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Grammars of Transformation: Saving Evangelical Cultural Engagement

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GRAMMARS OF TRANSFORMATION:
SAVING EVANGELICAL CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

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The completion of the dissertation signals the Lord's faithfulness in providing me with the time, resources, and especially people necessary to see this through. For His provision of these, as well as a supportive and patient wife, I remain humble and grateful.

"Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar.)"

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

"The great contemporary problems are moral and spiritual. They demand more than a formula."

Carl F.H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*.

PREFACE

Sociologist James Davison Hunter's 2010 publication *To Change the World* has become one of the most widely discussed books on the topic of Christian cultural engagement. He describes, analyzes, and criticizes the primary ways American Christians, especially Protestants, have understood and exercised a role in public life, or what is commonly referred to as "culture." He especially focuses on how efforts to change or transform society have failed to yield their intended results for both theological and sociological reasons. However, the analysis that has seldom been provided which helps account for the apparent failures to impact the culture is a critical analysis of evangelical views of culture, and especially the unique *language* associated with those views. Such an analysis will best position the contemporary church to understand and approach cultural pursuits in a manner consistent with its theology and practical aims in specific cultural contexts. This dissertation shows that language is a profoundly formative dimension of cultural engagement. The shifting "grammars" of cultural engagement within evangelical thought substantiate and illustrate this claim, even though not all of these proposals are exclusively or explicitly focused on the rhetorical aspects of this subject. Attention to the language used in explaining cultural engagement will help identify the potential theological and practical ambiguities associated with various models of engagement. Such models can be described as grammars, a linguistic concept for explaining and directing the role of Christians in the world. While the transformationalist approach to cultural engagement is still espoused by many evangelicals, new grammars of engagement have emerged, indicating that older grammars have been found to be inadequate. Studying these developments reveals the limits of any single, comprehensive grammar of cultural engagement in a post-Christian context.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Having arrived at the completion of this dissertation is humbling in many respects. It is the product of many days, weeks, and months of reading, conversation, reflection, writing, and rewriting. Moreover, it is the byproduct of many years of reflection on the topic of cultural engagement. I have marveled to discover how God has a way of weaving together conversation partners and intellectual curiosities, both of which have given profound shape to the material presented here. Drs. Biermann, Schmitt, and Cook have been my main conversation partners on all matters "Christianity and culture." Each has provided helpful and significant insights. I have also enjoyed extensive and fruitful conversations about this subject with colleagues at Concordia Seminary, namely Samuel Fuhrmann, Ryan Laughlin, and Ted Hopkins. Dr. Beth Hoeltke has also been a great advocate and encourager in terms of doing what needed to be done to press forward when progress was often slow or stalled. Finally, my great friend Matthew Bracey has pushed me to greater degrees of precision on this topic, and helped me formulate my specific concerns. For him and many more brothers and sisters, I am thankful.

Much attention has been given to evangelical cultural engagement over the last few decades. While this project is partially a critique of some of this thought, I am indebted to those who have preceded me and tried to address the thorny questions that comprise this topic. I have been benefited from others who have labored to minister well in their cultural contexts, and communicate their ideas with the written word. The focus of this project is on the vocabulary or language employed in this realm, an emphasis inculcated in me by two former professors, Drs. Darrell Holley and Stanley Hauerwas. Pastor-theologians should be lovers of words, but must use them with great care. My prayer is that this academic exercise will make a modest contribution to ongoing reflection and dialogue, especially within my own ecclesial home.

SELECT CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS IN NEO-EVANGELICAL HISTORY

The Scopes Monkey Trial is held	1925
Founding of National Association of Evangelicals	1942
Uneasy Conscious of Modern Fundamentalism	1947
Founding of Fuller Theological Seminary	1947
Christ and Culture is published	1951
Founding of *Christianity Today*	1956
Billy Graham holds crusade in New York City	1957
Roe v. Wade decision	1973
Charles Colson is converted	1973
TIME calls 1976 the "Year of the Evangelical"	1976
A "born again evangelical" is elected President	1976
Founding of Moral Majority	1979
Carl F.H. Henry dies	2003
The Gospel Coalition is founded	2005
Charles W. Colson dies	2012

ABSTRACT

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Evangelical Christians have been struggling to offer a thorough and unified account of cultural engagement for the last several decades. H. Richard Niebuhr's "Christ the Transformer of Culture" type has supplied evangelicals with the most influential rhetoric on the proper relationship of Christians and the church to the culture at large. However, this consensus is collapsing in the wake of new ways of speaking of cultural engagement that largely downplay or altogether avoid the language of transformation. The emergence of these new ways of speaking, that is, "grammars of cultural engagement," signals the important and formative role of language in uniting one's stated theology and suggested practices regarding cultural engagement. This dissertation argues that language is the way in which theology and practice is formally constituted in cultural engagement, and thereby serves as a control on the thought and life of the church. Because language is so formative and prone to ambiguity and imprecision, especially with respect to metaphors used in cultural engagement, no single grammar of engagement should be considered exclusively normative for the evangelical church. Grammars should be tethered to sound theological belief, and should allow such theology and contextual discernment shape how they are expressed linguistically with an eye toward practice.

CHAPTER ONE

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT: A THEOLOGICAL-LINGUISTIC ENTERPRISE

Relating the church's ministry to the world has been an enduring challenge ever since the rise of Christianity. "Christianity and society," "faith and culture," and "Gospel and culture" are among the many expressions used to frame this particular challenge. Indeed, countless theologians, historians, cultural commentators, and other authors have offered their own versions of how to frame the subject over the last half century.[1] None have been more famous or influential than H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*, which supplied the familiar models or what he called "ideal-types" that many have adopted, amended, or altogether rejected.[2] For Protestant Christians in general, and evangelicals especially, Niebuhr's types have provided the most commonly used language and framework for outlining the possible options for the relationship between Christianity and what is commonly described as "culture."[3]

Regardless of the formulation, the dualities mentioned above call attention to the challenge of understanding the Christian's relationship or responsibility to the world around him. Though it

[1] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: HarperOne, 1951); George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, ed., *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Robert E. Webber, *The Church in the World: Opposition, Tension, or Transformation?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986); Edward Schillebeeckx, *World and Church*, trans. N.D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1971).

[2] Diefenthaler identifies three categories of respondents to Niebuhr's types: critics, defenders, and fixers. Jon Diefenthaler, *The Paradox of Church and World: Selected Writings of H. Richard Niebuhr* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), xxi. This dissertation interacts mostly with those whom he calls "fixers."

[3] Books whose subject is the relationship between Christianity and culture commonly mention Niebuhr's models at least in passing, while other books today still use his framework on specific topics within the broader phenomenon of culture. For a recent example of Niebuhr's models being applied to politics, see Amy Black, ed., *Five Views on the Church and Politics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 8. For an example of Niebuhr's models being applied to worship, see Scott Aniol, *By the Waters of Babylon: Worship in a Post-Christian Culture* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2015), 71–84.

may seem inconsequential to consider the way that relationship is described linguistically, the prevalence of articles, books, and other literature on this larger topic suggests that this inquiry is more than just semantics. Language, theology, and the practice of cultural engagement are deeply interconnected. This claim is initially illustrated well by considering two aspects of the topic: (1) the language commonly used to describe the Christian role in culture, and (2) the polyvalences of the term "culture" itself.

How Words Shape the Discussion

Evangelical literature today reflects a range of proposed responses to society, culture, or cultural phenomena. The most commonly used term in general is "engagement," yet this engagement is further modified by active verbs, metaphors, and models, all of which we will later refer to as "grammars." Many argue that Christians should "renew culture," "restore culture," "impact culture," or "change culture." Typically included with these expressions is the most ambitious one of all: the call to "transform culture."[4] Many authors use these terms interchangeably, though their theological heritage, social setting, and vocational context shape and accent which terms receive particular emphasis. The elements that appear common to each of these terms, *prima facie*, is a belief that evangelicals should be *active* in society, or what is usually just called "the culture." Moreover, some type of change is thought to be desirable, possible, and in some cases, *required* of faithful Christian witness.

A second aspect of these proposed approaches to engagement is that some of them are not reducible to any one particular verb or imperative. They are instead formulated linguistically with the use of prepositions, denoting some kind of spatial-temporal relationship to the

[4] Those who emphasize cultural transformation in theory and/or in rhetoric will be referred to as "transformationalists" in this dissertation. Sometimes they are also identified as "transformationists" by other authors.

phenomena of culture. For example, Bruce Ashford has recently suggested that Christians should live *in* and *for* their cultural context.[5] Niebuhr also invoked spatial images in his typology as he used the imagery of "Christ above Culture," to give one example.[6] The use of prepositions in linguistic formulations is not as common in modern literature as the use of verbs, but they do nonetheless persist.

A third type of proposed response is the use of a historical figure as an exemplar for appropriate cultural engagement. The most discussed contemporary example in the evangelical community is the Benedict Option, offered by journalist and Orthodox Christian Rod Dreher.[7] Also published in 2017 was *The Pietist Option,* a proposal inspired by Philipp Spener's classic *Pia Desideria*.[8] Though "exemplar-based models" are less common among evangelicals, they are on offer along with action-based expressions and spatial-temporal expressions. The sheer diversity of terms utilized by evangelical Christians of such similar histories and theologies is worthy of further investigation.

Our study will focus on those broadly identified as transformationalists, and the presuppositions generally at work in their linguistic formulation of the relationship between Christianity and culture. Such an inquiry will show the connection between theology, practice, and language, and thus demonstrate the significance of the linguistic choices of Christians with respect to cultural engagement. Our usage of the concept of a grammar will also help function as

[5] Bruce Riley Ashford, *Every Square Inch: An Introduction to Cultural Engagement for Christians* (Bellingham: Lexham, 2015), 17.

[6] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 116–48

[7] Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in Post-Christian America* (New York: Sentinel, 2017). At present most of the formal responses to Dreher have appeared on blogs, in book reviews, and at conferences.

[8] Christopher Gehrz and Mark Pattie III, *The Pietist Option: Hope for the Renewal of Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2017).

both an evaluative tool and corrective one to the weaknesses in current engagement.

The second factor that contributes to the semantic confusion on this subject is the varied uses of the word "culture." Its varied usage also contributes to the linguistic significance of the debate. The introduction of the term "culture," when previously it would have just as likely been "world," "society," or "civilization," raises questions that lack clear and simple answers as this term is usually used without precision or clarity. Two examples will suffice to demonstrate the ambiguity associated with this term. The literary critic Terry Eagleton in his book *Culture* offers four possible definitions of culture: "(1) a body of artistic and intellectual work; (2) a process of spiritual and intellectual development; (3) the values, customs, beliefs and symbolic practices by which men and women live; or (4) a whole way of life."[9] Evangelicals can be found using all definitions of culture in books on cultural engagement or the Christian worldview. In fact, one can just as frequently read an evangelical author refer to "transforming culture" as "transforming *the* culture." Identifying the exact referent of "culture" must be determined by carefully studying its usage in the context of an author's work. Yet even these meanings can vary within the same work, making the linguistic choice that describes the precise type of engagement all the more significant.

The ambiguity created by the range of cultural rhetoric raises a number of questions for students of cultural engagement. How, for example, could one speak meaningfully about "engaging" a body of aesthetics, a process of development, values and practices, and "a whole way of life?"[10] What would it mean to "transform" each of these in a distinctly Christian sense?

[9] Terry Eagleton, *Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 1.

[10] It should be noted that "engagement" is not a word used by conservative evangelicals alone. It has come to see mainstream religious usage and mainstream social usage as well. For non-evangelical examples, see Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2011). For secular examples, consider the common refrain of politicians and journalists who speak of the need for America to

As a matter of preliminary judgment, it seems reasonable to observe that one word (culture) is being used to span a significant conceptual range. Additionally, one imperative or action (transform) is being used to define a substantial albeit unclear effect on an entire range of phenomena. Such is one of the challenges which attend evangelical cultural engagement. Indeed, we might describe this as the *linguistic dilemma of cultural engagement*. That is, the continued output on books on this topic suggests that there is something to be said about cultural engagement that previous proposals have been inadequate to convey. At the very least, this implies that the ways evangelicals have presented their views previously have lacked a definitive and fully persuasive account of cultural engagement. This owes significantly to the lack of attention given to the multi-dimensional qualities of language that is employed in explaining what proper cultural engagement requires and entails.

Though many books have been written to propose, analyze and critique various models of cultural engagement, few provide substantial engagement with the formative power of language to shape the thought and life of the practitioners of cultural engagement. Therefore, after situating this subject in a historical, theological, and sociological context below, we will consider the nature and function of language in cultural engagement. After we establish the significance of language from a philosophical and theological perspective, we will also incorporate insights from cultural anthropology. Such insights will reinforce our assertions that language itself has a formative effect on the way in which people think. This argument is significant because it gives further definition to the commonly observed phenomenon of words having the capacity to engender certain mental and/or emotional states. Though this observation is noteworthy, it must

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be "engaged with the world," referring to a particular orientation toward foreign policy and/or diplomacy. The roots of "engagement" are interesting in and of themselves, and though this term will be considered, it will not be the principal focus here.

be validated through theological argument.

In chapter two the emergence of basic concerns and theological emphases of evangelicals will be considered. This will help establish the way that rhetoric and responsibility were intertwined in evangelical cultural thought among the first and second generation of leaders in the neo-evangelical movement. Their writings and institutional influences formed the foundation for the engagement that would follow by later generations. Observing this historical trajectory displays how certain linguistic expressions can take root and endure over many decades, shaping and framing theological debates in particular ways.

The works we will consider in chapter three constitute proposals for new ways of thinking about rhetoric, cultural engagement and the nature of cultural responsibility. They will substantiate our argument that there is at least an implicit recognition afoot that language matters in shaping the thought and practice of Christians regarding cultural engagement. Our evaluation of these works will help reflect that influence, showing how language is at the heart of all of their proposals.

Chapter four will consider two additional books by authors who are arguably at the intellectual epicenter of the evangelical movement, especially in its Reformed contexts. Their books are important for that reason alone, yet these books are also significant because they help support the conclusion that our analysis of language will also lead to, which is that no single grammar of cultural engagement should be considered normative, exhaustive, or final. Though the authors considered in chapter four support the overall argument being advanced here, they are not explicit enough about the function of language in this subject: *Language is where theology and practice coalesce and form a grid through which cultural engagement may be interpreted and evaluated with the ultimate aims of better practice.*

There is no "non-linguistic" description of cultural engagement. The beliefs of a particular Christian community, or the proposal of a specific Christian theologian, must be articulated in order for them to be accepted as a potential approach that others may adopt. Even in those cases where practices or lived examples are thought to be more foundational and influential than a set of stated theological beliefs or propositions, those practices give rise to theological description.[11] So the theological convictions and proposed practices of engagement influence the linguistic choices of the person attempting to present an approach to cultural engagement. The result is that the models, metaphors, or "grammars" then become a sort of picture by which believers envision what it means to be faithful to the approach to engagement in question.

Consider two dominant ways of explaining the proper relationship between Christianity and culture: Two Kingdoms and Transformationalism. Two Kingdoms theology has been traditionally associated with Lutheranism, though some Reformed Christians have appropriated this language also.[12] Regardless of how Two Kingdoms is specifically formulated, in all its various forms it presupposes a duality (temporal/spiritual, civil/spiritual, world/church) that should help Christians make proper distinctions in how they navigate the world as citizens and Christians. This duality impresses upon believers the need to *maintain distinctions*. Two Kingdoms language then has the unique capacity to stress tension[13] (or paradox, to use Niebuhr's

[11] Even in a proposal like that of postliberal theologian George Lindbeck, his view is presented not solely as a constructive, prescriptive proposal. It is offered as a theory of how doctrine actually works in history. While postliberal theology emphasizes practices, it must account for those in some kind of articulated theological conceptuality. See George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville: Westminster, 1984).

[12] Presbyterians, especially those associated with Westminster Seminary California, are perhaps the most noticeable adherents to a type of Two Kingdoms theology outside the Lutheran tradition.

[13] Robert C. Crouse, *Two Kingdoms and Two Cities: Mapping Theological Traditions of the Church, Culture, and Civil Order* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 152.

word).[14] Fidelity to the paradigm tends to be assessed by the ability of a believer to not "confuse categories" or "confuse realms."[15] Transformationalism, on the other hand, has an ambitious connotation. "Cultural transformation" has a comprehensive sense to it given how transformation is typically defined and used in everyday English. This is why many transformationalists themselves have expressed that this view can sound "grandiose"[16] or "triumphalistic."[17] The connotations of both Two Kingdoms and Transformationalism become significant because a linguistic decision to explain faithful cultural engagement in one phrase or image begins shaping the thought of the individual believer in ways that may not have been intended when the specific language was initially adopted.

Though many evangelicals are trying to recast and reframe transformationalism in new language, in order for such efforts to influence mainstream evangelical thought and practice, the assumptions and aims entailed in our language must be examined, chastened, and nuanced. Our analysis of some evangelical proposals to "fix or save transformation," informed by insights from philosophy of language and theological appropriations of language and the concept of grammar, will more fully reveal the significance of language to cultural engagement. Documenting and analyzing the shifting language of engagement contributes to the conversation about cultural engagement by showing that linguistic choices in this area wed theology and practice. Better appreciating the impact of these shifts and the views that inform them will help

[14] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 149–89.

[15] David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 180.

[16] John Frame, *The Escondido Theology: A Reformed Response to Two Kingdoms Theology* (Lakeland: Whitefield Media, 2011), 78. Frame notes that the term "transform" itself can convey this.

[17] Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 199–200. Keller notes that that those in the transformationist camp tend to be over-confident about the prospects for change.

bring more care, precision, nuance, and realism in the rhetoric that is utilized.

We should first appreciate the ancient roots of this modern challenge in relating the church to the world, or the faith to the culture. Though the linguistic dimension of this subject in present times is the focus of this dissertation, it should also be recognized that this discussion has a larger biblical and historical context. We will briefly situate our study of language within such a context since many of the challenges and problems in the past shape the present discussion also.

Christianity and Culture as a Historic Challenge

H. Richard Niebuhr best summarizes the significance of the subject from a historical standpoint. He writes, "It is helpful to remember that the question of Christianity and civilization is by no means a new one; that Christian perplexity in this area has been perennial, and that the problem has been an enduring one through all the Christian centuries."[18] Surveys of church history confirm that Christians throughout the ages have often struggled to understand how to relate their faith to their social and cultural environment. Accordingly, different believers and communities of believers have often arrived at different responses to it.[19]

The second century father Tertullian famously asked, "What indeed hath Jerusalem to do with Athens?"[20] This question has since functioned as a common rhetorical tool for modern Christians to prompt reflection about Christianity and culture. The original context of Tertullian's question was an argument that pagan philosophy was the parent of heresies. Tertullian feared that appropriating Greco-Roman philosophy would compromise Christian

[18] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 2. D.A. Carson makes a very similar observation in *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), viii.

[19] Several authors, including Niebuhr in his seminal work, connect figures and periods of church history with particular models or types. More recently, Moore structures his book around "Christian approaches to culture from five periods in church history." See T.M. Moore, *Culture Matters: A Call for Consensus on Christian Cultural Engagement* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 16.

[20] Tertullian, *On Prescription Against Heretics*, 2.1.7 (*ANF*: 3:246).

doctrine. Tertullian thus appears to be an exemplar for what is usually associated with a "Christ against culture" position.[21] Yet one may also read him writing these words to a pagan audience: "We Christians live with you, enjoy the same food, have the same manner of life and dress, and the same requirements for life as you."[22] Reconciling competing sentiments then becomes not only the task of the historical theologian, but the one seeking guidance on the relationship between Christianity and culture. Tertullian's "against culture" or "pro-culture" sentiments may not lead to a developed approach to Christian cultural engagement, but the "against culture" sentiments do reflect a more separatist posture that is later associated with the monastic movement, the Anabaptist tradition, and twentieth century American fundamentalism.

Tertullian's question is also significant because of how it is often used in modern evangelical literature.[23] Framing Christianity and culture as "Jerusalem versus Athens" reinforces the dichotomy often smuggled into the debate about Christianity and culture, whereas the faith is something that can stand over and against culture. Culture becomes seen as something "out there," while Christians can deliberate about how best to engage or transform it from a neutral starting point. This abstraction is one that has been identified recently by evangelicals, though non-evangelical theologian Stanley Hauerwas memorably targeted it in his 1989 book *Resident Aliens*, which he co-authored with Methodist Bishop William Willimon.[24] Hauerwas and Willimon reject Niebuhr's proposal in *Christ and Culture* in acute fashion, noting that they had

[21] Niebuhr specifically identifies Tertullian as the "greatest example in early Christianity" of this type. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 51.

[22] Tertullian, *Apology*, 42.

[23] E.g. Scott Aniol, *By the Waters of Babylon: Worship in a Post-Christian Culture*, 54. *John Mark Reynolds, When Jerusalem Met Athens: An Introduction to Classical and Christian Thought* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 14–16.

[24] Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989).

"come to believe that few books have been a greater hindrance to an accurate assessment of our situation than *Christ and Culture*.[25] They felt that not only was Niebuhr's privileging of the "Christ the transformer of culture" type wrong, but that the book rested on two problematic and related assumptions. First, Niebuhr's categories were formulated in the context of Christendom (which was obviously not Tertullian's context).[26] Thus, Niebuhr's way of discussing the subject seemed to prop up liberal democracy and pluralism rather than challenging it. To do so would automatically fall prey to the charges of sectarianism. Second, these authors were also concerned that Niebuhr's formulation reinforces the temptation to abstract Christian life from cultural life. This leads Hauerwas to emphasize a point he has made elsewhere, which is that it isn't Christ *and* culture, but Christ *is* culture. In his words, "the church doesn't have a social strategy, the church *is* a social strategy."[27] However, the way Tertullian's famous question has been utilized tends to reinforce the modern linguistic construal of the Christianity and culture dialogue, making it possible for modern evangelicals to speak as though these are two separate realms or categories whose relationship can be reduced to a single description or ambition: transformation.

The Patristic age shows that other fathers, namely Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustine appropriated philosophical terms and categories in their writing, albeit in different ways. Related theological and methodological moves can be seen later in church history in figures as diverse as Peter Abelard, Thomas Aquinas, and Nicholas of Cusa. Niebuhr references most of these figures also, though he classifies them in different categories according to his own

[25] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 40.

[26] Many across ecclesial traditions have expressed the "Christendom critique" of Niebuhr's categories. In other words, these critics in various ways show how living in a society with a type of Christian consensus delegitimizes the application of Niebuhr's categories to present times. For a critique and proposed alternative, see Craig A. Carter, *Revisiting Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006).

[27] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 43. Emphasis is the authors'.

shifting definitions of Christ and culture.[28] So we find an artificial definition driving historical-theological analysis, which results in models that influence contemporary reflection.

The Reformation would later see a revival of emphasis in Scriptural authority, though this did not eliminate confusion about questions of Christianity and culture. The Magisterial Reformers had their own challenges in sorting out the socio-political implications of their theology as the religious landscape of Europe changed around them. Some of these figures defy discrete theological categorization, yet one common feature is that their theological ideas and paradigms could not help but reflect the social, religious, and intellectual climate of their times. Judgments about cultural embeddedness positively or negatively reflect the assumptions brought to the subject by scholars. Such scholars bring their own views concerning the proper relationship between Christianity and culture, how it relates to theological method, the authority and function of Scripture, and the scope of common grace. Yet they will also have implicit beliefs about the unique ability (or inability) of theological language to faithfully describe how people actually engaged culture in their time.

The story of God's people across both Old and New Testaments also reveals diverse ways of inhabiting and relating to different socio-cultural contexts. Though some may venture to argue there is a consistent model or approach, certainly Moses' life in Egypt, Daniel's in Babylon, Paul's in Athens, or even Christ's eating with sinners provide different angles on what it might look like to be faithfully in the world, while not being of the world (John 17:14–15). We read that Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, yet was called to lead God's people out of Egypt (Acts 7:22). Daniel capably served in a pagan administration, yet maintained

[28] John Howard Yoder and D.A. Carson both offer a careful reading of Niebuhr, noting how his definition of culture shifts throughout his book. See John Howard Yoder, "How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned: A Critique of Christ and Culture," in *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture*, ed. Glen H. Stassen (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 54; Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 11–12.

ritual purity through dietary resolve (Dan. 1:8–21). Paul asserted that he had become all things to all people (1 Cor. 9:22), but clearly distinguished the wisdom of the world from the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 2). Surveying such examples poses several challenges. First, how does one hermeneutically assess the distinction between descriptive accounts and prescriptive models? Second, if one can maintain that distinction hermeneutically, how might those models be translated into contemporary Western society? Specifically, what might it look like for an ecclesial tradition or church body to imitate Daniel's example, or know what Jesus would do in a particular cultural context? How could that be put into words to form a model, metaphor, or linguistic framework that could be communicated to lay Christians? How does one move from a model that describes the *relationship* between Christianity and culture to a specific set of practices and strategies that constitute the *responsibility* of Christians to the culture?

Answering such questions require us to examine both theological issues and practical concerns. Such issues and concerns are further amended by considering the American religious scene after Christendom and how that scene uniquely influences the language of cultural engagement.

Christianity and Culture in Modern American Christianity

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, many American denominations are coping with new questions about their role in society and cultural institutions. Many commentators point to the 1960s as the watershed decade which signaled the beginning of largescale decline in Judeo-Christian moral influence in mainstream culture.[29] Some point to the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision by the United States Supreme Court, the terrorist attacks of September 11, or other

[29] Os Guinness, *The Dust of Death: The Sixties Counterculture and How it Changed America Forever* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994); F. Leroy Forlines: *The Quest for Truth: Answering Life's Inescapable Questions* (Nashville: Randall House, 2001).

singular moments as marking the changing of the cultural tide. However, a consensus has emerged among many evangelical historians, cultural commentators, and authors in many fields that recognizes the emergence of "post-Christendom." The titles and subtitles of many books call attention to the "post-Christian" or "post-Christendom" condition of America and ministering in such an environment.[30] The rise of radical militant Islam, the legalization of same-sex marriage, and numerous other political and social developments are interpreted to signal this new environment that the church in America has entered. Some have gone as far as to describe recent decades as "the new dark ages."[31]

While proposals for what to do about this new cultural and religious situation differ greatly, much of the analysis of how we arrived at this precarious context is similar. Usually some combination of theological error, immoral social policy, and cultural confusion produce a narrative of decline that then is further accented by an author's own ecclesial or disciplinary background.[32] Yet it is in the proposals themselves that questions of mission and ecclesial identity are made explicit. Identity and mission become indicative of how different persons and church bodies understand cultural engagement, and how best to narrate their strategy using biblical motifs, biblical and/or cultural metaphors, or other linguistic paradigms.

Because identity, mission, and cultural engagement are so integral to the church's ministry,

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[30] Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2017); Charles J. Chaput, *Strangers in a Strange Land: Living the Catholic Faith in a Post-Christian World* (New York: Henry Holt, 2017); Christopher James, *Church Planting Post-Christian Soil: Theology and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). Craig Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007); Bryan Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006); Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2004); Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996); Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991).

[31] Charles Colson, *Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages* (Ann Arbor: Vine Books, 1989).

[32] Carl F.H. Henry, *The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society: Promoting Evangelical Renewal and National Righteousness* (Portland: Multnomah, 1978).

this study of the use of language in cultural engagement is timely, necessary, and beneficial. Our account will help explain why different grammars of transformation have emerged (or more simply, transformationalism operating with different names and emphases). This account will also make clearer the connection between theological belief, Christian practice, and linguistic choices, and why language is not arbitrary or inert in this intersection. A case study of this dynamic will help illustrate our initial claims about this intersection.

The National Association of Free Will Baptists: A Time of Transition?

My denomination, the National Association of Free Will Baptists, has largely adopted a much more self-conscious evangelical identity in that it sees itself as a conservative denomination seeking to be involved in society for the sake of Christian witness. For much of its modern history, however, Free Will Baptists would have been associated theologically, sociologically, and culturally with the Fundamentalism which arose in response to the encroachment of Modernism and theological liberalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus, they tended to adopt a more separatist posture to mainstream culture, public educational institutions, the arts and entertainment, and other aspects of American society. Some of this social distance could be attributed to the denomination's predominantly southern and rural roots. However, other theological and cultural forces also fostered what Niebuhr might describe as a "Christ against culture" approach or tendency.

Free Will Baptists have a unique history in terms of their development into a modern denomination. Prior to the advent of the National Association in 1935, Free Will Baptists were divided into two conferences that were scattered throughout the eastern half of the United States. These two conferences were what remained after the 1911 merger between the Free Will Baptists

in the north with the Northern Baptist Convention.[33] Theological liberalism was already present in parts of the movement, at least in its schools, by the late 1800s. That influence grew and made possible the environment for an eventual split. In the 1911 merger Free Will Baptists lost all of their educational institutions, missions organizations, assets, and many of their churches. It essentially crippled the movement of Free Will Baptists who had not become theologically liberal, or been beholden to those institutions and leaders who had liberalized. However, by 1935 the two remaining conferences of Free Will Baptist churches met in Nashville, Tennessee and formed what is known today as the National Association of Free Will Baptists. In time this new association began commissioning missionaries (1935), opened the doors to its own college (1942) and publishing house (1962), and eventually established other entities designed to promote, preserve, and strengthen the ministry of Free Will Baptists.

This brief summary of the advent of the modern Free Will Baptist movement in America serves our overall project by illustrating some of the historic circumstances that shape the identity and mission of religious bodies. Those circumstances also shape how those groups conceive of and describe their relationship to the culture at large. Free Will Baptists at mid-century would have to determine how to best train their pastors in the absence of a full-fledged seminary, having seen earlier generations of institutions liberalize.[34] The movement would also experience the influence of outside groups such as Independent Fundamental Baptists. This influence fostered an intense emphasis on the authority of the local church pastor, the exclusive use of the King James Version of the Bible, the mandate of parents to send their children to

[33] This group of Free Will Baptists was known more specifically as "Free Baptists."

[34] An affiliated college known as Mount Olive College in Ayden, North Carolina would also liberalize by the final quarter of the twentieth century. This only served to heighten Free Will Baptists' anxieties about worldly intellectual influences.

Christian schools, and several other views largely peculiar to Independent Baptists in the mid-to-late twentieth century. These views found a home in the piety of some Free Will Baptists because of their rural roots, conservative sensibilities, and suspicion toward anything that did not comport with the hermeneutical and homiletical traditions to which the movement had been accustomed. Free Will Baptists already had a Church Covenant that called for complete abstention from consuming alcoholic beverages, and called people to "abstain from all sinful amusements."[35] This complex mixture of outside influences as well as internal dispositions and convictions created a powerful narrative of tension with and opposition to mainstream culture. It would not be uncommon, then, to hear more warnings about worldliness than affirmations of creation's goodness at a Bible conference or from a pulpit. It would have been much more likely that one would sing "this world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through," than "this is my Father's world."[36] Add to this context the extensive influence of Dispensational theology among the pastors and churches in the east, and it became much more possible to think and speak of being "against culture" as opposed to "transforming culture."

A powerful minority account in the midst of this rhetoric and thought in the mainstream of the movement could be seen embodied in a sermon given at the denomination's convention and semi-centennial celebration in 1985. Dr. Linton C. Johnson, long-time president of Free Will Baptist Bible College (now Welch College), addressed the National Association of Free Will Baptists and expressed disappointment that the denomination was largely a rural one.[37] Though

[35] *The Treatise of Faith and Practices of Faith and Practices of the National Association of Free Will Baptists*, Inc. (Antioch, TN: Executive Office NAFWB, 2016), 2.

[36] Both of these phrases derive from hymns found in many Protestant hymnals. Michael Horton also mentions these two songs in contrast in Michael S. Horton, *Where in the World is the Church? A Christian View of Culture and Your Role in It* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2002).

[37] The college was founded in Nashville, Tennessee, but has since relocated to Gallatin, Tennessee.

rural churches had been financially important to the movement, Johnson noted that Americans largely lived in cities, and the denomination lacked strong churches in metropolitan areas. He lamented, "[t]he price is high for not having kept pace with a changing America."[38] Though some of Johnson's concerns may have been oriented around institutional preservation and maintaining loyalty among members to the Free Will Baptist denomination, a larger vision motivated his concerns.

First, Johnson believed that a truly Christian education was not only for training pastors. Christian education had a larger vision of God's world in view.[39] He noted that, "[a] Bible College curriculum, in my opinion, should be made up of approximately 40% liberal arts courses and 60% Biblical courses. It was my feeling that studies in the field of liberal arts would help students understand and appreciate the world and culture in which we live, while biblical studies would be the message we bear to the world."[40] Johnson's remarks suggest not merely a utilitarian dimension to knowing the world around us so as to help one preach better. He calls for understanding and *appreciation*. Such an observation is significant when one considers the many Free Will Baptists that saw culture and cultural products mostly through the lens of the doctrine of sin, not the doctrine of creation. The call of 2 Cor. 6:17, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate," (KJV) was an often-quoted verse among preachers in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Though Johnson would no doubt agree with the need for personal purity and sometimes ecclesial separation, history had convinced him that the city should not be seen as a

[38] Mary R. Wisehart, ed. *The Fifty-Year Record of the National Association of Free Will Baptists 1935-1985* (Nashville: The Free Will Baptist Historical Commission, 1988), 126.

[39] This way of describing Johnson's perspective is reminiscent of the Reformed emphasis on having a Christian "world-and-life view," though this parlance was not as pronounced among Free Will Baptists in earlier decades as it has been in the last two or three.

[40] Wisehart, *The Fifty-Year Record*, 125.

threat to Christians, but rather an opportunity and calling. He eloquently states, "If the Apostle Paul went to Athens, Corinth, and Rome, we must also go to our Athens, with its sophistication, to Corinth with its wickedness, and to Rome with its political power."[41] Though such remarks have an evangelistic overtone to them, Johnson was expressing what was becoming a commonly held view about cultural engagement among many in the mainstream of denominational leadership, both in terms of churches and denominational institutions. This changing consensus was precipitated in part by the influence of Free Will Baptist Bible College professors F. Leroy Forlines and Robert E. Picirilli.[42]

Though Johnson appeared to support robust cultural engagement, it is certainly true that many Free Will Baptists resisted a broader posture of engagement with education, the city, and the broad phenomenon that evangelicals commonly call "culture." A few years prior to Johnson's convention sermon, a new Bible college was established in Virginia Beach, Virginia to serve as an alternative college focused exclusively on training pastors, missionaries, Christian school teachers, and local church staff. In the views of many associated with the founding of Southeastern Free Will Baptist College (founded in 1983), the commitment of other denominational entities to this broader, more comprehensive educational approach would inherently diminish an emphasis on the local church.[43] Yet the vision for a more comprehensive, engaged approach to life and ministry was already shared by enough influential pastors and leaders that they would be able to impart a vision of cultural engagement for a new generation of church leaders who desired to impact twenty-first century America, despite how post-Christian it

[41] Wisehart, *The Fifty-Year Record*, 127.

[42] Pivotal figures in the neo-evangelical renaissance such as Carl F.H. Henry and Francis Schaeffer both heavily influenced Forlines, Picirilli, and others. Forlines cites from both numerous times in his landmark book, *The Quest for Truth: Answering Life's Inescapable Questions* (Nashville: Randall House, 2001).

[43] Southeastern would eventually relocate to Wendell, North Carolina.

may become.[44]

The resurgence of interest in understanding and "engaging culture" is not merely a development among Free Will Baptists. Many evangelical American denominations have witnessed a similar set of developments in terms of a burden, desire, or calling to be active and involved in social institutions, to address social questions, and to transform culture.[45] Evangelicals have especially been a social force in politics for nearly forty years. James Davison Hunter pointedly states that, "it is no exaggeration to say that *the dominant public witness of the Christian church in America since the early 1980s has been a political witness*."[46] Yet it is also true that more comprehensive efforts to engage all spheres or arenas of society have been emphasized in the last twenty years. Free Will Baptists are counted in that number. Though the *Free Will Baptist Covenant*, first adopted in 1935, pledged in part that Free Will Baptists would count "it [their] chief business in life to extend the influence of Christ in society,"[47] this call has only more recently been heard and reflected in denominational rhetoric and activity. This includes the themes of conferences, the liberal arts curriculum of Welch College, the books and articles being published, and the effort of North American Ministries to plant more churches in urban areas. Still, the notion of "influencing culture" remains unclear on its own terms. Such a

[44] Morgan best recounts this history. See Phillip T. Morgan, "The Promise of a Second Evangelical Mind: Free Will Baptist Bible College and the Hybrid Model of Christian Higher Education," (MA thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 2016).

[45] One of the many evidences of this interest is the establishment of centers for "faith and culture," "cultural engagement," and the like. Typically such centers are housed on seminary or university campuses. Such examples include the Carl F.H. Henry Institute for Evangelical Engagement at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (founded 1998), the L. Russ Bush Center for Faith and Culture at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (founded 2006), the Richard Land Center for Cultural Engagement at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (founded 2007), and the Center for Apologetics & Cultural Engagement at Liberty University (founded 2014).

[46] James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 12. Emphasis Hunter's.

[47] *The Treatise of Faith and Practices of Faith and Practices of the National Association of Free Will Baptists*, Inc., 2.

conviction must be qualified as the notion of influence assumes something concrete, obligatory, and proximate about the nature of the engagement. Evangelicals' liberal use of the term "engagement" in the names of books, journals, conferences, educational centers, and sermons reveals something about their conception of the Christianity and culture relationship, even when the use of "transformation" isn't explicit. Such rhetoric is always underwritten by particular theologies, practices, and cultural analyses. These merit consideration as language never stands apart from theology and practices, beliefs and behavior.

Christianity and Culture as a Theological and Practical Challenge

Evangelical denominations that take theology seriously are motivated at least in part by those beliefs, and how those beliefs shape their assessments about a desired state of society at large, its values, institutions, artifacts, and practices. Such denominations also face the practical questions of life and ministry: How might the church preach in this cultural milieu? How should Christians vote? What educational approach would be most conducive to our faith and values? These questions are only natural to ask for theologically conservative believers who perceive the onslaught of theological liberalism, Darwinism, the Sexual Revolution, and the creep of secularism into nearly every aspect of modern life. Accordingly, they are reacting against a gradual encroachment at best, or invasion at worst.

Several factors distinguish some denominational responses from others. One factor is the theological resources one's tradition offers to help direct and inform cultural engagement, whether it is an appreciation for the arts, an emphasis on vocation in the Christian life, or the health of its educational institutions. Another factor that shapes the church's practical response is

the background narrative that informs its beliefs about America's religious heritage.[48] If one believes that America was in fact formally established as a Christian nation, or that the Founders established a constitutional framework for religious people particularly, then this functions as a controlling narrative by which evangelicals interpret their role in society and culture. It also leads, intentionally or unintentionally, to much more activist and combative language. Believers feel the practical outcome of their theological convictions and interpretation of history is to "reclaim the culture," "take America back," or "win back the culture."[49]

While the cultural moment in which evangelicals live and their beliefs about the place of religion in society shape the language they use, what ideally exerts more influence on the linguistic choices of evangelical theologians is their confessional tradition and doctrinal commitments. As will be demonstrated more in chapter two, several doctrines informed how cultural engagement was first understood and defined by neo-evangelicals. In the case of transformationalists, the formative doctrinal factors that influence linguistic choices are the influence of Abraham Kuyper and the Dutch Reformed tradition, the doctrine of creation and its concomitant teachings on common grace and the cultural mandate, the lordship of Christ, and inaugurated eschatology. To illustrate how theological distinctions and judgments shape this discussion, one might observe the intramural debate within the contemporary Reformed community about Two Kingdoms theology, what it means, and what its application might be for

[48] This subject is vast in scope, and the contours of the debate are beyond the purposes of this dissertation. However, it is a significant influence on the type of language employed in cultural engagement. For a well-researched recent work on this topic, see John Fea, *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation? A Historical Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster, 2011).

[49] This reclamational and combative language is often associated with figures of the Religious Right such as Jerry Falwell (1933–2007) and Pat Robertson (1930-), yet it is still surfaces in the thought of many Christian authors today. See Ralph Reed, *Awakening: How America Can Turn from Moral and Economic Destruction Back to Greatness* (Brentwood: Worthy, 2014).

contemporary practice.[50] Disagreements can also been seen in the diverse ways Christians identify culture among the loci of Christian theology. Most theologians acknowledge that cultural considerations relate to numerous theological loci, but some tend to receive more emphasis than others. Some locate discussions of culture primarily within the doctrine of creation,[51] while others connect it to eschatology.[52] Still others speak more in terms of christology or lordship,[53] or ecclesiology.[54] There is real theological content associated with the choices being made about what words will be used to describe cultural engagement, and those which receive particular emphasis.

How then are we to make sense of this intersection between practical questions and theological convictions? Many evangelicals have developed ways of translating their theological views about creation, culture, sin, redemption, and other key biblical teachings into models, paradigms, or what will be described below as "grammars." This process of translation involves theological beliefs, practical concerns, definitions of culture, and linguistic choices. For transformationalists, these choices are intended to help answer spiritually significant questions such as, "What is the mission of the church? What would it mean to recognize Christ as Lord in every aspect of life? What does it mean to believe every square inch belongs to Him? How should the church engage the world when it is in a season of ascendancy in cultural influence, or

[50] Three camps or figures seem to be especially implicated in this debate, namely, David VanDrunen and the faculty of Westminster Seminary-California, the Dordt College journal *Pro Rege*, and members of the Reformed and Presbyterian community affiliated with Westminster Theological Seminary, as well as some associated with Reformed Theological Seminary. Emblematic of this intramural debate is John Frame, *The Escondido Theology: A Reformed Response to Two Kingdoms Theology*.

[51] Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959), 25–35.

[52] R. Michael Allen, *Reformed Theology* (New York: T&T Clark 2010), 156–77.

[53] Vern S. Poythress, *The Lordship of Christ: Serving Our Savior All of the Time, in All of Life, with All of Our Heart* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016); Presbyterian theologian John Frame also tends to emphasize these latter doctrinal themes.

[54] Timothy Keller, *Center Church*, 181–90.

when that influence is in decline?" These questions bring together theology and practice, discernment and discourse, and other features of our religious experience that must be held together if we are to have clarity about what cultural engagement really means in the twenty-first century. Clarifying the linguistic significance of this discussion brings clarity to the larger questions of cultural engagement. Engaging *language* as a focal point of reflection before engaging culture aids us in thinking rightly about cultural engagement.

Grammars of Cultural Engagement

Nearly every major Christian theologian since World War II has contributed to the conversation on Christianity and culture. The fact of these contributions as well as the *form* of these contributions supports our emphasis on the formative influence of paradigms on our framing of the questions.

Ever since H. Richard Niebuhr published his watershed book *Christ and Culture*, evangelicals have never thought of culture the same way. The neo-evangelical movement can be dated to the 1940s, but Carl F.H. Henry's 1947 classic *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* marked a decisive turn to the culture as the realm of Christian responsibility for the movement.[55] However, other major Protestant theologians were also writing on this subject during this time. John C. Bennett of Union Theological Seminary published his Richard Lectures from the University of Virginia under the title *Christian Ethics and Social Policy* (1946). Bennett offers some categories for relating Christianity and culture that remarkably parallel the categories

[55] Others would also point to Harold John Ockenga's opening convocation address at Fuller Theological Seminary as sounding the call to cultural responsibility. See "The Challenge to the Christian Culture of the West," in *Fuller Voices: Then and Now*, edited by Russel P. Spittler and Richard J. Mouw (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 2004), 11–19. This address was given in the same year that Henry's book was published.

Niebuhr would offer a mere five years later.[56] Emil Brunner, one the most important and recognizable Protestant theologians of this period, gave the Gifford Lectures between 1946 and 1948, which were first published under the title *Christianity and Civilisation*. In this two-part work, Brunner parallels later evangelical thought by classifying everything from science to education and work to art as "spheres of civilized or cultural life."[57] Then in 1959, Paul Tillich, another theologian of culture, published *Theology of Culture*. This work is a collection of essays that sets forth Tillich's unique emphasis on the religious aspects of what is commonly referred to as culture, such as art, science, and education.

What is the significance of these various works in the context of Niebuhr's influential proposal? At the height of Christendom in America, Christians increasingly offered paradigms, models, and motifs for understanding culture and cultural engagement (even if the term 'engagement' wasn't nearly as ubiquitous then as it is now). This approach is understandable for numerous reasons, not least of which because of their usefulness for analytical and pedagogical purposes. As John Howard Yoder explains, "The story of the past, and especially the story of our mental past, would be chaos, if we were limited to listing names and statements without analyzing them and grouping them. Naming 'types' and 'schools' helps us to do that."[58] Alister McGrath similarly speaks of the "importance of analogy or 'models' as a heuristic stimulus to theological reflection."[59] Some authors speak more of paradigms and strategies, some more in

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[56] John C. Bennett, *Christian Ethics and Social Policy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), 32–87

[57] Emil Brunner, *Christianity and Civilisation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948-9), 127.

[58] John Howard Yoder, "How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned: A Critique of *Christ and Culture*," in *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture*, 43–4. We should note that Yoder's specific assessment of Niebuhr is far from favorable and affirming, though we take this specific remark to apply more generally to the project of trying to make sense of historical inquiry. As someone who frequently engaged in historical analysis in his works, Yoder could make this statement in good faith alongside his specific criticisms of Niebuhr.

[59] Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 18

terms of types, models, or motifs. How might we make sense of these constructions in the context of cultural engagement?

What these constructions have in common is that they rely upon the ability of language—often metaphor—to describe a relationship between two things. In this case, that relationship is the one between Christianity and culture, or the church and the world. Yet these constructions also assume a second feature of language—the ability to prescribe a way of practicing the faith in a specific cultural way, setting, form, or institution. Applying these assumptions to cultural transformation might help illustrate the ambiguities built into the transformationalist approach.

When one speaks of transforming culture, do they primarily have in mind the agency of God, or the agency of man? If 'culture' is taken to be interchangeable with 'society,' then is transformation too ambitious in a post-Christian age? How would transformation differ if applied to a sphere like the arts versus the state? Is transformation primarily a duty we perform or a desired outcome to which we aim? A single word, though biblical, has the capacity to generate these types of questions.

These initial questions are indicative of the importance of choosing language carefully in a way that acknowledges its intimate connection to theological beliefs and practical aims. Moreover, these questions challenge the assumption that a single grammar of cultural engagement is adequate to do justice to the full scope of the biblical texts, the diversity embedded in the word "culture," and the diversity of settings in which God's people find themselves.

In unpacking our principle claim about language's coalescence with theology and practice, I will offer three related claims about language and cultural engagement that the rest of this chapter will seek to demonstrate, then further chapters will illustrate through the story of the rise

of neo-evangelical cultural engagement, and the efforts of several important evangelical authors to recast transformationalism.

First, approaches to cultural engagement might be understood as "grammars." A conceptual tool is needed to categorize linguistic constructions that are diverse, and yet have the same ultimate goal, which is to relate Christianity to culture. It is possible to evaluate types *as types*, such as in the case of Niebuhr.[60] And it is possible to evaluate metaphors *as metaphors*, such as in the case of other authors.[61] However, since there are some common conceptual and practical features that link nearly all mainstream models being proposed by evangelicals, I have employed a linguistic concept with a theological background that is capable of helping us analyze them together. It will be further demonstrated below why this is a legitimate and appropriate theological category.

Second, grammars of cultural engagement have both descriptive and prescriptive qualities, even if they fall short of strict precision on either count. One will note when they survey the range of proposals that some attest to be *describing* a relationship. Others attest to be *prescribing* a specific strategy or outlining a particular set of responsibilities. However, either approach cannot help but entail the other. That is to say, descriptive and prescriptive are artificial distinctions when it comes to this subject. One cannot speak abstractly about a relationship between two entities without also implying some general role, responsibility, or posture that would flow out of that relationship. Similarly, one cannot hope to speak in mere practical terms of a responsibility without a particular type of relationship being presupposed in that set of

[60] John Howard Yoder, "How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned," 43–52.

[61] Daniel Strange, "Rooted and Grounded? The Legitimacy of Abraham Kuyper's Distinction between Church as Institute and Church as Organism, and its Usefulness in Constructing an Evangelical Public Theology," *Themelios* 40, no. 3 (2015): 430–45. Metaphor Theory is another conceptual resource that could be considered a possible tool for informing this larger subject. See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

responsibilities. Critical appropriations of the insights of postliberal theologians and their critics enable us to see that reality and rules, metaphysics and practice, are false dichotomies.

Third, as an outgrowth of thesis two, language is where theology and practice meet. That is to say, valid linguistic constructions for cultural engagement must have both well-considered, propositional, theological content undergirding them, and they must possess a practical, directive element as well. They should be substantial enough to make or reflect some concrete theological claims, and they should be pastorally nuanced enough to offer practical direction to the lived faith of God's people. For this reason, given the varied nature of the social contexts in which God's people find themselves, as well as the diversity of cultural phenomena which constitute our experience in God's world, no single grammar should be taken as the definitive one for all times and places. Even if one's theology never changes, the circumstances in which that theology is lived changes. Accordingly, our theology will shape our practices in every unique circumstance. Therefore, contextual, nuanced, linguistic consideration must govern the employment of grammars in the contemporary church.

Christ and Culture as a Linguistic Enterprise

Language is where one's vision of cultural engagement is linked theologically and practically. This is one way of summarizing the collective emphasis of this dissertation and the theses above. In order to substantiate and illustrate the claims I am advancing about language and grammars of engagement, the linguistic features of the Christianity and culture discussion must be explored in greater depth. First, the centrality of language to Christian mission and ministry will be briefly considered as a way of establishing a practical foundation for the linguistic exploration to follow. Second, some background of the philosophy of language will be briefly considered. Third, the legitimacy of grammar as a theological concept will be demonstrated to

justify our ongoing use of it, especially as it has been appropriated in theology. Finally, the insights of cultural anthropology and linguistics will be considered to further substantiate the centrality of language to guiding and shaping cultural engagement, and its profound influence over thought and life.

Language as a Fundamental to Mission and Discipleship

The orthodox Christian faith is predicated on several fundamental presuppositions about language. First, God has spoken in intelligible language to human beings in history. Second, humanity is able, albeit imperfectly, to receive that communication and understand it. Third, verbal communication through human languages is both a gift to humanity and indispensable for the church's ongoing mission on earth. None of these three assumptions minimize the complexity of language, the impact of sin on human communication, or the numerous hermeneutical challenges associated with language—each of which are fields for extensive research that lies beyond the scope of the present study. Despite the challenges of communication, many theologians who espouse an epistemic realism have not felt too threatened by these challenges.[62] They recognize that an acknowledgment of language's limitations is not *coequal with* the assertion that language is unreliable. For the life of the church and its members, language is indispensable to its ability to execute its mission. We need not be sidetracked by the intricacies of all of the debates on language to acknowledge this claim and examine it.

The late Lutheran theologian Robert Jenson (1930–2017) explains the centrality of language to the church's mission well. He notes that the "church is, in general, concerned for the

[62] E.g. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority After Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016); Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 98–9. Ironically, Vanhoozer cites Steiner's *Real Presences* as a formative influence on him in several of his books.

unity of description and creation in language because the church is the gathering to perform a certain language act, to make and hear a certain address: the church is those who tell and hear the gospel."[63] Language, in other words, is central not only to the Gospel as a series of propositions about what God has done in Christ, but it enables the church to communicate that truth to one another and to the world. Jenson elaborates further,

> The gospel tells about Jesus as the future, and in so doing impresses him on the hearers as a future for which they may live, calls up and evokes the coming Lord as the Lord of their present. Therefore, the gospel can never be only statements about Jesus; the gospel depends on the creative, future-evoking power of language. The church seeks to intensify the future-pointing power of its talk about Jesus; as a result, the church finds itself singing, rhyming, dancing, and playing his story.[64]

Even if one's emphasis is to focus on the use of theological language in communicating propositions, it remains plain to see that preachers preach with words. Teachers teach with words. Language helps believers to pray and sing, and parents to catechize. Words are tools that remain indispensable to Christian worship and liturgy, catechesis and discipleship, ministry and mission. There are actions bound up with the ideas, and practices with the propositions.

Another reason why language is fundamental to these aspects of the church's life is because of the theological-doctrinal-creedal foundations that undergird that life. It is no small accident of history that much of the church's unity and integrity was impacted by the distinction between *ousia* and *homoousios*.[65] Other instances of conflict and debate often come down to the choice of one word or another. Within confessional evangelicalism, "inerrancy" as a concept and term has been a subject of debate since the 1970s, and earlier by some accounts. Still it remains a

[63] Jenson, *Essays in Theology of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 3–4

[64] Jenson, *Essays in Theology of Culture*, 4.

[65] McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 29–30.

disputed subject.[66] Any church body that cares about truth and Scripture cannot escape the nature and function of language. Even a church body that give less explicit attention to those two subjects but cares about worship, liturgy, or most any other aspect of religious life, will find language inescapable.

Having established the centrality of language to the mission and ministry of the church, we now move to some brief background on philosophy and language. This area is pregnant with insight to supply a fuller understanding of how philosophical questions bring clarity to our subject. They can help us in our movement toward a more precise use of the term "grammar," a decidedly linguistic metaphor, as a means of thinking about cultural engagement.

Philosophical Background to Grammars of Engagement

Many historians and philosophers have remarked that there has been something of a turn to language in philosophy in the twentieth century. This so-called linguistic turn[67] was fueled by the contributions of numerous philosophers, including Gottlob Frege (1848–1925), Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), J.L. Austin (1911–1960), Noam Chomsky (b. 1928), Saul Kripke (b. 1940), and most notably Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951). Philosophical discussions of language have created quite a body of literature, but the influence of Wittgenstein looms largest.

Ludwig Wittgenstein is thought by many to be the most significant philosopher of the twentieth century.[68] Though he died by mid-century and only published one book during his life, his thought has left a lasting impression of Anglo-American philosophy, analytic philosophy, and

[66] James R. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett, ed., *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).

[67] The phrase "the linguistic term" was first used by Gustav Bergmann, though others have employed the phrase also. See Gustav Bergmann, *Logic and Reality* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964).

[68] The renowned philosopher and historian Anthony Kenny is perhaps the most notable voice in this chorus of voices who have expressed this opinion. See Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein* (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), xi.

philosophy of language. However, his "impact reaches into such various fields as cognitive psychology, sociology, ethics, literary criticism," and more.[69] Wittgenstein is also unique among major philosophers in that he did not produce a "breakthrough" in ontology, epistemology, or ethics.[70] Rather, he "tried to get clear all kinds of elementary things, like differences between names and concepts, and activities and capacities like 'intending,' 'thinking', and 'believing'."[71] It is probably Wittgenstein's proclivity toward raising questions about word usage that contributed to the "ordinary language philosophy" school of thought with which he is often associated. But the idea Wittgenstein is likely best known for is his notion of "language games." In essence, language is inseparable from its usage or practice, that is, the particular language game in which it is implicated. As opposed to looking for some generalized theory of language and meaning, Wittgenstein's later work focuses on the contextual nature of word usage, how it generates different responses in different situations, and how certain skills are required in acquiring the right use of language. As Adonis Vidu explains, "Wittgenstein's intention was to carefully teach us to 'remember' the unity of language and life."[72]

Wittgenstein's thought in this area is highly debated. His writing tends to be very dense and opaque, especially because of the aphoristic approach he employs in his writing. Yet it is a fair generalization to say that his later thought lends itself to an emphasis on language as contextual, pragmatic, and not bound by conventional modern notions of grammar. Interestingly, this is the precise point where his work connects to theology. In *Philosophical Investigations*, he refers to

[69] Bruce R. Ashford, "Wittgenstein's Theologians? A Survey of Ludwig Wittgenstein's Impact on Theology," in *Journal for the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no.2 (June 2007): 357–75.

[70] His only book published during his lifetime was the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, regarded by many as one of the greatest philosophical treatises of all time.

[71] Paul L. Holmer, *The Grammar of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 17.

[72] Adonis Vidu, *Postliberal Theological Method: A Critical Study* (Milton Keyes, UK: Paternoster, 2005), 165.

theology as a grammar.[73] This idea is thought to originate with him, and in turn has been appropriated by numerous theologians. Indeed, his influence on theology has been striking and significant.[74] It is not crucial to our project here to analyze Wittgenstein's thought in great detail. But his influence lurks in the background of this subject and on many theologians, especially on those who see how language connects to the church's practice. They two become inseparable. As Bruce Ashford notes, "language is continuous with experience—language gives one the categories with which to experience 'experience'."[75] If this application of Wittgenstein is correct, then this reaffirms our contention that language is not a secondary or tertiary concern in cultural engagement. Rather, the language used to describe and prescribe our engagement is bound up with what our experience have been in living the faith in a cultural context.

An additional question posed by a dialogue with Wittgenstein is whether it can be maintained that religious language corresponds to or describes theological reality, or whether it merely has a pragmatic, contextual function in terms of the language game of religious practice. Wittgenstein's later thought reflects the modern anxiety over metaphysics, and theology as ontology. His own relationship with religion was rather complicated on several levels.[76] But needless to say, conservative evangelicals have not been among those sanguine about the appropriation of his work. Michael Harvey helpfully explains the philosophical background of

[73] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, Joachim Schultze (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009), § 371, 373.

[74] Bruce R. Ashford, *Wittgenstein's Impact on Anglo-American Theology: Representative Models of Response to Ludwig Wittegseinstein's Later Writings* (PhD dissertation, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary). The Yale School, comprised of theologians such as Hans Frei, Paul Holmer, and George Lindbeck, are among those best known for appropriating Wittgenstein's thought in theology, along with Fergus Kerr and Stanley Hauerwas.

[75] Bruce R. Ashford, "Wittgenstein's Theologians? A Survey of Ludwig Wittgenstein's Impact on Theology," in *Journal for the Evangelical Theological Society*, 362.

[76] Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 123. Monk notes that the idea that the "essence of religion lay in feelings" and "practices rather than beliefs remained a constant theme in Wittgenstein's thought."

the linguistic challenge we confront when discussing Wittgenstein and language:

> In the wake of Kantian and positivistic critiques of metaphysics and theology, one group of philosophers and theologians has attempted to reconstrue the meaning of religious discourse without making ontological commitments to a mind-independent reality. Another group has refused to abandon such commitments: they remain convinced that religious language is meaningless without them, because it cannot otherwise be 'about' anything objectively real; it merely becomes an expression 'of' religious piety, sentiment, or emotion.[77]

This larger philosophical debate helps us situate the centrality of language to religious discourse, including how we speak about the relationship between the church and the world, or Christianity and culture. Should language be seen as giving us access to timeless truths about the church and the world as abstractions, or should a more practice-oriented view be the focus of the language we use to formulate cultural engagement? Language can and should do both, and the concept of grammar helps to establish this. Just as a grammar governs the operation of a language, the postliberal emphasis on theology as a grammar which governs the practice of the church can link thought and practice. And since language is more often associated with conveying theological truth in traditional Christian theology, a linguistic metaphor such as grammar helps form a more explicit link to actual practice. We now may further consider the theological legitimacy of this concept by surveying the thought of several theologians who utilize the concept of grammar and/or linguistic metaphors. This survey helps illuminate the significance of the revisions at work in the language of cultural engagement for the life of the church, and the possibilities for what further revisions could take place.

Theological Legitimacy of the Concept

Seeing various approaches to cultural engagement as "grammars" may seem like

[77] Michael G. Harvey, "Wittgenstein's Notion of 'Theology as Grammar'," *Religious Studies* 25 (1989): 89–103.

something of a novelty as this term is not traditionally associated with Niebuhr's categories, or any other major proposal on cultural engagement. Here we will focus on establishing the usage the term "grammar" has enjoyed in theology.

This dissertation's title knowingly eludes to the title of George Steiner's 1990 Gifford Lectures, *Grammars of Creation*. Steiner (b. 1929) uses this term to refer in part to the "articulate organization of perception, reflection and experience."[78] He is especially interested in the emergence of the future tense and what this might suggest about the nature of hope. Though Steiner utilizes the concept of grammar in *Grammars of Creation*, *Real Presences* has more of a direct thematic bearing on our subject here.[79] Steiner writes of "the tenor of *trust* which underlies, which literally underwrites the linguistic-discursive substance of our Western, Hebrew-Attic experience."[80] "This instauration of trust," he writes, "is that between word and world."[81] Steiner not only uses the term grammar, but in his overall theological project he is concerned about the link between word and world that all of our language is predicated on, at least in part. This of course has implications not just for everyday language, but theological language or doctrinal formulations. Approaches to cultural engagement may not typically be seen as rising to this level, and yet in some ecclesial traditions they very much do.[82] After all, many of the terms used in doctrinal formulations are not explicitly biblical, but rather they are extra-biblical terms used to describe biblical teaching. Examples might include "Trinity,"

[78] George Steiner, *Grammars of Creation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 6

[79] We might also note Steiner's *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975). I only came to this title late in my research, but Steiner discusses Wittgenstein's thought at length in this book.

[80] George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 89.

[81] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 89.

[82] An example of this might be seen among many Two Kingdoms adherents. Whether Lutheran or Reformed, they tend to speak of this view in terms of confessional identity and not merely a "practical strategy."

"rapture," or "two realms."

A second notable theologian who discusses the relationship between theology and language is Alister McGrath (b. 1953). In *The Genesis of Doctrine*, adapted from his 1990 Bampton Lectures, McGrath's gives extensive attention to the way that linguistic formulations of doctrine reflect hermeneutical assumptions, views about historical appropriation, and metaphysical commitments. At the heart of his argument is the observation that the genesis of doctrine lies partly in "the perceived need to transfer theological reflection from commitment to the limits and defining conditions and vocabulary of the New Testament itself, in order to preserve its commitment to the New Testament proclamation."[83] McGrath is not only making an historical observation, but he is endorsing the use of extra-biblical language to preserve New Testament teaching. While McGrath does not offer "grammar" as part of his own formal theological argument, he does find much commendable about it as he sees it in the work of George Lindbeck. McGrath engages at length with Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*, to which we shall return below. However, for now we can simply note two further aspects of McGrath's argument that are pertinent here.

First, McGrath stresses that, "there is a creative dialectic between the historical and descriptive on the one hand, and the theological and prescriptive on the other."[84] When it comes to doctrinal claims, efforts to separate the two are errors arising from misunderstanding the genesis of doctrine and the nature of doctrinal criticism. Second, McGrath argues that doctrine as a historical phenomenon has four major dimensions: it is a social demarcator, it is generated by and subsequently interprets the Christian narrative, it interprets experience, and it makes truth

[83] McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 7.

[84] McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, ix.

claims.[85] Doctrine is, if anything a linguistic construction. Yet it functions in all four of these ways in the existence of the church. McGrath is an important voice to validate the notion of language as a grammar guiding the life of the church. He affirms the validity of seeing doctrine as having a "regulative function," as being a "grammar" that "describes the regulatory language of the Christian idiom."[86] Yet he unequivocally stresses that, "there is an ineradicable cognitive element to Christian doctrine."[87]

Another notable theologian who has used the term grammar is John Henry Newman (1801–1890) in his *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870).[88] Newman is best known for his association with the Oxford Movement, and his very public transition from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism. Though Newman was a churchman, this work is as philosophical as it is theological. While it does serve as a sort of apology for the faith, the *Grammar of Assent* explores the nature of knowledge, especially the problematic epistemology inherent in empiricism. Newman felt it is ultimately too restrictive and narrow for everyday life, even if some of it wasn't technically incorrect. Moreover it requires too high a standard for assent to meaningful propositions.[89]

Paul Holmer (1916–2004), a philosophical theologian, uses the concept of grammar in *The Grammar of Faith*. Ludwig Wittgenstein was crucial to Holmer's work, as tends to be true for many theologians who appropriate the concept of grammar. For Holmer and Lindbeck, this is

[85] McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 37.

[86] McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 28–9.

[87] McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 75.

[88] John Henry Cardinal Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1992).

[89] Newman's contribution is included simply due to the notoriety of his work, which includes the term grammar. His work is less important to this argument than are the works of other figures named here.

especially the case.[90] Holmer shares an apparent concern of Wittgenstein's, which was that the Christian faith had been distorted by preoccupation with metaphysics. Holmer not only credits Wittgenstein for the use of the term grammar,[91] but he begins his work by citing this term as one he had long been intrigued by, first spotting the term in the work of Graham Wallas (1858-1932), a British political science professor who spoke of the "grammar of politics."[92] He also points to Karl Pearson's *Grammar of Science* as an example of using the term in philosophy.[93] But ultimately Holmer is a true "Wittgensteinian" who appropriates his thought to an extent that this author feels incompatible with Christian orthodoxy.[94]

George Lindbeck (b. 1923) is by far the most important theologian who has brought the term "grammar" into distinct theological usage. Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine* has been a touchstone for numerous theological dialogues and responses since its publication in 1984.[95] Lindbeck outlines what he sees as two failed paradigms for theology. First, he describes and critiques the so-called cognitive-propositional theory of doctrine. This perspective, as Lindbeck describes it, would be more associated with traditional conservative theology. It emphasizes the propositional aspects of Christian doctrine, which inevitably creates tensions in the face of competing religious traditions. Second, he describes and critiques the experiential-expressive theory, which would be most closely associated with Protestant liberalism. Doctrines are not

[90] Holmer and Lindbeck were both theologians who taught at Yale Divinity School for decades.

[91] We may observe at this point that the title of one of Wittgenstein's works was *Philosophical Grammar* (Malden: Blackwell, 1974).

[92] Holmer, *The Grammar of Faith*, ix.

[93] Holmer, *The Grammar of Faith*, ix.

[94] Bruce R. Ashford, "Wittgenstein's Theologians? A Survey of Ludwig Wittgenstein's Impact on Theology," 357–75. Ashford categorizes the theologians who interact with Wittgenstein in three categories: Wittgensteinians, users, and rejecters. See Ashford, 361.

[95] George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville: Westminster, 1984). Hauerwas has arguably perpetuated Lindbeck's doctrinal vision as broadly as anyone else employed at an American religious institution.

seen to convey propositional truth content, but instead they are seen "subjectively as symbols revealing existential orientations or feelings."[96] He sees both as inadequate historically, and unable to account for competing doctrinal claims in ecumenical contexts.[97]

Instead of these approaches, Lindbeck offers what he calls the "cultural-linguistic model." Drawing from disciplines as varied as philosophy of language, sociology, and anthropology, Lindbeck offers this approach as a way of providing a directive or regulative theory of doctrine that is concerned more for the religious life of the church than metaphysical claims. Lindbeck acknowledges Wittgenstein as a stimulus to his thinking, employing the concept of a language game in arguing for Lindbeck's alternative. Lindbeck offers his approach as a way of focusing on "deeply interiorizing the rituals and skills of the cultural-linguistic community."[98] Lindbeck does not mean to suggest that religious claims are devoid of cognitive truth or experiences. However, Christians are implicated in the biblical story and should focus on interpreting their lives through that story.[99] Lindbeck's proposal revises the way most confessional Christians (transformationalists included) understand the faith. He explains,

> a religion can be viewed as a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought…It is not primarily an array of beliefs about the true and the good (though it may involve these), or a symbolism expressive of basic attitudes, feelings, or sentiments (though these will be generated). Rather it is similar to an idiom that makes possible the description of realities, the formulation of beliefs, and the experiencing of inner attitudes, feelings, and sentiments. Like a culture or language, it is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities. It comprises a vocabulary of discursive and nondiscursive symbols together with a distinctive logic or grammar in terms of which this vocabulary can be meaningfully

[96] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 65.

[97] Lindbeck does also offer another often overlooked option which is a hybrid of the first two. See *Nature of Doctrine*, 16–17.

[98] Ronald T. Mitchener, *Postliberal Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 67.

[99] Mitchener, *Postliberal Theology,* 66.

> deployed. Lastly, just as a language (or "language game," to use Wittgenstein's phrase) is correlated with a form of life, and just as a culture has both cognitive and behavioral dimensions, so it is also the case of a religious tradition.[100]

The cultural-linguistic theory of doctrine then manages to be both descriptive (in one respect) while also pragmatic. It narrates the church's existence as a distinct community whose theology is much like a grammar, designed to regulate its life as grammar does human languages. It guides the church's preaching and prayer. It makes intellgible the world through the lens of its living out the story of Christ.[101] However, as a descriptive approach to doctrine it does not offer the robust type of propositional truth claims inherent in historic Christian theology.

Lindbeck's thought is not without its problems. It has a tendency to fall prey to a dichotomy that often emerges in philosophy between a more propositional view of language, and a more pragmatic view. The first is sometimes connected to logical positivism (including Wittgenstein's earlier thought) and the second is usually associated with more contextual understandings of language and what it does. Philosophers like J.L. Austin and John Searle would be associated with this position, as well as Wittgenstein's later thought.[102] This is significant because while his use of the term "grammar" is similar to the manner in which we are employing it, it tends to deemphasize the cognitive or propositional elements of traditional doctrine in favor of a more practice-oriented view. Even as the cultural-linguistic approach has a descriptive element, it does more to describe the church's *reception and response* to the biblical narrative than it does the *actual meaning and referent* of that narrative. Our approach to language

[100] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 33.

[101] Many of the themes running through Lindbeck also can be seen in the work of Stanley Hauerwas, another theologian who has appropriated Ludwig Wittgenstein's thought.

[102] Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) and *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) constitute two distinct phases in his life in which he transitions from a more positivist view of language to the view he would ultimately become best known for.

and cultural engagement argues that valid grammars hold together the theological referents of religious language and the practical function of that language.

A final theologian who is best identified with the postliberal tradition (either as a proponent or critic) is Stanley Hauerwas (1940–). Hauerwas was a student or colleague of many of the Yale theologians associated with postliberal theology. However, unlike the rest of these figures, his teaching career was not spent at Yale, but primarily at the University of Notre Dame and Duke Divinity School.[103] Hauerwas is best associated with his scathing critique of Constantinianism, his espousal of pacifism and virtue ethics, and emphasis on the practices of the church. His writings have been voluminous, and have elicited a number of scholarly reviews and responses in the form of monographs, articles, and dissertations.[104] His relevance to our argument concerns his emphasis on the Christian's use of language, his indebtedness to Wittgenstein, and the centrality of practices to Christian life.[105] We will briefly discuss the intersection of these three themes.

These three themes surface in Hauerwas' work throughout his career. However, it is interesting to note how his emphasis on language becomes increasingly explicit over time. This emphasis and its relationship to practice is seen in *Performing the Faith* (2004)[106], *Working with Words* (2011)[107], *Approaching the End* (2013)[108], and most recently in *The Work of Theology*

[103] Hauerwas retired from full-time teaching in 2013.

[104] For an introduction to Hauerwas' work, see Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael G. Cartwright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

[105] Brad Kallenberg has written a dissertation on Hauerwas's use of Wittgenstein, especially as it relates to ethics. In its published form, see Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar: Changing the Postmodern Subject* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).

[106] Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004).

[107] Stanley Hauerwas, *Working with Words: On Learning to Speak Christian* (Eugene: Cascade, 2011).

[108] Stanley Hauerwas, *Approaching the End: Eschatological Reflections on Church, Politics, and Life* (Grand

(2015).[109] I mention these titles in chronological fashion to make a point. It seems something of a truism that theologians' ideas mature over time, and that only when we view their work over a period of time do key themes and emphases become more transparent. We also might say that the root issues which animate all of their work become even more explicit. For Hauerwas, the subject always returns to how the church practices the faith and speaks as Christians. "One of the essential tasks of the theologian," he says, "is to teach speech; it is to teach Christians how to speak Christian."[110] Hauerwas makes this point in numerous ways, so much so that he has sometimes been accustomed to accusations of pragmatism.[111] In a qualified way, he is willing to accept that label, provided he may define it on his terms. His strenuous effort to never separate theology from how Christians live gives the impression that ethics are primary for him, while theology is secondary. Yet Hauerwas rejects that dichotomy altogether.[112] He explains that it has always been his aim to "show that theology is a performative discipline."[113] Central to performing that discipline is learning the discourse of the Christian faith, a discourse that is embedded in the practices of the Christian church. Christian theology cannot be separated from the Christian community practicing its faith together, using the language of Scripture which only makes sense in that web of practices.[114]

Hauerwas, like many of the postliberal theologians surveyed, can often be difficult to interpret at times. This is partly because they speak of the relationship between theology,

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Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

[109] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

[110] Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology*, 111.

[111] Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology*, 3.

[112] Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology*, 269–71.

[113] Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology*, 271.

[114] Michael G. Cartwright, "Stanley Hauerwas's Essays in Theological Ethics: A Reader's Guide," in Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, 641.

practice, and language in unconventional ways. A more conventional, simplistic account might work this way: A theological truth is derived from a biblical text through exegesis. That truth is then formulated into a doctrinal statement using language supplied by the biblical text and/or the ecclesial tradition within which one belong. Then one may deliberate on what, if any, practical application that may have for the Christian life or church ministry. Theologians like Hauerwas complicate this picture by suggesting that the church believes as it says and does, regardless of what confessional statement they may have. The church's language is unapologetically Christian, and speaking that language and being formed by its practices are as integral to its life as a church as any grand theory it may have about the Bible, or any relevance it may have to the surrounding culture. Theologians working with the concept of grammar, then, tend to be especially focused on the link between language and practice. Though some postliberal theologians and others influenced by Wittgenstein overemphasize this at the expense on traditional propositional truths, theologians like Steiner, McGrath, and others help provide a more balanced account that shows how Christian doctrinal statements can in fact bring together confessional belief and practical emphases.

Though we have identified some of the theologians who have given special emphasis to the concept of grammar or language, linking a linguistic idea to the task of theology, there are two additional theologians who have provided further examples of how linguistic decisions are pertinent to theological work. The first theologian provides an example of one might appropriate an emphasis on Christian doctrine and language as directive, while not diminishing the cognitive or propositional claims being made by theological language. The second theologian provides a specific example of how careful attention to the use of language in relation to Christian theology and practice can enable Christians to be consistent, clear, and chastened in the words and images

they use.

Kevin J. Vanhoozer (b. 1957) is a theologian who has given extensive attention to language, doctrinal theory, hermeneutics, and metaphor. Vanhoozer is helpful and important to our argument for two main reasons. First, he offers one of the more substantial engagements with Lindbeck's influential theory of doctrine. His aim is to revise it, giving proper attention to the "performative context of propositions."[115] Vanhoozer fears that Lindbeck stresses the community's performance of the truth at the expense of the truth as it is given in the scriptural narrative. This notion of performance connected to biblical narrative underpins Vanhoozer's "canonical-linguistic" proposal for theology. This is the second reason he is valuable to our project here, because *The Drama of Doctrine* offers a "postconservative, canonical-linguistic theology and a directive theory of doctrine that roots theology more firmly in Scipture while preserving Lindbeck's emphasis on practice."[116]

Vanhoozer believes that the canon of Scripture should have more purchase over theological reflection than one's ecclesial community. This in no way minimizes the importance of the community's engagement with the Word. Vanhoozer's proposal utilizes the metaphor of the theater, showing where there is a drama unfolding in the text of Scripture. But that drama continues in "the church as God uses Scripture to address, edify, and confront its readers."[117] Vanhoozer develops this imagery across nearly 500 pages, helping the reader to see how the theater metaphor entails "theology (dramaturgy), Scripture (the script), theological understanding

[115] Mitchener, *Postliberal Theology*, 137.

[116] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster, 2005), xiii.

[117] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 17.

(performance), the church (company), and the pastor (director)."[118] This approach helps believers see how "doctrine, far from being unrelated to life, serves the church by directing its members in the project of wise living, to the glory of God."[119]

Vanhoozer's contribution, then, avoids the excesses of Lindbeck's "theology as grammar" idea by using the metaphor of the theater. In this scheme, authority is anchored in "the narrative depiction of Christ," not the church's "*use* of this narrative."[120] God's communication of himself through the drama of Scripture must be kept in the focus of the church's life. Only when the divine drama is the focus can the church's performance of the script be faithful. This in no way minimizes the church's commitment to the theological grammar which governs its life. But this is secondary, a response to the Divine prerogative.

Robert Jenson, our final theologian, provides a helpful example of attention to language in a 1983 essay in a collection of essays on theology and culture. At a symposium on religious ritual, he delivered a paper on what may be described as the "theology of ritual" with respect to man as a "praying animal." Some of his fellow participants described ritual as a form of "human adaptation." Jenson takes issue with the term adaptation, for he says that in normal usage this term "is controlled by the metaphor of evolution."[121] He expresses concerns about this as a root metaphor since it is "incompatible with use of the Christian gospel's root metaphor, its identification of God by the resurrection of a crucified one, that is, by the most radical possible disruption of continuity and development."[122] For this reason, Jenson proceeds to offer a counter

[118] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, xii.

[119] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, xii.

[120] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 172.

[121] Jenson, *Essays in Theology of Culture*, 118.

[122] Jenson, *Essays in Theology of Culture*, 118.

proposal and refers to ritual as "humanizing *re*volution" instead of "human adaptation."[123] He argues that this is in better keeping with the nature of the gospel.

The type of criticism Jenson levels here is one that so often causes theologians to be accused of playing word games, or being too worried about semantics. Yet if semantics does in fact refer to the meaning of words, metaphors are to be taken seriously (if not literally). This then has significant application to the church and to theology, two enterprises that are nothing if not predicated on words that have been spoken by God, and that continue to be spoken by man. These words include how we speak about God, His Word, as well as those we use to speak of our responsibility to His world.

This survey of some theological appropriations of the idea of grammar and emphases on language helps us to see where there is a reaction in late twentieth century theology against some reductionist accounts of doctrine.[124] Many accounts emphasize ontological referents of theological language at the expense of the church's practice and embodiment of biblical truth. Yet there is nothing required of the notion of grammar or of language itself which must treat this as an either/or issue. We can affirm both the cognitive-intellectual dimensions of language, as well as the directive-practical aspects of it. To apply this to our study of transformation, to take "transforming the world" seriously as a theological statement is to take it serious *linguistically.* It implies actions or practices of the church or individual Christian changing the world that is subject to be evaluated biblically and theologically in light of what Scripture actually says about transformation—whether of believers, or the cosmos. To paraphrase our previous questions above, is transformation a mandate or outcome? Is it a necessary inference of the biblical data?

[123] Jenson, *Essays in Theology of Culture*, 119. Emphasis his.

[124] Another important critique of postliberal theology can be found in Adonis Vidu, *Postliberal Theological Method: A Critical Study*.

Additionally, is the notion of transformation consistent with a biblical account of the world, human culture, and its redemption? To paraphrase a familiar Wittgensteinian aphorism, transformationalists have been held captive by a familiar picture of culture. This picture assumes culture is somehow stable, inert, and an abstraction from where the Christian stands. It lays waiting to be engaged, changed, and transformed. However, the recent shift in grammars reflects uneasiness about the rhetoric of transformationalism. Regardless of the stated reasons, these anxieties and concerns are instantiated in our decisions about language.

Additional insights from cultural anthropology and linguistics further support the contention that there is an important link between language and practice, thought and life. These insights are significant to this argument since many of these contradict the dominant theories about language that have been present in academia for the second half of the twentieth century. Considering this stream of data and argument may perhaps better explain why it is so common for certain associations to be established in our minds when it comes to metaphors of cultural engagement, such as the examples provided above about Transformation.

Insights from Cultural Anthropology and Linguistics

It may seem far afield to venture into cultural anthropology and linguistics in order to understand grammars of cultural engagement. However, being aware of an internal debate among philosophers of language, modern linguistics, and field researchers yields important insights into how our use of language *says* something and *does* something.

Noam Chomsky is the most important modern figure who has contributed to the scholarly theories about language. Perhaps most notably, Chomsky advanced an idea known as Universal Grammar.[125] This concept entails two claims about language: First, language is more formally a

[125] It should be noted that while thematically this use of the term "grammar" is related to the overall

result of genetics than it is culture or environment. That all human languages appear to have some universal properties, such as nouns and verbs, seems to support this conclusion. Second, deep structural features seem to govern all human languages, despite their diversity. Among these commonalities is a grammatical feature known as recursion, which is essentially the ability for a sentence to be embedded within another. The finer points of this theory are not pertinent to our argument here. However, the Chomskyan school of thought is important because it has largely won the day in its particular field. It tends to rely more heavily on mathematics than it does field research for analyzing language, thus making it more akin to the philosophical paradigm found in earlier twentieth century philosophy of language.[126]

The work of Daniel Everett has posed the greatest threat to the Chomskyan school of thought. Everett (b. 1951) was a trained linguist who, for most of his career, worked among Amazonian peoples, namely the Pirahãs.[127] It was in his decades of work among them, studying their culture and seeking to translate Scripture into their language that led to his greatest breakthroughs.[128] Central to his contribution is the challenge he has mounted against Chomsky and his idea of Universal Grammar.[129] Everett explains that there is "enormous disagreement" about where language came from among linguists, psychologists, anthropologists, and philosophers. Some claim is it was discovered by chance, some suggest it was invented, while

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discussion of cultural engagement, it is not used by Chomsky or linguists in the same sense I am employing it.

[126] These ideas would be more akin to those found in Wittgenstein's earlier writings.

[127] Everett catalogs his work among this tribe and his linguistic research largely in two books. See Daniel L. Everett, *Don't Sleep, There Are Snakes: Life and Language in the Amazonian Jungle* (New York: Pantheon, 2008); *Language: The Cultural Tool* (New York: Vintage, 2012). Pirahãs is pronounced "pee-da-HAN."

[128] Everett was originally doing his linguistic research as part of his larger calling as a missionary. He eventually turned away from the faith.

[129] Daniel L. Everett, "Cultural Constraints on Grammar and Cognition in Pirahã," *Current Anthropology*, vol. 46, no. 4 (2005): 621–46.

others say it is genetically encoded.[130] Everett argues that the rules of grammar are not innate, arising from some genetic property. Rather, language is a *cultural* tool. Everett summarizes the larger debate and situates his view this way:

> Linguistics, psychologists, anthropologists, biologists, and philosophers tend to divide into those who believe that human biologist is endowed with a language-dedicated genetic program and those who believe instead that human biology and the nature of the world provide general mechanisms that allow us the flexibility to acquire a large array of general skills and abilities, of which language is but one.[131]

Everett does not deny that there are biological and genetic properties of human nature that make it possible for humans to acquire language. However, he does not believe that the properties of language can be ascribed to one gene, and he does not believe that language is primarily a product of biology. Instead, language is largely a product of culture. "Each language," he says, "is a history of the symbiosis of grammar, mind, and culture."[132] He fully acknowledges that, "there is no simple or uncontroversial theory about the interaction between language and thought. Life, language, and thought have a complex interrelationship. Answers will not always be neat."[133] So what are the live options for best explaining this relationship? In *Don't Sleep, There Are Snakes*, Everett briefly surveys six theories or paradigms for understanding the relationship between grammar, cognition, and culture. One theory known as the "Sapir-Whorf hypothesis" suggests that grammar shapes cognition. By "cognition," Everett essentially means, "the cerebral or mental structures necessary for thought, or thought itself."[134] In its simplest form then, this theory suggests that language or the way we speak shapes what is

[130] Everett, *Language: The Cultural Tool*, 4.

[131] Everett, *Language: The Cultural Tool*, 5.

[132] Everett, *Language: The Cultural Tool*, 9.

[133] Everett, *Language: The Cultural Tool*, 266.

[134] Everett, *Don't Sleep, There Are Snakes*, 221.

thought, not the other way around as we typically think in the Western world. Language structures thought, even if the precise structuring is not entirely known.[135] Everett is careful to point out that there are stronger or weaker forms of this theory. The stronger version asserts that language itself is shaping cognition. Language controls thought.[136] Thus, sometimes this hypothesis is also referred to as "linguistic determinism."[137]

There are also weaker forms of Sapir-Whorf that Everett believes can be supported by psycholinguistic research. In a weaker form, this view simply claims that language influences how we see the world and in turn respond to it. The weakest view suggests that language can influence how we think "in highly specific, real-time tasks."[138] The theory or hypothesis remains highly disputed. An additional component that would have to be factored into such a theory would be how language, if it is in fact a cultural tool, is generated by cultural context and necessity. Everett explains that, "language is how we talk. Culture is how we live."[139] Moreover, "language has been shaped in its very foundation by our socio-cultural needs."[140] Yet it remains a significant task for researchers to better discover what this shaping entails. Many agree that there exists a dynamic interaction between culture, experience, language, and thought. But competing theories exist as to how best to define and state that relationship.

How might these insights from cultural anthropology and linguistics advance our

[135] Proponents of Speech-Act Theory join Everett in this assertion, even if they do so for different purposes. Consider John Searle's insight: "What we have is not just the mind on one side and language on the other, but mind and language enriching each other until, for adult human beings, the mind is linguistically structured." See Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society: Philosophy in the Real World* (New York: Basic, 1998), 152.

[136] Everett, *Language: The Cultural Tool*, 255.

[137] Everett, *Language: The Cultural Tool*. 255.

[138] Everett, *Language: The Cultural Tool*, 255.

[139] Everett, *Language: The Cultural Tool*, 6.

[140] Everett, *Language: The Cultural Tool*, 218.

argument? They yield further insight into the formative influence of life and culture over language, and language over thought. If language is indeed formative in some of the ways that Everett and other researchers' work suggests, then this means that our use of certain grammars of engagement ('grammar' as we have defined it for our purposes) may have a subtle, often overlooked bearing on the way Christians envision culture and come to engage culture. What type of attitude or posture toward culture might language such as "impact," "change," "restore," "reclaim," or "transform" engender? Andy Crouch and James Davison Hunter, whose work will be evaluated in chapter three, both call attention to the power dynamics that are often at work in the way Christians engage culture. Can the exertion of power in cultural affairs be abstracted from the ways those cultural affairs are perceived? Can those perceptions be abstracted from the *language* used to convey those perspectives? The insights we have garnered from Wittgenstein, postliberal theology and its critics, and cultural anthropology and linguistics suggests that this cannot be done.

Language, Practice, and Theology: Moving Forward

Pastors and churchmen have much at stake in this debate. This discussion bears interesting similarities to *lex orandi, lex credendi.*[141] Historical theologians, liturgiologists, and biblical scholars have long affirmed that a liturgical tradition predated the formulation of most creeds and a biblical canon. This represents an interesting dialectical relationship between worship and belief. Even after a biblical canon was recognized, and many of the ancient creeds were formulated, the church's worship has always shaped the way it believes. The work of theologians such as James K.A. Smith, Amy Plantinga Pouw, Dorothy Bass, and Craig Dystra further

[141] This saying is usually credited to Prosper of Aquitaine. See Frank Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 46–47.

illuminate how Christian practices give rise to certain beliefs.[142] If *lex orandi lex credendi* is not just an historical phenomenon, but an appropriate source for theological reflection, then it seems to support the larger argument being advanced here. Such an argument, if applied to grammars of cultural engagement, would lead to a deeper analysis of the assumptions in our language, the practices that language engenders, and the beliefs entailed in our language. It points to a dialectic between rhetoric and action, theology and practice, ideas and conduct.

There are other streams of philosophical and literary theory that further support the contention in view here, that language has a dynamic and formative impact on its users. Speech-Act Theory has increasingly made inroads into Christian theology, further heightening the attention of evangelical scholars to what language *does*.[143] Many figures in the Western political tradition have also believed that language does things aside from simply convey information. Edmund Burke (1729–1797) thought language was highly performative and rhetorical, and not merely about conveying information.[144] J.G. Herder (1744–1803), among others, paved the way for the inseparability of language and thought. Though Eagleton explains that it did not originate with Herder, he did much to advance it and anticipate it in later philosophers.[145] Those philosophers include those like Wittgenstein, who in turned influenced a generation of theologians. While that influence is not unvarnished or above critique, the overall impact is a

[142] James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009); Amy Plantinga Pouw, "Attending to the Gaps Between Beliefs and Practices," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Dorothy Bass, Miroslav Volf (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," in Volf and Bass, *Practicing Theology*.

[143] E.g. Abraham Kuruvilla, "David *v.* Goliath: What is the Author *Doing* with What He is *Saying*?" in *Journal for the Evangelical Theological Society* 58, no. 3 (September 2015): 487–506. Speech-Act Theory is also to be found in the work of Kevin Vanhoozer.

[144] Eagleton, *Culture*, 80–81.

[145] Eagleton, *Culture*, 81.

closer attention to language and its intersection with Christian thought and practice.

We might summarize our findings in this chapter as such: The life of the church is constituted by its formal creedal affirmations and its embodied practices, which inevitably lead to the construction of an approach to relating to the world. I am calling these linguistic constructions "grammars," paralleling a fairly extensive pattern of usage of this term for theological purposes. Grammars here refer to linguistic structures or models that shape our thought about a relationship between two phenomena, and entail the responsibilities of a Christian. In other words, they don't merely describe a relationship, but they prescribe one. As such, grammars best serve the church's life when those grammars embody biblical claims and responsibilities. For this reason, all grammars should be subject to a careful reflection to ensure that they satisfy both a requirement of corresponding to faithful doctrinal belief, and a correspondence to faithful practice.

Toward a Definition and Critique of Transformation

The following chapters provide our data set for the influence of rhetoric in cultural engagement. To understand the terms and concepts that animate transformationalism, we must first explore the history of neo-evangelicalism. Chapter two surveys the life and legacy of Carl F.H. Henry, the practical contributions of Charles Colson, and the Kuyperian framework of Albert Wolters. These three figures help us narrate this history in a way that sets the parameters of evangelical views of culture and cultural engagement. They also help us see how adequately their language reflected both theological belief and Christian practice.

Chapter three introduces some of the framers of the contemporary discussion of cultural engagement. Surveying their thought will help illuminate the way in which new grammars of engagement are emerging, which in reality remain within the theological framework of

mainstream evangelical transformationalism. Yet these proposals constitute significant linguistic innovations that show how rhetoric is as central to this discussion as stated belief. These efforts, it will be shown, are attempts to save and reform the concept of transformation. Moreover, because there is no one grammar that speaks to the entirety of cultural phenomena and faithful postures, we will see where each of these offer something positive to the discussion, even if they are not sufficiently explicit about the role of language in this subject.

Chapter four will then introduce two highly influential authors who offer significant contributions to modern Reformed evangelical thought. Both are said to be "fixers" of Niebuhr's thought, when in fact they seek to save evangelical cultural engagement through biblical, theological, and practical balance. They also avoid false dichotomies when it comes to choosing grammars. But more explicit emphasis on the formative power of language would enable their proposals to offer assistance to the wider evangelical church as it tries to reform cultural engagement. It would also show an acceptance of the claims I am arguing for about the matrix of language, theology and practice, and how that matrix gives rise to evaluation of what our cultural engagement assumes.

CHAPTER TWO

THE EVANGELICAL STORY: FOUNDATIONS OF TRANSFORMATIONALISM

Defining evangelical identity has become something of a cottage industry in the last two decades.[1] The history of the movement itself, another fairly well documented field, is predicated on identifying what does and does not constitute evangelical identity.[2] It is important to our project to offer some tentative definition here since our argument assumes (1) that evangelicalism has operated with one primary grammar of cultural engagement, and (2) we are in fact analyzing the linguistic proposals offered by actual evangelicals or evangelical-influencers. Answering the question, then, of what constitutes an evangelical becomes a necessary methodological step in establishing our claims.

The church historian George Marsden famously commented that an evangelical is "anyone who likes Billy Graham."[3] Though this is by no means a serious social scientific claim, it does hint at the fact that American evangelical scene cannot be understood apart from the profound and sweeping influence of the evangelical Billy Graham (b. 1918), of whom we will make further reference below.[4] Graham's ministry and those associated with him certainly embody

[1] Kenneth J. Stewart, *In Search of Ancient Roots: The Christian Past and Evangelical Identity Crisis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2017); Andrew David Naselli and Collin Hansen, ed., *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2011).

[2] Owen Strachan, *Awakening the Evangelical Mind: An Intellectual History of the Neo-Evangelical Movement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015); Douglas A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003); George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

[3] Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, 6.

[4] Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon & Schuster,

some of the features that most reputable historians have linked specifically to evangelical identity.[5] The British historian David Bebbington has offered the most lasting and discussed definition, which we will use as a basic framework. Known today as the "Bebbington Quadtrilateral," he identifies

> four qualities that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion: *conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.[6]

Bebbington explains these terms and gives examples of them from evangelical history, but he qualifies his use of them. He of all people is aware that the term "evangelical" has a unique context and sense in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Moreover, in the British context and American context there were always differences. While acknowledging such distinctions and the fact that different generations exhibited these characteristics differently, he contends that they all still displayed them.[7] "Variations there have certainly been in statements by Evangelicals about what they regard as basic. Here is nevertheless a common core that has remained remarkably constant down the centuries."[8]

A second, sometimes contested adjective that modifies "evangelical" is "Reformed." By introducing this term we don't mean to suggest that our analysis is especially concerned with this term as a historical phenomenon. Rather, we are making reference to those evangelicals who not only self-identify as evangelical, but also as "Calvinists" or "Reformed Christians." Though

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2017), 169–208.

[5] Grant Wacker, *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of the Nation* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2014).

[6] David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2–3.

[7] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 3.

[8] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 4.

evangelicalism has always including a range of theological traditions, the Calvinist stream has been most prodigious in its intellectual output, and thus has been extremely influential. This is no less true in relation to the academic and most theologically substantial work on cultural engagement.

Our goal in this chapter is describe the emergence of neo-evangelicalism as a movement in America, giving special attention to its theology and aims as it concerns cultural engagement. This will help establish the foundational grammar of transformation that later proposals seek to save through revision. We will consider the life and legacy of Carl F.H. Henry as providing the foundational principles that animated evangelical cultural engagement over the half century following its publication, and the ways that was linguistically formulated. Additionally, we will consider the life and legacy of Charles W. Colson. His legacy serves as one influential example of the neo-evangelical approach to culture, and one under the decided influence of the original vision of the neo-evangelicals. The final figure we will consider is Albert Wolters, author of a highly influential modern book on culture, and representative of the Dutch Reformed theological tradition which has significantly accented and shaped modern evangelical thought on culture.

As we survey the contributions of these three figures and their thought, we will gain a better understanding of the theological grammar guiding evangelical cultural engagement during the last 50-75 years. We will also consider some of the tensions in the transformationalist grammar that have left it vulnerable to critique both from within the movement and from outside.

Carl Henry and Neo-Evangelicalism

Carl F.H. Henry (1913–2003), sometimes called the Dean of Evangelical Theology, is central to the story of neo-evangelicalism in America. Henry, the son of German immigrants, did not become a Christian until after adolescence. Yet his work as a theologian garnered attention

relatively early in his career. He earned two doctorates in the 1940s, a reflection of both his own erudition as well as his conviction that intellectual pursuits were central to the evangelical project in American society. A large part of Henry's career was spent trying to help raise funds for a prestigious Christian research university.[9] Henry's discontent with the state of evangelical higher education is ironic since he was instrumental to the founding of Fuller Theological Seminary, as well as a visiting professor at numerous other Christian colleges and seminaries. He helped found other evangelical institutions also, including the Evangelical Theological Society and the Institute for Advanced Christian Studies. Three leading evangelical seminaries have institutes named in honor of him.[10] Still, Henry is likely better known for his editorship of the neo-evangelical publication *Christianity Today*, which was founded by the world-famous evangelist Billy Graham. Henry was the founding editor and oversaw its work from its inception in 1956 until 1968. The opening editorial captures the spirit of Henry's earlier project begun in the 1940s:

> Christianity Today will apply the biblical revelation to the contemporary social crisis, by presenting the implications of the total Gospel message for every area of life. This, Fundamentalism has often failed to do. Christian laymen are becoming increasingly aware that the answer to the many problems of political, industrial, and social life is a theological one. They are looking to the Christian Church for guidance, and they are looking for a demonstration of the fact that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a *transforming* and vital force.[11]

The language of transformation can be seen early in the thought of Henry, helping forge a vision that would animate his work for years to come.[12]

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[9] Owen Strachan, "Carl F.H. Henry's University Crusade: The Spectacular Promise and Ultimate Failure of Crusade University," in Hall & Strachan, ed., *Essential Evangelicalism: The Enduring Influence of Carl F.H. Henry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 59–80.

[10] The Carl F.H. Henry Center for Theological Understanding at Trinity International University, The Carl F.H. Henry Institute for Evangelical Engagement at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and the Carl F.H. Henry Institute for Intellectual Discipleship at Union University.

[11] "Why Christianity Today?" *Christianity Today* 1, no. 1 (October 1956): 20. Emphasis mine.

[12] *Christianity Today* was originally published every two weeks, but now is a monthly publication.

Though Henry continues to be associated with *Christianity Today*, he had earlier set the evangelical world ablaze with his first two books, *Remaking the Modern Mind* (1946), and *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947). While the former showed his theological and philosophical acumen, the latter showed his passion and a pioneering imperative. It was this brief book that became the clarion call for neo-evangelicalism. Henry managed to produce a book that made a historical, theological, and moral-practical argument. We will briefly consider its three main claims.

First, Christianity had historically been a religion that wedded doctrinal convictions with social responsibility. This is part of the reason for Henry's lament. He surmises, "For the first protracted period in its history, evangelical Christianity stands divorced from the great social reform movements."[13] Though he concedes there had been moments when, "Christianity has not always been fired by a maximum social passion," this is not characteristic of a religion imbued with the "full genius of the Hebrew-Christian outlook."[14] After all, "a Christianity without a passion to turn the world upside down is not reflective of apostolic Christianity."[15] In other words, non-engagement is not an option for historic Christian faith. Impact, involvement, and change are all words either used by Henry or evoked in the minds of readers when they read this part of his argument.

Henry's second fundamental claim was that later Fundamentalism, that is, the conservative Protestantism which had arisen in response to the Social Gospel movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, had largely abandoned a vision of a Gospel with social and cultural

[13] Carl F.H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 27.

[14] Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 27, xvii.

[15] Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 16.

implications. The renowned historian of fundamentalism and evangelicalism George Marsden concurs. In explaining the broader religious environment of the early twentieth century that fueled Henry's concern in the late 1940s, Marsden notes that Social Gospel proponents at the beginning of the twentieth century had proposals "essentially identical with those 'progressive' politics of the same era. Social gospel advocates tended to make these social concerns central to their understanding of the gospel."[16] Thus, an association began to form between progressive politics and liberal or nonevangelical theology. Again, Marsden notes:

> This association of progressive politics with liberal theology came at the same time as a deep crisis was brewing over theological issues. The result of this conjunction of theological and social crises was that twentieth century American Protestantism began to split into two major parties, not only between conservatives and liberals in theology but corresponding between conservatives and progressives politically…As theological liberals spoke more and more about the social implications of the gospel, revivalists [fundamentalist] evangelicals spoke of them correspondingly less.[17]

Though Marsden and Henry both noted ways in which fundamentalists continued to have some involvement with social causes, by and large the response was that of retreat and withdrawal.

Later Fundamentalism's posture of retreat and withdrawal paved the way for Henry's third and most central plea: Evangelicals must trace out how their understanding of the kingdom of God informs their lives in the present world. Henry believed that an understanding of the kingdom that had both "already" and "not yet" dimensions could provide a basis for clear thinking about the Christian role in the world. The task for students of the Word is to discover how God's kingdom was *here*, in what sense it is to be further realized *now*, and in what way it will be realized *then*, at the return of Christ.[18] Henry perceived that many conservative Christians had developed a significant divide between their theological beliefs and ethical

[16] Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 29.

[17] Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 30.

[18] Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 48.

obligations to the world. Separation and withdrawal gave way to antagonistic language, such as being "against the world" and "out of the world." However, he felt that the very theological beliefs that evangelicals espoused provided the basis for a social and cultural imperative. Thus, the latter chapters of the book set forth some areas with which Christians should especially be engaged, such as the literature of many fields, educational endeavors, totalitarianism, and other global concerns.[19]

Where did Henry acquire this comprehensive vision for engagement? Henry was indebted to a stream of Reformed theology which emphasized the broad scope of God's redemptive work. Such a perspective is perhaps best exemplified in the phrase "world and life view," or "world-life view," or what is usually just called "worldview" today.[20] Developed from the German *weltanschauung*, many of the early neo-evangelicals adopted the term "world-and-life-view" to speak of the commitment of the mind to see the entirety of life and the world through the lens of the Christian faith. Though many who continued to identify with Fundamentalism did not emphasize such a concept until decades later, "worldview" would become a household world in later Christian parlance.

One observes in Henry's *Plea* several key components of the neo-evangelical project: (1) a rejection of social and cultural quietism, withdrawal, or retreat; (2) an effort to center evangelical identity around the Gospel and biblical fundamentals; and (3) an emphasis on the necessary implications of the Gospel and evangelical theology to the whole range of social and cultural concerns in the world. His work represents a call to "engagement," the word that has so captured the imagination of not only evangelicals in America, but Christians in general. Yet, *The Uneasy*

[19] Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 65–74.

[20] Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 69.

Conscience does not necessarily propose a discrete model, metaphor, motif, or approach to cultural engagement that is as organized as the one found in Niebuhr's typology. He does emphasis active engagement, and speaks of "turning the world upside down." Additionally, he remarks that in his generation, "Christianity again faces the apostolic task of seeking to *transform* an environment that is quite unilaterally hostile."[21] He also gives some additional examples of how Christians could "press the Christian world-life view upon the masses."[22] In later work he also begins to deal with some terms, expressions, and concepts that have bearing on the church's strategy to engage the culture.

In *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*, several of Henry's lectures were published together in a single volume focused on various themes in social ethics. The opening chapter entitled "Christianity and Social Transformation" is especially significant as this is one of the earliest uses of "transformation" in Henry's work, especially in reference to society. The chapter begins by Henry explaining that many Christians were divided about the "best method for improving social conditions."[23] Though this question does not exactly refer to a potential theory of cultural engagement, it does gesture toward the impulse to engage society. It also presupposes that Christians have some obligation to do so. In the background of this question is an informal debate between Billy Graham and Reinhold Niebuhr that had taken place in earlier years. The debate surrounded the nature of spiritual decision versus legislation and social policy in terms of bringing about change in social and cultural matters. Since Henry was a close friend and colleague of Graham's in the neo-evangelical movement, his discussion is relevant to the larger issue of how one engages the culture. More importantly, Henry gives an early example into how

[21] Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 69. Emphasis mine.

[22] Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 69.

[23] Carl F.H. Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 15.

careful reflection upon and use of language should play a role in explaining the Christians responsibility to the world.

Henry's fundamental thesis is this: "the Church has a legitimate and necessary stake in education and legislation as means of *preserving* what is worth preserving in the present social order, but it must rely on spiritual regeneration for the *transformation* of society."[24] This claim is both profound and simple. It is simple in that it calls for Christians to remain involved in the spheres of education and legislation (or politics and government), while not putting confidence in earthly means to bring about widespread spiritual change. On the other hand, it is profound because early in Reformed evangelical thought "transformation" was being used with such precision, the kind of carefulness that will later be difficult to find in the works of other figures, particularly among those associated with the Religious Right. Henry did believe in the potential for social transformation, but not without regeneration.

Henry proceeds to discuss a variety of potential social strategies for bringing forth social and spiritual change. Each of these strategies includes the prefix *re*. This prefix "bears a variety of meanings and signifies either repetition, restoration, or reversal."[25] As we will see in later figures, this careful attention to the semantics is especially evident when attending to "re words." Henry discusses revolution, reformation, revaluation, and regeneration as the four strategies. His conception of the second and third are very similar as they aim to revise an existing social situation, though the former is rooted in an evolutionary philosophy of progress, and the latter emphasizes "transcendent values discoverable in human experience."[26] Revolution rejects any notion of a divinely given order in pursuit of rectifying social ills, even if force may be needed.

[24] Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*, 16.

[25]. Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*, 17.

[26] Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*, 18–19.

But regeneration is an expression of a classic Christian view which acknowledges both an order to creation, while at the same time seeking spiritual renewal by helping man respect and return to "the divine intention in society."[27] These are very brief sketches of these strategies, and some may characterize them as rather thin in terms of social theory and theological depth. Yet when taken in the full context of the chapter and the larger body of Henry's work, a pattern emerges. When thinking about social and cultural change, some type of controlling metaphor, model, strategy, or what we call grammar is unavoidable. Evangelicalism was a movement that believed that the Christian faith should guide and shape actual practice in the world. To summarize Henry's position, "the historic Christian view sets the social problem in the larger theological framework of divine revelation and redemption, and cultural objectives in the context of the Christian mission."[28]

In the first edition of *Christianity Today* in October 1956, Henry penned an editorial cited above outlining the vision of this publication, as well as for neo-evangelicalism as a whole. Glimpsing the themes of the other articles in that issue gives some sense into the publication's orientation: "The Changing Climate of European Theology," "Biblical Authority in Evangelism," "The Fragility of Freedom in the West," and "The Primary Task of the Church."[29] Theology, ministry, civil liberty/religious freedom, and mission would be themes carried forth in future editions as well. Henry had wide aims for the magazine, hoping to cast a vision for the church's theology and place in the world. Even as the magazine would explore such ambitious themes, it attempted to strike a balance between an intellectual-driven content and what might be described as practical devotional concerns. Writing on the primary task of the church, theology

[27] Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*, 18.

[28] Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*, 19–20.

[29] Billy Graham authored the article on evangelism.

professor Addison Leitch focused on the spiritual nature of the church and its obligation to personal and global evangelism in an early article. Yet he follows by asserting that, "Saved men should also have an impact on culture. Great periods in the history of the church have meant great art and architecture, great music, new laws, educational institutions, in short, a new way of life."[30] Leitch, foreshadowing Richard John Neuhaus (1936–2009) thirty years later, asserted that, "a dominant religion *will* create a way of life; the question is, which religion?"[31] He ends by noting that the future of Christ's church and the nations is to confess Christ's Lordship.

The reference to lordship in this context is one of the ways in which theology and cultural analysis create a certain picture, which then shapes the language that is to be employed. Since culture or society are treated as a sort of independent realm, along with the church, this gives the impression that to not engage or impact culture is to leave a vacuum (literally a space) in the cultural realm that would be inevitably infiltrated by other influences. The doctrine of lordship, understood in an unqualified, comprehensive way, is thought to be the church's way of occupying that space, spreading its influence, bringing transformation and renewal. To envision the relationship this way, however, overlooks the influence of the world on or *in* the church. It also ignores how various spheres of culture may require different types of Christian responses aside from "engagement and transformation." For example, one might go back to this era and pose this thought experiment to the neo-evangelicals: Imagine that all elected officials were converted persons seeking earnestly to develop legislation that was consistent with biblical norms. Would it be possible (or necessary) to speak of *transforming* a government comprised in

[30] Addison Leitch, "The Primary Task of the Church," *Christianity Today* 1, no. 1 (October 1956): 13–18.

[31] Leitch, "The Primary Task of the Church," 18. Emphasis mine. Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988). Neuhaus spoke of a vacuum that is created in the public square when people with religious values cede that space. Yet this vacuum is also filled by someone's values or beliefs.

such a way? What work would be left to do for the Christian aside from *preservation*? Does not the cultural situation shape the way we would describe our obligations to some extent? Lordship, along with eschatology and the cultural mandate, provide a framework for the neo-evangelical approach to cultural engagement, but they do not answer every question. This is where Carson in chapter four will help a fuller picture of what biblical-theological considerations are needed to aid in this task.[32]

The theme of lordship would echo throughout future editions of Henry's beloved periodical, and the thought of many in the neo-evangelical movement for which he, Harold John Ockenga (1905-1985), and Billy Graham helped serve as catalysts. It's important to observe that not everyone tells the story of this movement through the Henrician lens. George Marsden, Molly Worthen, and Frances FitzGerald, most recently, are among the many scholars who have studied and written on the evangelical movement in America. There are certainly other important chapters in the entire story that could be told. The important step is to set aside simplistic accounts of neo-evangelicalism in order to see the role that deeply-held theological beliefs had in the rise of the movement in the twentieth century. It is true that the presidential campaign of Jimmy Carter in 1976 brought a great deal of attention to the idea of being a "born again evangelical." The editors of *Newsweek* featured the idea of being a "born again evangelicals" on the cover of an October edition of the magazine.[33] It is also true that by the mid-late 1970s evangelicals were an incredibly potent source of political activism and enthusiasm. As Fitzgerald argues, evangelicals "reintroduced religion into public discourse, polarized the nation, and

[32] The transformationalist view tends to be controlled largely by these three theological loci, while not always carefully emphasizing and tracing out how other theological convictions may shape their approach. Carson is helpful as he will emphasize how all of the major elements of biblical theology are involved in shaping one's approach to cultural engagement.

[33] *Newsweek*, Oct. 24, 1976. This edition made famous George Gallup's statement of 1976 as "the year of the evangelical."

profoundly changed American politics."[34] It is difficult to deny the first and third of those assertions as a matter of historical fact. But does this account appreciate the theological motivations of evangelicals, which propel them to engage and transform culture of all kinds?

George Marsden perhaps summarizes modern evangelical identity best when he says that

> Evangelicalism today includes any Christians traditional enough to affirm the basic beliefs of the old nineteenth-century evangelical consensus: The Reformation doctrine of the final authority of the Bible, the real historical character of God's saving work recorded in Scripture, salvation to eternal life based on the redemptive work of Christ, the importance of evangelism and missions, and the importance of a spiritually transformed life.[35]

Marsden's summation is cogent and clear. But what cannot be bracketed off from this self-understanding of evangelicalism is the notion of being actively engaged in all spheres of culture, whether it be education, politics and legislation, the arts, or other such areas. Henry in *Uneasy Conscience*, *Christianity Today*, and all of his later work constantly emphasized that Christians had a stake in socio-political and cultural affairs. This vision is illustrated by Henry's involvement in the founding of so many institutions which united evangelicals around common intellectual ventures. Though a tendency remains among historians to dismiss the theological emphases which separated fundamentalists from early evangelicals, a close reading of the writings of Ockenga, Graham, and Henry show a decided posture of engagement over withdrawal.[36] The language of engagement, in an era when these men felt that America's soul

[34] FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals*, 2.

[35] Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 4–5.

[36] Neil Young suggests that Ockenga and Henry were fundamentalists who wanted to drop the term merely due to its social and historical baggage. While no doubt negative associations and historical developments shaped their rhetoric, this still overlooks real differences in theological emphasis between fundamentalism and neo-evangelicalism. See Neil J. Young, *We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 13–15.

was being lost to the world, arose from a sense of genuine spiritual concern and theological conviction.

Many young evangelical pastors, scholars, and writers were influenced by the early neo-evangelicals. The literary output of not only the aforementioned neo-evangelicals is impressive, but especially when one considers others such as E.J. Carnell (1919-1967), Bernard Ramm (1916-1992), Harold Lindsell (1913-1988), and George Eldon Ladd (1911-1982). Not only were these men professors of many future evangelical pastors and scholars, but they published many books which would be read by students and pastors. Some are still in print today.[37] It is difficult to argue the counterfactual point about whether this neo-evangelical movement, especially the intellectual renaissance associated with its scholarship, would have transpired had Carl F.H. Henry not lived. It does seem, however, indisputable that the contours of the movement would have been different, and the unified theme of engagement would not have as deeply penetrated evangelical thinking had the constant pen of Henry not been at work reminding evangelicals of the social and cultural implications of historic Christianity.

As a matter of historical patterns, it is true that movements need exemplars to have a life beyond their founders. While Henry and his colleagues may have provided the rationalization for such engagement, and helped launch institutions to further prepare people for such engagement, Charles Colson's life constitutes a unique case study in what transformationalism looked like and sounded like by the mid-to-late twentieth century. We turn to consider his important legacy, and the embodiment of transformation in ministry.

[37] The works of George Eldon Ladd in New Testament studies and eschatology, for example, still are considered recommended reading by many. See George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). To illustrate the staying power of some mid-twentieth century neo-evangelical scholarship, consider that this particular work was first published in 1959.

Charles Colson: Embodying the Neo-Evangelical Vision

Charles W. Colson (1931–2012) was no doubt an heir to the Henry legacy and the neo-evangelical vision of cultural engagement. His life, legacy, and language are important to the neo-evangelical story in the late twentieth century. They are especially important as his widely selling books were often characterized by rhetoric that was simultaneously vivid, ambitious, alarmed, and impassioned. This rhetoric serves our narrative of how language, theology, and practice intersect, especially within the trajectory of transformationalist Christianity.

"Chuck" Colson is still known to many American Christians and unbelievers alike because of his powerful and surprising conversion story, his imprisonment, and remarkable post-prison ministry. Some older Christians will remember him for his role in the Nixon administration and in Watergate, while others associate him with the founding of Prison Fellowship, a parachurch ministry to prisoners. His personal public downfall positioned him to develop a burden for such a ministry. Colson had been an attorney who worked closely with President Richard Nixon during his administration. At that time Colson was not a Christian, and as he recounts in his autobiography, far from it.[38] Due to the Watergate Scandal, Colson became one of several administration officials who faced serious legal trouble. Ultimately, he went to prison for a brief stint, but it was shortly before this time that he became a Christian. This conversion led to one of the most influential and productive public ministries by any evangelical in the late twentieth century.

Colson's life overlapped with Henry's, and the two shared many qualities. Both were deeply devoted to the life of the mind. Both emphasized the importance of personal regeneration or conversion. And both were deeply committed to developing institutions that would help

[38] Charles W. Colson, *Born Again* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 1976).

transmit Christian ideas and contribute to cultural change. Colson also saw Henry as a mentor, and this influence was reflected in the types of books Colson wrote and causes for which he advocated.[39] Though Colson authored many books, often with other colleagues, one representative sample of his thoughts about culture and cultural change can be seen in *How Now Shall We Live?*

Clearly evocative of Francis Schaeffer's *How Then Should We Live*?, this book, co-authored by Colson and Nancy Pearcey, attempts to show how a worldview shapes the way one lives. Colson argues very much in the "ideas have consequences" vein of thinking, popularized by Richard Weaver and Francis Schaeffer years earlier. This perspective sees one's worldview as "the sum total of our beliefs about the world, the 'big picture' that directs our daily decisions and actions."[40] Most of the book is devoted to explaining how ideas have had either positive or deleterious effects on the world. Yet the emphasis on worldview intersects in a significant way with Colson's conception of culture and the Christian's role in relation to it. Culture is sometimes referred to as a sort of realm, much like how one would use the word "society." Yet Colson also speaks of culture as the work of God's image-bearers in Genesis 1–2. He affirms a "cultural mandate" or "cultural commission" which is the work of exploring creation, "developing its powers and potentialities," and building a civilization.[41] Despite the fall and sin, the cultural mandate is by no means negated. Colson explains that "when we are redeemed, we are not only freed from the sinful motivations that drive us but also restored to fulfill our original purpose, empowered to do what we were created to do: to build societies and create culture—

[39] Charles Colson and Harold Fickett, *The Faith: What Christians Believe, Why They Believe it, and Why it Matters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 236.

[40] Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1999), 14.

[41] Colson and Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?*, 295.

and, in doing so, to restore the created order."[42]

Many evangelicals who discuss or explain culture do so as Colson did. However, two significant qualifications often follow. First, "culture" tends to be defined both as the work humans do, as well as the realm in which they live and work. Second, the cultural work of human beings as part of God's overall redemptive program is never something humans can or will fully accomplish before the eschaton. Rather, believers work in light of it and in anticipation of God's completion of the final restoration. No human cultural endeavor can accomplish this. Though this view is sometimes undermined by the assumptions of postmillennial eschatology, readers will note that among the evangelical figures discussed in chapters two, three, and four, no such eschatological view is advocated for.

Much of the rest of Colson and Pearcey's book is devoted to explaining what it might look like in practice for Christians to engage every sphere of society or culture. Colson places particular emphasis on the Christian obligation to bring about change and transformation. It begins with having the right worldview: "If we want to transform our pagan culture as the monks did in the Middle Ages, we must start with ourselves, understanding what a Christian worldview means for our own moral and lifestyle choices."[43] Since the Christian is to be involved in redeeming culture, he must be personally redeemed, have a Christian worldview, and be engaged in specific cultural spheres to bring about change. Colson uses the term "transformation" a great deal in the book (nearly 60 times), and although it is largely focused on the transformation of persons, he does write of the work of transforming society, institutions, or cultural spheres also.[44] Colson, like most transformationalists, was not interested in technical discussions of Niebuhr's

[42] Colson and Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?*, 295.

[43] Colson and Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* 308.

[44] Colson and Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* 356.

"Christ the Transformer of Culture" type. Rather, the language of cultural transformation is adopted because this is the language and category he had inherited from people like Niebuhr, Henry, and others who brought this term into mainstream religious currency.[45] This inability or unwillingness of earlier evangelicals to explore and evaluate the background influences in transformationalist rhetoric is one area where we will observe a greater care being exercised by the figures discussed in chapters three and four.

Finally, it is also significant that Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch Reformed statesman and theologian, is cited often in Colson's work. This stream of Reformed thought has stimulated much evangelical reflection on culture and worldview. This was true for the early neo-evangelicals, as well as those who began shaping the conversation on cultural engagement later in the twentieth century, as we will observe below.

A second work of Colson's that helpfully connects his understanding of the church and world relationship is *Being the Body*, co-authored with Ellen Vaughn in 2003. Colson's intellectual influences are recognized in the acknowledgments of the book, and confirm the overall portrait of Colson as an heir to the neo-evangelical vision. Colson credits Carl Henry "foremost" as an "inspiration" for this particular book. [46] He follows this mention with a word of gratitude to Francis Schaeffer, whose "writings on truth informed our theme here regarding the church as a pillar of truth in a lost culture."[47] Colson, barely a generation removed from these

[45] Providing an extensive genealogy of the term "transformation" in the context of American Christianity *as a whole* is not essential to the specific argument I am making about language and evangelical Christians. However, I do believe that it is demonstrable that twentieth century religious thought bears witness to a unique emphasis on this type of thinking. And certainly this term is employed by evangelicals for their unique theological, practical, and cultural purposes.

[46] Charles W. Colson and Ellen Vaughn, *Being the Body: A New Call for the Church to be Light in the Darkness* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2003), x.

[47] Colson and Vaughn, *Being the Body*, x.

two men in age, credits them above all others as inspiring his thought about the role of the Christian church in the world. This theme becomes strikingly obvious in the very structure of the book. Part One is called "The Church Against the World," and Part Two is "The Church in the World." Once again spatial imagery is being employed, treating the church as something of an abstraction from the world in order to then define its mission to the world. Though Colson's intentions are to distinguish the two so as to better explain how the two can and should interact, this conceptual framing of the two lends itself to the language of a gap or vacuum that is left to be filled with evangelical *action*. The only alternative is the posture of withdrawal, as if Christians can transcend culture, free from its influence, and it free from their influence.

Much of the first half of *Being the Body* is devoted to explaining what the church is, using biblical and theological imagery. Defining the church's identity and mission then establishes a framework for his move later to describe what the church's ministry might look like in today's world. He uses many real anecdotes from contemporary people, trying to show his ideas in as practical of terms as possible. Having set forth mainstream, traditional ideas of the church, he then turns to the task of the church in the culture. First, he notes that, "modern-day evangelicalism must exuberantly flow from our character as a worshipping, godly community; it must be done in the context of the corporate body and it must articulate the gospel in language and ways that twenty-first century men and women can understand, as well as demonstrate it in the timeless language of love."[48] Here he refers to evangelism and contextualization, though the later term is not explicitly used. But the Christian mission goes beyond mere evangelism.

Colson uses the biblical metaphor of God's people as salt to justify the strategy of engagement he will propose. The purpose of salt, he says, is to season and preserve. But in order

[48] Colson and Vaughn, *Being the Body*, 377–78.

to season and preserve, it must penetrate. Just as salt has this affect, "so, too, Christians must flavor our culture, bringing good taste, if you will, to every arena of the world in which we live."[49] The definition of culture Colson operates with here is a conventional evangelical one, treating culture as interchangeable with "society," as well as a collective term to refer to all spheres of human life. Such spheres are to be engaged by Christians. Otherwise, decay will happen "*unless* Christians are part of culture, penetrating and preserving its expressions—like the arts—and its institutions—like government."[50] All throughout Colson is careful to maintain an emphasis on the church being the church, loving its neighbors, and sharing the Gospel. Yet he does employ pugilistic language here because Colson is fundamentally shaped by a theological vision of lordship and cultural renewal that had animated neo-evangelical cultural thought prior to his time. Yet Colson also believed that this type of mindset was essential given the reality of spiritual warfare, and the increasing decadence of American culture. In a "post-Christian culture," he writes, Christians have to fight behind enemy lines. In order to influence the "culture from within," they must "infiltrate small units to disrupt the enemy's communication and attack strategic targets."[51] The book is replete with examples of Christians participating in this type of faithful penetration in the realms of news media, politics, and more.

Though the edition of *Being the Body* cited here is the 2003 edition, it was first published in 1992. A worthwhile intellectual experiment might consider how the tenor of the later edition of the book was shaped by Colson's having lived through another major White House controversy during the Clinton administration (something he was no stranger to), the terrorist attacks of September 11, and the increased marginalization of orthodox Christians in high-level

[49] Colson and Vaughn, *Being the Body*, 380.

[50] Colson and Vaughn, *Being the Body*, 380.

[51] Colson and Vaughn, *Being the Body*, 380.

public institutions.

Though Colson was no theologian or scholar, many of his later books reflect a grasp of theology and biblical foundations for evangelical cultural engagement. It may be fair to say that figures like Henry, being trained theologians, produced grammars of engagement that were more tempered by theological reflection. Conversely, people like Colson who were seen as popularizers in their writing, could be said to be less precise, more practical than technical in their proposals for cultural engagement. These types of criticisms often surface later by those who examine the legacy of such men after they are gone. Carl Henry's influence waned for several years after his death, followed by a revival of interest in his legacy emerged in the form of books, dissertations, and conferences. Such publications and events reflect a desire to interact with the theological and cultural assumptions of these men's actions and words. But their words, regardless of how carefully or carelessly chosen, give a window into how transformationalism has manifested itself through the decades. It also further illustrates this symbiotic relationship between theology, practice, and language which we argued for in chapter one.

In several instances we have made reference to Abraham Kuyper and the Dutch Reformed stream of theology that has influenced neo-evangelicalism. Nearly all of the early neo-evangelical founders were themselves Calvinists or Reformed, but many of their specific views were accented by the influence of Dutch Reformed thought. This tradition has especially how the theology of John Calvin has been read, interpreted, and appropriated. Institutions such as Calvin College, authors such as Henry Van Til,[52] and some Reformed publishing houses have done much to propagate modern Kuyperian thought. In truth, though, most evangelicals have never

[52] Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959).

actually read Kuyper, but have read him only through his interpreters and popularizers.[53] Yet Albert Wolters' *Creation Regained*, published over 30 years ago, is perhaps the most widely read distillation of many of the emphases in Dutch Reformed thought. This treatment provides a basic theological framework for cultural engagement that guides many in the evangelical community today, especially those authors who we discuss in this work. It further clarifies our understanding of the theological views that transformationalists, including those influenced by Henry and Colson, have come to accept. These views also exert tremendous influence on the way the grammar of cultural engagement has developed among evangelicals.

Albert Wolters and Creation Regained

No single work better exemplifies the Reformational worldview in reference to culture and the Christian's role in it than Albert M. Wolters' *Creation Regained*.[54] First published in 1985, Wolters' work has influenced two generations of students with respect to how to understand both Christianity and Christians' participation in Christ's redemption. Just as Henry called attention to some words beginning with the prefix "re," as will some authors in chapter three, Wolters' book gives a theological justification for the employment of such terms.

Wolters begins his work with the argument that a plea: "for a biblical worldview is simply appeal to the believer to take the Bible and its teaching seriously for the totality of our civilization *right now* and not to relegate it to some optical area called 'religion'."[55] After all,

[53] Bruce Riley Ashford, *Every Square Inch: An Introduction to Cultural Engagement for Christians* (Bellingham: Lexham, 2015). *Comment* is also a journal that also operates within the Kuyperian tradition.

[54] Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

[55] Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 9.

Scripture "speaks centrally to *everything* in our life and world."[56] In this Wolters is invoking the basic insight of the Dutch theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper, whose work significantly influences the thinking of all the figures taken up later in this study.

Culture, in this conception of things, is located most closely within the doctrine of creation. Accordingly, the cultural mandate of Genesis 1–2 represents "creational law as it holds for society and culture."[57] Like many Reformed thinkers, Wolters uses the terms cultural mandate and creation mandate interchangeably. This mandate provides man with a basis for all kinds of creational tasks like "making tools, doing justice, producing art, and pursuing scholarship" because we are "coworkers with God."[58] The fall, as deep as its impact may be felt, does not nullify these duties because "grace restores nature." To put it differently, "Redemption is *recreation*."[59] This insight is certainly not original to Wolters, but has roots much deeper in Reformation theology and history, especially in the Dutch Reformed tradition. To speak of redemption in Jesus Christ, in its fullness, "means the *restoration* of an original good creation."[60] This then has implications for Christian cultural engagement, for "if the Lord does not give up on the works of his hands, we may not either."[61]

It is significant to observe that at this juncture in Reformed thought there are often differences in thinking about the ongoing work of man in God's creation. Some Reformed theologians such as David VanDrunen reject any notion of our cultural products being present in the life to come, a belief sometimes held by transformationalists. Yet as Edgar points out,

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[56] Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 8.

[57] Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 42.

[58] Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 16.

[59] Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 12. Emphasis his.

[60] Wolters, *Creation Regained*.

[61] Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 45.

> even Reformed theologians vary in their interpretations of the biblical data. Thus, at one end of the spectrum, the new heavens and new earth are viewed as a restoration to the original, Edenic state…At the other end of the spectrum, the present life is believed to move deliberately toward a renewed earth, one in which today's culture and technology and city-building are validated in the eschaton.[62]

This is one area where some theological nuances may indeed alter the particular grammar of engagement employed. Depending on what one believes about the destiny of one's cultural efforts, it could lead to a more triumphalistic outlook ("rescue the culture") or it could create greater sobriety ("faithful presence"). Nevertheless, what unites most Reformed evangelicals influenced in their views of culture by Kuyper is a belief that though there will be discontinuity between this life and the new creation, and there will also be continuity. This includes the products of human culture that, Wolters argues, "will be transfigured and transformed."[63]

To adopt such a view about the Christians' place in culture is not necessarily to espouse a low view of sin or an inflated view of human nature. Rather, Reformed evangelicals would attribute such an understanding to (1) viewing salvation as entailing recreation, and (2) inaugurated eschatology. Russell Moore explains in *The Kingdom of Christ* that the new evangelical consensus about eschatology emerged in the wake of debates over premillennialism, dispensationalism, and other perspectives at the end of the twentieth century.[64] This means that there are both "already" and "not-yet" aspects of Christ's kingdom that the believer experiences in terms of salvation and God's full redemptive program.[65] The question for those interested in cultural engagement is to understand whether the in-breaking kingdom of God has social implications for the world, or just "spiritual implications" for the church. For Carl F.H. Henry,

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[62] William Edgar, *Schaeffer on the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Crossway: 2013), 105–6.

[63] Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 48.

[64] Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004).

[65] Many scholars across Christian traditions have come to speak in this way, invoking some basic understanding of inaugurated eschatology.

the neo-evangelicals, and their heirs, it was both.

Many contemporary evangelical theologians credit Kuyper for their understanding of culture and cultural engagement. However, for many of them, Wolters was the window into Kuyper. And given that Wolters' work dates to the 1980s, his work helpfully grounds our discussion on the ideological trajectory about culture that Henry and others set in the 1940s.

This trajectory does not end with Colson, but it takes us up to the present and the work of a few notable authors who have attempted to save transformation as a basic framework for engagement, while recasting it using new grammars. Before we can turn to those figures in chapter three, we will conclude with a working definition of culture and cultural transformationalism, and a few preliminary critiques that can be made about this concept and language.

Working Definitions and Critiques

The Welsh cultural critic Raymond Williams famously asserted that "culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language."[66] Though he cites the development of this word across several European languages as one reason for this complexity, he also notes that it has come to be used "for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought."[67] Williams made these claims in 1976. The complexity of this word and how it influences reflection on the relationship between the church and the world has only deepened in the intervening decades, as noted in the

[66] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 49.

[67] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, 49.

work of authors like Eagleton, theologians like Kathryn Tanner[68], and sociologists like James Davison Hunter[69], to name a few. However, Williams' insight contributes significantly to the argument advanced in this dissertation, as culture, as well as theology, practice, and language itself, provide the intellectual matrix out of which any coherent reflection on Christian cultural engagement must take place. It becomes very difficult to deal with the linguistic significance of grammars of cultural engagement when the idea of culture itself is so contested.

Evangelicals tend to use the term "culture" in four main senses: (1) It is used interchangeably with the terms "society" or "civilization"; (2) It is used to refer to all human activity. As David VanDrunen says, "Every time you reflect upon what your faith has to do with your job, your schoolwork, your political views, the books you read, or the movies you see, you confront the problem of Christianity and culture."[70] (3) It is used to refer to the arts, the cultivation of skills and abilities, and generally the development of human life; and (4) It is used to refer to individual spheres in distinct concepts. Thus, "culture" can become shorthand for politics at one moment, entertainment at other, and so on. In light of these often-used definitions, it would not be an overstatement to say that culture can be seen sometimes as ideas, values, artifacts, institutions, or spheres. One must look carefully at its usage in various settings, making the linguistic choices of evangelicals in the area of cultural engagement all the more relevant. As was suggested earlier, what might be conveyed when we speak of transforming culture if culture is an idea? What does transforming an artifact entail or require? Is transformation always the appropriate grammar to speak of institutions, regardless of their constitution? My contention is

[68] Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997).

[69] James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

[70] David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 11. Though not a transformationalist, his definition is in perfect keeping with their sweeping definitions of culture.

that grammars can entail certain ambiguities which need to be clarified by considering how language has both descriptive and prescriptive qualities. Additionally, more semantic sensitivity is needed in the ways in which culture is defined.

Despite the "certain built-in inflationary tendencies" of "culture," we must offer some basic definition that will allow us to continue this inquiry and account for the range of usages that follow in the works of our key authors.[71] Henry Van Til, writing in the 1950s, still has provided a reasonably clear and accurate framework that gives our analysis of transformationalism some sure footing. "I use the term to designate that activity of man, the image-bearer of God, by which he fulfills the creation mandate to cultivate the earth, to have dominion over it and to subdue it."[72] Yet he follows this with a second qualification: "The term is also applied to the result of such activity, namely the secondary environment which has been superimposed upon nature by man's creative effort."[73] With some careful consideration, one can see that this definition is both tied biblical truth as well as phenomenological reality. Moreover, it is nuanced enough to include the breadth of emphases found in different authors writing on culture.

Returning to evangelical cultural engagement, we could survey numerous more authors aside from those recognized in this project to compare and contrast definitions. One of the limits of such an exercise is that not all of them use "cultural engagement" specifically to describe the phenomenon they seek to define, which ultimately ends up being practically the same basic activity. Robert Webber, for example, says "We may define evangelical social concern as the application of the Christian world view to the political, legislative, economic, and moral life of society and individuals. It is a repudiation of Christian privatism and obscurantism, and a

[71] Terry Eagleton, *Culture*, 3.

[72] Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, preface.

[73] Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, preface. Emphasis mine.

reclamation of the lordship of Christ over every aspect of life."[74] By "evangelical social concern," Webber nearly approximates the same basic idea conveyed by "evangelical cultural engagement." Again, what distinguishes the "social" from the "cultural" becomes paramount if all proposals are to be analyzed fairly.

For purposes of description and analysis, we must work toward a clearer sense of what it means to be a cultural transformationalist, based on the legacy of such persons who have advocated just that. We will aim for a provisional one here: "Transformationalism" denotes an evangelical approach to cultural engagement which emphasizes (1) the ongoing applicability of the cultural mandate of Genesis 1-2, (2) the presence of common grace even in a fallen creation, (3) an inaugurated view of eschatology, and (4) the Lordship of Christ over all of creation. The transformationalist not only affirms these key theological beliefs, but seeks to actively engage all spheres of what may be called culture in light of them.

This vision continues in the thought of many evangelicals writing today, including several who have provided some proposals for how to continue this vision, though reforming it with new grammars that are theologically and practically adequate. We turn to these in chapter three to help elaborate on this project in reformation, repair, or "saving cultural engagement."

[74] Robert Webber, *The Church in the World*, 13.

CHAPTER THREE

SAVING EVANGELICAL CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

There has been no shortage of books and articles published in the last 40 years about the relationship between Christianity and culture. The purpose of this chapter is to consider three of the more substantial recent proposals that operate within the broad theological framework of transformationalism, yet offer distinct linguistic proposals. These proposals reflect not only the disciplinary backgrounds of the authors or their social location, but they also reflect a perceived problem, weakness, or limitation in prior models of engagement. In some cases, it is a particular perspective on the "post-Christendom" or "post-Christian" milieu that animates these proposals. Each of them will be summarized and briefly analyzed, with special attention being given to the linguistic and rhetorical features of these proposals. While each of them will make explicit mention of language or vocabulary which will substantiate the arguments advanced in chapter one, all of them only implicit acknowledge how extensive the influence of language is in these debates over Christianity and culture.

James Davison Hunter and "Faithful Presence"

Perhaps the most substantial critique of evangelical cultural engagement in the last twenty years, especially its transformationalist rhetoric, is James Davison Hunter. Hunter, a sociologist, for many years, Hunter has explored the nature of evangelical religion in the modern world.[1] He is especially interested in how "religious faith [is] possible in the late modern world," and how

[1] James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983); *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Control the Family, Art, Education, Law and Politics in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

"believers live out their faith under the conditions of the late modern world."[2] Hunter is well-positioned to make this inquiry as he is a chaired professor of religion, culture, and social theory at the University of Virginia, and the Executive Director of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. His book *To Change the World* gained the attention of many evangelicals, not least of which because of the subject matter and the objects of some of his critiques, which are many notable figures and organizations within the evangelical community.[3]

Hunter's book is offered both as critique and proposal. From the outset he affirms his personal and sincere understanding of the Christian's responsibility in the world. He clearly affirms that "to be a Christian is to be obliged to engage the world, pursuing God's restorative purpose over all of life, individual and incorporate, public and private. This is the mandate of creation."[4] In one single statement Hunter positions himself in line with other framers of the current discussion, even as he will offer a devastating critique in the coming pages. This statement expresses the conviction that the Christian's proper relationship to the world is (1) one of active engagement, (2) restorative in nature, and (3) connected to a mandate given in creation. He expands on his understanding in the following way:

> People fulfill their individual and collective destiny in the art, music, literature, commerce, law, and scholarship they cultivate, the relationships they build, and in the institutions they develop—the families, churches, associations, and communities they live in and sustain—as they reflect the good of God and his designs for flourishing.[5]

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[2] James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 59.

[3] It is fair to say that Hunter is also widely read because his work is recognized as intellectually serious, and he writes from the standpoint of a committed Christian as well. Most indicative of the nerve he touched is an ebook that was published in 2015. See Collin Hansen, ed., *Revisiting Faithful Presence: To Change the World Five Years Later.* The book is filled with replies to and reflections upon aspects of Hunter's arguments from mostly Reformed evangelical theologians and pastors.

[4] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 4.

[5] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 3–4.

Hunter's remark reflects the type of comprehensive cultural vision that is in keeping with Kuyper and the other authors we have considered and will consider below. Though he does not cite or even mention Kuyper in his book, the ideas and broad theological framework which undergirds Reformed and neo-Calvinistic reflection on culure are certainly present. He specifically employs the idea of common grace to justify the work of image-bearers in the world.[6] Still, this positive proposal and affirmation cannot be separated from the critical aims of his work. He affirms early in the book that his argument is predicated on the fact that "the *actual* legacy of Christians in relation to this mandate is ambivalent, to say the least."[7] Hunter identifies numerous evangelical denominations, parachurch organizations, and evangelical leaders whose express mission or goal is to "change the world" or "transform the culture." In response, Hunter provides his fundamental argument: "I contend that the dominant ways of thinking about culture and cultural change are flawed, for they are based on both specious social science and problematic theology. In brief, the model on which various strategies are based not only does not work, but it cannot work."[8]

Hunter follows this claim by outlining the problematic understandings of culture and cultural changes have been embedded in American evangelical thought. At the heart of his critique is the idea that cultural change requires people being present in cultural institutions of significant symbolic capital. It is not enough simply to have Christians *en masse* living out their worldview in order to bring change. He challenges the "idealistic view," espoused by many proponents of worldview thinking.[9] Hunter argues that this view, which sees culture as the

[6] James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World*, 232–33.

[7] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 4.

[8] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 5.

[9] For the most extensive critique of this understanding of worldview and culture, see James K.A. Smith,

accumulation of everyday decisions guided by values, is fundamentally reductionistic. The main target of this criticism is none other than Charles Colson, whom he cites at length. Hunter believes that not only is Colson's definition of culture too limited, but it makes the same mistakes as other proposals for cultural impact and change: it is not nearly institutional enough. In a sense this is the same criticism that Hunter will make of Andy Crouch's proposal, which we will consider at length below.

Crouch's approach emphasizes the importance of Christians creating or making culture. Hunter sees this "culture-as-artifacts" perspective as also reductionistic, and not holistic enough. He points to the vast amount of culture-making or production that evangelicals have been involved in during the twentieth century. Though this production has outmatched "the cultural output of probably any other faith tradition in America," other minority groups have had more cultural impact and influence.[10] Hunter argues that Crouch, like Colson in a different way, fails to see "the relationship of culture to the dynamics and structures of power that operate in the world (and in the culture itself)."[11] Additionally, Crouch "falls short of adequately understanding the powerful institutional (and not just organizational) nature and dynamics of culture."[12] Whether Hunter's critique of Colson or Crouch is completely accurate is immaterial. Rather, it illuminates some of the differences among persons who adhere to the same doctrinal foundations and affirm the positive and active type of cultural engagement belonging to Christian identity.

Ultimately, Hunter's proposal is to offer a "theology of faithful presence," which he says is

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Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009).

[10] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 29.

[11] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 30.

[12] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 30.

a theology of *engagement in and with* the world around us."[13] It requires that Christians be present to each other, to their various tasks, within their spheres of influence. They should seek to love and serve their neighbors through welcoming the "other," serving through the use of one's gifts and by means of one's vocation. As he says, "individually and collectively, we direct ourselves toward the flourishing of others through actions and structures that embody sacrificial love."[14] In his conceptualization of these responsibilities, this approach moves beyond some of the problematic ones he otherwise discusses. He especially hopes that his approach will provide greater balance for engagement in all spheres, and not merely politics. Hunter repeatedly stresses that, "the institutional aspect to faithful presence is not optional but rather of essential importance."[15] One entailment of this perspective is that it means "Christians and the church are settling in for the duration."[16] Using the example of Judah in exile in Jeremiah 29, Hunter argues that we can only enact faithful presence in the circumstances in which God has placed us. Christians look to be a blessing to the world in which they find themselves, "even when the city is indifferent, hostile, or ungrateful."[17] We realize that just as God's people in Jeremiah's day awaited the restoration of Jerusalem, so too do Christians today await the New Jerusalem. Thus, we will sometimes have to minister amid tensions and conflict.[18]

What of Hunter's discussion of language? He does, in fact, appreciate that language matters on multiple levels. Though it is not the main element of his analysis, critique, or proposal, it is present. From the outset of his work, Hunter points to Gen. 2:15 where Adam is

[13] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 243. Emphasis mine.

[14] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 246.

[15] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 270.

[16] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 270.

[17] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 278.

[18] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 279.

told to cultivate and keep Eden, and explains that the Hebrew verbs *abad* and *shamar* are very significant. He says "these are active verbs that convey God's intentions that human beings both develop and cherish the world in ways that meet human needs and bring glory and honor to him."[19] In this instance biblical exegesis is helping shape the vision of cultural engagement which Hunter will proceed to develop. He is directly connecting the terminological choices of the biblical author to provide an impetus for the type of relationship between God's world and God's image-bearers, who themselves are, "by divine intent and their very nature, world-makers."[20] As part of our redemption, we must also learn a "new language rooted in Scripture that is at the heart of the story of creation, redemption, and consummation. Words such as covenant, grace, gift, sin, mercy, forgiveness, love, hope, blessing, the flesh, glory, creation, resurrection, sacrament, and the like must be learned anew in part by understanding the significance of the language and narrative of faith."[21] Christian existence is thus couched using linguistic metaphors found in Scripture. Carson's proposal in the following chapter will reinforce, but give even more definition to this proposal by not just focusing on various words in Scripture, but larger doctrines or biblical-theological "turning points."

Second, Hunter lodges his critique of Christian cultural engagement on the basis of their use of specious social theory and problematic theology. He is able to illustrate this overall problem through beginning his work with a survey of the mission statements of numerous denominations and parachurch organizations. Illustrating the inflated rhetoric of institutions that call for world "change, "impact," and "transformation" allows him to draw a contrast between such rhetoric and the *actual* record and results gained by Christians in the late modern world.

[19] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 3.

[20] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 3.

[21] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 237.

Hunter helps show that Christians who carefully assess the quality of their engagement must measure that engagement against some stated goal or outcome. In this case, Hunter uses mission statements to provide that measure. These particular terms function as aims, goals, and targets from Christian cultural efforts.

Third, as he advances a more institutional and sociological-based understanding of culture and cultural change, Hunter acknowledges the cognitive-linguistic dimension of worldview and culture. He states that our "frameworks of knowledge and understanding (and thus culture, in this sense) are largely coterminous with language. Language, the most basic system of symbols, provides the primary medium through which people apprehend their conscious experience in the world."[22] As an extension of this point, Hunter draws from George Steiner's *Real Presences* to address a problem he describes as "dissolution." Western civilization is predicated upon a fundamental trust in the word, in language. Language underlies every aspect of our civilization, and it has been assumed in the past that words connected us to the reality, whether it be politics, aesthetics, or especially religion. In late modernity, Hunter notes, this trust has eroded.[23] Hunter is not trying to make a technical argument for a strict correspondence theory of truth. Rather, he acknowledges the limitations of language in expressing and describing all of the "depths and complexities of love, beauty, knowledge, and sensation."[24] But he reaffirms the fact that there is *some* correspondence by which the world can be made intelligible through the medium of language. This notion, by no means foreign to epistemic realists, has concrete purchase on the Christianity and culture debate because grammars of engagement must correspond to actual theological conviction and social realities if they are to possess ideological coherence, much less

[22] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 33.

[23] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 205.

[24] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 205.

practical usefulness. Otherwise the outcome is more dissolution in an already fragmented age.

Fourth, for all of his criticism and concerns of transformationalists, Hunter operates within the larger transformational framework because of the theological commitments he avers. However, he certainly is less intent on change and is concerned about the proper methods of pursuing change. Near the end of his book he gives several examples of persons or companies working toward cultural renewal and human flourishing through their various social and vocational contexts. He concludes by noting that these examples are "less a blueprint to be applied than a catalyst for thinking about other imaginative possibilities for *transformation* of culture in business, the arts, medicine, housing, and the like."[25] He rejects paradigms of engagement he names as "defensive against," "relevance to," and "purity from," and instead offers one which he believes challenges all of these dominant paradigms.[26] In response, Hunter's "theology of faithful presence is a theology of engagement in and with the world around us. It is a theology of commitment, a theology of promise."[27] It is, alluding to Kuyper's notion of sphere sovereignty, faithful presence "within every place and every sphere where Christians are present."[28] Being faithful "to the highest practices of vocation before God is consecrated and itself *transformational* in its effects."[29] In one summary remark, he puts it this way:

> when the Word of life is enacted within the whole body of Christ in all of its members through an engagement that is individual, corporate, and institutional, not only does the word become flesh, but an entire lexicon and grammar becomes flesh in

[25] Hunter, *To Change the World,* 269. Emphasis mine.

[26] Hunter, *To Change the World,* 213–19. Readers will note striking resemblances between this language and Niebuhr's descriptions of "Christ against culture" and "Christ of culture."

[27] Hunter, *To Change the World,* 243.

[28] Hunter, *To Change the World,* 248.

[29] Hunter, *To Change the World,* 254. Emphasis mine.

> a living narrative that unfolds in the body of Christ; a narrative that points to God's redemptive purposes.[30]

Hunter thus brings another linguistic metaphor into his proposal, an already substantial proposal that weds social theory, history, and theology. His employment of the specialized linguistic terms of "lexicon" and "grammar" also support the connection between language and life, beliefs and behavior. This work makes Hunter a pivotal figure in framing the contemporary discussion, showing that transformational Christianity may be possible, but only through a more nuanced account.

He concludes his argument by making the most concrete plea for linguistic precision in theory and practice: "

> We need a new language for how the church engages the culture. It is essential, in my view, to abandon altogether talk of 'redeeming the culture,' 'advancing the kingdom,' 'building the kingdom,' 'transforming the world,' 'reclaiming the culture,' 'reforming the culture,' and 'changing the world.' Christians need to leave such language behind them because it carries too much weight. It implies conquest, take-over, or dominion, which in my view is precisely what God does not call us to pursue—at least not in any conventional, twentieth- or twenty-first century way of understanding those terms."[31]

Is Hunter right? His desire for a new language is motivated by conceptual clarity, contextual appropriateness, and the suggestive nature of our words. But in so diminishing the prospects of cultural renewal and change for those outside of elite institutional settings, does he go too far? This is the juncture at which many have expressed misgivings about his proposal. However, as a serious proposal involving the language of cultural engagement, its connection to theological claims, practical aims, and cultural context, it largely illustrates the type of precision and care myargument in this dissertation seeks to advocate.

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[30] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 254.

[31] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 280.

Where Hunter's proposal stands in most need of strengthening is two-fold: First, his argument fails to account for the profound social and cultural impact that Christians had in the first century when they were not in cultural ascendancy, and were a minority religion. Perhaps this is where Carl Henry's words challenge Hunter's: "a Christianity without a passion to turn the world upside down is not reflective of apostolic Christianity."[32] Is it possible to use language that engenders passion for our world, without promising to change the world? This is the tasks of pastor-theologians to work out. The second question we can ask of Hunter is whether "faithful presence," on its face, connotes the type of active engagement he certainly wants to advocate. If he analyzed the entirety of Charles Colson's proposal for cultural transformation, for example, he might find that this language only sounds triumphalistic if one brings that background concern to the discussion. Similarly, "faithful presence" may not seem passive if one considers Hunter's entire proposal, which is anything but passive. We will give more consideration to this proposal below.

Andy Crouch and Culture Making

Crouch offers perhaps the most accessible modern taxonomy for relating Christianity to culture—culture being understood primarily as a set of material artifacts. Crouch is a Christian journalist and author who for many years was an editor for *Christianity Today*, a publication still associated with its former editor Carl F.H. Henry. Crouch is best known, however, for his award-winning book *Culture Making* (2008). While short of being a technical academic work, Crouch's best-selling book is a substantial effort to change the culture conversation. From the outset, he

[32] Carl F.H. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 16.

specifically emphasizes his aim, which is to "offer a new vocabulary."[33] He explains, "our ways of talking about culture—how it works, how it influences us and what we hope for from it—often do not serve us well…If we are to be at all responsible agents in the midst of culture, we need to learn new ways of speaking about what we are doing."[34] The connection between action and language we have argued for are also said to be significant here, even if mostly in passing.

Another element of Crouch's project which overlaps with the concerns of this dissertation is his emphasis not only on vocabulary or grammar, but how story is so critical to understanding the human role in the world clearly. He laments that for too long many Christians have "forgotten to tell the story of Scripture as a story that is both a genuine disclosure of God's presence in the world and a deeply cultural artifact that intersects over and over with concrete historical realities."[35] This leads Crouch to show how his own proposal is birthed out of a critique of a prevailing view of culture and grammar about cultural engagement: "We talk about culture as if it were primarily a set of ideas when it is primarily a set of tangible goods. We talk about 'engaging,' 'impacting' and 'transforming the culture' when in fact the people who most carefully study culture tend to stress instead how we are transformed by it."[36] Crouch believes that thinking in "storied" terms is essential to adopting the right posture toward culture since the Bible is a story of culture. To think in this way is to better help Christians to understand their specific role within the broader scope of God's work in the world. This is quite similar to the types of emphases found in Stanley Hauerwas (see chapter one).

Crouch proceeds to describe his perspective on culture as primarily an artifact (or set of

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[33] Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2008), 10.

[34] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 10.

[35] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 11.

[36] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 10.

artifacts), and he tries to help readers see the story of human culture making as situated in the biblical storyline from Genesis to Revelation. Adopting such a materialistic understanding of culture allows Crouch to analyze the modern history of evangelical cultural engagement through the lens of its involvement with material artifacts. In surveying this recent history, Crouch shows that in different times and circumstances, that evangelical Christians have had a history that includes condemning culture, critiquing culture, consuming culture, or copying it. Interestingly, Crouch argues that each of these approaches corresponds to particular moments in the transition from fundamentalism to mainstream evangelicalism.[37]

Crouch explains that these approaches to culture are best understood as gestures that, in certain situations, are appropriate. While some cultural goods must be rejected or condemned (e.g. pornography), in other instances, critique is the appropriate gesture (e.g. a new controversial art exhibit). But Crouch's concern is that over time, to borrow a physical metaphor, constantly engaged in *one gesture* eventually creates *a certain posture* or reflex that is detrimental to one's health.[38] What is his alternative, then? His proposal is to create and cultivate more culture.

One of the ways Crouch's proposal parallels Hunter's is that he too is critical of the mindset of many Christians toward cultural change. He argues that, "on the whole we are much more changed than changing. The rise of interest in cultural transformation has been accompanied by a rise in cultural transformation of a different sort—the transformation of the church into the culture's image."[39] These concerns do not mean that Crouch does not believe in a cultural mandate or the prospects of cultural change. Rather, like other figures in this project, he believes that the scale and type of change may not match the inflated rhetoric often assumed by

[37] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 84–9.

[38] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 92–4. Emphasis mine.

[39] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 189.

certain grammars like transformation. That said, Crouch does not seek completely to abrogate the notion of transformation. In fact, he says that his cautions and qualifications about culture do not "mean that human beings do not participate in essential ways in the transformation of culture—but it does mean that when transformation happens for the better, the one who does get the credit is the Creator."[40] Indeed, "transformation also seems to be the best way to describe Revelation's final vision of cultural goods brought into the new Jerusalem, redeemed and included in an eternal city. Whatever God is up to with his wayward and willful creation, the restoration and reclamation of culture will be an indispensable part of the story."[41]

Though Crouch does not neatly fit into any one modern ecclesial group, he explicitly acknowledges his own indebtedness to the Dutch Reformed tradition, especially Kuyper, in developing his views.[42] He even engages the thought of Richard Niebuhr as seen in his typology. Accordingly, Crouch's work is incredibly significant for shaping the conversation.

Crouch is a valuable conversation partner when it comes to thinking about the relevance of semantics, metaphors, and language in general to cultural engagement. Perhaps Crouch's most specific deviation from many modern evangelical schemes of understanding culture is that he thinks of culture primarily as artifacts and not ideas, which would be distinct from many other mainstream emphases. Though Crouch is certainly aiming to be practical, he tends to think of the church in broader, more "movement" terms than the individual, local church level. This is significant, as a proposal anchored in pastoral reflection would need to think about the formative view of language more directly in the context of equipping members of the local church for engagement and ministry. Even in Crouch's critique of the contemporary church he tends to

[40] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 182–83.

[41] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 182.

[42] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 11.

speak more about "the church" than "churches." As we have seen above, language is profoundly contextual and communal, orienting the life and practice of Christian communities. Perhaps the biggest limitation of Crouch's proposal is that he offers culture making as the singular grammar for the church as a whole. Yet "culture making" seems to not improve upon some of the limitations of the transformationalism he critiques. Similar to our concerns above, how might one "make" culture if culture has any intellectual content? How might culture making help us think of the *ideational* aspects of culture? We will evaluate Crouch's proposal more below to consider its strengths and weaknesses.

The Colson Heirs and Other Restorers

As mentioned in chapter two, Charles Colson had a significant influence on the developing of the evangelical worldview and approach to culture in the second half of the twentieth century. Aside from having had a public conversion and publishing many books, Colson also established several parachurch organizations, including Prison Fellowship and the Colson Center for Christian Worldview. Colson also leaves behind a legacy of persons whose views of cultural engagement were shaped by him. Among these are Warren Cole Smith and John Stonestreet.

We need not consider the full biography of these two men in order to gain insight into their contribution to this discussion. Rather, we note that their work for the Colson Center today represents the ongoing contribution of Charles Colson, as well as the outworking of his transformational understanding of culture, albeit in changing times. Accordingly, the ways of speaking of cultural engagement by those who knew and worked alongside Colson gives a window into continuities and discontinuities with earlier ideas about the same.

In *Restoring All Things,* Smith and Stonestreet argue that the last chapter of the great redemptive story is the restoration of all things to God. Moreover, God shows his love for us in

that "He allows us to participate in that restoration."[43] Thus we observe the bold subtitle: "God's audacious plan to change the world through everyday people." They call attention to the many "re" words in Scripture, such as "*re*demption, *re*new, *re*store, *re*surrection, *re*conciliation and *re*generation."[44] They believe that the unfortunate reputation that many Christians have today is associated with other re words: "*re*sisting, *re*acting, and *re*jecting."[45] They then argue that "if our Christian witness is to be taken seriously in our post-Christian world, we should spend more time reflecting on those other 're' words and how they can better shape our words and deeds." At this juncture, Smith and Stonestreet invoke the precise importance of words in helping us understand our responsibility to the culture. They summarize this concern by saying that in this book they hope to "articulate better language as we challenge one another to faithfulness and good works. We hope to clarify a more biblical posture toward the evil and brokenness we see all around us. We hope that Christians can become better known for what we are for, not just what we are against."[46]

Though Smith and Stonestreet are speaking of very specific theological concepts, and they espouse an inaugurated understanding of eschatology (as do the other framers of the contemporary discussion), they are clear that the consistency of Christians' public witness and the perception of Christians by the world are driving factors in their proposal. Cultural context matters significantly. As opposed to separation and distance from this world, "the grand narrative

[43] Warren Cole Smith and John Stonestreet, *Restoring All Things: God's Audacious Plan to Change the World Through Everyday People* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2015).

[44] Smith and Stonestreet, *Restoring All Things*, 17. These are incredibly reminiscent of Carl F.H. Henry's discussion of terms in *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1964), 15–30.

[45] Smith and Stonestreet, *Restoring All Things*, 17.

[46] Smith and Stonestreet, *Restoring All Things*, 18.

of Scripture describes instead a world we are called to live *for*."[47] This will require "re" word living, which means Christians should ask four key questions: "What is good in our culture that we can promote, protect, and celebrate? What is missing in our culture that we can creatively contribute? What is evil in our culture that we can stop? What is broken in our culture that we can restore?"[48] One can see how these questions flow directly from a particular way of reading Scripture, and especially from an emphasis on restoration that pervades the entire book. So they can make the case that theological analysis is driving their word choice, though it forces them to choose one theological emphasis over others.

The focus on restoration can be seen in the structure and emphasis of the book. The remaining chapters of the book explore issues of work and poverty, capitalism, abortion, sex trafficking, education, criminal justice, racial reconciliation, sexuality and marriage, and more. They not only provide biblical insight and perspective, but they build most of the rest of the book around stories from real people's lives. In this, they reflect the kind of bottom-up understanding of cultural change which James Davison Hunter describes as bad social theory. Essentially, Colson and his heirs would emphasize individual Christians simply living out their faith in various spheres, and then they would anticipate the culture changing through this witness and work. Smith and Stonestreet would not deny the importance of Christians strategically working in various institutions of cultural influence, as Hunter advocates. However, as a guide for everyday Christians, this book emphasizes the individual stories of people's faithfulness and how those stories advance change. They argue that stories advance change more than ideas or arguments anyway. And so in their opinion, Christians living out the story of Scripture in a

[47] Smith and Stonestreet, *Restoring All Things*, 20.

[48] Smith and Stonestreet, *Restoring All Things*, 25–26.

postmodern world is best suited to impact the world.[49]

Smith and Stonestreet's work does have something positive and constructive to say about language and cultural engagement. They emphasize specific words and how these words correspond to the biblical storyline. They emphasize the way that these words and concepts shape Christians' engagement with the world. And they also emphasize story—a particular way of using language—to narrate the world as it really is and as it should be. These contributions are important to this dissertation, even if they do not go far enough to help us understand all the implications of our grammars of cultural engagement, as sketched out in chapter one.

One of the common features of many contemporary critiques and proposals concerning Christian cultural engagement, especially among evangelicals, is to be formulated in reference to the significant shifts in American society, especially with respect to laws, beliefs, practices, and the deepening of secularism.[50] Consider the subtitle to James Davison Hunter's book: "The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the *Late Modern World*."[51] More recently, journalist Rod Dreher has published a widely discussed book on cultural engagement.[52] Its subtitle makes reference to the present situation of America being a "Post-Christian Nation." Other religious leaders and parachurch organization leaders have authored volumes on this topic of late that also invoke the changing times.[53] These phrases do not simply denote a discrete

[49] Smith and Stonestreet, *Restoring All Things*, 33.

[50] Most would refer to this simply as "culture" just as much as "society," and yet the reader will note that I have attempted to be sparing in my use of the term "culture" when possible since its multifarious usage over and against precise usage is itself a matter upon which my project is predicated.

[51] Emphasis mine.

[52] Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Penguin, 2017).

[53] E.g. Charles J. Chaput, *Strangers in a Strange Land: Living the Catholic Faith in a Post-Christian World* (New York: Henry Holt, 2017); Tim Muehlhoff and Richard Langer, *Winsome Persuasion: Christian Influence in a Post-Christian World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2017); Anthony Esolen, *Out of the Ashes: Rebuilding American Culture* (Washington, DC: Regenery, 2017).

historical moment in time. Rather, they emphasize a new era of wide scale cultural shifts which we have now entered is such that new proposals for cultural engagement are necessary. Subtitles like these better demonstrate the perceived rationale and urgency of the specific works being offered. Some Reformed evangelicals like James K.A. Smith have taken issue with these types of books, seeing them as alarmist or buying too much into narratives of cultural decline, and the fact that they are gaining influence.[54] Yet the Colson heirs presuppose these same narratives.

Gabe Lyons is another significant voice in the scholarly conversation whose work has been birthed out of a sense of urgency given the times, and fits with the Colson heirs due to his emphasis on restoration. He is the founder of Q, a community of Christian leaders equipped to engage our cultural context and to help others do the same. They hold an annual conference which brings together thousands of Christians from many different vocational backgrounds. Lyons' work is significant as it reflects what are thought to be new and important ways of thinking about and engaging culture. This impulse is seen especially in his books. The two which are significant to this discussion are his 2007 book *unChristian,* co-authored with David Kinnaman, and especially his follow up book entitled, *The Next Christians.*[55]

In the bestselling book *unChristian,* Kinnaman and Lyons assert that, "Christianity has an image problem."[56] They proceed to unfold the argument, rooted in extensive research, that a rising generation of younger adults have a negative perception of Christianity. They see Christianity as "too hypocritical, too judgmental, too sheltered, too antihomosexual [sic], too

[54] James K.A. Smith, "the new alarmists: How some Christians are stoking fear rather than hope," https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/03/10/the-new-alarmism-how-some-christians-are-stoking-fear-rather-than-hope/?utm_term=.42124af6655d; accessed 9 August 2017.

[55] David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity…and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007); Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christians: The Good News about the End of Christian America* (New York: Doubleday, 2010).

[56] Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian,* 11.

focused on converts," among other things.[57] Kinnaman and Lyons want to help the reader better understand the mind of outsiders, reflected in the research, in order to provide the motivation necessary to "change how we see ourselves and our role in culture."[58] Though *unChristian* is heavier on descriptive analysis and argument than prescriptive practice, they do suggest that if "Christians of all generations allow Christ to transform their hearts, minds, and actions, their expressions of the Christian faith will change, resulting in an influence on society that we have not experienced in decades."[59] Throughout the book, a posture of engagement is emphasized, though all the particulars of such engagement are on better display in *The Next Christians*, Lyons next book.

Lyons begins *The Next Christians* by speaking of the "loss of Christian influence in our culture."[60] Though he is concerned about this, the tone of his reflection and the book in general is optimistic regarding the opportunities that Christians have to be the church in new and exciting ways. He sees the "end of Christian America," another narrative of decline[61], as an opening for Christians to engage.

In casting a vision for this fresh engagement, Lyons offers something of his own typology for thinking about American Christians' (and largely evangelicals') current interaction with culture. He identifies three groups: separatists, cultural-blenders, and restorers.[62] Separatists may, in the name of purity, withdraw or retreat from certain cultural spaces at all costs. Instead, they

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[57] Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*, 26.

[58] Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*, 221.

[59] Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*, 226.

[60] Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christians*, 3.

[61] By "decline narrative," I mean simply stories of how institutions (or in this case nations) that were once great have fallen from their greatness. I derive the term from Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2007), 530.

[62] Lyons, *The Next Christians*, 31.

immerse themselves in a Christian version of everything in mainstream culture, whether television, radio, film, etc.[63] Other Separatists style themselves as Culture Warriors. This posture rests on an emphasis of American identity being intertwined with Christianity. Thus, secularization is a great evil to be fought. Such persons adopt a combative posture, tone, and tactic.[64] A final form of Separatists is an Evangelizer, one who sees converting others as "the only legitimate Christian activity in the world."[65] Lyons associates this group with the Fundamentalism of a century earlier. The entire Separatist category bears striking similarities to Richard Niebuhr's "Christ Against Culture" type, once again reminding us of the lingering influence of Niebuhr's types or models on modern reflection of Christian cultural engagement. It also does strengthen the argument of those who see Niebuhr's types favorably today for heuristic purposes.

The next group evokes Niebuhr's "Christ of culture" or "Christ above Culture." Lyons refers to these as Cultural Blenders. They mostly mirror whatever else is going on in the culture. Blenders identify with the "beliefs of Christianity on a spiritual level, but at the cultural level, they attempt to blend with the mainstream."[66] Some in this group do believe in service and community, however they generally aspire for cultural acceptance and tend to "conflate their faith with culture itself."[67] Ultimately both Separatists and Blenders fall short of what Lyons believes is an emerging third way of Christian expression which is preferable to the others: Restorers.

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[63] Lyons, The Next Christians, 32. This category is quite similar to Andy Crouch's criticism of those Christians who simply copy culture. See *Culture Making*, 87–88.

[64] Lyons, *The Next Christians,* 34.

[65] Lyons, *The Next Christians,* 35.

[66] Lyons, *The Next Christians,* 40.

[67] Lyons, *The Next Christians,* 42–43.

Lyons describes Restorers this way:

> I call them restorers because they envision the world as it was meant to be and they work toward that vision. Restorers seek to mend earth's brokenness. They recognize that the world will not be completely healed until Christ's return, but they believe that the process begins now as we partner with God. Through sowing seeds of restoration, they believe others will see Christ through us and the Christian faith will reap a much larger harvest.[68]

Several key observations emerge from Lyon's description of Restorers. First, the name itself clearly is evocative of a distinctly theological concept, as seen earlier in the thought of Al Wolters and the Reformed tradition. Lyons even proceeds to connect this to the biblical storyline by explicitly referring to creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. He specifically argues that sometimes Christians operate with a truncated Gospel that often "emphasizes the fall and redemption pieces of the story, but largely ignores the creation and restoration components."[69] Furthermore, Lyons' indebtedness to authors like Charles Colson, Nancy Pearcey, and Tim Keller, to name a few, shows the influence of Reformed thought on his own. Second, Restorers embody a posture of engagement rooted in an understanding of the Kingdom of God, in keeping with the earlier work of the neo-evangelicals. As Lyons says of Restorers, "they don't separate from the world *or* blend in; rather, they thoughtfully *engage*."[70] Moreover, "instead of waiting for God to unveil the new heaven and the new earth, the rest of us can give the world a taste of what God's kingdom is all about—building up, repairing brokenness, showing mercy, reinstating hope, and generally adding value." Third, this type of engagement, rooted in visions of restoration and inaugurated eschatology, is to be displayed across all spheres of culture. Lyons refers to these spheres as "channels of cultural influence." His list includes media, education, arts

[68] Lyons, *The Next Christians*, 47.

[69] Lyons, *The Next Christians*, 51.

[70] Lyons, *The Next Christians*, 47.

& entertainment, business, government, the social sector, and the church.[71] The goal of the Christian is to be a Restorer in each channel. Since "*creating* sits at the heart of restoration," there is space in each of these channels to begin work.[72] Though, Lyons doesn't fully develop what such creative content would look like, he provides a rationale for this type of engagement.

Evaluation

To say that knowing how to engage God's world is a profound challenge is not thereby to dismiss the challenge and proposals to face it. However, if our concerns about language are to be fairly applied, and if we are right in asserting that the Bible gives rise to numerous emphases or "grammars" when it comes to cultural life, then we must consider the strengths and limits of the proposals on offer. These authors are not only framers of the contemporary discussion. They are also "fixers," in a manner of speaking. They are trying to remedy or save something that isn't entirely wrong or broken (evangelical cultural engagement), but something that has been ineffective and inadequate in significant ways.

Hunter's proposal is the most helpful as it combines history, theology, social and cultural analysis, and offers a fairly robust alternative. Hunter, more than the other authors, is attuned to the dynamics of language. Among the examples mentioned above, he identifies how one's rhetoric about cultural engagement and change fixes a goal or ambition that cannot be achieved if believers operate with problematic theology or specious theories of social change. He also shows how cultural context and Christian witness intersect in ways that help support our perspective on language and practices being in a mutually-reinforcing relationship. Yet in the

[71] Lyons, *The Next Christians*, 116.

[72] Lyons, *The Next Christians*, 93. This notion coincides also with the major thesis of Crouch, which is that Christians should be making culture in order to change culture.

end we must consider whether his proposal is more definitive or comprehensive than any of the others.

His proposal, I would argue, has three primary weaknesses. First, as mentioned above, in challenging the ambitious and optimism of "culture-changing" Christians, he is implicitly critiquing the *agency* of such Christians. They are unable to accomplish the change they desire because of numerous factors, largely sociological ones according to his argument. Yet in kind he offers the grammar of "faithful presence" which is, for all of its strengths, predicated on a different *kind* of agency among Christians to bring about any potential change. Hunter is emphatic about the role of spiritual formation in the Christian life, and how this serves to equip Christians to be faithfully present to their neighbors, to their communities, to their places of work, and more. To be clear, he is not arguing for "man-centered theology." But as Hunter mostly believes that cultural change happens through elites in institutions with significant symbolic capital, then the only Christians who could effect change would be those who could do so through their agency in those settings. It isn't that he believes "ordinary Christians" cannot bring about change, but he sees change as more of a by-product of faithfulness, a point that I concur with. But if this is how we should understand cultural change in his sense, then it seems to lead to the conclusion that we should not ever say to Christians, in any form, "you can make a difference for Christ." This is a much more modest claim than saying that a person can "transform the culture," yet Hunter's proposal seems reluctant to even go this far.

The second weakness I would point to is that Hunter uses a fairly ambiguous spatial metaphor as his alternative grammar. "Presence," while no doubt a theme one can connect to biblical themes such as incarnation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, requires an extensive

amount of definition to sound concrete.[73] Some might suggest this is a strength of his proposal, since "presence" is not loaded with the types of surface-level associations and assumptions that are engendered by "transformation." One might additionally suggest that the strength of an approach to engagement should not be predicated on how concise the proposal is. We have asserted that associations and connotations are important when adopting language for cultural engagement. We have also argued that grammars aren't merely prescriptive, but descriptive. Therefore, we should expect that grammars require some teaching and instruction to explain their theological assumptions. However, if grammars are linguistic tools to help capture biblical truths and encourage Christian practices, then there is the possibility the some may become too complex for lay Christians to appropriate. This may explain why, for all of the criticisms of Niebuhr's models, several of them have endured.

A final weakness is Hunter's explicit call to abandon the language of redemption and transformation in connection to cultural engagement.[74] In calling for "a new language," he has not only chosen to no longer use these terms, but to avoid altogether a potentially nuanced usage of transformation, though it is in fact a biblical term associated with the spiritual renewal of persons and ultimately the cosmos (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:21). We will return to this concern in chapter four. Despite these three weaknesses in Hunter's proposal, his is as important as any contemporary voice in this discussion.

Crouch has also offered some helpful insights into an often-overlooked aspect of cultural engagement, but ultimately there are some reductionist tendencies, to echo Hunter's concerns. By focusing so exclusively on culture as an artifact, he creates for his proposal some of the same

[73] Hunter articulates his view across more than 50 pages of text, not including endnotes.

[74] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 280.

problems other evangelicals have had when developing grammars of engagement. By reducing culture to one exact thing, it may make the choice of a grammar easier at first. He can speak of culture making if indeed culture is to *continue to be solely defined as an artifact*. But Crouch will expand his vision of culture to speak of anything one makes of the world.[75] In this way ideas and institutions would also be cultural in nature. But mostly people do not make ideas, at least not in the typical sense of "ideas." And most Christians work in institutions that have already existed years before they have. From a practical standpoint, one can see where unpacking the grammar of "making" may not be adequate to do justice to the myriad of vocational situations in which Christians find themselves.

A significant strength of his proposal is his acknowledgment of the ways in which the world acts upon believers in it, avoiding the abstraction so common in earlier evangelical thought. However, in offering some very helpful corrective insights Crouch resorts to an error we identified earlier, which is largely reducing cultural engagement to a single grammar.

The primary elements in Smith, Stonestreet, and Lyons' conceptualizations of "restoration" coincides very well with the historic consensus about Reformed evangelical cultural engagement, and yet dovetails also with modern proposals. They are rooted in theological convictions about creation, redemption, and eschatology, and they emphasize engagement. Restorers are doing the same as they help contemporary Christians envision cultural engagement in new language. Reconfiguring cultural engagement around the notion of being a Restorer is much better suited, in Lyons' words, to "reshaping the Christian stereotype."[76] The image problems spoken of in Lyon and Kinnaman's earlier book are not theological errors in the conventional sense, but rather

[75] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 27

[76] Lyons, *The Next Christians*, 166.

lifestyle errors. Implicitly, a new way of thinking and speaking will also shape a new way of being Christian after the "end of Christian America."

One of the points we have attempted to make about language is that it has both a descriptive and prescriptive quality to it, especially in the context of developing grammars of cultural engagement. "Restoration" is a helpful addition to this discussion as it clearly refers to something the Bible describes in both Old and New Testaments. Moreover, to speak of being a "restorer" is to offer a decidedly prescriptive element into a proposal that seems to be a reasonable inference from Scriptural principles about the church being the proleptic sign of God's redemption. However, we encounter some of the same challenges with this grammar, used at the expense of other biblical images and metaphors. Does speaking primarily (or solely) of being a restorer of culture not fall prey to some of the same limitations of transformationalism? To restore things assumes we are able always to discern to degree to which things aren't as they ought to be. Seemingly this would include more than just broken marriages or fractured friendships, but complex social problems. In the type of complex civilization in which we live, it is likely not always going to be clear precisely what it would look like to restore things to God's proper ordering. Practically then, the "restorer" has to have theological judgment which perhaps only rivals the theological judgment of the person trying to be "faithfully present."

Being in a position to make such comprehensive judgments, as I will show in the final chapter, seems to assume a sort of "meta-grammar." By this I mean a grammar to end all other grammars. I will maintain that such a grammar is not available for adoption for those who take canon and context seriously. Our two final evangelical authors help substantiate this argument.

CHAPTER FOUR

GRAMMARS OF TRANSFORMATION?

We have seen that analysis of the multi-dimensional nature of language is crucial to having a coherent conversation about evangelical cultural engagement. Chapter one sought to introduce the historical and theological context of the larger question of cultural engagement, and gave extensive attention to the models, metaphors, and other linguistic formulations that have come to be associated with the church's engagement with culture. Such formulations have been described here as grammars, borrowing and slightly repurposing a linguistic metaphor that is in keeping with our rhetorical emphasis and well-established in both theology and philosophy.

We furthermore argued that the ambiguities of language make formulating an approach to cultural engagement an inherently challenging project, while also observing that the descriptive and prescriptive qualities of language require Christians to be attentive to both the theological and practical implications of choosing one grammar over another. This was especially necessary as many in the past have not always done this. Drawing insights from Wittgenstein and some of his theological users, as well as insights from cultural anthropology and linguistics, we argued that language is intimately bound up with both thought and practice, and becomes a grid through which fidelity to theology and practice is evaluated.

This study of language and cultural engagement enabled us in chapter two to revisit the history and theological foundations of transformationalism with fresh eyes. Carefully examining the historical context, theological convictions, and unique language of founders such as Carl F.H. Henry helped reinforce a guiding presupposition of this dissertation. That presupposition is that

"transformation" was the predominant grammar which best described neo-evangelical reflection on cultural engagement. Examining the legacy of influential author and practitioner Charles Colson helped illuminate how the language of impact, change, and transformation was interwoven with a set of theological views, social practices, and a fluid definition of culture. Such practices cannot be separated from the rhetoric which gave rise to them, and which shaped the millions of readers of Colson's books. Finally, we examined a significant theological influence on modern evangelicals in the form of the Kuyperian tradition as meditated through theologians such as Albert Wolters. The Dutch Reformed tradition has uniquely colored the life and language of those evangelicals with a comprehensive vision of cultural engagement. Belief in a cultural mandate, emphasis on the lordship of Christ, and an espousal of inaugurated eschatology are the three most decisive doctrinal influences on transformationalists. Yet the "every square inch" mantra of Kuyperians especially made possible their unique approach to culture.

Despite the published volumes which have advanced the transformationalist vision, we saw in chapter three that it could be argued that transformation was a grammar that could perhaps be better understood as one grammar in a constellation of other grammars: "faithful presence," "culture making," and "restoration." These proposals by a sociologist, a journalist, and several parachurch leaders signaled a shifting of rhetoric within evangelical Christianity on the subject of cultural engagement. However, upon closer examination, James Davison Hunter, Andy Crouch, the Colson heirs, and Gabe Lyons all were ultimately operating within the same theological framework, and were explicitly or implicitly shaped by the same theological sources as most of earlier transformationalists. Their unique disciplinary insights, anecdotal observations, and specific complaints motivated them to offer a revised grammar to frame the evangelical

cultural thought and practice. I do not question the motivations of such shifts. In fact, I applaud and welcome these efforts. However, we have examined the adequacy of these moves. Ultimately their inclusion and our analysis of them have served to substantiate our principal claim that language is *as formative* in cultural engagement as theology and practice because it is interwoven with them.

We could perhaps go as far as to say that too many evangelicals have assumed a myth related to this subject. We might call it the "myth of linguistic neutrality." No doubt all the persons weighing in on this debate understand that language counts, that words have meaning, and the like. But there has been a tendency to treat language as one-dimensional, seeing it as solely cognitive and descriptive. This explains why some transformationalists will unapologetically maintain their use of this term. They don't see it as necessarily focused on Christians changing the world. John Frame, for example, says that transformationalism is "simply the view that God expects believers to apply his word to all areas of human life."[1] With such a minimal definition, Frame is able to defend it against any critique. On the other hand, there has been a tendency among others to focus solely on the practical, regulative quality of language. Such approaches focus primarily or solely on the activity of cultural engagement, and not as much on the exact *content* of culture and the theology that defines it. Charles Colson, for example, was orthodox theologically and emphasized the importance of the local church and Christian piety in his writing and ministry. Yet his adoption of "culture" as a catch-all term made his calls to "transform" culture often sound grand, imprecise. and ambiguous. Even when Colson himself acknowledges a changing of the cultural climate in America, his rhetoric largely remained focused on what Christians could do to change it. Though Colson was a well-read

[1] Frame, *The Escondido Theology*, 78.

Christian leader, he was fundamentally a practitioner. Still imprecision in the language of engagement become even more important whenever there has not been deep theological reflection undergirding and guiding its usage from context to context.

Ambiguity is an unavoidable part of life in a fallen word. There are indeed ambiguities in many theological subjects and practical aspects of Christian life in ministry, whether it be certain biblical texts, or choosing to determine which biblical norm to apply when competing principles seem to be at stake. This is why it is incumbent on Christians to offer clarity whenever clarity is possible, including on this topic.

Earlier we made reference to the use of prepositions in formulating some grammars of engagement. Consider this insight on prepositions from one New Testament scholar Murray J. Harris,

> Basically, a preposition is a word—usually a small word in most languages—that expresses a relationship between other words. In Greek that relationship may be as wide-ranging as purpose or result, cause or basis, concern or benefit, derivation or separation, identification or distinction, instrumentality or agency, correspondence or equivalence, representation or substitution, circumstances or sphere, incorporation or fellowship, priority or posteriority. So the significance of prepositions is immediately apparent.[2]

The author's last statement is perhaps an understatement given the 22 possible relationships he provides! He clearly is trying to call attention to the theological and semantic relevance of this often overlooked unit of speech. He does not mean that "prepositions in themselves can express theology," but that "the way they are used invests them with theological import."[3] So whether we are using biblical terms, or terms to describe biblical concepts, Harris' sweeping insight into

[2] Murray J. Harris, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament: An Essential Reference Resource for Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 14.

[3] Harris, *Prepositions and Theology*, 13. Harris additionally cites a Danish linguist who believes that Greek prepositions had been highly formative in the development of the Western philosophical tradition, which itself was based on Greek and nuances expressed by these prepositions. *Praepositionernes Theori—inledning til en rationel Betydningslaere* (Copenhagen: B Lunos, 1970), 92.

prepositions alone reminds us of how care and precision are always critical. This is the type of care that the philosophical legacy of later Wittgenstein points toward. But moving forward, Hunter and two additional Reformed evangelical voices bring greatest aid to this conversation.

Charting a Path for Confessional Evangelicals

We conclude this study by briefly surveying two final authors who represent an important stream of evangelicalism which perhaps best exemplifies the heirs of the neo-evangelical legacy: the Reformed evangelical tradition. The reason this dissertation focuses its exploration of the subject of cultural engagement largely from within the Reformed evangelical community is because it is the segment of evangelicalism which has had the most intellectual influence. This influence is certainly seen through the types of publications that have been generated by Calvinists of all kinds, but even in some of the other institutions that embody certain expressions of Reformed theology and ministry. The Gospel Coalition (TGC) is the best example of such an institution.

Founded in 2005 by well-known pastor-author Timothy Keller (b. 1950), and theologian and biblical scholar D.A. Carson (b. 1946), TGC is a community of evangelical churches belonging to the Reformed tradition committing to the contemporary renewal of the church through the Gospel. To that end, TGC operates a widely accessed website, several large-scale conferences, and provides many resources for Christian life and ministry.[4] This organization is the embodiment of the intellectual center of confessional evangelicalism and has had extensive success in influencing younger pastors, church leaders, and scholars. Timothy Keller's book

[4] The website is of special note since (1) much of its content is translated into other languages, (2) it hosts the blogs of several widely-known evangelical pastors and leaders, and (3) it culls content from other Internet sources that reflect the same Reformed evangelical commitments. See http://www.thegospelcoalition.org

Center Church and D.A. Carson's *Christ and Culture Revisited* will be briefly considered. In addition to their Reformed identity, these two author's seminal works on culture deserve special attention because they help lead arguably the most *intellectually* influential evangelical institution outside of a college, university, or seminary. While our authors from chapter two still have books in print, none are read as widely as Keller or Carson. Similarly, though the authors featured in chapter three have written significant books, their intellectual influence on the evangelical community is not as significant as these two men. A final reason why we consider their works at this juncture in this dissertation is that both Keller and Carson each display a depth of knowledge of Niebuhr, cultural theory, theology, American religion, and practical Christian ministry that surpasses the other authors considered. It is this ability to hold together canon and context, theology and practice, nuance and precision that make them key leaders charting a path forward for this movement.

Timothy Keller and Blended Insights

Keller's *Center Church* is a highly unusual book on "Christian ministry."[5] It weds history, theology, ministry, social theory and other related features to produce a substantial contribution to pastoral theology, practical theology, and contemporary missiology. Keller specifically narrates the collapse of Christendom and the rise of various cultural responses from the church. The majority of this discussion is framed around a discussion of Niebuhr's typology. Following the argument that Carson will make below, Keller argues that, "each of the models has running through it a motif or guiding biblical truth that helps Christians relate to culture."[6] Keller is appreciative of Niebuhr's models and indeed finds models necessary to "encourage church

[5] Zondervan classifies this work as "Christian Ministry."

[6] Timothy Keller, *Center Church*, 195.

leaders to avoid extremes and imbalances and to learn from all the motifs and categories."[7] Here we see the *practical function* of a model or grammar being emphasized, while theological concerns are also seen as pertinent. Keller will evaluate each approach, call attention to specific strengths and weaknesses, and place proponents of the various approaches in dialogue with one another.

The ultimate outcome of this analytical and dialogical approach is to arrive at Keller's own proposal, which revises Niebuhr's five models by turning them into a four-fold model: "Two Kingdoms, Relevance, Transformationalist, and Counterculturalist."[8] These four models are positioned on a diagram in four separate quadrants, connected through the middle with lines which intersect at the center of a circle. Keller shows where each approach is tethered to specific theological and social emphases, such as ideas like "the church as counterculture (counterculturalist) common good (relevance), humble excellence (two kingdoms), or having a distinctive worldview (transformationalist)."[9] He shows that the two main questions that move a person into different quadrants of a diagram (with their corresponding models) is to what degree they believe common grace is at work in the world (more or less) and to what degree Christians should be active (or passive) in influencing culture.[10] These two factors form the two axes of his diagram and help in comparing and contrasting the various views.

After this extensive analysis and creative formulation, Keller surprisingly does not argue for any particular view. He calls attention to the need for balance as he does not think any single model (or grammar) "balances all the insights and emphases of the models," so he offers these

[7] Keller, *Center Church*, 195.

[8] Keller, *Center Church*, 231.

[9] Keller, *Center Church*, 231.

[10] Keller, *Center Church*, 231.

new models as an alternative.[11] In the end, his view is that (1) Christians should know the spiritual season the church is in relative to its relationship with the broader culture, and (2) Pastors and church leaders should recognize that whatever approach one chooses should be sensitive to the "gifts and calling" of individual Christians.[12] We should note at this point that Keller is committed to a cultural mandate, though his presentation of it reflects a more specific focus on the role of vocation. As a Reformed Christian schooled in the Westminster theological tradition, he also operates with the same beliefs on the lordship of Christ and inaugurated eschatology that the luminaries of that tradition espoused. Yet he calls for a ministry that operates with the benefit of the "blended insights" that can be gained when evaluating his adaptation of Niebuhr's models.

Keller affirms that the models need to be controlled by biblical categories and themes. This allows him to argue that all of them have some degree of biblical insight to contribute to one's reflection on and engagement with culture. Although everything Keller theologically affirms best fits with the transformationalist category, he leaves the choice of the approach to readers based on their specific context, cultural moment, and gifting or calling.

Keller's proposal requires inclusion in this argument because (1) it is a decidedly Reformed evangelical perspective from an especially influential author, (2) it deals seriously with models or grammars of engagement, (3) it helps contribute to an emphasis on how specific grammars relate to church practice in specific contexts and (4) it avoids many of the false either/or dichotomies that so often characterize this debate. Though Keller offers the least in terms of specific emphasis to language, his contribution is designed to move Christians from faithful

[11] Keller, *Center Church*, 237.

[12] Keller, *Center Church*, 238.

theological reflection to faithful practice. And, in order to do that, he does modify the linguistic paradigm of Niebuhr to offer his four-fold graph with its blended insights. As a pastor, Keller is interested in offering a way for the church truly to understand its place in the culture and thereby to engage it. Recognizing the validity of many insights disallows him, however, from offering one particular grammar. In this respect, his conclusion to avoid reductionism coincides with our argument made first in chapter one.

Keller's proposal is further qualified by considering the work of Stephen Bevans. Bevans is among many theologians who have attempted to offer some way of thinking about models in the practice of theology. In *Models of Contextual Theology*, he discusses some of the common efforts to use models. But before offering his models, Bevans makes two important claims. First, models in theology are typically theoretical in nature, they simplify complex reality, and they may be exclusive or complementary.[13] In the first two senses, Bevans follows Niebuhr in recognizing that there is an "ideal" quality to our models or types, and also in recognizing that they don't answer every practical question one may raise. But his latter point is especially significant. Niebuhr himself presented his types as exclusive options. There is no prospect for adhering to two of his types at once. However, the models of contextual theology Bevans will offer are, in his words, "inclusive." He believes that there is value and validity to all five, each to different degrees being more sensitive to classical theological tradition and sources, or more sensitive to cultural contexts and social change. He concludes his book by saying that the best model to use "depends on the context."[14] Interestingly, Bevans shares Keller's basic idea here. He says of his models that, "though each model is distinct, each can be used in conjunction with

[13] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 26.

[14] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 112.

others."[15]

Keller's position not to commit to a single model is in keeping with the proposal advanced here, though for different reasons. Keller is mainly focused on the season or context of the church's ministry, and the giftedness of believers in the church. While his concert for context is a point I also concede, and will be further explicated in Carson below, his concern for giftedness does not provide a sufficient enough control over cultural engagement. It seems to conflate the category of spiritual gift with vocational or institutional location. The latter would be a contextual consideration, which would be in keeping with points that Keller makes elsewhere in his work (which I would also affirm). One's vocational and/or institutional setting certainly could shape the kind of grammar that would be in keeping with those lived realities, provided they are qualified by concrete theological commitments. So Keller arrives at the same conclusion as I do, though not entirely for the same reason.

My position is that one single grammar should not be used at the exclusion of others because of the multi-dimensional nature of *language*. Whether it concerns our use of verbs or prepositions, the various definitions of culture employed, or the numerous biblical themes and turning points that Scripture offers us—these factors point us to recognize the limits of transformation, while not completely abrogating the term. This is why my critiques of the figures in chapters one and two were not primarily directed against the word "transformation," but rather (1) how that term had been employed most commonly, and (2) the use of that term at the exclusion of other considerations.

Speaking in this measured way about transformation helps transition our reflection finally to the work of D.A. Carson, and his emphasis on canon alongside context.

[15] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 28.

D.A. Carson and Biblical Turning Points

In 2008 D.A. Carson published his significant book work, *Christ and Culture Revisited.* Though some felt Carson was largely critical of Niebuhr, the Niebuhr scholar, Diefenthaler classifies Carson as a "fixer." In other words, he reads Carson as one not desiring to reject Niebuhr's project entirely, but one who believes that some revision and qualifications are necessary.[16] Whether Diefenthaler is correct to call Carson a "fixer" of Niebuhr is a slightly different question than the one we are concerned with here. I maintain that Carson is a fixer, but of evangelical cultural engagement in general. He accomplishes this by way of his Niebuhrian critique, an emphasis on the necessity for cultural reflection to be controlled by the biblical canon, and by taking into account the varied church and state arrangements under which believers throughout the world live.[17]

Carson's central thesis is that one's posture towards culture must be controlled and constrained by the great turning points in redemptive history.[18] He intends to "lay out the rudiments of a responsible biblical theology," and "begin to show how these turning points in the history of redemption must shape Christian thinking about the relationship between Christ and Culture."[19] By turning points he means biblical-theological categories such as creation and fall, Israel and the law, Christ and the new covenant, and the like.[20] Carson believes that "the structures generated by such biblical theology are robust enough to allow the many differing emphases within Scripture to find their voices, so that to speak of different 'models' of the

[16] Diefenthaler, *The Paradox of Church and World*, xxi.

[17] Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 5–6.

[18] Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 206.

[19] Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, xi.

[20] Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 44–55.

Christ-and-culture relationship begins to look misleading."[21] In a sense, he is advocating for the kind of careful biblical reflection that figures such as Wolters and Crouch set forth. Yet Carson goes further in wanting to anchor one's development of paradigms or models around these turning points. The biblical-theological points which he makes about these turning points in redemption history "must control our thinking *simultaneously* and *all the time.*"[22] This is why he calls them the "*non-negotiables* of biblical theology."[23]

Carson's argument here is partly just an extension of the emphases in his many earlier works on canon, biblical theology, and related themes.[24] It is also partly a critique of Niebuhr, who, Carson believes is inconsistent when it comes to describing the "Christ" and "culture" in *Christ and Culture*. Moreover, Carson is also critical of his handling of Scripture and assignment of historical figures.[25] This is where Carson thinks that a more rigorous exegetical engagement with Scripture and the insights of biblical theology would help demarcate the range of faithful options for Christians. For example, judging only the "Christ-of-Culture" type to be completely unbiblical, Carson suggests that in certain situations nuanced understandings of all the other types might be appropriate if carefully constrained and clarified by biblical exegesis.

Carson also provides robust consideration of other key terms such as "culture," the nature of church and state in the late modern west, and some brief historical surveys of the legacies of the figures associated with Niebuhr's various types. This latter type of analysis is not new in

[21] Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, xi.

[22] Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 59.

[23] Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 59.

[24] Though Carson has published numerous books and articles connected with these topics, his edited volume on Scripture perhaps best exemplifies his commitment to the biblical text. See D.A. Carson, ed., *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

[25] Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 36–40.

reaction to Niebuhr's work, but rarely is it combined with Carson's emphasis on Scripture and cultural context. Perhaps the best example of Carson showing the tensions with which Christians have to cope in this subject is his citation of the famous "Not one square inch" aphorism of Abraham Kuyper. To this Carson replies, "Yet that truth, which all thoughtful Christians will confess, must be integrated with other truths—for example, that Christ's sovereignty is widely contested now as it will not be in the new heavens and the new earth."[26] This is an application of what it means to move beyond clichés, powerful and true as they are, and to employ language that is constrained by biblical turning points, but also mindful of how those turning points give guidance to Christian practice in diverse cultural situations.

Christians trying to be more sensitive to the linguistic dimensions of cultural engagement are not engaged in a mere language game, simply trying to stand over and against all uses of imprecise language. They bring to this discussion the language of Scripture, connected as it is to real theological realities and spiritual imperatives. The concept of biblical turning points provides the primary resource for chastening our use of language as we formulate and evaluate grammars of cultural engagement. We have argued throughout this dissertation that grammars must take into account both theological content and practical direction. But what must control that content? For traditions seeking to be faithful to Christ, this is the Christian Scriptures. In the case of transformationalists, Carson would simply ask them whether this imagery—biblical as it is—is adequate to use in light of all of the biblical turning points and how they shed light on new and diverse situations, including a post-Christian context.[27] Though Carson does not say it as explicitly as I have in this dissertation, he demonstrates sensitivity to language by way of

[26] Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 214.

[27] Carson himself affirms the notion of biblical transformation. *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 55.

providing illustrations and critical analysis of some postmodern approaches to language that he believes compromise traditional notions of truth and language.[28] This serves to illustrate the fact that even if one does not employ our specific usage of the term grammar, a greater attentiveness to language and its interconnectedness with theological truth and Christian practice can foster the kinds of sensibilities needed to ask probing questions about the way one speaks about cultural engagement.

Recognizing Limits

What if the answer to the main concerns raised in this dissertation is not to find *the* grammar, but instead embrace many grammars of cultural engagement? Even in his advocacy for culture making, Andy Crouch will concede that speaking of transformation is appropriate in some instances.[29] And almost none of the authors cited in this dissertation who expresses concerns about transformational*ists* and transformational*ism* will deny the relationship of some kind of transformation to the Scriptural message, even if they disagree about how that relationship is explained. They understand that language's *usage* and *meaning* are connected, which shapes how they communicate their concerns about rhetoric from the past, and motivates what proposals they offer instead. Still, the conversation continues up until the present in evangelical circles about how best to engage the culture. How might the proposal here advance those conversations? I will offer a few concluding possibilities for such dialogues to progress.

One of the ways in which these disagreements might be turned into fruitful dialogue is for all evangelicals who believe in some form of cultural engagement to enter into dialogue with one another about the proposals offered by Keller or Carson. With Keller, they might be able to

[28] Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 68; 74–75; 99–113.

[29] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 182–83.

consider if there are overlapping areas of theological similarity, which in turn would indicate why they are drawn to certain postures over others. With Carson, they might be able to see if a difference is rooted in a contextual circumstance that is driving the interpretation and appropriation of a particular biblical turning point. It may also be the case that differences would emerge from within the vast number of self-identified evangelicals about how biblical turning points are to be fully understood in relation to one another. Such differences in interpretation could in turn change the way application is made to an individual situation.

Though we have argued that no single grammar is able to simultaneously account for all biblical truths and practical responses necessary in various situations, it is likely that certain Christians, churches, and denominations will always be predisposed to certain grammars with which they have become accustomed. After all, if the insights from philosophy of language and cultural anthropology are correct, this is exactly what we would expect to happen in many cases. However, I contend that if language is formative in the way that I have argued, since God's revelation has been given in written, verbal form, then there are great possibilities that biblical language can still form the church afresh and anew.

Though Stanley Hauerwas has not been offered as the best exemplar for our overall argument, he has been cited to help draw attention to some key points within that argument. There is an additional insight from Hauerwas that helps reinforce our call for a chastened, nuanced, rigorous reflection on the language of cultural engagement. Though Hauerwas has been the subject of many studies, theologians have remarked that it is difficult to identify the center of his work. In the words of one critic, "Hauerwas challenges the very idea of an account of his work as a whole. He has not provided us with anything like a systematic presentation of his

argument, and he has rejected repeated calls for a statement of his theological position."[30] As another reviewer of Hauerwas has put it, "Hauerwas, like Wittgenstein, rejects high theory and system-building."[31] Even Hauerwas himself offers a basic acknowledgment of these observations. As he explains, "[Wittgenstein] slowly cured me of the notion that philosophy was primarily a matter of positions, ideas, and/or theories."[32] With respect to his writing style, readers have also observed that Hauerwas' books are overwhelmingly collections of essays, lectures, or sermons. Very few of his books, especially in recent years, would be considered entire proposals in book-length form. Speaking more directly of this approach to writing, Hauerwas notes that his approach is somewhat aphoristic, like Wittgenstein's.[33]

How do these insights relate to grammars of engagement? We could say that for too long evangelicals have tried to operate with a sort of "meta-grammar." They have acted as though their grammar was a system or a grand theory, rather than a specific account of how to engage culture informed by the entire canon, but in specific times and places. It might be more constructive if we thought of our grammars as aphorisms, expressions rooted in principle and concerned with practice, appropriate as our contexts called for their usage. This does *not* require, as Hunter asserts, that we abandon the language of transformation and redemption completely, even as it relates to culture.[34] Instead, transformation should be recognized as part of God's plan to make all things new. If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation, the apostle Paul says (2 Cor.

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[30] Nicholas Healy, *Hauerwas: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 18.

[31] Bruce R. Ashford, "Wittgenstein's Theologians? A Survey of Ludwig Wittgenstein's Impact on Theology," 361.

[32] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), xxi.

[33] Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 6.

[34] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 280.

5:17). Moreover, the Lord is making all things new (Rev. 21:5). It is not necessarily carelessness or arrogance that has always motivated the use of transformation in the past. Human beings as both image-bearers and a part of creation has the New Jerusalem as a glorious future to which he may look, and for which he may labor, knowing he works for the eschatological Christ who will *himself* usher in this new creation. So the "new language" Hunter would have us learn *should* include transformation, though carefully chastened, nuanced, and not to the exclusion of other biblically-informed, practically-oriented, culturally appropriate ones.[35]

[35] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 237.

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Previous Theses and Publications

"Singles: Our Forgotten Families," D6 Family Ministry Journal 2 (2017): 65–80.

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Current Memberships in Academic Societies

Evangelical Theological Society