart from non-believers.

The feeling of being set apart has other social dimensions. Several of the women are engaged in bringing outsiders into their community, whether evangelizing to friends and neighbors as others had done with them or praying for the conversion of those whom they love. Their conversations with me were, I believe, part of their outreach to outsiders. Kimberly and Tricia are both involved in the Good News Club, a Christian oriented, non-denominational after-school program that meets in one of the local town halls. The children who attend may or may not be from evangelical families. In fact, Tricia mentioned that some have "never heard about God at all." She added, "I've heard kids who don't even know who God is except for a swear word. So, there's just a big range there, so I do have kids that are Christians, and then I have kids that have no clue who, what God is" (2/3/09 p. 7). Others are Catholic. Drawing further differences between us and them, the saved and the unsaved, she commented, "they tell me it's so much funner than catechism [laughs] cause like I guess catechism is boring from what I've heard [laughs] that they just like memorize and stuff, and I teach stories and then like through the Bible stories tell them like how they should apply it to their lives (2/3/09, p. 8). Presumably the parents, Catholics and non-believers included, consider Good News Club to be a wholesome environment for their children. Tricia described her teaching as an effort to plant the seeds of belief:

And it's just a big challenge taking, there's so much in the Bible, and you just have so little time with these kids, and trying to get them to understand who God is and how much he loves them and how much he wants them to go to heaven . . . I just have to trust what whatever I'm

teaching them, the Lord's gonna use it in their lives, that maybe like two years down the road they're gonna come across someone else who's a Christian and that person, it's kind of like, I don't know if you ever heard like the analogy of that like, I might be planting a seed, but then somebody, you might meet somebody else who waters it a little bit, and so like someone else might just build on what I've taught them (2/3/09, p. 7).

Evangelizing is thus an integral part of the women's identities as evangelical Christians and points to some of the ways in which they distinguish themselves from others, even while attempting to draw others into their religious orbit so that they too can enjoy the benefits of salvation.

One feature absent from the interviews is an overtly political identity. Pastor Bob's blog is filled with clear political views. He praises George W. Bush. He condemns abortion and equal rights legislation and mentions specific politicians, such as Barney Frank, whose lifestyle and political stances would be considered liberal and, to the pastor, both non-Christian and un-American. A similar orientation is found among the politically active evangelicals described by Randall Balmer in his recent book (2007). Balmer, in fact, decries their worldview as a distortion of Protestantism and a threat to American values (2007: 193). Although Pastor Bob's sermons are less overtly political than his blog, many nuances of the American Right are apparent, as discussed in chapter 4. I am not sure if my open-ended questions simply did not lead in political directions with my women informants or if, knowing I attended a liberal arts college, they had certain assumptions about my own political orientation and wanted to avoid potential areas of conflict or offense. Lori did describe the way in which one of the administrators for whom she worked at the local college told her to keep her conservative views to herself and not offend the liberal members of the college community. She noted that, in fact, she never preached to people at the college. She recalled how one faculty member,

who remains a good friend, once engaged her on the topic of abortion, which Lori vehemently opposes, but these were not major themes in our lengthy conversation in which she was free to bring up what was most important to her.

Among the five women I interviewed, only Pamela overtly mentioned the subject of Democrats and Republicans, the Left and the Right. Pamela was also the only one of my contacts who was still in the process of searching for the right church community within the evangelical orbit. She remarked, however, that it's a matter of values and her "very liberal" Unitarian Universalist mother was supportive of her and noted about TEF,

[T]he people of the church are just so nice, and I mean definitely there are some super, super right-wing people who I still don't agree with and you know say some crazy things and but I think most of the people I met were a lot more, I don't know if I would say, well definitely conservative but more moderate, um open-minded, not just immediately shutting you out if you're a [college] student or if you may be, if you were a little more liberal or whatever (2/1/09, p. 3).

Pamela insisted that a person could be a student at the local college and still hold the same sort of values espoused at TEF. In other words, her worlds could overlap.

At first, I thought that some of the women's preference for home-schooling their children suggested a conscious effort to divide between worlds, to distinguish "our" values from "their" values. Tecla home-schooled her children and Tricia was home-schooled, but neither defined these choices in us/them or necessarily religious terms. As Tricia noted, home-schooling could be done well or not, as was true of education in the public schools (2/3/09, p. 5), and Tecla seemed to be more worried about the inadequate learning environment both of her children experienced in the public schools than about its non-Christian ways. On the other hand, home-schooling does separate a family and its children from the wider local public community, and the home-school curriculum in

which both women were involved clearly had the Christian orientation of the home environment that would be absent in a public school. For the women I interviewed, belonging to and participating in a community was one of the major appeals of the church.

The Appeal of TEF

For Tricia, who was born into an evangelical family, participation in the wider evangelical community was an extension of her closest kin. She alluded to this connection repeatedly: “Well, I grew up in a Christian family, so my whole life I’ve been involved in church. My parents are very like strong Christians so they’ve always been like involved in church . . . And all my friends, they were church people and stuff” (2/3/09, pp. 1-2). For Tecla, whose parents and siblings are not evangelicals, the church has become like kin to her, her husband, and their children. She pointed to the ways in which adults in the church have served her children as role models saying, “My kids have always had friends that are adults at church” (1/27/09, p. 3). I asked Tecla if the phrase “extended family” captured what she meant, and she responded,

That’s exactly right. People that will cry with me when something’s going on with my children. Michael very much the last five years before he went to the service was just a kid, a young adult that was making bad choices. He didn’t like his family. He doesn’t need to go to church according to him. He says he can do church in his heart, he can talk to the Lord, and I don’t doubt that he knows the Lord, but part of the relationship, is also, it’s like being when you’re a family, it’s hard to call yourself a family when you don’t ever, ever have contact with your family. And that’s the same thing with the church, it helps you out, your circle of friends (1/27/09, p. 3).

Tecla's words capture not only the quality of community as extended kin that she finds at TEF but are also a reminder of the tensions that exist in all families and of the form that adolescent rebellion may take in a Christian household.

Lori recalled how the community rallied around her during her husband's illness, saying, "People cooked, people we didn't even know cooked for us. This was just all so foreign because in the Catholic Church, your close friends did things for you but not people you didn't know, so that endeared us to [Trinity] even more" (3/13/09, p. 4).

After his death, "They just took over, planned a beautiful reception and lots of food. All the church people brought food. It's just such a community and such a family.

Everybody's close in spite of the fact that it's huge. Pretty awesome" (3/13/09, p. 9).

Kimberly pointed to the warmth and welcome offered at TEF, saying, "We have people at the doors welcoming you. We had people walk up to us and just say, 'Hey I haven't seen you before, nice to see you, I'm so-and-so'" (3/9/09, p. 3). This feeling of being at home meant a great deal to her and was what initially attracted her to the church.

Pamela also emphasized the "personal connection" that she experiences with people at the church (2/12/09, p. 8). It was interesting, however, that she herself understood "community" to include people who were not Christians and felt that the church defined the community in more narrow terms:

[A]nother thing that I really struggled with was, yeah the issue of if you weren't Christian or didn't believe exactly what was being preached in the evangelical community. But yeah I think, I guess still hearing, there was the message of that still everyone is God's, a child of God. I guess that kind of helped me reconcile it a little bit but um but I never did have a conversation about it with Pastor Bob (2/12/09, p. 8).

For Pamela, it was necessary to reconcile the different notions of community that can be found under the sacred canopy of Christianity, which she regarded as including "love and

compassion for everybody” (2/12/09, p. 8). In this way, her own feelings of kinship extended beyond the church or larger community of evangelical Christians. She was able to find a message of tolerance in church by interpreting in her own way the messages she heard at TEF that everyone is “a child of God.” Nevertheless, her thoughts point to a tension in the wider tradition discussed earlier between acceptance and rejection, “us” and “them,” kin versus non-kin. Another interesting paradox or duality in the appeal of TEF is its use of popular media, music, and contemporary technology even as it reinforces and insists upon, “traditional values.”

All of the women mentioned traditional values as a critical aspect of the church’s appeal. One of Pamela’s first comments about TEF dealt with values. She said,

I had a lot of friends in high school whose parents had been divorced, um, whose family structures were very different and I think that was one of the big things that really appealed to me about the church, was the really strong um, family values, traditional values, um which I really believe very strongly and I know really impacted me (2/12/09, p. 1).

She returned to this theme several times during our conversation, as did the other women.

The breakdown of families because of divorce was a special concern. For Tricia, who was recently engaged, the issue of shared traditional family values framed her relationship with her fiancé. She says about him,

And I just like noticed that he was really godly and I wanted someone that had the same values as I did because um since being a Christian is the biggest part of my life, you want someone that has that as the biggest part of their life, too. Like the Bible calls it being unequally yoked. Like, I don’t know if you’ve ever heard of that, but so that’s why it meant a lot that I have someone that had the same values that I did (2/3/09, p. 3).

The women’s attitudes to homosexuality and views of women’s roles in marriage also relate to the traditional values preached within the church community, and will be dealt with below. It is important to note that these values were frequently mentioned by the

women in terms of relationships within the immediate family. Such traditional values are imparted, however, in the thoroughly modern, media-savvy environment (described in chapter 3). Each of the women also mentioned with appreciation and approval the youthfulness of the church, the music, and its contemporary feel. Pamela captured Pastor Bob's comments about relevance and his tastes in music in saying,

[O]ne of the things I really, I actually loved about the church was the music and um I guess kind of the more modern um I don't know, the more modern approach I guess so that whole piece of it. I, it was actually funny because, I a couple months ago went with my dad to an Episcopal church which to me felt, I was just not, it did not, I did not feel very comfortable there . . . one of the things I did notice and didn't like very much about it was the music was you know out of the traditional hymn book and I just, I guess I didn't feel the same connection through that music and prayer as I did when I was at Faith. So, so that was one of the things I really, I really did enjoy about [TEF] (2/12/09, p. 4).

Pamela and Lori both noted that Pastor Bob makes the Bible come alive by relating it to contemporary issues and concerns. Pamela recalled a sermon in which Pastor Bill related the Bible to the Superbowl: "the way that he related that back to us . . . he talked about like the way that that can be like a great connector for the family and um but also the way I guess it can also [laughs] if it's just like a wild party like that's obviously not so into the family [laughs] . . . stuff like that was really interesting (2/12/09, p. 5). Several of the women mentioned how much they enjoy the fact that so many young people are associated with the church.

The women's views of their own identity are bound up in belonging to a particular kind of a Christian community. Their interviews reveal an emphasis on being set apart and special, a status shared with other evangelicals who are virtual kin. The importance of the born-again experience is a frequent theme and related to the possibility of feeling as if they are in God's actual presence at critical moments in their lives. At the

same time, they emphasize that they are like other people in their life trials, their emotions, and their state of sin. For most of the women, TEF's appeal is enhanced by the liveliness of the service and the relevance of the sermons. Certain distinctive points of view also emerge. The line between us and them, true kin and non-kin, some of whom may be actual relatives, was drawn more softly by Lori, who pictures her Catholic mother to be in heaven, and by Pamela, whose liberal family accepts and supports her faith. Additional essential continuities and some subtle differences emerge in the women's core beliefs.

Core Beliefs: Order Out of Chaos

It comes as no surprise that all the evangelical women interviewed place importance on the Bible as an aspect of their religious identities. As discussed in chapters 2 and 4, the centrality of Scripture is typical of evangelicalism and essential to the formal religious life experienced at TEF, its sermons, study groups, and pastors' self-presentation. Pamela and Lori enjoy the way in which Pastor Bill makes the Bible relevant to today. Tecla and Tricia see an important role for women in the teaching of the Bible to children and other women. Tecla finds a reason for women's non-participation in leadership roles in Scripture, noting "we take Scripture to heart." (1/27/09, p. 7). Lori mentions the way in which Jesus' role as Messiah was predicted in the Bible (3/13/09, p. 3). As I go back over my fieldnotes, however, I am struck by how references to Bible are much more specific in "official religion" at TEF than in the themes emphasized by the women. Pastor Bob seeks to understand through his exegesis the relationship between God's word and norms. How should men and women relate to one another? What does

God say about homosexuality or about the salvation of the Jews? For the women, however, Bible study is integrated into a more personal level of religious life, for example, as a feature of their prayers. Scripture relates directly to their sense of what God wants of them.

Kimberly, Lori, and Tricia find the reading of Scripture to be an intensely personal, meaningful, and satisfying activity. In reading the Bible, Kimberly finds liberation from reliance on a priest or person as she seeks her own religious identity. Contrasting Catholicism with an evangelical orientation, she said, “I can go to [Christ], not a person, not a priest or a pastor to be forgiven . . . and just reading the Bible everyday and praying everyday. It’s about that relationship with the Lord . . . I have to apply that to my life and what I believe” (3/9/09, p. 3). Her own reading of Scripture thus brings forgiveness, a possibility of self-renewal and reflection; it’s about her relationship with God and Christ. Tricia raised similar themes. Reading the Bible is one of the activities she shares with her fiancé. The Bible draws them together and makes them a better couple (2/3/09, p. 5). Since the Bible is God’s word, the studying of Scripture forms and cements a deep personal relationship with God. In a sense, the living Bible is the means by which God communicates to the women. As Tricia expressed this idea, “I like to read my Bible every day cause that’s how we get to know Him [God] and my prayer life is really big” (2/3/09, p. 8).

Lori too felt that she achieved a deeper understanding of her life and God’s role in it by reading the Bible and noted that all the answers are contained in Scripture, if a person knows how to read it: “We evangelicals and Bible-believing Christians know that the Bible interprets the Bible . . . the Bible is where it’s at. You read the Bible, that’s the

word, that's what we walk in (3/13/09, p. 2-3). Lori, like Tricia, shared Bible reading with her late husband. It was clearly a very meaningful activity that reinforced their religious faith and bound them together. She said, "We knew that Jesus died to save us and so we just, everything, we incorporated everything together in the Bible (3/13/09, p. 4). For her, reading the Bible is getting to know the Lord, gaining a better understanding of her own situation, and receiving assurance of her salvation: "Having found the Lord, being able to read the Bible, I have a study Bible so it translates a lot for me. That really is the biggest thing, that I'm saved (3/13/09, p. 9). Tecla said, "You can't see God, but you can read and feel God. And if you're not building a relationship there talking to him everyday then how can you love God? How can you trust Him?" (1/27/09, p. 8). This personal relationship, like any other, requires work and attention, but the rewards are enormous: peace, clarity, and permanence. As Tricia expressed these themes,

[S]o many times you can't really, people can disappoint you, but God will never disappoint you. You know, people sometimes won't be there for you, or they'll like turn their back on you, but God will never do that, and so, He's not going anywhere. Sometimes we stray away from Him, but it's us that's moving away from Him. He never moves away from us . . . I don't know what it's like not to have Him in my life. I just feel like I really take it for granted that He's always been there for me . . . He's that certainty, that clarification (2/3/09, p. 9).

The personal relationship with God and/or Christ, described by Tricia, is a recurring theme of the interviews, a true core belief.

Lori spoke about the importance of her family members' personal relationships with God, again, a relationship that did not have to be mediated by a priest or the Pope, as in her understanding of Catholicism. She described the relationship by saying, "[God] embedded Himself in our hearts and in our lives" (3/13/09, p. 4). Recalling the death of an uncle, Tricia said, "You just like, you know everything's gonna be okay, even

sometimes when you're sad, or just things are going wrong, you just, you just know He's there with you and you don't have to feel alone cause you can always talk to Him"

(2/3/09, p. 9). Tecla described her relationship with God as intimate: "It's very intimate.

It's absolute trust in that for me, and I can only relate to me, especially going through cancer cause that's one of those life-changing moments, and the absolute peace"

(1/27/09, p. 8).

The intimate relationship with God who is sure and true, who can be found in the Scripture and reached in prayer, relates to another important factor in the women's beliefs, the notion that a Christian who is born-again, who has accepted Jesus as savior, is uniquely equipped to cope with the problems of life. I have already explored this theme in the context of support offered by the church community. The theme of God or Christ's support in daily life is also integral to the visceral experiences of the divine that help to define the women's faith. They receive such signs in times of intense personal stress. It is important to add, however, how often in our conversations the women each made reference to specific problems they faced on a very personal, day-to-day level and to the ways in which their personal faith allowed them to cope with these sources of everyday chaos and stress.

The lives of Pamela, Tecla, Kimberly, and Lori have all been affected by their own serious illness or the illnesses of those close to them, and they all expressed the ways in which "having the Lord in their lives" has enabled them to cope. As Kimberly said,

And it's really helped us and we've grown so close over these last years and um, we've had uh health issues that have been difficult and um my daughter has a significant learning disability and um and I don't think without our faith and the confidence knowing that you know we're gonna get through it. We're not gonna go through anything that God doesn't think we can handle and um that, that's been a real help (3/9/09, p. 4).

Tecla coped with cancer by identifying with the persecution and crucifixion of Jesus: “He went through this pain for me, and I was gonna get through this time of pain too”

(1/27/09, p. 9). Pamela recalled dealing with her sister’s cancer and the way in which her faith was reinforced by this crisis:

As cliché as this may sound but when my sister was diagnosed I think that’s when I was like, oh my gosh . . . bad things can happen to me and my family, too, you know so I think it took something that was that concrete . . . I just relied on my faith and praying and luckily the outcome was great. But so I would say that was definitely when it became more personal for me” (2/12/09, p. 6).

Pamela went on to say how important the community of TEF was to her at this time, and seemed to emphasize the human, relational aspect of her religious life rather than the direct experience of Christ, which may separate her somewhat from the other women. Nevertheless, her language makes reference to prayer, faith, and the personal. She added that she heard many stories at TEF about former alcoholics or people whose marriages were in trouble who coped by means of their faith. Lori’s family has had its fill of these problems, and she perceives God as directly intervening in situations to improve them, allowing her and others to deal with their loved ones’ problems and their own. Problems between generations and the wildness of children were additional recurring issues addressed by the women’s faith.

In addition to the role of Scripture, the personal relationship with God, and faith as a source of coping, another critical set of core beliefs comes under the heading of sexual and family ethics and, in this area, some surprises and variations emerge. Pastor Bob speaks frequently and passionately about homosexuality as a sin against God, a sure sign of the moral decline of American and Christian civilization. Three of the women

made no reference to homosexuality at all, even though they discussed many other aspects of their traditional values. Tecla, however, brought up the subject in reference to her own children saying, “If my son or daughter came home and said, ‘Mom, I’m gay, I’m a homosexual,’ would I love them any less? No, no, I’d still love them, absolutely. Would I let them bring that lifestyle into my home and stay here? No” (1/27/09, p. 10). While she disapproves of homosexuality, she would not reject or denounce her children if they were gay. Pamela went further, drawing a clear line between Pastor Bob’s views and her own. One of her best friends from college is an openly gay male. He does not know that she regularly attends this conservative evangelical church, and she is very uncomfortable with what she describes as “their anti-homosexuality stance” (2/1/09, p. 1). She seems to regard homosexuality as a sin, but not a sin to be especially denounced. Given that we all sin, she wondered if her friend’s homosexuality was worse than any other kind of sin. She found this particular aspect of the church’s “black and white-ness” difficult and said that, “Being friends with John was the hardest part of going to [TEF]” (2/12/09, p. 1). Categories that are drawn too sharply thus can lead to new sources of ambivalence.

Other issues in sexual and family ethics, including male headship in marriage and views on pre-marital sex, are discussed below. These complex self-identifying and life-ordering concerns explored under the larger heading of marriage and family were important to all the women I interviewed. My own initial interest in exploring how and why forms of evangelicalism appeal to modern women was triggered by some of these most gendered aspects of evangelical religious identity.

Family and Marriage

The phrases “male headship” and “female submission” appear frequently in discussions of family and marriage among evangelicals themselves and among those who study them. What these phrases mean to women in various contexts is, however, problematical and open to interpretation. Pastor Bob suggested that he considers churches that forbid women to speak in church to be wrong-headed and that he certainly did not regard biblically enjoined notions of male headship and female submission to be a license for abusive treatment of wives. Moreover, in spite of the importance of holding marriages together, he thought it necessary for a wife to divorce an abusive husband. As discussed in chapter 4, for Pastor Bob submission includes the notion of mutuality. All human beings should submit to the Lord, and each member of the marriage commits to selfless love towards his or her spouse. He takes very seriously the Christian mandate that men love their wives selflessly as Christ loved the church and that women submit to men as the church did to Christ. In this respect, his views seem very much like those of the women interviewed by Judith Stacey (1990).

To a feminist outsider, these concepts of headship and submission may seem reactionary and sexist at worst and patronizing and condescending at best. The women I interviewed, by and large, share Pastor Bob’s views on family, marriage, and gender roles and spheres of authority, but subtle nuances did emerge between “official religion” and their worldviews. Differences also emerge among the women’s individual views. There is, in fact, a spectrum of opinions regarding the meaning of female submission and its implications for actual relationships. The women apply the concept differently in their lives, and justify their behaviors and definitions in various ways.

At the most conservative end of this spectrum is Tricia. Perhaps as a consequence of models offered by her own family, her youth, or her non-assertive personality, Tricia defines male headship in very clear terms and demarcates gender roles in an uncomplicated way. For her, being submissive appears to mean regularly submitting to the husband as leader:

I'm gonna be a stay-at-home mom and wife. That's what we wanna do unless, like I'm not afraid to work if he needs me to. So, but I'd like to be a homemaker. Um but like I'm gonna like let him make um as the leader as the head of the family, he's gonna make a lot of decisions, but I know he's gonna ask me about a lot of stuff, but I just wanna be very supportive of what he decides . . . but to me, I just feel like a godly wife is really supportive of her husband and is there for him and stuff (2/3/09, p. 5).

Tricia's views of marriage and family relate to her views of traditional values. The wife ideally works only in the home, the husband is the leader, and she is a supportive godly wife. She noted, "We don't believe in divorce" (2/3/09, p. 4), and did not mention the possibility of exceptions in abusive situations. She did not mention the complicated mutuality discussed by Pastor Bill. Rather, for her, the wife is merely a sounding board for the husband who will always make the decisions.

At the other end of the spectrum is Lori, who held a very responsible job for many years in a high-powered dean's office at the local college. She also had to take over much of the family responsibility, including becoming the family's breadwinner, during her husband's lengthy illness. These life situations no doubt affected her wider worldview, but her spunky personality made it possible for her to take these roles, public and private, and she readily admitted that submission was never her style, saying "I'm not a submissive type person" (3/13/09, p. 1). Knowing about the concepts of male headship and wifely submission, she is a bit guilty about her shortcomings from a Christian

perspective. She said that she “knew he should have the last word,” and did give it to him, “but certainly not without kicking and screaming. I was not a, and I’m sort of sorry that I wasn’t and yet I am who I am, I was not this submissive little subservient wife. We had a great relationship” (3/13/09, p. 10). Ultimately, Lori described her marital relationship in terms that suggest Pastor Bob’s concept of selfless love and mutuality: “He was my closest friend . . . If the man is being the true Christian man, then yeah, I believe . . . he knows what's best for his family. Um but see, it wasn’t an issue for me. I didn’t have a problem . . . My love for him um made it not a problem. I did things that I, just were things I loved doing for him . . . Those things just came naturally out of love for him” (3/13/09, p. 10). When asked about wives’ submission, Lori thus struggled a bit with its meaning for her as a Christian but ultimately, all of these categories take a back seat to her love and devotion to her best friend. She did not frame her relationship with her husband in the sort of theological terms employed by Pastor Bob.

Kimberly and Tecla, however, do attempt to understand their marriages in more scripturally based terms and seem to echo their pastor’s views. Their views of submission allow for more mutuality than those of Tricia. Tecla alluded specifically to Pastor Bob’s views:

Pastor [Bob] says you treat your wife like Christ treats that church. So, it’s like, to the men, if you know she’s had a hard day, you go and do those dishes for her . . . He makes it very clear that you need to get off your duff, away from the television, and help your wife. So it’s very much, and how can you not love a man that gets up and says no you sit there, I’ll go do the dishes (1/27/09, p. 7).

Tecla thus remembered the practical, domestic applications of Pastor Bob’s often heavily exegetical and theological readings of Scripture. Tecla emphasized mutuality within a

Christian marriage. She grappled with the word hierarchy, although ultimately seemed to describe the marriage as hierarchical. As she said,

It's not a hierarchy, or that's not the word I want to use, it's not a dictatorship, but there always has to be, would I say this is a 50 50 marriage? No someone is always putting in something more. This is 100 percent, 100 percent and to say we're equal, it's never equal. There's always a president, and then there's the vice president. There can't be two people in charge or you're gonna have chaos. Somebody is always in charge (1/27/09, p. 7).

Kimberly employed the language of mutuality several times. She also drew a clear demarcation between male and female spheres and abilities associated with gender:

Well the husband is supposed to be the spiritual leader . . . and he's supposed to lead his household um, he's accountable for the household as far as living for the Lord. You know, he's very, very uh good with books, organizing and money and all that. He has a great job, great insurance, and he works really hard. And he does treat me very well and um I do respect, respect, it's not, it's not like you know the wife's supposed to be this doormat and he's the, 'you do this and you do that, you can't.' It's a mutual thing because, if he shows respect and honor towards me, and obviously it's gonna be easier for the other person to return that, you know. Making decisions of course you know he makes the final say but he doesn't do anything without talking with me and seeing how I feel about it . . . We were created as a helper to our husbands and um we're, that's where he and I meet. We're complete in each other. We're incomplete apart. I mean, a marriage works best when there's that situation you know, no marriage should ever be 2 people. It should be 3. It should, the husband, the wife, and the Lord in the middle . . . I'm the emotional, and he's like the very black and white, sort of practical type of things. . . Where his strengths are, I may be weak, and where my strengths are, he's weak, so, it's just, it's not the wife is over here and she's got all these rights and he's over there, you know what I mean? It just doesn't work. . . It's mutual. It's mutual (3/9/09, p. 5).

Emphases on mutuality, on God's role in the Christian marriage, and upon gendered characteristics emerge in Kimberly's words. Women are emotional, men practical. Lori mentioned a similar dichotomy. Tecla implied that women are so organized and practical

that they might take over the whole church if allowed more public power via leadership roles. This would not be a good thing in her view (1/27/09, pp. 6-7).

Kimberly was overtly dismissive of “those feminists” who demand “all these rights” (3/9/09, p. 5). Tecla also sought to distinguish herself from feminists, saying about her view of the give and take in marriage, “It’s a give and take as opposed to you know, I hate to say it but that women’s lib idea, ‘I don’t need a man.’ See, I want my man, I want that helpmate” (1/27/09, p. 2). “Women’s lib” almost seemed to be a dirty word to her, something she would rather not speak about. Lori mentioned that the most feminist of her children was now comfortable with the notion of submission because her husband’s becoming born-again helped this “boozier, lady’s man” to reform, a theme also reflected in Judith Stacey’s interviews with Pam. Significantly, the married women all frequently used language that invoked happiness and contentment to describe their marriages.

Pamela’s attitudes to male headship, wifely submission, and related issues were the most difficult to interpret. It is possible that she hesitated to discuss these matters with me as we are roughly the same age and both associated with the same college, whose ethos is definitely not evangelical. She may have taken my question as a challenge to what she would expect me to regard as sexist attitudes. She expressed her belief that having a mother who stays at home while the children are growing up is important for family stability and the welfare of the children. In response to my question about male headship in marriage, she spoke briefly, turned the question back to me quickly, and then moved on to another topic:

Yeah um I think for the most part I pretty much agreed with what they were saying. I mean I guess, I’m still a proponent of you know women

working and everything else of course, so, but I think for the most part I agreed with what they were saying and teaching in that respect, so . . . Um, were you really surprised when you went there or was that what you expected or . . . ? (2/12/09, p. 4).

Pamela thus revealed some ambivalence, and the view of marriage and family is one of the core beliefs that she herself is still developing in relation to and perhaps in contrast with official views expresses at church.

Two other areas relating to marriage and family emphasized by some of the women fall under the heading of purity in marriage and the value of marriage with like-minded Christians who share their evangelical values. Tricia and Tecla approve of “saving oneself for marriage.” Tecla brought up the theme of sexual purity more than once, sharing a story about young people in the church who never even kissed until marriage (1/27/09, pp. 10-11). Tricia told me that she and her fiancé had never kissed until they were formally engaged. She noted that her parents “wanted us [her brother, her sister, and herself] to do courting instead of dating” (2/3/09, p. 3). She spoke about “honoring your future spouse even before you meet them so I decided I was going to be careful with my guy relationships” (2/3/09, p. 3). Tricia described the way in which she and her fiancé decided to take it slow how they “decided right off that we weren’t gonna get physical cause we wanted to make sure that we got to know each other. And um so yeah he, it’s been really good cause we’ve been able to concentrate on like getting to know each other and like going to church together and stuff has been really cool” (2/3/09, p. 3).

In Tricia’s view, this agreement is possible when the partners share the same beliefs, and it was especially important to her and to several of the women that they marry a Christian who shared their worldview. Tecla, who also mentioned her hope that

her children would be “pure when they marry” (1/27/09, p. 6), expressed the desire for her children to marry inside the faith. She joked, comparing herself to a Jewish mother in this respect. Her point was given that the church is such a big part of the born-again life, not sharing such a vital aspect of existence would tend to tear the marriage apart. Four of the women expressed the view that shared faith is a bulwark of marriage. Once again Pamela, whose happily married parents do not go to the same church, did not portray shared faith between marriage partners as a core belief, although her former boyfriend’s evangelical identity was clearly an attraction to her and something she came to share with him.

An analysis of the women’s views on marriage and family reveals both shared ideas and some variation. The submission of wives and male headship are approached differently by a number of the women and vary somewhat from views expressed by Pastor Bob, even though all the women, including Pamela, consider themselves to be in general agreement with these hierarchical and gendered concepts. While Tricia seems even more strict and clear-cut than Pastor Bob in her concept of male headship, Lori is surprisingly independent and self-assertive. Several frame submission within the concept of mutuality as does Pastor Bob. The women negotiate their own way within the evangelical tradition and tend to confirm Christian Smith’s finding of considerable variation upon key aspects of belief among self-confessed evangelicals (2002). While they contrast their worldviews with those of non-evangelical, – feminists and women’s libbers – they also shape or understand evangelical views of marriage and family in personal or individual ways. Some of the women emphasize sexual purity more than others. All valorize the role of stay-at-home mother, although some more sharply

associate men and women with public and domestic spheres, respectively. The mention of public roles for women leads to another theme that arose in the interviews, the women's activities within TEF and the ways in which they view their work lives and careers within an evangelical framework.

Roles of Women

Three of the women interviewed have played or continue to play very active roles in church or Christian-related activities. For Lori, Tecla, and Tricia, church work helps to define their identities and their community of friends. Pamela, who attends services more sporadically, does not seem to take a strong organizational role at the church, while Lori participates in one of the many small groups at church, but did not mention having a leadership role. The women described their own work at TEF and that of other women at the church in traditionally feminine frameworks and contexts.

Tecla was the most scripturally specific in explaining the lack of female leadership in the church and points to the subordinate, but in her view, important roles played by women at TEF. Tecla felt it necessary to justify her stance about women's roles in the church. Some ambivalence is implicit in the words of this capable and intelligent woman:

[T]he leadership role within the church is strictly male. Women are not allowed to take on leadership, however, women run the we call it fellowship committee, they organize the food for whether it be funerals or weddings or whatever functions, there's women that do that, and myself and my other friend who do the decorating of the church and women who lead bible studies to other women, you know Kitty [Pastor Bob's wife] does that. I was very involved in the youth. I had my own office there. So really the only difference between what the men can do, what men are allowed to do and what women are allowed to do in the church is just that leadership thing. Women can do anything else except be leaders. A

woman cannot be a leader over a man. How do you feel about that?
[laughs] (1/27/09, p. 6).

I asked if the rule governing male leadership is based in Scripture in her view, and she responded,

Right, that's it. It is commanded by God that women do not hold the leadership roles, but again, that's the only thing that we don't do. We're very, there's many, many women very involved. You know, we greet at the door, we take the kids, we can serve communion if we want to, but we're not gonna be the pastors of anything, and we're not going to be the elders, even though some of us say [laugh] we could do a whole lot better job sometimes. My friend and I, the decorators, we've very organized. And there are times we say, if we were running that thing, if we were in that leadership role, we'd have those boys just going [laughs] (1/27/09, p. 6).

Tecla thus pointed to women's roles in the church as greeters, event organizers, decorators, child-care providers, and teachers of women and children, all of which might be seen as extensions of traditional women's roles in the domestic sphere. On the other hand, she spoke with some pride about having an office in her capacity as a youth leader and, like Pastor Bob himself, is well aware of her and her fellow women's organizational skills, which often surpass those of the men, the official leaders. I would suggest that Tecla does claim importance and even views herself and the other women to hold some power within the church, but as in any traditional patriarchal culture, the power is subtle and exercised indirectly so as not to confront or compete with the men. Power, such as it is, is safely contoured within traditionally circumscribed gendered norms. These norms are justified by Scripture. As Tecla said, "We take Scripture to heart and you know I could certainly pull out Scripture there that the Lord doesn't want women in the leadership roles" (1/27/09, p. 7).

Views of Pastor Bob

The women generally expressed admiration for their pastor, his sense of humor, musical talent, charisma, knowledge of Scripture, and personal attention to their well-being, especially in times of special stress and trauma. As in any large congregation, some of the women and their families had formed closer relationships with some of the other pastors, and some knew Pastor Bob better than others. A few of their comments and recollections do suggest that their views of the pastor are not uniform and reflect some of the various ways in which the women negotiate and understand their identities as evangelical Christians. Pamela's response concerning the pastor is distinct in this regard.

Early in the interview, Pamela praised Pastor Bob for his lively, relevant sermons. Later on, however, following her criticism of the church's attitudes to homosexuality, views that rubbed against the grain of her own Christian worldview, she described him as "kind of arrogant." She suggested he acted as if the ethical problems he discussed were not his own (2/12/09, p. 8). Pamela is still searching for the right church, and in some ways, Bob is not her ideal minister. She is, however, fully able to separate her enthusiasm for evangelical ideas on the family, worship, and other matters from her criticism of a particular pastor. Similarly, Kimberly implied that she found one of the associate pastors more to her taste than Pastor Bob, and although Tecla loves Pastor Bob, she could see how some might want him to be a little more flexible on certain issues. Nevertheless, she appreciates that he "doesn't preach fluff!" (1/27/09, p. 11). Tricia made it clear that she prefers another church to TEF, even though she regularly participates in the small group I attended. Is it possible that Pastor Bob's views on divorce are too liberal for her? Lori, on the other hand, regards Pastor Bob and his wife,

Kitty, as guardian angels who tended to her family in its times of greatest need. To her, he is a teacher and a mentor.

Differing personal responses to the same spiritual leader are not at all surprising, but I found it significant that even in an evangelical community which accepts very clear norms and categories laid out by a conservative, self-described fundamentalist preacher, nuances of opinion exist. Responses to Pastor Bob suggest some room for disagreement with official religion, a spectrum of evangelicalism.

Conclusions

Interviews with five evangelical women reveal the ways in which each perceives her Christian identity and negotiates her spiritual journey. Certain constants are expressed by the women. All believe in the relevance and truth of Scripture as God's word. They deeply appreciate and have experienced the enormous support offered by an evangelical community. This support and their personal faith have allowed the women to withstand adversity. All are born-again and describe a process or a moment of conversion and a growing commitment to their faith. They were evangelized by friends or family members and their conversion and commitment frequently were initially motivated or spurred on by life traumas. They believe themselves to be saved, and know that upon death they will go to heaven. All emphasize "traditional values" and frequently employ that language to describe their worldviews. They find joy in the contemporary music employed in worship. They share some version of the concepts of male headship and female submission. In these ways, the women's interviews echo many of the messages I received from interviews with Pastor Bob, from sermons preached by him and

others at church, and from interpretations of Scripture offered in the small group. The official religion of TEF both reflects and, no doubt, helps to shape the religious identities of these women.

A number of dichotomies and tensions also emerge that relate the women's religious identities to recurring themes I encountered at TEF. Many are former Catholics and, like Pastor Bob, the women draw clear distinctions between their current faith and their former faith, between insider and outsider, us and them. They feel special in a positive way, blessed and saved, and yet they feel that the outside world of non-Christian relatives, townspeople, and people associated with the local college does not understand them or share their values. At the same time, they insist that they are just regular folks. They take pleasure in fun and family and have to deal with problems such as illness and divorce.

Listening closely to the women speaking in their own voices, however, also reveals variations among the women's attitudes and some individual ambivalence. Their privately revealed expressions of faith sometimes have a different tone and texture from Pastor Bob's public religion. For the women, the reading of Scripture is an example of personal religion, akin to prayer, a way to commune with God. The relationship with God or Christ is intensely personal. God or Christ is their best friend, always there for them. The women also describe conversion or specific epiphanies as experiential events in which they viscerally know that God has been with them or sent them a specific message. With respect to these personal dimensions of religious experience, the women I interviewed have much in common with those interviewed by Brenda Brasher (1998: 92-102; 109).

In addition to this personal dimension of religious experience, not emphasized as clearly in public or official religion at TEF, some of the women I interviewed diverge from the Pastor Bob's views on homosexuality and divorce. Even the gendering of church leadership appeared to occasion some degree of ambiguity. Several of the women seem to share Pastor Bob's views on mutuality and selfless love in marriage, and all accept the Scriptural basis for male headship in marriage, but their comments reveal important nuances, from Tricia's conservatism to Lori's independence.

A few of the women made overtly anti-feminist comments. Scholars such as Judith Stacey have suggested that contemporary women, who benefit from feminism but claim to reject it, are post-feminist. I found the women I interviewed to virtually be pre-feminist. That is, they act and think the way women always have acted and thought in patriarchal, traditional cultures. They achieve desired ends and a degree of empowerment in roundabout, subtle ways, negotiating with the men who love them in gendered worlds where men and women play different roles, and they insist they are happy.

The women's insistence on their own contentment is to be taken seriously and respectfully. Like Brenda Brasher and Judith Stacey, I find myself tempted to comment further on differences between the women's worldviews and my own and to reveal more fully my opinion of the ways in which they define themselves. In this ethnography, however, an evaluation of these differences from a feminist or other perspective has not been a central goal. Our varying worldviews, though, have clearly affected the project itself and shaped my experience as an ethnographer. I conclude with an overview of my findings and a reflection on the ethnographic process.

Chapter 6 Conclusions

This ethnographic study has explored the spiritual journeys and religious identities of a group of evangelical women whose life experiences and orientations are very different from my own. For me, the differences between us increased both the challenge of doing the research and its intellectual appeal. Ninian Smart, a scholar of comparative religion with a strongly sociological orientation, writes that the study of another person's religious identity "is a kind of voyage into the sentiments and ideas that animate people, often at the deepest level" (1983: 4). The voyage has several stages. First, it must be undertaken with planning and a process of self-education. Background work, found in chapter 2, on socio-historical contexts, terminology, and scholarly work relating to American evangelicalism offered such an education. The models provided by fellow "voyagers," discussed in chapter 3, helped me to think about and construct the questions and theoretical frameworks that would guide my study. The next stage involved fieldwork and its analysis, undertaken with an attitude that Smart calls "structured empathy" (1983: 16, 175, 176):

Empathy literally means "feeling in": it is getting at the feel of what is inside another person or group of persons. It is not quite the same as sympathy, "feeling with," . . . for sympathy means I *agree* with the other. Even if I do not agree with the other person, however, I can still have empathy . . . empathy helps us to better grasp the facts – for the facts include the way she feels and thinks about the world. This is why too, the empathy needs to be *structured*. We have to comprehend the structure of another's world; and in general, we have to try to understand the structures of belief inside the head of the believer (1983: 16).

Smart tries to capture the essence of a balancing act whereby the ethnographer empathizes with the people he or she studies but does so in a structured, objective way. Chapters 4 and 5 offer the results of my efforts to approach, understand, and present the

religious lives and identities of TEF, its chief pastor, and the women I interviewed with structured empathy.

Chapter 4 examines the environment and worldviews that frame and animate “official religion,” as preached and reinforced at TEF in its services and groups. TEF shares much with other contemporary evangelical churches, such as the use of contemporary music and modern spaces, the role of a charismatic pastor, and the relevance of his words to the congregation’s day-to-day life problems. Official religion at TEF also draws upon many aspects of American evangelicalism as it emerged in the first quarter of the 20th century: a premillennialist theological orientation, the emphasis on traditional values, clearly demarcated spheres for men and women, the importance of being born-again in Christ, and the conviction that Scripture is the true and inerrant word of God. The church, nevertheless, has its own quality and character, and is one example of the many versions of American evangelicalism. Neither Pastor Bob nor the congregation is heavily invested in the theological implications of premillennialism. They are much more concerned with coping in daily life and seek the assurance that they need not fear death because they and others who share their beliefs are going to heaven.

Worldviews, reflected in worship and belief at TEF, require members to negotiate a set of seeming contradictions. They are traditionalist, but engage with modernity. They believe themselves to be saved by God, implying a heightened sense of self, and yet they feel like victims. As saved, they consider themselves to be special, and yet insist they are like everyone else. They love fellow human beings, but condemn those perceived to be sinners. They read Scripture literally, but interpret and reapply these ancient texts in contemporary ways relevant to their own lives.

The research presented in chapter 5 explores the way in which the women I interviewed privatize and personalize their religious identities as evangelicals and how they negotiate the contradictions listed above. Their views reveal both subtle and more overt departures from attitudes expressed by their charismatic and influential pastor. One woman, for example, admitted that some Christian women might like more of a leadership role in church and another disagreed with the Pastor Bob's condemnation of homosexuality. The women, moreover, exhibit differences from one another concerning issues such as divorce and homosexuality and in the various ways they understand and live out wives' submission to their husbands and male headship. The women's negotiation of boundaries in relation to gender and gendered expectations is nuanced and varied.

Tecla and Kimberly specifically differentiated themselves from "women's libbers" and "feminists," which might be described as an anti-feminist, traditionalist stance, and yet they described their marriages in terms of mutuality, teamwork, each spouse giving 100 percent to the marriage, making decisions together, and each having important contributions to make. Lori insisted she was not submissive and said that she probably should have been more compliant, but her tone and demeanor indicated that she did not feel genuinely guilty about her lack of wifely submission. She described her husband as her best friend and their relationship as one of devotion and love. The youngest of the group, Tricia, seemed to be the most traditionalist of the group, accepting wifely submission in terms of a hierarchy and subservience to the husband, while another one of the younger women, Pamela, stated that she accepted views of wifely submission,

but did not want to elaborate, quickly changing the subject. Assessing and evaluating this variety of views has been a challenge.

Judith Stacey might suggest that the three women who spoke in terms of mutuality and submission exemplify a post-feminist ideology. Stacey describes post-feminism in relation to the women she interviews as follows: “To varying degrees, all have distanced themselves from feminist identity and ideology . . . at the same time, however, all have semi-consciously incorporated feminist principles into their gender and kinship expectations and practices” (1991: 263). The women I interviewed certainly reject feminist self-definition and express no interest in furthering a feminist political agenda. Is their expectation to be treated with complete respect and mutuality and their belief that that they participate in some version of egalitarian marriage post-feminist? In Chapter 5, I employed the term pre-feminist, in that the women describe their marriages in ways that harken back to an idealization of marital relationships as portrayed in the 1950s, before the developments of second-wave feminism. Such idealizations suggest that wives and their husbands are helpmates and that the women have implicit power in a household that on an overt level is controlled by men. In this context, it is also important to realize that as central as their relationships with their husbands are to their sense of self, perhaps even more important is the relationship they have with God and/or Christ.

The women’s personal relationships with Christ or God and the way in which their reading of the Bible is a form of communion with God are recurring themes in the interviews and point to another aspect of the women’s individual negotiation of their faith within the special contours of their lives and particular needs. Quintessential evangelical beliefs serve the women in private and perhaps unexpected ways. It might be expected,

for example, that the literalism of biblical inerrancy limits the women's options for the construction of religious identity. The Bible says what it says and is to be taken at face value. For example, several of the women provide biblical pronouncements as the reason why women do not lead in church. Biblical texts thus function as accepted sources of personal limitation. However, the Bible also offers the women a wider place in which to locate their own problems and sources of comfort. In this respect, they read, interpret, and apply biblical texts with imagination and creativity. The Bible is a source of possibilities. The text is open, a flexible medium that speaks to their particular situations. God Himself speaks to them through Scripture.

Similarly, born-again status has paradoxically limiting and expansive implications for the women's sense of self and their possibilities. It promises all true Christians salvation, forgiveness of sins, and an afterlife in heaven. Although this evangelical certainty is important to the women's sense of their long-term well-being, it can also be limiting by leading believers to worry less about their daily goals and situation in life. Everything will be fine once they get to heaven. On the other hand, even more important to the women in a very immediate sense is the way in which Jesus provides them with a true friend in the here and now, a personal confidante, a rescuer in this life. The women speak of intimacy, friendship, and of seeing and hearing the word of the Lord. God or Christ is there for them; they need never be alone.

I have come to appreciate the way in which these women have made the evangelical tradition her own. Each has undertaken a spiritual journey in the effort to make meaningful sense of her life. The tradition in which they locate themselves is very different from my own, although the problems they face, such as illness, anxiety, and the

death of loved ones, are universal. In the end, I did not feel drawn to join them, but this is not to say that I was not deeply affected by my research.

The process of learning a great deal about evangelicalism and interacting with people who are evangelicals has challenged me to accept people on their own terms, to be less judgmental. I would not feel comfortable suggesting, for example, that the women I interviewed are totally oppressed or deluded or not really happy, even though they describe themselves as feeling liberated and content. Understanding their point of view required considerable intellectual negotiation and self-education on my part. Dealing with their interest in my own salvation was trickier and less intellectual than emotional. Like Judith Stacey, Amy Frykhom, and other ethnographers, I experienced a range of emotional responses, including anger, guilt, embarrassment, and anxiety.

The portrayal of and attitudes expressed at TEF's services towards Jews, homosexuals, and women often offended me. Early in my fieldwork, I felt as if I was among anti-Semites, homophobes, and sexists. In person, however, Pastor Bob is disarming, complicated, and engaging. I know that he thinks that I am headed to hell in my present condition, even though I am a good person, "a real treat," as he told me in our final meeting, but somehow, I no longer take his assessment as personally. In many ways, Jews and gays are in as much trouble, in his view, as Catholics and liberal Protestants. Have I been co-opted or softened up? I do not think so, but I have become aware of the inevitable ways in which the ethnographer's empathy grows for the subjects of study.

I have also come to realize that while I was studying people associated with TEF, they were studying me. My attitudes about evangelicalism were influenced by working

with them, but my presence also influenced those I met. As a stranger with my own worldview, I was a challenge to their faith, and they needed to convince me that their way was *the* way. A final moment with Pastor Bob reignited many of my initial misgivings, anxieties, and ambivalences.

As I was about to leave his office, Pastor Bob asked if he could pray with me. In a very calm and soothing tone different from his usual speaking voice, Pastor Bob thanked the Lord for bringing me to TEF under the auspices of this research project, but he noted that really the Lord was working on me. He prayed for my finding a job. He prayed further that in whatever future situation God places me, I will be surrounded by people who will help me commit myself to the Lord unconditionally (PB 2/26/06, p. 7). The prayer made me uneasy, as if Pastor Bob claimed to know me better than myself, as if he could affect the course of my future. Tecla's final words to me in our interview were also a little unsettling. She had been describing to me the sexual purity of a recently married couple at the church and then turned to me and said, "Again, it doesn't matter what your background is, or what you've done, we've all done things we're not proud of, so . . . It's been neat to watch you, to listen to your questions. And I would love to know where this goes" (1/27/09, p. 11). I think it is safe to say she was not simply referring to my academic future or to the outcome of my research, but was hoping that the road, my own spiritual journey would lead to Christ.

I have undertaken a journey. The thesis was as much a process as a project. As an ethnographer, I have traveled from feelings of judgment, fascination, and fear to a degree of understanding, as a practitioner of structured empathy. I confess that I would drive to small group Bible study with enormous anxiety, tempted to turn back before I got

there, and sometimes I would leave shaking, on verge of tears. In one small group meeting, we discussed the concept of hope in the context of salvation, and a male participant I had never met before turned to me, staring, and said, “Some of us have hope, but others of us do not!” (SG 10/29/08, p. 2). It is not easy to be among people who imply you are going to hell. This man was particularly extreme in his views.

Nevertheless, at times I did not think I could complete the project, and was wrought with anxiety before every one-on-one interview. I am also left somewhat uncertain and ambivalent as a feminist about how to characterize the views of the women. I have tried to provide a new paradigm in order to understand the complex and personalized religious identities which each woman has negotiated within the framework of evangelicalism.

Gaining an understanding of the varied spiritual journeys of evangelical women has been a journey of my own on personal and intellectual levels, as I experienced first-hand the complex interplay between individuals, belief systems, and communities.

Appendix: Abbreviations

- B Pastor's Bob's Blog
- CS Church Services
- D Dinner with Phil and Tecla
- PB Interviews of Pastor Bob
- SM Small Group

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