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The Social Movement Dynamics of Modern American Evangelicalism

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In discussions with theologically conservative African American Christians, I discovered that the term "evangelical" has a negative association for many of them. They associated the word with a politically conservative agenda and mentioned school prayer, school vouchers, pro-Israel policy, the death penalty, and other political platform issues that are coupled with American evangelicalism as reasons for their antipathy. In the same conversations, some white evangelicals stressed the historical and theological components of the term and focused on those meanings to define the word and themselves. In this article, I describe American evangelicalism in terms of social movement dynamics and offer an alternative word to describe theologically conservative Protestants.

The Social Movement Dynamics of Modern American Evangelicalism

American evangelicalism exists as a theological construct,[1] a historical phenomenon,[2] and a sociological movement. At its core, it is a set of beliefs about God, Scripture, the nature of salvation, and personal morality. Those beliefs are rooted in and grow out of a historical milieu associated with the rise of conservative Christianity from the mid-1700s to the 1900s. In particular, the great awakenings, pietism, revivalism, abolitionism, the holiness movement, world missions, the prohibition movement, the emergence of Christian fundamentalism, and dispensational eschatology are historical factors that strongly influenced the development of modern evangelicalism. Modernity also fashioned the contours of American evangelicalism to the extent that evangelicalism interacted with it and reacted to it, e.g., changing demographics associated with immigration/emigration, secularism, the theory of evolution, biblical criticism, and progressive politics coupled with an aggressive social activism that threatened traditional values. Sociologically, modern evangelicalism became a codified political movement in the 1970s as it reacted to a cluster of issues that endangered the core fabric of a mythical evangelical

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empire. Those issues gave American evangelicals a basis for common cause and the energy necessary to propel themselves into political activity. Some flash issues were the Civil Rights Movement, legalized abortion, the Equal Rights Amendment, gambling, the homosexual lobby, the proliferation of pornography, and an activist judiciary.

Sociologically, when groups of interrelated evangelicals act in collaborate ways, the corresponding behavior may reflect movement dynamics.[3] Undoubtedly, in the last 30 years, American evangelicals organized ideas, material culture, and activities to give structure, unity, and purpose to their evangelical beliefs. It is from this perspective that I wish to reflect on American evangelicalism as a social movement.

Some Sociological Theories Associated with Movement Dynamics

According to Zald and McCarthy (1979), social movements are a response to a systematic strain.[4] The strain leads to a mobilization of people who share the same deprivation or grievance. The strain takes place on the macro-level of society, e.g., immigration, systemic social injustice, economic dislocation, urbanization, health crisis, threat of war, and the like; and influences the micro-level of the individual. The micro-level strain is related to psychological and/or social factors. The micro-level strain in the context of the macro-level reality is what motivates group action. The strain does not have to be "real" or justified to cause a social movement if a social group perceives that it is disadvantaged or threatened. Moral outrage can also elicit group action (Duijvelaar 1996: Chapter 2.3).

According to resource mobilization theory, strain always exists in a society. However, groups do not seek to alleviate it until three criteria are satisfied. First, the threat must be significant enough to motivate individuals into concerted group action. Second, the motivated people must have access to necessary resources so they can organize and operate. Third, the individuals must believe that they can change the situation causing the strain via group action (McAdam 1999). For example, suppose gangs were terrorizing a neighborhood. If the residents felt threatened and believed that the police were not able to protect them, they might form themselves into vigilante groups to patrol their streets. However, before vigilantes patrol the streets, they must be organized, properly resourced, and determined to change the situation. On the other hand, if the residents felt overwhelmingly intimidated by the gangs and did not have access to resources, they would still feel the strain but would not organize to challenge it. According to this theory, a movement's success

lepends on its ability to motivate individuals to collective action and to harness necessary internal and external resources to achieve mission goals that reduce he stress (Zald and McCarthy 1979).

Political opportunity theory takes resource mobilization to another evel. In order to change public policy, laws, or the corporate culture of a nation-state that causes a group stress, social movements need to gain access to political power. In so doing, they must manipulate the political system so it works on their behalf. If the political climate is hostile to the emerging social movement and if the social movement cannot enlist the support of some politically elite people, it will not have long-term success in its efforts to elicit change or reduce corporate stress (McAdam 1999).

Typically, a symbiotic relationship exists between a political organization and a successful social movement. They may join forces to ride the same wave, to share resources, or to maximize a change in the socio-political landscape. In America, a major political party must have many popular alliances. By virtue of the huge diversity in America, all major political organizations are heterogeneous. Through alliances, political parties are able to acquire voting blocks. This allows the political organization to elect its own people (gain power) and further an ideologically motivated agenda.

Sometimes a social movement is energized and/or created when a political organization seeks to establish a new base of support with an underrepresented group (non-aligned or nonvoting).[5] For example, a political organization might champion the cause of single mothers and then organize them into a political force provided that the new group and those who sympathize with it vote. This would benefit the political organization by increasing its share of the voting market. At other times, a nonpolitical group outside the political arena may define itself and then seek to use the political mechanism of the day as a means to promote its cause and gain the necessary political power to change society. In this case, the social movement is careful to define itself apart from its relationship to the political organization. If the political organization does not represent the social movement's cause or acquire the needed power to further the aims of the social movement, the social movement may transfer its influence and voters to another political organization (McAdam 1999).[6]

In summary, numerous studies have determined that religious movements with the expressed goals of effecting change in society fall within the conceptualization of a social movement and can be analyzed in terms of resource mobilization strategies (Hall 1998). Additionally, there is a clear relationship between components of modern American evangelicalism and the

Republican Party, e.g., the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition. Voting patterns also bear witness to this relationship. Hence, political opportunity theory can also be utilized to describe and interpret modern American evangelicalism.

Historical Foundations to the Modern American Evangelical Movement

Following the Civil War, most American Protestants believed that the United States was a Christian nation. Protestant evangelicals considered their faith to be the normative American creed. From their perspective, they were correct. From the time of the great revivals in 1790 through 1870, the history of America was marked by successive advances of evangelicalism. Methodists and Baptists were the dominant denominations and were firmly established in every sector of the country. Few believed that the progress of evangelicalism would stop. For many in the North, the Civil War itself was evidence that God's righteousness was being established in America and that his kingdom would come (Marsden 1980:11). America had a manifest destiny that was from God.

At the same time, American evangelicals were so diverse that they defied facile generalizations or attempts to group them into a national category because Reformed, Free Church and Wesleyan traditions had particular theological beliefs and historical antecedents. In other words, 19th century evangelicalism did not represent a homogenous grouping of likeminded Christians. However, unity existed in the diversity. Latourette captured the essence of 19th century evangelicalism when he wrote,

> "In no country . . . was Evangelicalism as prominent and as permeating as in the United States . . . . It was spread through revivalism—in camp meetings, by itinerate evangelists, by resident ministers who employed the methods of the evangelists, and through Sunday schools. It assumed belief in the Bible as the Word of God, the basic sinfulness of man, and in conversion through faith in the redemption wrought by God through Christ" (1961:82).

In Latourette's descriptive definition, evangelistic zeal is a defining quality of American evangelicalism and is as significant to its essence as its theological content. One informed the other. Through mass evangelism, 19th century evangelicals advanced their influence and changed the social order one person at a time. When a person was "saved," he or she was connected to a church and conformed to its value system. To use Dean Kelley's terminology (1986), 19th century evangelical churches were socially strong and strict

organizations that made real demands on their converts and maintained high expectations related to group conformity and personal behavior.

Interestingly, Latourette did not mention social action in his definition. From the late 18th century through the 19th century, northern and southern evangelicals followed different paths related to the social gospel. Typically, northern evangelicals were more aggressive in pursuing the whole gospel, i.e., a combination of evangelism and social gospel issues related to core faith themes. Southern evangelicals tended to individualize faith by focusing on personal holiness and by staying clear of controversial public policy debates.

The dichotomy between northern activism and southern individualism can be traced back to the founding of the country. The Puritan (New England) vision of theocracy and conformity ran deep in the blood of northeastern evangelicals in the 1800s. The agrarian ideals of the South and the survival mindset on the frontier with its history of circuit riders and camp meetings focused southern evangelicals on personal religion. The Jefferson and Hamilton debates in the 1790s, point to the regional split in America. However, slavery and reconstruction functioned as more immediate causes for the regional dichotomy in the 19th century.[7]

In order to be successful in evangelizing the South and in maintaining a dominant influence in that region, southern evangelicals compromised on moral issues related to race. For example, a politically active church that challenged slavery and the moral underpinnings of it could not have broad, popular support in the antebellum South. So, in order to have access to the South and to African Americans, southern evangelicals emphasized personal religion and minimized conflict with the wider culture. In the 1790s and early 1800s, southern evangelical preachers were very opposed to the institution of slavery but chose not to make it an overriding issue because of the negative consequences associated with it. In time, southern evangelicals became accustomed to slavery and did not feel the ire of earlier evangelicals. Methodism's North/South split in 1844 reflects great divergence and passion over this issue and further illustrates the dichotomy between northern and southern evangelicals. The formation of the Southern Baptist Church points to a similar movement in that tradition.

Southern evangelicals evangelized African Americans, formed them into churches, promoted their wellbeing, and gave them limited autonomy in their religious lives, but they did not fight the institution of slavery or promote equality in the public arena. In time, southern evangelicals defended slavery and segregation on biblical grounds. Southern evangelicalism was indigenous to the culture of the white South. In fact, it became so at home in the dominant culture

that it ceased to be distinguished from it or to be a prophet in its midst (Payne 2001).

By the end of the 19th century, northern evangelicalism had also distanced itself from the social gospel because of the social gospel's association with theological and political liberalism. By the 1920s, there was a great divide between the two. Liberals tended to focus on social gospel issues and evangelicals focused on evangelism and missions. Even when evangelicals advanced social gospel issues, the issues were subordinate to evangelism and church growth (Moberg 1972).

Linda Smith writes, "As a backlash against liberalism, the inheritors of the evangelical tradition went into a period of retreat and separatism which had a profound impact on social concern. . . . All progressive social concern, private as well as political, was nearly eliminated among evangelicals by the end of the 1900-1930 period" (1989:25). She attributes the decline to the rising influence of liberalism and the concomitant stigma of the social gospel. She says that the social gospel emphasized Christian obligation to respond to physical need and oppression and it prioritized a social action that attempted to establish the kingdom of God on earth through human efforts. Evangelicals rejected "kingdom of God" talk. Most projected the term into a future millennium in which God would rule on earth. In fact, most gave up on the present world order, thinking that it was beyond fixing. In light of this, evangelism and world missions became its priorities, i.e., saving people from this world.[8]

From the 1870s to the 1920s, a series of social developments threatened evangelicalism. First, the religious climate following the Civil War was very unreceptive to conservative Christianity in the North. "The Emancipation Proclamation removed the one adhesive, abolitionism, that had united northern evangelicals, so that after the Civil War evangelicalism in the North began to dissipate in a flurry of theological controversies and denominational disputes" (Balmer 2003:1).

Second, the meteoritic growth of Roman Catholicism challenged the religious hegemony and political influence of Protestantism.[9] Immigration of Roman Catholics and the skyrocketing birthrates of the Roman Catholic immigrants are primary reasons for the tremendous growth of Roman Catholicism in America. Ironically, southern evangelicals tended to vote with the Roman Catholics and against the northern evangelical tradition that was associated with the Republican Party. Marsden puts it this way,

> "The Democratic Party [became] the party of outsiders. Its two strongest components were Catholics and Southerners,

> two groups who had almost nothing in common except their common distain of Republicanism, with its self-righteous evangelical penchant to impose its version of Christian morality on the whole nation. Northern evangelicals, such as Congregationalists, New School Presbyterians, most Methodists, and most Baptists, usually voted Republican" (1991:90).

Third, rapid urbanization and industrialism shifted the cultural and political center of the nation away from small-town America. During the late 19th century, evangelicalism found its greatest receptivity among the lower classes and rural inhabitants. Across America, cities seemed resistant to its evangelistic efforts and were a bastion for liberalism, immigrants, progressive idealism, and sin of every sort. Even though great evangelical traditions grew-up around prominent cities, the political influence of evangelicalism diminished as the political influence of cities grew.[10]

Fourth, the spread of science, technology, biblical criticism and evolutionary thought caused people to question the simple faith that evangelicals preached. Much debate focused on the accuracy and authority of Scripture. The Scopes (Monkey) Trial vividly illustrated this.[11] The clash between modernity and conservative Christianity was not new to the 20th century. Many of the liberal churches became liberal because they adopted a progressive position on these issues. The liberal churches had their greatest strength in the North and in the cities. As liberal Christianity increased in the North, the center of evangelicalism shifted to the south so that evangelicalism became associated with the South and rural America in general.[12] A casual analysis of the membership records of evangelical churches during this time will demonstrate this point.

Finally, the dominant culture rebelled against the narrowness of biblical evangelicalism. Linder captures the essence of the situation that divided "evangelicals" from "modernists:"

> The early 1920s found social patterns in chaos. Traditionalists worried that everything valuable was ending. Younger modernists no longer asked whether society would approve of their behavior, only whether their behavior met the approval of their intellect. Intellectual experimentation flourished. Americans danced to the sound of the Jazz Age, showed their contempt for alcoholic prohibition, debated abstract art and Freudian theories. (2002)

Before the 1960s, 20th century evangelicals tended to stay out of the political arena for reasons that have already been discussed.[13] They promoted their agenda through their churches, publications, revivals, radio programs, missionary work, Christian colleges, and prominent leaders. However, as American politics evolved, "Southern Democrats" became a fixture in American politics.

The alliance between theological conservatives (in the South) and the more liberal of the national parties can be explained largely in historical, regional, and class terms. The force of tradition kept theological conservatives firmly attached to the party that had reestablished white political dominance in the wake of Radical Republican Reconstruction. The linkage was further cemented in the 1930s by the popularity of the New Deal social welfare programs that attacked poverty and agricultural distress in the region. (Le Beau 2003:3)

The Emerging of Modern Evangelicalism: 1960-2000[14]

The Democratic Party had a very complex and diverse constituency. It was the party of immigrants, African Americans, Jews, Roman Catholics, liberal Protestants, and southern evangelicals. As long as the party represented the political interests of southern evangelicals, they remained a member of the alliance. However, in the 1960s, the nomination of President Kennedy, a Roman Catholic, and support for the Civil Rights Movement caused large numbers of southern evangelicals to vote for Republican candidates or George Wallace, a radical southern Democrat who vigorously opposed desegregation. Wallace ran as an Independent in 1968. His candidacy illustrated the growing schism between the Democratic Party and white Southerners, and was a prescience of things to come (Eskridge 2003:5).

Time Magazine hailed 1976 as the year of the Evangelical. In that year, a born-again, Southern Baptist from the heart of Dixie won the presidency. President Carter talked about his Christian faith and why it was central to his character.[15] Surprisingly, he carried the Roman Catholic and Jewish votes by the same margins as previous Democratic presidential candidates . He also carried virtually the entire African American vote (Miller 1980:332). On the surface, it appeared that Carter held the Democratic coalition together and that southern evangelicals were represented in his coalition. However, a majority of white southerners voted for President Ford (Public Opinion 1985). Since the white South was mostly evangelical, one can assume that a majority of southern evangelicals did not vote for Carter.

Allow me to use a personal anecdote to illustrate the point. My family hails from southern Georgia. In the 1970s, my late aunt and uncle lived in Plains, Georgia and owned the house in which President Carter was born. I went to high school with a close cousin of President Carter. When I was a child, my parents and my entire family were staunch Democrats. However, neither my parents nor my older brother voted for him in 1976. In 1980, my family admired him and respected him, but it did not resonate with his politics or feel that he represented our political ideals. Interestingly, at family reunions, we talked about Carter because so many of my aunts and uncles knew him personally. However, no one ever talked about his politics or how they voted. By 1980, my family and many of my aunts had become Republicans. I think we were typical of the majority of evangelical southerners at that time. According to my late father, he would have switched sooner. However, he believed that most elections were determined by the Democratic primaries. As such, if he wanted to influence the election, he had to vote in the Democratic primaries. Due to mass defections, that changed by 1980.

The return of conservative Protestants to organized political action, manifested in what has been labeled the New Christian Right, was facilitated by a number of local movements that developed during the social fragmentation of the 1970s. (Le Beau 2003:4). Each movement focused on issues that threatened evangelical culture and produced moral outrage in their ranks. For example, the Equal Rights Amendment challenged the evangelical ideal related to the role of women in society. Many believed that the traditional social structure of the evangelical home reflected a biblical model. They projected that ideal onto society at large. In that ideal, a male hierarchy existed. Objectionable schoolbooks, the continued debate on human origins, school prayer, homosexual rights, sexual immorality, abortion laws, and a series of Supreme Court rulings also outraged evangelicals and pushed them into an activist mode. In an attempt to combat these social evils and preserve the moral underpinnings of American society, many grass roots organizations formed. Focus on the Family is an obvious example.[16]

However, in order to advance the evangelical social agenda on the national level, evangelicals needed political sponsorship. Consequently, an alliance was formed between religious and secular conservatives within the Republican Party. It was a symbiotic relationship in which both joined hands to pursue a similar vision for America. The enemy was big government and its liberal social agenda that threatened traditional religious and economic values (Le Beau 2003:5). Televangelists, Christian radio, a plethora of Christian

printed materials, Evangelical, Fundamental, and Pentecostal churches, national evangelical associations, and an assortment of political action committees blanketed the nation with the message of the Christian Right.

The election of President Reagan in 1980 cemented the relationship between secular conservatives and evangelicals. During the next 12 years, the Republican Party continued to push the evangelical social agenda and the Christian Right continued to mobilize its constituency to vote for Republican candidates. Jerry Falwell of the Moral Majority, Pat Robertson of the 700 Club, James Dobson of Focus on the Family, and Chuck Colson of Prison Fellowship and Watergate fame became household names. Scandals related to televangelists tarnished the image of the Christian Right but they did not derail its agenda.

The 1992 defeat of President Bush marked a low-point for Christian conservatives. For the next two years, the Democrats controlled the White House and Congress. However, in 1994, the Republican Contract with America and huge gains in the House and Senate ensured that the social agenda of evangelicals would continue.

The Republican Contract with America and the election of 1994 demonstrated the national influence and movement dynamics of the Christian Right. The contract focused the party and gave it a tangible vision for the American people. It advocated the following causes: restoring religious equality, local control of education, promoting school choice, protecting parental rights, family-friendly tax relief, restoring respect for human life, restricting pornography, privatizing the arts, and punishing criminals not victims. Each of these points focused on an issue that had stressed and threatened evangelical Christians. In support of the contract and the Republican Party, the Christian Coalition claimed 1.6 million members in 1,600 national chapters and 25 million dollars in political action funds (Le Beau 2003:6).

During President Clinton's second term, Republicans controlled both the House of Representatives and the Senate. This demonstrated that Republicans still resonated with the public and that many Americans liked Clinton but did not trust him with a united government.

Evaluation of Modern American Evangelicalism as a Social Movement

A demographic shift occurred in American evangelicalism at the same time that it became a politically active force in the Republican Party. The shift was signaled in the early 1960s, but was not obvious until later. Before the 1960s , evangelicals huddled in rural America and insulated themselves from

change. Most lacked the educational attainment, occupational status, or financial worth of the average American (Roof 1987). However, the children of these evangelicals surpassed the educational levels of their parents. As they did, they increased their net worth and occupational status. Many moved to the cities or suburbs in search of good jobs. As these new evangelicals climbed the corporate ladder and became middle class Americans, their political lethargy turned to activity. Plus, in the cities and the workplaces, they saw how the liberal agenda threatened their own values. Upward mobility also exposed these younger evangelicals to new networking possibilities and contacts with "movers and shakers." They discovered that they had many of the same concerns as traditional Republicans related to government, taxes, and the economy. A new class of evangelical clergy also entered the scene. They were very educated and committed to a social agenda (Wald 1997:238, Beinart 1998:25-26, Le Beau 2003:7).

In terms of strain theory, the younger evangelicals and their parents shared the same tensions with the society as it changed in the 1960s. The parents led a silent protest against the Democratic Party by changing their voting allegiance. The younger evangelicals followed in the footsteps of their parents and took it to a higher level. They had the resources, motivation, and optimistic determination needed to organize themselves in a concerted effort to change society. They did this through many grass roots and national organizations. The organizations they formed took on a movement dynamic that influenced other like-minded evangelicals and non-evangelicals who sympathized with their agenda. For example, the pro-life and pro-family agenda of the Republican Party attracted many Roman Catholics, Mormons, and Moonies who joined forces with the evangelicals in a common cause.

Political opportunity can be demonstrated in several ways. First, when the Democratic Party no longer met the expectations of the evangelical constituency, the evangelicals stopped supporting the party. Second, the Republican Party realized a political opportunity and the younger evangelicals needed political sponsorship. Third, the two groups formed a symbiotic partnership. Evangelicals brought vision, moral indignation, energy, people power, money, and voters to the Republican Party. The Republicans gave the evangelicals a political machine through which to work on local and national levels, leadership, a national pulpit, and political power.

Interestingly, a unique sociological picture of modern American evangelicalism develops when its movement dynamics are viewed through the interpretive lens of classical Marxism. In terms of Marx's theory,[17] in the 1950s, most traditional evangelicals were blue collar workers, farmers, and petty

managers. They were far removed from the center of political activity and did not have much real influence. They had a self-identity through which they maintained a sharp distinction between themselves and other social/ethnic/religious groups. By means of a religion that fostered political apathy, they remained an inert force. In time, they became conscious of their disadvantage and they rose up against the political hegemony that used alliances with many divergent groups to maintain its own power base. In this sense, the rise of evangelicals was a class struggle. The religion that was used to hold the white southerners down became a means by which they organized themselves and broke their chains of oppression. Their movement represents a revolt that attempted to change the social order and their economic condition. In that revolt, evangelicals were pitted against the Democratic leadership and many other social groups that identified with the Democratic agenda. Most specifically, many were opposed to the Civil Rights Movement.

In light of the political polarity between the American evangelical movement of the last 30 years and African American Christians who identify with the Civil Rights Movement, strain theory, political opportunity theory, and Marxist insights are useful.

Application

Since 1992, the Christian Right voted for Republican candidates by a 3 to 1 margin. Similarly, African American Protestants voted overwhelmingly for Democratic candidates. In the 2000 presidential election, voters who identify themselves as Evangelical voted 4 to 1 for Bush. On the other hand, 90 percent of African Americans voted for Gore.[18] No data was given for theologically conservative black voters. However, since the black Church was the center of the Civil Rights Movement[19] and strongly supported the Democratic Party, one can assume that their constituents also voted for Gore by overwhelming margins. These voting patterns clearly indicate that a political divide exists between white evangelicals and conservative black Protestants.

Theologically and denominationally, there are close ties between evangelicals and conservative black Christians.[20] There is a historical reason for this linkage. During the late 18th and 19th centuries, most African Americans were theologically conservative for three reasons. First, they lacked access to higher education and liberal theology. Second, a large majority lived in the South where evangelical churches dominated the religious landscape. Hence, evangelicals had more access to African Americans by reason of proximity and they were the most active in evangelizing them (Marsden 1991). For example,

in 1890, 6,752,000 of the total 7,388,000 African Americans lived in 15 southern states. In eight out of 15 of the southern states, Methodists and Baptists combined to equal over 80 percent of the population.[21] Even in southern states with a higher concentration of Roman Catholics, most African Americans aligned with evangelical traditions after the Civil War.

Immediately following emancipation, thousands of Negroes left the Roman Catholic Church. It is said that in Louisiana alone 65,000 fell away. The reason seems to have been the desire for full independence from white control and the attraction of the Baptist and Methodist churches with their emotional appeal and their autonomy. (Latourette 1961:80)[22]

Third, because of their African roots, black Protestants did not view the Christian message through the same lens as liberal, white Protestants. Greek categories of thought and the theological controversies that shaped Western Protestantism were not major influences in black traditions. Accordingly, their Christianity was more immediately biblical (Marsden 1991:51).

Marsden captures this point well. He avers that black Protestants were shaped by the evangelical heritage of America and preserved it. However, because of racial segregation that isolated them from white evangelicals, they seldom used the term "evangelical" to describe themselves (1991:46).

Yet, in terms of self-identity and point of reference, the black church focuses on its history of oppression and segregation more than it does on its shared theology with evangelicals. In fact, for most of the 19th and 20th centuries, evangelicals have been linked with the oppressors by deed, association, and lack of action to the contrary.

The black church shares much of its struggle with other minorities, immigrants, Jews, and Roman Catholics. That common experience bonds these divergent groups together in the political realm. For conservative black Christians, the Civil Rights Movement has a symbolic and transforming value. The Democratic Party is a national organization that advocates for African Americans and offers them hope in their struggle. Transformation has to come from within the community, but the community seeks outside resources to organize, equip, and mobilize itself. In so doing, African Americans have attempted to use the Democratic Party to achieve their goals in the same way that modern evangelicals have used the Republican Party to achieve their goals.

The modern evangelical movement and the Civil Rights Movement are opposed to each other in terms of political objectives. When blacks hear the term evangelical, they do not think about conservative theology or evangelism. Rather, they think about a political movement that works against their interests and they remember their history of oppression. For better or worse,

"evangelical" has a different meaning for the African American community than it does for most white evangelicals.

So, What Do We Call Ourselves?

The question remains, is there an umbrella term that can be used to describe white evangelicals and theologically conservative black Protestants who share an "evangelical" theology? Marsden urges the use of "Bible-believing" Christian (1991:49). However, that term sounds pejorative and implies that other Christians do not believe the Bible. Plus, progressive evangelicals would prefer to focus on a broader moniker. "Theologically Conservative Christian" describes panevangelicalism well; however, conservative is associated with politics and implies that one is not an activist. If it were shortened to "TCC" it might work. Within the Protestant world, "charismatic" has achieved widespread use and has a positive meaning. Like "evangelical," it is based on a Greek word that has a biblical usage. However, it does not describe most evangelicals. In institutional settings, traditional black worship is often referred to as a "Gospel Service." One can also refer to a gospel choir or gospel music. The term "gospel" is a synonym for evangel which is the root for evangelical.[23] Perhaps we could call ourselves "Gospelites or gospel Christians?" Gospel is already used as an adjective when someone refers to the "gospel truth" or the gospel message.

Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to demonstrate how modern evangelicalism functions as a social movement. I have also attempted to demonstrate why conservative black Protestants do not resonate with that term. Additionally, I have shown that social movement theories offer a unique and often neglected lens by which to view and interpret religious movements. Finally, I suggested that "gospel" could be used as a dynamic equivalent for "evangelical" because it does not have baggage attached to its usage.

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[1] According to Marsden, evangelicalism includes all Christians that affirm the basic beliefs of the old 19th 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 the spiritually transformed life (1991:4-5).

[2] Evangelical comes from biblical term for "gospel," or the evangel. Historically, evangelical described a type of preaching that emphasized the gospel message and was associated with the "evangelical" awakenings that spread over England and America in the 18th and 19th centuries. In fact, the British refer to the Second Great Awakening as the Evangelical Awakening. Early revivals emphasized simple Bible preaching in a very zealous form so as to elicit a religious experience (conversion or awakening) in the hearers through the present power of the Holy Spirit manifested in visible ways. Most denominations were influenced by evangelicalism at this time. Circuit riders and camp meetings are often associated with it.

[3] Marsden differentiates between evangelicals and "card carrying" evangelicals. Card carrying evangelicals represent a self-conscious, interdenominational movement, with leaders, publications, and institutions with which people from many subgroups identify. The test of being a card carrying evangelical is that one has a strong transdenominational identity, regardless of the person's church affiliation (1991:5-6).

[4] McCarthy and Zald discussed resource mobilization theory in the 1960s and are the architects of the concept. Many others have utilized it and modified it. Zald and McCarty differentiated between a social movement (a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure), a social movement organization (a complex, or formal organization which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement or a counter movement and attempts to implement these goals), a social movement industry (all the social movement organizations with relatively similar goals that have a basic unity in purpose), and a social movement sector (all social movement industries in a society, no matter to which social movement they belong) (Zald and McCarthy 1979:2).

[5] "A very good example of this being the division between northern and southern Democrats during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960. The northern Democrats saw the newly urbanized and northern dwelling blacks as a political mass that must be taken into account in order for them to take further political power away the northern Republicans. At the same time, the southern Democrats . . . wanted nothing to do with the policies of their northern brethren." (Agnone 2000:5)

[6] For example, during the Clinton presidency, many evangelical organizations threatened to pull away from the Republican Party if the party went soft on core evangelical issues. I heard James Dobson of Focus on the Family speak very adamantly to this issue on several occasions. At that time, the Republican Party was attempting to increase its appeal to nonaligned Americans who were turned-off by the "vitriolic rhetoric of the religious right."

[7] Interestingly, Baptists and Methodist "evangelicals" were outspoken critics of the established church in New England and they waged a fierce war for disestablishment.

[8] "Rejecting the prevailing postmillennialism which taught that Christ's Kingdom would grow out of the spiritual and moral progress of this age, dispensational premillennialists said that the churches and the culture were declining and that Christians would see Christ's kingdom only after he personally returned to rule in Jerusalem." (Marsden 1991:39)

[9] In the 19th century, the Methodist churches represented the largest faith tradition in America. In fact, the Methodist Episcopal Church became the largest American denomination in 1812. Baptist churches represented the second largest faith tradition. In the 1920s, the Baptists became the largest Protestant Church in America. However, by that time, Roman Catholics were the largest denomination in America (Gaustad 2001).

[10] Before 1870, awakenings were common in the great cities of the North and effected the educated. The great revival of 1857-1858 centered in the cities and grew out of noonday prayer meetings that were led by businessmen. During the Civil War, revivals also swept through army camps in the North and the South (Marsden 1980:11).

[11] "In a response to the new social patterns set in motion by modernism, a wave of revivalism developed, becoming especially strong in the American South. Who would dominate American culture--the modernists or the traditionalists? Journalists were looking for a showdown, and they found one in a Dayton, Tennessee courtroom in the summer of 1925. There a jury was to decide the fate of John Scopes, a high school biology teacher charged with illegally teaching the theory of evolution. The guilt or innocence of John Scopes, and even the constitutionality of Tennessee's anti-evolution statute, mattered little. The meaning of the trial emerged through its interpretation as a conflict of social and intellectual values" (Linder 2002).

[12] "Going into the 20th-century evangelicalism still held the status of an American 'folk religion' in many sectors of the United states – particularly in the South" (Eskridge 2003:1). After the 1920s, fundamentalists, perceiving that American culture had turned against them, retreated from public life, but they did not disappear. Some argue that they retreated to the obscurity of the South where the culture was more sympathetic to their ideals. Before this, fundamentalists were represented in most denominations. After the 1920s, they began to form themselves into separate churches. As they did, they constructed a huge subculture of churches, denominations, Bible institutes, colleges, seminaries, mission organizations, and publishing houses. This

provided a firm foundation for their re-emergence as a national political force in the 1970s (Balmer 2003).

[13] The prohibition movement and the fight to keep evolution out of the public schools are obvious exceptions. The conservatives won both battles but lost the cultural war associated with them.

[14] This section is very indebted to the work of Bryan F. Le Beau of Creighton University. His article, "The Political Mobilization of the New Christian Right" (2003), informed my thinking and writing.

[15] In today's terms, President Carter was a radical evangelical in the tradition of Ron Sider and Tony Campolo. Many conservative Christians thought he was too progressive. Others called him liberal.

[16] According to the Focus on the Family website, "Focus on the Family began in 1977 in response to Dr. James Dobson's increasing concern for the American family."

[17] According to Marx, history and individual societies are progressing in accordance with his dialectical theory related to class struggle and competition for resources. In society, the division of labor produces class distinctions. Those who own the means of production manipulate those who labor in order to maintain the hierarchy that protects their own economic advantage and social control. Over time, those who produce will attempt to free themselves from the inequity of their plight by confronting those who control the means of production and capital. The social dichotomy pits classes against each other. In the ensuing struggle, religion, government, and political association are used to exert social control and to gain influence over the opposing class. In many cases, violence is the natural outcome of the struggle. Of course, Marx believed that dialectical conflict was the means by which society progressed through various stages. In this scenario, class struggle may take the form of a social movement.

[18] (See "2000 Presidential Elections: How Faith and Race Influenced Voting" at http://www.religioustolerance.org/vote_rel.htm).

[19] Jon Agnone states that black churches were the institutional center of the Civil Rights Movement. "The churches gave the movement an internal institution at their disposal in which to gather for meetings, to use as a communications headquarters, and as a general safe haven in which the white oppressors could not legally intervene. This was made possible, in part, due to the migration of large numbers of blacks to cities, which let to institution building, community organizing, and a dense social network through which protest could be organized" (2000:7).

[20] "Even most black Protestants, who have been almost entirely separated from whites since the Civil War, have enough common heritage to be readily identified as "evangelical," though they seldom use the word" (Marsden 1991:65).

[21] See National Census for 1890 and The New Historical Atlas of Religion in America (Gaustad 2001:376-381).

[22] In 1812, before the formation of the African American Methodist churches, African Americans equaled 33 percent of Methodist membership in the southern states or 33,568 people. It is estimated that 60,000 African American attended Methodist preaching or were in some other way connected to the Methodist Episcopal Church at that time (Payne 2001:300-322 and 430-448).

[23] In defining the term "evangelical," Timothy George states that evangelicals are gospel people, i.e., "Evangelicals are a worldwide family of Bible-believing Christians committed to sharing with everyone everywhere the transforming good news of new life in Jesus Christ" (1999).