

Case Study

“Everyone Did What Was Right in His Own Eyes”: Nondenominational Fundamentalist/Evangelical/ Pentecostal Archives in the United States

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Abstract: The conservative Protestant traditions of Fundamentalism, Evangelicalism, and Pentecostalism have few archives, particularly for the nondenominational institutions that provide so much of these groups' leadership and resources. Part of the explanation for this scarcity of archives lies in the nature of these traditions—their relatively recent origin, focus on the present, diversity, and funding priorities. The Evangelical Archives Conference, held at the Billy Graham Center in 1988, began to address the problem by bringing together a group of archivists and nonarchivists to plan an agenda for future action.

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THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES in the United States include congregations that meet in great cathedrals and others that meet in storefront churches not much more comfortable than the catacombs in which those of the faith first sheltered themselves. The range of activities in which these churches engage is vast: worship services, publishing, land development, missionary activities, radio programs, television broadcasting, film production, soup kitchens, and retirement homes, among others. Anyone who wished to tell the story of American Christianity could not hope to do more than briefly outline and suggest these denominational activities and their impact on America.

But such an outline would be very incomplete. The church was made for people, not people for the church, and the impulse of faith has been as vigorous outside denominational boundaries as within them, although the nondenominational expression of the impulse does not necessarily appear in traditional religious statistics. Nondenominational efforts in the United States have been particularly important for the Protestant traditions known as Fundamentalist, Evangelical, and Pentecostal, that here will be referred to jointly as "the Evangelical movement."¹

The nonprofit corporation has often been used within the movement for channeling the energies and resources of millions of people into evangelism and missions in the United States.² These corporations, along

with other less formally organized parachurch structures, have been almost as influential as denominations in the Evangelical movement.³ Although both the denominations and the nondenominational elements have generated archives, they have hardly done so to the same degree. There are several denominational archives, but only a scattered few repositories for nondenominational records. Yet the records generated by nondenominational corporations document an important aspect not only of religious history, but of American history. They illustrate some of the most typically American aspects of the Evangelical movement, such as a strong commitment to individualism and an emphasis on the present and future that amounts to almost an avoidance of the past.

The Evangelical movement is part of an evangelistic heritage with a long history and influence in the American church, although the three elements of the movement are much more recent in origin. All three are theologically conservative and oppose perceived tendencies in the old mainstream Protestant denominations to downplay the importance of the spiritual and supernatural, as opposed to social aspects of Christianity. All stress the importance of personal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, the authority of Scripture, the responsibility of each individual before God for his or her own faith and actions, and the imperative need to carry out the Great Commission of the twenty-eighth chapter of Matthew to preach the Gospel to every nation. Al-

¹There is a vigorous and growing Catholic Pentecostal movement which is outside the scope of this paper. For more information, consult Richard J. Bord and Joseph E. Faulkner, *The Catholic Charismatics: The Anatomy of a Modern Religious Movement* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983); and Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan, *Catholic Pentecostals Today* (South Bend, IN: Charismatic Renewal Services, 1983).


²Among the sources for information on some of these corporations are: Samuel Wilson and John Siewert, eds., *13th Mission Handbook: North American Protestant Ministries Overseas* (Monrovia, CA: Missions Advanced Research and Communications Cen-

ter, 1986); *National Evangelical Directory*, 1989-90 ed. (Wheaton, IL: National Association of Evangelicals, 1989); *The Directory of Religious Broadcasting*, 1989 ed. (Morristown, NJ: National Religious Broadcasting, 1989); *Para-Church Groups: A Report on Current Religious Movements With an Annotated Bibliography on Contemporary Sects* (New York, NY: United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., n.d.).


³See, for example, the introduction in George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1987).

THE SEVEN EVANGELISTS


4 SPEAKERS




HENRY OSTRUM




JOHN P. MILLER




W. E. BIEDENKOPF



HARRY MAXWELL



B. FAY MILLS



J. R. MORRIS

3 SINGERS

AT

BIEROD'S BEER GARDEN

SECOND MEETING.

Monday, Nov. 4th, 1895

9 P. M.

N. B.—NO CHARGE FOR ADMISSION.

Figure 1: Poster for a series of meetings led by evangelist B. Fay Mills, possibly in St. Louis, Missouri. (Courtesy of the Billy Graham Center Archives.)

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though each group has its own distinctions, it cannot be stated too strongly that the boundaries between these traditions are very vague. Thus, it is all but impossible to write hard and fast definitions on which all will agree. Fundamentalists emphasize being separated individually and corporately from the corruption of the world, while Evangelicals concentrate on the evangelization of the unsaved living amid the corruption. Pentecostals focus on the work and baptism of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life, one evidence of which is the ability to speak in tongues.⁴

Factors that Affect Evangelical Documentation

The nature of the Evangelical movement inevitably affects the way it preserves its documents. Four aspects of that nature are particularly important. First, despite roots

going much further back, the three elements of the movement are all of the twentieth century. If Pentecostalism has a founder, it is probably Charles Fox Parham (1873-1929). The start of the tradition is generally associated with the revival that began with the Azusa Street meetings in Los Angeles in 1906. Devising a date for the birth of Fundamentalism is more difficult, but a good case could be made for the publication between 1910 and 1915 of a series of publications called *The Fundamentals*. The term "fundamentalist" first came into use in 1922. "Evangelicalism" in the sense of a distinct movement in the United States is an even more recent development. A reasonable date for its founding would be 1942 when the National Association of Evangelicals was established.⁵

The histories of these traditions are therefore short compared with others, and a sense of history only really began to develop in recent years. For many Evangelicals, Fundamentalists, or Pentecostals, church history consisted of the early apostolic church, apostasy, the Reformation, apostasy again, and a return to biblical faith in these last days before the Apocalypse. Few figures from the past were acknowledged except the apostles, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the founder of one's own particular denomination. (Of course, this lack of knowledge about church history is probably true of the lay members of other Christian traditions as well.) More formal hierarchies do emerge as the years pass, and papers, photographs, films, and scrapbooks begin to accumulate. But the con-

⁴An excellent introduction to the definitions and institutions of these traditions by one of the leading scholars in the field is Timothy Smith, "The Evangelical Kaleidoscope and the Call to Christian Unity," *Christian Scholar's Review* 15(1986): 125-140. Further definitions and statistics can be found in: David B. Barrett, ed., *The World Christian Encyclopedia* (Nairobi, Kenya: Oxford University Press, 1982) esp. pp. 711-28 on the U.S.; J.D. Douglas and Earle E. Cairns, eds., *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978); and Stanley M. Burgess and Garry B. McGee eds., *Dictionary of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988). Other useful introductions to these traditions are: Mark A. Noll et al., eds. *Eerdmans' Handbook to Christianity in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1983); George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Vinson Synan, *The Holiness Pentecostal Movement in the United States* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1971); and David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *The Evangelicals* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1975). Helpful compilations of bibliographical and other information are Charles Edwin Jones' *A Guide to the Study of the Holiness Movement* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press and the American Theological Library Association, 1974) and *A Guide to the Pentecostal Movement*, 2 vols. (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press and the American Theological Library Association, 1983).

⁵For Parham and the Azusa Street meetings, see the relevant articles in the *Dictionary of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*; for the origins of Fundamentalism and the use of the word "fundamentalist," see the article on Fundamentalism in the *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*; for the development of modern Evangelicalism, see pp. 465-68 of *Eerdmans' Handbook to Christianity in America*.

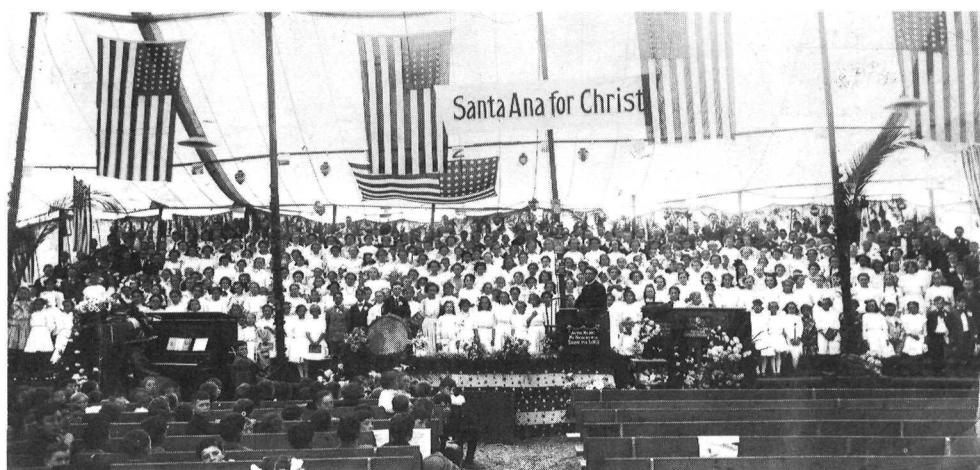


Figure 2: Children's meeting, which was part of a larger evangelistic campaign led by evangelist John Brown in Santa Ana, California, ca. 1911. (Courtesy of the Billy Graham Center Archives.)

cern with the present needs and the expected arrival of the prophesied future still make archives a low priority.

The comparatively recent nature of these movements leads to their second common factor, the great concentration on the present. It is in the present that so much needs to be done. The world must be evangelized. Every individual must be brought face to face with the claims of Christ. The past is dead and largely irrelevant to the work of carrying out the Great Commission. This is, of course, an exaggeration of the attitudes held by Christians of the Evangelical movement but one with a strong basis in reality. The same single-minded fervor that gives the movement so much of its energy also relegates most other tasks to second place, with archives too unimportant to rate even third. As one officer of a large independent ministry put it, "Well, we'll just be faithful to our mission and let God worry about archives."

The third factor influencing archival collecting is the diversity resulting from the emphasis on individual salvation and conscience. All Christian traditions stress the importance of studying the Bible, but the

people within the Evangelical movement place particular emphasis on the divine authority of Scripture and the need for each individual to search it for God's will. The result, not infrequently, is splits within the tradition over points of doctrine and/or practice. Instead of a few central organizations producing well-ordered record groups, there is a staggering number of small denominations and organizations. Within this fragment of religion in America, there has been an ever-changing variety of groups forming, reforming, combining, and splitting. Independent evangelists, Bible schools, faith mission boards, prison ministries, and rescue missions are some of the major institutions of these non-institutional traditions. Archivally, this means that a much wider net must be cast in order to acquire even a representative sample. This vigorous diversity, however, is directly linked to the movement's theological beliefs and should be reflected in the record if it is to be a true image of reality.

The fourth factor, not unrelated to this diversity, is the budgetary priorities of organizations within the movement. Several corporations have yearly budgets of mil-

lions of dollars. Many more lead hand-to-mouth existences, with faith in God's provision for the meeting of basic needs. Often these groups are on the cutting edge of ministry among the poor, forsaken, and despised in our society. Needless to say, they have no funds for archives and little for record keeping beyond the bare necessities. The previously described concentration on the present makes it unlikely that even the relatively wealthy organizations will earmark resources for the archives, unless the value of archives as a resource for the church is presented effectively to them. As the report of the Society of American Archivists Task Force on Goals and Priorities states, "Therefore, the success of archival programs depends in no small measure on the ability of archivists to convince their sponsors that these programs provide valuable and useful services and should receive an adequate allocation of funds."⁶ The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and World Vision are examples of parachurch groups that have been willing to make that allocation, once a convincing case was made.

Current State of Evangelical Archives

What is the current state of archives for the Evangelical movement? There are many denominational archives, but the archival picture of the nondenominational aspect of these traditions is a poor reflection of the vigorous, chaotic reality. Archives simply have not been a high priority. The collecting and preservation that has been done has usually been an afterthought, and, as a result, there has been no coordination or cooperation in collecting efforts. With few exceptions, reporting of collections to the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, national databases, newsletters, and professional associations has been almost

nonexistent as have other efforts to stimulate both scholarly and nonscholarly use of the documents.

Several different kinds of repositories are now preserving Evangelical archives. Denominational archives are traditionally the foundation of religious archives. There are several professional programs, either within the Evangelical movement or with close affiliations to it, that have long been represented in the Society of American Archivists. Others are relatively new. A recent informal count revealed some four dozen denominational archives consisting wholly, or in substantial part, of twentieth-century Evangelical material.⁷ Additional records are being preserved by state and county historical societies and university archives because of their regional or thematic interest, often quite apart from their importance for religious history.⁸ Bible colleges and institutes and private Christian colleges are another major source for such materials,⁹ and some parachurch groups are

⁷Among the major archives are the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville; Concordia Historical Institute in St. Louis; Assemblies of God Archives in Springfield, Missouri; Disciples of Christ Historical Society in Nashville; Salvation Army Archives and Research Center in New York City; Pentecostal Holiness Church Archives in Oklahoma City; Presbyterian Church in America Archives in St. Louis; Church of the Nazarene Archives in Kansas City; records of the Reformed Church at Hope College, Holland, Michigan; Grace Brethren denomination materials at Grace College, Winona Lake, Indiana; and the records of Advent Christian General Conference at Aurora University in Illinois.

⁸For example, Yale University has papers of Dwight L. Moody, the University of Kentucky archives includes papers about evangelist Mordecai Ham, and the Bentley Historical Library of the University of Michigan includes materials by and about Fundamentalist Carl McIntire. An instance of religious organizational records being held by a secular repository is that of the YMCA of the USA, who deposited their archives in the Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁹Of these, probably the best known is the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago which contains papers of Dwight L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, and James Gray, as well as the records of the Institute. Two other very influential Fundamentalist schools with archives pre-

⁶*Planning for the Archival Profession: A Report of the SAA Task Force on Goals and Priorities* (Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists, 1986).

at least giving serious thought to preserving their own records.¹⁰ A few institutions have adopted collecting policies that view the Evangelical movement thematically. The DuPlessis Center of Fuller Seminary (Pasadena, California) collects the records of Pentecostalism and some ecumenical or-

ganizations; Asbury Seminary (Wilmore, Kentucky) documents the Holiness movement, and the Billy Graham Center (BGC) of Wheaton College (Wheaton, Illinois) focuses on Evangelical nondenominational missions and evangelism—all three of these institutions' collecting policies emphasize, or at least include, records of nondenominational organizations.

In summary, the archival picture of the movement's nondenominational element is that of a few schools and organizations collecting records immediately relevant to their history, a few other documents in scattered repositories, and a very few programs attempting the systematic collection of selected portions of the heritage. The fragment of what is being preserved is as a feather to an elephant compared to what potentially could be collected. A mission handbook lists more than four hundred nondenominational overseas missions ministries, and a recent listing of prison ministries in the United States included 486 programs.¹¹ Because little of what is collected is reported, much material remains virtually inaccessible.

Many administrators of Evangelical organizations are willing to support the idea of archives once they are presented with ways an archives fits into the work of their organization. Half of the eighty-three members of the Evangelical Foreign Mission Association responded to a 1988 survey of their archival programs; of those respondents, most without a program indicated an interest in more information.¹² They need professional guidance to develop an archives that meets minimum standards and is accessible to users—the kind of voluntary institutional evaluation

serving the records of their founders as well as the files of the institution, are Bob Jones University and Columbia Bible College, both located in South Carolina. The papers of Billy Sunday and the Winona Lake Christian Assembly are at Grace College, Winona Lake, Indiana; the notebooks of Fundamentalist leader William Bell Riley can be found at Northwestern College, Roseville, Minnesota; the papers of Clarence E. Macartney are kept at Geneva College, Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania; the papers of J. Gresham Machen are at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia; the papers of leading Fundamentalist businessperson Robert G. LeTourneau are preserved at LeTourneau College, Longview, Texas; the clipping file and other materials on Jerry Falwell are at the school he founded, Liberty University in Virginia. CBN University (Virginia Beach, Virginia) holds the archives of the institution and miscellaneous material on its founder, Pat Robertson, as well as files on the prayer amendment and anti-abortion movements. Kings College in Briarcliff, New York has various materials of its founder, Percy Crawford, including films of his television broadcasts from the late 1940s and early 1950s. The archives of Wheaton College include the records of the school, one of the major Fundamentalist/Evangelical institutions, as well as the papers of the college's presidents, often important leaders in their own right.

¹⁰World Vision (Monrovia, California), which is involved in charitable aid and economic development, has set up archives of both its international and United States branches. Wycliffe Bible Translators has been involved in virtually every non-European country in the world translating Bibles into languages (for which the Wycliffe workers must also prepare the first written alphabets, dictionaries, and grammars). The Wycliffe archives (Dallas, Texas) consists mainly of the papers of the organization's founder, W. Cameron Townsend, which are not yet open to the public. The Evangelical Alliance Mission has preserved many of its historical records in its Wheaton, Illinois headquarters. The Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association (Tulsa, Oklahoma) started an archives several years ago, but it is mainly for Association use only. The Holy Spirit Research Center of Oral Roberts University collects many Pentecostal periodicals available nowhere else. In Chicago, the headquarters of the Women's Christian Temperance Union preserves the records of the organization, rich in prohibition and temperance movement history and the papers of Francis Willard. The American Bible Society (New York City) has long had a fine archival program.

¹¹Wilson and Siewert, eds. *13th Mission Handbook; Prison Ministry Directory* (Wheaton, IL: Billy Graham Center, 1986).

¹²The results of the survey are summarized in the January 1989 newsletter of the Evangelical Documentation Interest Group. The returned survey forms are in the offices of the archives of the Billy Graham Center.

program being developed by the Archivists of Religious Institutions for the New York area and funded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC).

Evangelical Archives Conference

Some steps toward providing this guidance were taken in the summer of 1988. The Institute for Study of American Evangelicals at Wheaton College received a grant from the Lilly Foundation for the study of the interactions of Evangelicals, voluntary associations, and American public life. As part of this grant, the Billy Graham Center Archives received funds to plan and host an Evangelical Archives Conference to discuss the state of archives among Evangelical movement institutions and to plan an agenda for solving some of the problems.

The conference, which took place on 13-15 July 1988, placed particular emphasis on developing minimum standards for starting archives and beginning a process of documentation strategy for the movement. It also examined the possibilities for cooperation among archives and ways of raising the archival consciousness of the movement.

The aim of the BGC archives staff, who planned the conference, was to invite a small, mixed group of archivists, librarians, administrators of organizations, researchers, and other users, all of whom would participate actively in a working conference. To provide input from a variety of backgrounds, it was essential that a large number of the attendees be non-archivists, although it was often difficult to convince administrators of organizations who lacked archival expertise to attend.¹³

The conference was organized into four study groups, described below. (A fifth group on funding had been planned but was canceled because too few attendees indicated an interest.) Assignment of participants to study groups was based on individual preference and on a strategy of insuring that each group contained a mix of archivists, administrators, and users. Group leaders coordinated the readings and communication within each group that began before the meeting.

One group worked on identifying what ideally should be preserved to document the Evangelical movement, existing documentation gaps, and collecting problems. It sought to discern the kinds of materials necessary to document these conservative Protestants and to identify the activities, organizations, relationships, and modes of consciousness that are important to capture. The group generated a list of possibilities as a beginning point for discussion and action by existing and potential collectors. The report of this group also described the types of organizations that should be encouraged to organize and provide access to their own records. The purpose of listing gaps was to stimulate interest and concern among some of the executives of these organizations in establishing their own institutional archives, because existing archives cannot hope to take over the management of the records of the hundreds of nonprofit Evangelical movement corporations currently active. Another suggestion was for several organizations in a similar ministry to form a joint archives.

Another group considered what the nature of the archives should be. What kind

¹³Among the organizations represented were the American Bible Society, Asbury Seminary, the Assemblies of God Archives, Calvin College, Campus Crusade for Christ, CBN University, Christian Service Brigade, Concordia Historical Institute, the

DuPlessis Center of Fuller Seminary, the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association, Moody Bible Institute, the National Association of Evangelicals, the Salvation Army, Wheaton College, William Tyndale College, World Vision International, and Wycliffe Bible Translators. In overlapping groups there were seventeen archivists, seven administrators, four scholars and three librarians.

of space, personnel, supplies, and goals will they need? Who will be allowed to use the material and what services will be provided? What resources should the administrators of a small nondenominational agency expect to set aside for an archives? Equally important, how can they be taught to think systematically about the goals and decisions involved in setting up an archives? Most such organizations work with very limited funds earmarked for evangelism, nurture, training, and church growth. This group's report suggested minimum archival standards for these organizations and outlined a model for beginning an archives.

A third group dealt with the question of cooperation between archivists and users and among archives. This question of cooperation is central to the whole idea of documentation strategy. There is so much to be collected and so few doing the collecting that it is ludicrous that there should be significant competition between existing archives. The group examined some of the barriers to cooperation and ways to remove them.

The fourth group studied ways of building support for archives in the Evangelical movement. Individual archives might survive with a very narrow base of support, but a network of archives attempting cooperatively to document a large and vital movement such as the activities of the community of conservative Protestant Christians cannot hope to do so without that community's support. The tangible giving of documents and money must be tied to a sympathetic understanding and appreciation of the work of archives and a realization of how that work directly and indirectly benefits the different elements of the community. The group developed a list of suggestions for accomplishing this.

The conference schedule allowed the maximum time possible for interaction within each small group, as well as between groups. On the morning of the last day, each group leader gave the group's

report, which was then discussed by all the attendees. Each report consisted of a statement of problems followed by a suggested agenda to address the situation. Some of the actions were appropriate for a single archives, while others entailed the cooperation of several institutions. The conference also discussed several useful projects for the immediate future, including forming a group to further develop and guide Evangelical movement documentation strategy, speaking at various national gatherings of Evangelicals on the benefits and importance of archives, developing a directory of archives, and developing educational materials such as a video and a booklet to assist those interested in beginning individual archives.

The conference took at least the first step of providing a framework for future action: small groups were formed to work on projects independently; an occasional newsletter will describe the progress being made on various projects; and the Evangelical Documentation Interest Group, an ad hoc committee made up of all of those working on projects, was established. This group is not limited to people who attended the conference; any interested person (archivist or nonarchivist) who is willing to work on one of the projects can join. At a later time, the members of the ad hoc group will assess progress and interest to determine if another conference or a more permanent organization would be beneficial.¹⁴

Longtime Lutheran archivist Robert Wiederaenders has remarked that the church has many ministries: teaching, preaching,

¹⁴*A Heritage at Risk: Proceedings of the Evangelical Archives Conference, 13-15 July 1988* (Wheaton, IL: Billy Graham Center, 1988), 47 pages. A copy of the proceedings can be obtained by sending eighty-five cents postage and a self-addressed envelope 6 x 9 inches or larger to: Evangelical Documentation Information Group, P.O. Box 661, Glen Ellyn, IL 60138. Anyone wishing more information about the ad hoc group formed at the conference should write to the same address.

healing. But fundamental to them all is remembering. The complex task of maintaining a memory of the true past, unaffected by nostalgia and with as few blank spots as possible, will not happen by accident or default. The Evangelical Archives Confer-

ence has made a start toward creating a consensus and a vision in the Evangelical movement about archival purpose, means, and service. Without that vision, archives, continuity, and memory will indeed perish.