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# Angels with Leather Wings: An Ethnography of the Christian Motorcyclists Association

## Abstract

For two years I rode with a group of bikers. For those two years we rode together, ate together, and prayed together. The bikers with which I rode were members of the Christian Motorcyclists Association and they believe that they have a mission to evangelize the world of American bikers.

The resulting ethnography is a study of a little known, little understood and little studied segment of the American evangelical Christian movement. Recent academic study posits that Americans in larger numbers are experiencing religion, spirituality, and faith differentially than in the past, as reflected in gradually decreasing numbers of Americans who report themselves to be regular members of religious congregations.

One notable exception to this apparent decrease in church identification and membership is found in the evangelical Christian movement. The members of the Christian Motorcyclists Association represent themselves to be dedicated evangelicals whose mission is "changing the world, one heart at a time."

Since its founding in 1974, the CMA has grown into a ministry with thousands of members in hundreds of chapters nationwide. This study documents two years of attendance with CMA members at public events, private gatherings, and the completion of in-depth, personal interviews with members. The study asks and answers just how the membership of the CMA fits into the typical profile of American evangelicals and documents its transition from a purely biker centered ministry into an evangelical Christian outreach organization.

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Richard Vincent O'Connell

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## Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction to the World of Bikers: History and Social Impressions	Page 1
Chapter Two: Setting the Stage for the Project: The Theoretical Perspective, Notes on Methodology, And a Look at Contemporary American Evangelicalism	Page 16
Chapter Three: The Founding of the Christian Motorcyclist's Association, The CMA Colorado State Rally, and the Resulting Non-Confidential Interviews With CMA Leadership	Page 52
Chapter Four: Biker Charity Runs, Run for The Son and the Diaper Run: The "Cradle Christian," and "The CMA is my Family."	Page 74
Chapter Five: Seasons of Refreshing and "Love Conquers All."	Page 97
Chapter Six: Food and Clothing on East Colfax, and "The Broken One."	Page 116
Chapter Seven: The Easter Egg Hunt and "I'm Workin' On It."	Page 129
Chapter Eight: Reflections on a Two Year Ride: Identity Issues, "Are you a Christian...Are you a biker?"	Page 145
Appendix A: Glossary	Page 171
Bibliography:	Page 175
End Notes:	Page 180



## List of Figures

Figure 1:	Page 52
Figure 2:	Page 66
Figure 3:	Page 66
Figure 4:	Page 87
Figure 5:	Page 88
Figure 6:	Page 97
Figure 7:	Page 129
Figure 8:	Page 133
Figure 9:	Page 134
Figure 10:	Page 135
Figure 11:	Page 145

## Chapter One: Introduction to the World of Bikers, History and Social Impressions

This project is an ethnography of a little known, little understood and little studied segment of the American evangelical Christian movement. The project does not concern itself with great cathedrals, high level theology, or denominational internecine power struggles. It is a study of lived religion among a group of evangelical Christians. It is a study of religion in the daily lives of people of faith; the kind of religion that is found in small group bible study, food distribution to the homeless and visits to prisons.

On a pleasant spring morning in May I found myself heading east along Colorado Highway 83 on my Harley Davidson. The temperature was mild, typical for early May along Colorado's Front Range. The conditions were perfect for a ride, the engine was running fine, the pipes were emitting their usual throaty growl and the wind in my hair felt great. Dressed in blue jeans, a Harley t-shirt, my old leather flight jacket and sunglasses, I was heading towards a gathering of motorcycle riders at a slightly seedy "road house" bar and café located at the crossroads of two rural highways.

When I arrived the parking lot was full of motorcycles, mostly Harley Davidsons, with a smattering of large Japanese cruiser bikes and even a few high powered, road burning, sport bikes which were capable of outrunning pretty much anything else on an American highway. At 10:00 on a Saturday morning the parking lot was already filled, as was the bar itself. I could smell the stench of cigarette smoke, sweat, and stale beer. The

assembled bikers were a typical assortment, mostly middle aged, mostly white, dressed in leathers and sporting multiple tattoos, numerous examples were of the prison variety. Inasmuch as this was what the Christian bikers refer to as a “secular event,” the vast majority of participants were not adverse to a certain amount of “partying” at 10:00 AM.

Among the crowd, one group of about twenty bikers stood in a circle, some holding hands, some with their arms around each other. They wore patches on the back of their leather vests just like all the other bikers, except their patches read “Riding For The Son.” They weren’t drinking or smoking; they were praying. These were members of the Christian Motorcyclists Association (CMA), and these were the people I was coming to meet.

The Christian Motorcyclists Association claims to have created a ministry of their own, through which they share the Christian gospel with unchurched bikers, feed the homeless, support women’s centers, and provide support, both financial and physical, to overseas Christian missions. These bikers have come together to form a Christian ministry which creates and supports an identity formation for themselves, while debunking popular, stereotypical misconceptions of American bikers.

Beginning with the end of World War II, American military personnel returning from combat, many of them without current roots, jobless and no longer in contact with their wartime buddies, looked to re-capture the extraordinary stimulation of war that they had experienced overseas, and began to form high energy motorcycle clubs. This is not to say that motorcycle clubs did not pre-exist WWII. The American Motorcyclist

Association was founded in 1924. But, these new postwar clubs brought a higher level of energy and activity to the sport, along with a trend towards sometimes violent acting out.

These occasionally violent eruptions put a picture in the minds of the American public.

As Brock Yates puts it,

Americans gaped in shock at the photograph on page 31 of the July 21, 1947 issue of *Life* magazine. Peering at the citizenry in boozy defiance and waving a beer bottle at the camera was a pudgy man on a motorcycle. Dozens of empties were littered on the pavement around the drunken rider's jack-booted feet. The caption...enhanced the outrage: On the Fourth of July weekend 4,000 members of a motorcycle club roared into Hollister, California for a three day convention. They quickly tired of ordinary motorcycle thrills and turned to more exciting stunts. Racing their vehicles down Main Street and through traffic lights, they rammed into restaurants and bars, breaking furniture and mirrors. Some rested on the curb. Others hardly paused. Police arrested many for drunkenness and indecent exposure but could not restore order...Lock up your daughters! The Huns are on the roll! Your town may be next. The fat man on the Harley became riveted in the skulls of millions of decent, law-abiding, God fearing Americans as an alcohol soaked harbinger of anarchy spreading across the nation.<sup>1</sup>

This overly florid prose represents typical exposition of biker activities in American popular culture. In point of fact, the local authorities in Hollister, California did have to call in reinforcements from the California Highway Patrol and several other police agencies to quell the riot. If the *Life* magazine article were not enough, this incident was later immortalized by producer Stanley Kramer in his 1953 "outlaw biker" film *The Wild One*, starring Marlon Brando as Johnny, leader of the Black Rebels Motorcycle Club, who when asked by a local resident "What are you rebelling against," answered "What have you got?" In Kramer's classic, the members of the BRMC (as they were identified on the back of their black leather jackets) were outcasts rebelling against everything that middle class Americans believed in.

The image thus cemented into the American mind was the “biker” as crazy, drunken, dirty and mindlessly violent, an image furthered upon the creation of the Hells (no apostrophe) Angels in Fontana, California in 1950, followed by clubs such as the Mongols, Banditos, Satan’s Slaves and Sons of Silence.

This popular image of the foul tempered outlaw biker represents only one, very small contingent among American bikers. In fact, these outlaw clubs proudly display patches proclaiming “1%er,” a reference to being self-identified as only one percent of the riding public. From the early postwar days of outlaw clubs, other affiliation groups have joined the mix, including military, police, and the subject of this study, evangelical Christians. Today, motorcyclist affinity groups are generally classified into the separate categories of “motorcycle clubs,” known as “MCs,” and “riding clubs,” known as “RCs.” The organizational structures, membership rules and behavior rules differ greatly between these segments of the riding public. As will be discussed later in detail, a “member” of one MC never directly addresses the president (“Prez”) of another MC without the Prez’s initiation and permission...and don’t even think about reaching out to shake his hand or you will come into instantaneous contact with his ever-present bodyguard. The members of the CMA, while presenting a virtually identical look, have an entirely different attitude.

My intention is to create an ethnographic study of the work of this evangelical Christian ministry. It is informed to a great extent by the work done in three studies which I admire; *Awesome Families*, by Kathleen E. Jenkins, *Congregations in Conflict* by Penny Edgell Becker, and *Sense of the Faithful* by Jerome B. Baggett. The Jenkins

work first inspired me to do a long term, participant observation study of the bikers, patterned to some extent by her work with the International Churches of Christ, in particular, the City Church of Christ. During five years of participant observation study she conducted over fifty formal interviews, attended sixty church events, and attended church related activities, sometimes as often as twice a week.<sup>2</sup> I relate to her observation that her “sociological imagination was stirred”<sup>3</sup> as she searched for “common themes”<sup>4</sup> among the church members. Baggett’s influence on this study stems mainly from his detailed collection of data regarding attitudes among the various Catholic parishes that he was able to put into simple, comprehensible data charts. Finally, I am impressed by the detailed and highly descriptive prose used by Becker in her work examining conflict resolution methodologies in a variety of Christian congregations. I intend to capture that level of informative detail in this work.

This project is a long term, participant observation study of an evangelical Christian motorcycle group, the Christian Motorcyclists Association. I consider their activities to be outreach ministries to an underserved population. Much like the early work done by the Salvation Army, these organizations are leaders in “evangelism to the outcasts.”<sup>5</sup> Unlike the experience of Jenkins who simply “asked leaders if (she) could spend time in their church observing and talking to members,”<sup>6</sup> (and readily obtained it) my experience has been more laborious.

In order to understand the process of acceptance it is necessary to know something about both evangelical Christian groups and bikers in general. Anecdotal, but personal, experience over the course of many years has convinced me that most evangelical

Christian groups will “talk your ear off” about themselves. The outreach of organizations like Campus Crusade for Christ, Church of Christ, and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship typify a spectrum of outreach assertiveness levels. Door knocking missions like those of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and Jehovah’s Witnesses are famous for their generally pleasant assertiveness. In the majority of these cases the individuals involved are uniformly eager to share their word with prospective members. They are happy to talk about their organizations, and to some extent, their beliefs. I found a disarming reluctance to do so among the CMA bikers with respect to details of the organization.

Since I had come into contact with the members of the CMA regularly, and have done so for years, at the various “runs” put on by different organizations (Toys for Tots, remembrance for a fallen police officer, funerals, etc.), I envisioned an acceptance process that would be relatively simple. “Hi, it’s me...mind if I hang around?” It turned out to be quite a different situation for me when I first approached the CMA. Each individual that I approached, although individually eager to engage in evangelization, felt the need to contact “higher ups” in the organization for permission to talk to me about details of the ministry. It took me from October of 2012 to February of 2013 to actually meet in person with some of the “higher ups.” I was finally able to meet with organizational leaders of the Colorado Christian Motorcyclists Association, the Colorado State Coordinator and an Area Representative, on Feb. 2, 2013 at the Rocky Mountain Motorcycle Show and Swap Meet, held in the Denver Stock Show complex. I have been, after a great deal of vetting, invited to join the Rocky Mountain Christian Riders chapter

meetings as a guest. It was clearly understood that this would be a participant observation study and I would not become a member or prospect.<sup>7</sup>

The Rocky Mountain Motorcycle Show and Swap Meet, the largest regional motorcycle show in the Rocky Mountain West, features everything from custom show bikes and vintage rides, to industry demonstrations and wet t-shirt contests. Right in the middle of this heavy metal extravaganza, as Steppenwolf's "Born to Be Wild" blasted from speakers, were the booths of the Christian Motorcyclists Association and the Soldiers for Jesus Motorcycle Club<sup>8</sup> (ironically, right next to the Hells Angels). Through previous telephone conversations and e-mails I had arranged these meetings. Prior to the meetings, I had shown some of my previous academic work to the organizational leaders in order to assure them of my qualifications to conduct the study.

In the biker community there exists a type of individual very specifically known as a "hang around." A "hang around" is not a member, or the "ol' lady"<sup>9</sup> of a member, and is not even a "prospect." A "hang around" simply "hangs around" with no prospect of joining the club at any time. He just accompanies the group on a variety of what are called "runs" (charity rides, poker runs, etc.), socializes to some extent, and may or may not be allowed inside a meeting, depending on the rules of the club, which differ between MCs and RCs.<sup>10</sup>

To some extent, a "hang around" is the biker equivalent of the "free rider" of the sociological literature, since they avail themselves of many of the benefits of membership, without "paying the dues" in any meaningful sense of the term. Hanging



around with the CMA is actually more of a “free rider” situation than it is with 1%er MCs because there are fewer benefits withheld in the Christian biker world. For instance hanging around with the Hells Angels does not entitle a person to attend club meetings, wear the Hells Angels patch on his jacket or be instantly supported by the other members in a brawl, all benefits of HA (Hells Angels) membership.

It was at my initial formal meeting that I heard the story that suggested to me the theme for this study. The story-teller was a middle aged, upper middle class, white male retired from many years of business experience. He was erudite and an interesting conversationalist; in other words, he would fit comfortably in a typical white, middle class, evangelical congregation. He explained that he and his wife had been on a motorcycle ride with some friends, in full biker regalia (tattoos, leathers, piercings, and motorcycle boots) when they stopped to attend a Sunday church service at what he described as a typical Protestant church. From the official “greeters” to everyone else inside the church, they were completely ignored. No “welcome,” no pamphlet, no song sheet, no communication at all. They were made to feel quite the outsiders and totally unwelcome. The supposedly “outreach” personnel of the “good news” seemed to find their presence, as perceived from their looks, to be antithetical to the group dynamic of the church. It would appear that, at least among some white, middle class Christian Americans, “bikers” are prototypical examples of the “other.” During the course of this study, I came to learn that the founder of the CMA was specifically motivated to create an outreach ministry to bikers, as they were considered to be both unchurched and, to some extent, social misfits.

Initially, I had considered this project to be all about the “outcasts” of society, the “losers” who may have “found Jesus” and created their own network of receptive ministries. But, here were the epitome of middle class, middle aged Protestants being rejected by a largely middle class local church. The project grew immediately. Are there two distinct types of people in these “biker” ministries, the “down and out-ers” and also the otherwise thoroughly upstanding middle class Christians who are rejected by traditional congregations? It appears as if that might be the case. With that question in mind, this project began to clarify.

Among others, this project asks the questions;

*What constitutes the basic belief structures of the members of the CMA and how do they relate to typical evangelical perspectives?*

*Can we find similarities in the life stories of various members?*

As noted by Peter Berger, some subsets of Christianity are thriving within the United States in the early twenty-first century. Although, as claimed by secularization theorist Steve Bruce, secularization has been and continues to be rampant in Europe,<sup>11</sup> in America by contrast, evangelical and fundamental Christianity are at least holding steady; maintaining membership and participation, and, according to some studies, are possibly thriving and growing as they are in parts of Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. Mainstream church attendance may be down, but Americans reporting themselves as very engaged in their faith constitute a growing population. In contrast to the analysis by Bruce of the situation in much of Western Europe, per Berger, “American churches are

generally in better shape, and religious belief and practice is more robust (especially in the burgeoning community of evangelical Protestantism).”<sup>12</sup>

Understanding the place played by a minor, essentially niche group, of evangelical Christians can tell us about the part minor groups play in contemporary Christian America. By understanding these groups we gain a greater understanding of American Christianity in the early twenty first century.

The CMA’s vision in their mission statement is “changing the world one heart at a time.”<sup>13</sup> They profess the following beliefs:

The Christian Motorcyclists Association is interdenominational and evangelistic in nature.

We believe in:

- The Bible as the inspired and infallible word of God.
- One God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- The virgin birth and deity of Christ, His explicit atoning death, bodily resurrection and ascension.
- Salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ.
- The sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, who enables a believer to live holy.
- The second coming of Jesus Christ.<sup>14</sup>

This statement of belief is in most respects similar to that of the National Association of Evangelicals, generally differing only with respect to specific language.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike the NAE statement, the CMA statement makes no reference to the “resurrection of damnation” awaiting the unsaved. Although Satan is viewed by CMA members as a very real, corporeal being alive in this world, other than one speaker at a State Rally, very little mention is made of hell and damnation in their daily discourse.

The CMA claims on their website to have ministered to 170,000 individuals, and generated 16,000 “salvations” in 2012. They claim that, through their largest fund raising drive, “The Run for The Son,” 13 million people worldwide have “received Christ as their Savior.”<sup>16</sup> This fund raising endeavor claims to “reach the lost with the gospel of Jesus,” and to have raised \$3,961,295.83 to be distributed to various Christian ministries in 2012.<sup>17</sup> The association has chapters in 30 countries around the world. The U.S. is divided into six regions, the Rocky Mountain Region alone being comprised of over 75 chapters.

This project investigates one of the “underserved niches” such as those referenced in *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* by Stark and Finke. As they note, religious “firms” can be successful entering any market that represents an “unserved or underserved niche (s) in the market.”<sup>18</sup> I suggest that “bikers,” as social outcasts, represent such an underserved market. However, as will be noted in the chapter on theory, this does not mean that the ethnography will be conducted under the aegis of Stark’s market-based model.

The theoretical model is that of Lived Religion as put forth by Nancy Ammerman, Penny Edgell Becker, and Jerome Bagget. This lived religion perspective speaks to the fact that religion is a subject that is considerably more multi-dimensional than can be addressed solely through quantitative analysis, although quantitative analysis does have value. Such data mining as is typical of quantitative analysis, and which seems attractive to secularization theorists such as Steve Bruce, fails to consider the implications of Grace Davie’s memorable phrase, “believing without belonging.” The lived religion

perspective, as adopted for this study, views much of everyday life for many people as being religious in nature. There is much more to religion than can be calculated by church attendance figures or “forced answer” survey responses.

In addition to the lived religion perspective, this study engages with the methodology of ethnography, writing from within the reality of participant observation. The richest and deepest understanding of groups of people is achieved by living among them, eating their food, engaging in their daily activities, and being subject to their observation and, occasionally, their criticism. Taking a cue from Penny Edgell Becker’s work in *Congregations in Conflict: Cultural Models of Local Religious Life*, in this study I view the membership of the CMA as a congregation in its own right, geographically dispersed, but organized under one “pastor,” adding a number of “junior pastors,” “youth pastors,” and including management committees.<sup>19</sup>

To some extent, an understanding of the significance of Christian motorcycle clubs (missions) necessitates an understanding of the history of bikers in the U.S., their activities, structures, communication methods, conflicts and American public reaction to them. To have gone from an era of American attention being paid primarily to the outlaw 1%er clubs to one in which “respectable,” middle class Americans are wearing leathers and riding Harleys is a significant societal change. Today, in addition to the outlaws, there are Christian bikers, military bikers, and police agency bikers.

This project undertakes to understand evangelical bikers positioning on doctrinal matters, such as those outlined in the CMA doctrinal statement. Do the members of the

various chapters adhere to the CMA doctrinal statement? If so, to what extent? As suggested by Baggett<sup>20</sup> with respect to “good Catholics,” can these bikers be “good Christians” while accepting only a portion of the CMA doctrinal statement? Is a comparison possible with the “core Christian beliefs” set out by Stark and Finke, which are similar, but include “life after death” and a belief in the real existence of Satan?<sup>21</sup>

How does the CMA attract new members? Are the recruits “down and out” “outcasts” who have “found Jesus” and want to participate in an organized ministry that is accepting of them? Or, are they previously committed evangelical Christians who just happen to ride motorcycles? What is the method of recruitment? According to Lorne L. Dawson, “recruitment to NRMs [New Religious Movements] happens primarily through pre-existing social networks and interpersonal bonds.”<sup>22</sup> Is that the case with the bikers? How does an “outcast” even find a Christian biker ministry? Or, do the ministries seek them out? In his 1998 work *American Evangelism: Embattled and Thriving* Christian Smith notes that organizations such as these feel an “‘evangelical burden’ of responsibility to evangelize the world,” how does that burden affect the group membership?<sup>23</sup> Or, does it only affect “management?” The study looks into whether this “evangelical burden” actually exposes members to what Smith referred to as “their surrounding culture and society,”<sup>24</sup> or whether they merely ignore those factors.

The project examines the social norms, strictures and mores of the group. What are their social control mechanisms? There are over 30 CMA chapters in Colorado alone. How do they position themselves with respect to what Becker referred to as “who we are and how we do things here.”<sup>25</sup> Just how much variance, if any, is there between chapters?

The interviews which were conducted in the course of this study also concern themselves with family and gender issues in the CMA. The interviews indicate how families react to club membership as well as how membership in an evangelical organization affects the family itself. Sally K. Gallagher suggests in her essay *The Marginalization of Evangelical Feminism* that significant internal issues arise within families with respect to the evangelical behavior patterns surrounding males as the family leader and head of household.<sup>26</sup> The leadership of the CMA is less hierarchically oriented than is often found in evangelical households. In several of the interviews which were conducted with both husband and wife present, it was clear to me that the wife was more influential in addressing the direction of the interview.

A final concern of the study deals with the subject of race within contemporary evangelicalism and how it is reflected in the CMA. The project discovered the racial configuration of the organization and notes how it differs between geographic locations. The racial interaction, or lack of same, is observed. Does the CMA “mirror the racial diversity and conflict of racial ideologies in the larger American society” as suggested is the case for “mainline” Protestant churches by Alumkal in *Racial Justice in the Protestant Mainline: Liberalism and its Limits*, or does it reflect a racial identity, structure and terms of conflict which are more specific to the CMA, or more specific to evangelicalism as a whole?

This study has been conducted over a period of two years and included eighteen personal, confidential interviews, attendance at over twenty chapter meetings and a great variety of additional activities ranging from street ministry, bible study sessions, visits to

women's centers, Christmas cookie distribution parties, and providing food and clothing to the homeless. The CMA is engaged in all of these activities and exhibits a strong sense of commitment to their mission. In this work I hope to engage in critical ethnographic analysis of the movement, while at the same time communicating their focus and energy.



## Chapter Two: Setting the Stage for the Project

### The Theoretical Perspective, Methodology, and a Look at Contemporary American Evangelicalism

Before plunging into an in-depth discussion of Lived Religion Theory, the perspective upon which this study is based, it may be helpful to briefly discuss the general field of sociological theories of religion, and make some observations regarding perspectives other than Lived Religion Theory. Beginning in the late twentieth century, sociologists of religion have been debating whether or not religion has a diminishing place in modern life, the so-called “secularization” of the world. Additionally, discussions continue with respect to just what “drives” religious actions in society.

The sociology of religion is the worldwide, contemporary and historical study of society and patterns of social behavior concerning what is thought of as “religion” in the contemporary West. I say “what is thought of as religion” because the very concept of “religion” as a separately identifiable characteristic of human life and behavior is something of a western academic construct. In numerous non-western cultures, religion is so totally integrated into the fabric of social life as to not be distinguishable conceptually. Even as such, not being separately articulated as a subject matter as it is in the West, religion is still studied in those locales.

Sociologists of religion investigate how religion impacts the society in which it operates and how that society, in turn, affects religion. It is a study of the behaviors of

both people and institutions. As in this study, it is not an investigation into theology, the supernatural, or the truth claims of any particular faith tradition. The tools of analysis are participant observation, surveys, interviews and questionnaires. This perspective is referred to by Peter Berger as “methodological atheism,” not to be confused with “ontological atheism.”<sup>27</sup> Both atheists and people of faith can engage in the sociological study of religion, but their faith, if any, needs to be bracketed out of their analysis to whatever extent the individual scholar finds to be possible.

Perceptions of religion in the post-Enlightenment, Western world have undergone a series of changes. For Marx, religion was the opiate of the people, soon to disappear upon the advent of the proletarian revolution. Comte claimed that religion was fundamentally the childhood of the human race. For Durkheim, religion existed to bind society together harmoniously, and for Weber religion attempted to explain what science later explained better.

Beginning with Auguste Comte (1798-1857), the discipline of sociology attempts to bring a scientific orientation, derived from the physical sciences, to the study of human activity, in our particular case, the human activity surrounding religion. As the sociological study of society matured, a continuum of perspective emerged. On one end reside the *positivists*, who model themselves to the largest extent possible after the physical sciences, following Comte and dealing primarily, but by no means exclusively, with quantitative analysis. Toward the center of the continuum can be found sociologists such as Robert Wuthnow, who bring something of an interpretive perspective to the study. At the far opposite end of the spectrum from the positivists, we find the *post-*

*modernists*, who maintain that overarching theory is impossible, and that only *description* is valid.

Significant debate exists within the sociology of religion with respect to what is often referred to as the “old paradigm” and the “new paradigm,” a debate which will be discussed at length in the following pages. The debate has a number of participants, but I will focus on Peter Berger and Steve Bruce as being emblematic of the “old paradigm” of a *secularization crisis*, and Rodney Stark, Lawrence Iannaccone, and Nancy Ammerman as being emblematic of *differing* but *compatible* interpretations of the “new paradigm,” asserting that religion is not facing a secularization crisis at all and that it is simply manifested in new ways in the lives of individuals and groups.<sup>28</sup>

#### Early Berger, the “Sacred Canopy” and the Secularization of the Modern World

Secularization theory is not new by any means. Ever since the European Enlightenment, the decline and extinction of religion (at least in Western cultures), has been predicted by savants. The original Enlightenment version of secularization was highly ideological in nature.<sup>29</sup> Voltaire, certainly not a fan of religion in any form, predicted the death of religion within fifty years. His contemporary, Diderot, famously exclaimed “*et des boyaux du dernier pretre serrons le cou du dernier roi*” let us strangle the last king with the guts of the last priest. Marx and Engels in the nineteenth century concurred with the sentiment. Auguste Comte, the father of sociology, taking a less confrontational and ideological stance, predicted that his new discipline would eventually replace religion as the organizing moral force for society. More recently, Peter Berger told the *New York Times* in 1968 that by “the 21<sup>st</sup> century, religious believers are likely to

be found only in small sects, huddled together to resist a worldwide secular culture.”<sup>30</sup> This prediction has proven to be monumentally untrue, a fact which Berger himself has acknowledged.

The most well-known and cited discussion of what Christian Smith refers to as “sheltered enclave” theory is that put forth by Peter Berger in his 1967 work *The Sacred Canopy*. In it, Berger makes the assertion that religious plurality is disadvantageous to religion. Competing truth claims by competing faith communities erode the basic plausibility structure of the religious society. Competing worldviews destabilize the religious homogeneity of a society. Absent an overarching “sacred canopy,” deterioration of societal religiosity sets in, resulting eventually in the secularization of that society.<sup>31</sup>

According to Berger’s thesis, religious organizations must react to this secularizing of society by one of two means, either adapt to the newly secular society, or withdraw into “sheltered enclaves,” neither option being helpful for the religious believers or their organizations.

Initially, Berger presents a very narrow definition of secularization, “the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols,”<sup>32</sup> a definition concurred in as recently as 2011 by Tariq Modood, who considers secularization to be “the non-domination of political authority by religious authority,”<sup>33</sup> a crisply minimalist definition. In this portion of Berger’s project, with this specific claim, Berger does not assert that people anywhere are becoming less

religious or that religion is not significant, only that it is being excised from certain sectors of society. If he had left it at that, the reality of life in the Western world in the twenty-first century would be compatible with the claim.

There was a time in mid-twentieth century America when schoolchildren in public schools recited the Lord's Prayer every day before the start of class, Christmas meant Nativity scenes on the lawns of public buildings and Christian crosses and Judeo-Christian Ten Commandments monuments dotted the public landscape. A years long series of ACLU lawsuits and Supreme Court rulings succeeded in removing much of Judeo-Christian iconography from the American public square. To that extent, secularization did become a *fait accompli* even in the U.S., at least with respect to the public square.

One of the crucial, but dysfunctional aspects of theorist's clear insights is that they are all too often extended beyond the initial, accurate observation into a less accurate, but grand, theory. Such is the case with respect to Berger's view of secularization. Taken over the long term, it could be argued that as old (in post-modernist or even modernist terms) an articulation as a "wall of separation between church and state"<sup>34</sup> validates this particular claim of Berger's. Going even further back in history, there could be little dispute that the French Revolution dramatically removed religion from a great many aspects of French society with reverberations up to today, such as the 1905 French *laicite* edict which was expanded in the early twenty-first century to outlaw the wearing of the *hijab* in public schools and government offices.<sup>35</sup> However, Berger extends this thesis to

claim that the “sacred canopy” which has overseen religion in the Western World (ex-“Christendom”) has been taken down, replaced by modernist, secularizing influences.

#### Steve Bruce, Secularization in the Early Twenty-First century

The strongest remaining bastion of secularization and of secularization theory remains Western Europe. Academics like Steve Bruce continue to carry the torch and maintain that secularization is occurring to a great extent. In his 2011 work, Bruce, quoting Bryan Wilson, defines secularization as “the decline in the social significance of religion.”<sup>36</sup> Like Berger before them, Bruce and Wilson extend the theory beyond the simple separation of church and state and the minimalization of religion in the public square. For Bruce, secularization extends to the actual decay of religious institutions and the decline of religious consciousness, replaced by empirical thought.<sup>37</sup> He echoes the wishes of Voltaire and his associates. To his credit, he does not view his theory as an immutable law pertaining to all societies at all times and in all places. He does limit his project to explaining religion in Western liberal democracies in the modern and post-modern eras, viewing the driving forces for secularization as democratization and industrialization.

Bruce refers to himself as “an old fashioned positivist” and decries what he calls the “subversion” of sociology by the academics which attempt to bring additional interpretive characterizations into the discourse.<sup>38</sup> As an avowed positivist, Bruce is adept at citing reams of data supporting his thesis. The question for Bruce and his research partners is two-fold: are you testing for data that is actually pertinent to the

question at hand, and, is your data and thesis exportable to the rest of the world, or are they unique to Western Europe?

Bruce places great emphasis on British measurements of church attendance and recorded church affiliation. With respect to the validity of the data, we bear in mind that there exist varying criteria for what constitutes affiliation with religious organizations. Additionally, testing for recorded affiliation does not account for the re-focused religiosity of segments of the population (which may not feel a need for recorded affiliation), the segment of the population which is often referred to as “believing without belonging,” or “spiritual without being religious,” as if those were mutually exclusive perspectives.

Contra Smith, Stark, Finke, et. al., (see below) Bruce’s model is fundamentally a demand side model, not only discounting the utilitarianism of the new paradigm, but arguing that as religion becomes more a matter of free choice among individuals, boundary maintenance suffers.

#### New Paradigm Critics of Secularization Theory and the De-Secularization of the World

Berger does, in a sense, defeat his own narrow definition when he proceeds to claim that this results in “the decline of religious content in the arts, in philosophy, in literature,”<sup>39</sup> a position which can be disputed more easily than can the claim that there is a separation of church and state in many Western countries. Superficially, his claim may be so. It would be difficult to assert that there is as much religious art and literature in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries as there was during the Renaissance. However,

art historians claim that the lessening of the amount of religious art and literature in Western Europe after the Renaissance is more due to the change in where the money for cultural artifacts came from. The rise of the middle class and the nation state put more cultural funding into the hands of middle class patrons and nation states interested in heroic art and literature, thereby reducing the influence of “church money” on material culture.<sup>40</sup> Shakespeare wrote scathingly about Richard III precisely because he was writing for a Tudor audience, which had deposed Richard. David painted the heroic Napoleon Crossing the Alps because his audience and patron was the French Academy of Art. Art and literature, like politics, follow the money.

Berger’s initial, narrow definition could be successfully argued as being valid today, however, his corollary is where his argument loses traction. Berger expands his argument to claim that this secularization of certain elements of society (i.e. Western nation-state government) extends to the very *consciousness* of humanity, a diminution of spirituality in a much broader sense than his narrow definition would necessarily allow.<sup>41</sup> For Berger, the modernity-actuated loss of religion’s overarching plausibility structure causes a veritable *crisis* for religion in the modern, industrial world. In his assertion that these forces are global in scope, he failed at the time to take into account the reality of religious expansion, both Muslim and Christian, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South America where, contra-Berger, the “religious legitimizations” of society are as strong, or stronger, than ever.<sup>42</sup>

In his defense, this information was not widely known in 1967, not to mention the immense expansion of religious activity in the former Soviet Union upon its dissolution



or the expansion of Christianity, despite the Communist government, in twenty-first century China. By 1982, Berger, while continuing to maintain his position vis-à-vis the erosion of plausibility structures, was at least noting the explosive growth of religious movements in what he called the Third World. In his essay on the crisis of secularity, Berger admits that resurgent Islam, revitalized Hindu traditionalism, and neo-Buddhist activism run counter to his previous claims with respect to the universal effects of modernity.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, as is well known, Berger himself repudiated his overall conceptualization later in his career.<sup>44</sup> Berger's unsupported expansion of his theme is the problematical aspect of Berger's 1967 perspective, as well as his assertion that such secularization is an inevitable result of global industrial capitalism, or simply industrialization or modernity *per se* in socialist or communist economies.

As early as 1982 Berger began commenting on what he perceived to be a *crisis of secularism* as a crisis within and of secularism, not a religious crisis caused by secularization, operationally, a *deseccularization* of the western world. This crisis was explained by Berger as being, in part, caused by the inability of secular society to accommodate the Weberian *theodicy*. Although secularism can attempt to cure the ills of civilization on a grand scale, (for instance, the proletarian revolution eliminating class distinctions) it cannot adequately address the deeply disturbing, personal crises associated with illness, death, and pain. Religious faith would seem to be a greatly superior comfort and explanation at such times of crisis.

Berger is not the only secularization theorist to come under fire by "new paradigm" scholars. In their 1995 response to Steve Bruce's critique of their work, Stark and

Iannaccone take Bruce to task for sloppy and possibly disingenuous data usage. In a technical, methodological argument, they attempt to dismantle several of his assertions regarding the decline of religiosity in Britain.<sup>45</sup> Additional critique of aspects of data collection as used by Bruce comes from Grace Davie. Davie notes that, of the typical measures of religiosity as used in the European Values System Study Group, one subtype which measures institutional attachment and participation, may properly lead to conclusions of secularization. The other sub-group, measuring feelings, experiences and beliefs, really are non-dispositive with respect to secularization. A more nuanced perspective on the data argues for the proposition that Bruce's Great Britains may well be unchurched, but that does not mean that they are secularized.<sup>46</sup>

By the early twenty-first century, desecularization and any concomitant crisis of secularization became the subject of significant discussion. In his 2011 Paul Hanley Furfey Lecture, published in the Journal of the ASR, Tariq Modood advises that numerous scholars now consider desecularization and a resultant crisis to be worthy of consideration. Among others he references Mathew Sherer, Olivier Roy, and Rajeev Bhargava as addressing the subject.<sup>47</sup>

In particular, Modood draws our attention to the recent (2006) work of Jurgen Habermas, and quotes him as saying that we are now entering into a *post-secular* age, wherein “‘secular citizens’ have to express a previously denied respect for ‘religious citizens,’ who should be allowed, even encouraged, to critique aspects of contemporary society and to find solutions to its problems from within their religious views.”<sup>48</sup> We note that this observation is coming from the pen of an old (Frankfurt) school, Western

Marxist, Critical Theorist, something of an amazing perspective. From Modood's point of view, religion and religious groups are reacting to, and contesting, socio-political marginalization.<sup>49</sup> In Europe in particular, this pushback is evidenced in what might be called "muscular Islam."<sup>50</sup>

When discussing the apparent decline in measures of religiosity in Britain, he calls our attention to Grace Davies' memorable expression "believing without belonging" to posit a possible explanation for the continuing decline of reported church attendance. While Modood will not go so far as to concur that there is a specific crisis of secularization in Europe, he does insist that political secularism has been, in his word, "destabilized" and whether the current level of political secularism will continue is somewhat in question.<sup>51</sup>

As noted by Christian Smith and others, the entire construct of the "sheltered enclave" as a viable reaction to modernity is disputed by the data, at least in the United States.<sup>52</sup> As an example, the path taken by American Evangelicals such as those who participated in this study, has been to actively engage with American society on all fronts. They not only engage, but actively *confront* American society in politics, social activism, education, and issues pertaining to religious life in general, religious freedom in particular. There is little or no "sheltering" from the social and cultural aspects of American industrial modernity. Smith asserts that there exists an "almost complete lack of correlation between distance from modernity and religious vitality."<sup>53</sup> Mary Douglas, in her essay on the effects of modernization on religious change, makes note of the fact that there is virtually no reliable evidence that there was ever what we might call a

“golden age” of religion which can be used as a baseline case to argue for a general decline in religiosity.<sup>54</sup>

In a series of graduate lectures at the Iliff School of Theology, Antony Alumkal points out that the “sacred canopy” has arguably not been shredded at all. It has merely been replaced by a collection of somewhat smaller, individualized “religious legitimizations,” oriented towards group and individual religious views, resulting in a series of canopies, which are characterized by their individuality and/or group orientation.

#### Rational Choice/Supply Side Theories of Religion

The basic premise of market based, rational choice theories is quite simple (and to some extent, almost simplistic), and dates back to Adam Smith’s invisible hand. “Human action is governed by the pursuit of rewards and the avoidance of costs,” and rational beings will act in accordance with this basic principle.<sup>55</sup> Market based, rational choice theories are the cornerstone of what might be referred to as the “new paradigm” in the sociology of religion. Other theories in the “new paradigm”, such as Sub-Cultural Identity theory, form a complex of thought that expands, modifies or otherwise utilizes basic concepts of market/rational theories, standing in contrast to the “old paradigm” which centers around the inevitable secularization of the world and resultant loss of religious vitality.

Although the varieties of market based theories have numerous proponents, the work of Rodney Stark (along with Finke, Iannacone and Bainbridge in various contexts) sets the baseline for market based theories of religion.

A religious economy consists of all the religious activity going on in any society: a 'market' of current and potential adherents, a set of one or more organizations seeking to attract or maintain adherents, and the religious culture offered by the organization(s).<sup>56</sup>

This religious economy is believed by the proponents of market based theories of religion to manifest all the characteristics of any economic system and is subject to all the rules of economics; risk and reward, profit and loss, benefits accruing to those who work for them. Supply side theorists even go so far as to suggest to economists that they should be studying religious beliefs insofar as those beliefs can affect the economic behavior patterns of individuals and groups.<sup>57</sup> Rational choice theory's most salient characteristic is the premise that pluralistic societies with competing religious interests are the most favorable climate for religion to thrive in the modern world. Accordingly, market based theory is diametrically opposed to the "old paradigm" contention that pluralism is a strongly negative influence on religion. Market based theory holds that much of what was previously considered to be negative influences are, in fact, positive; such things as exclusivity, high cost of membership and relatively high tension with the surrounding society, aspects of religious life in America which are evident among study participants.

Market based/rational choice theories contend that the negative influences which result in failure to thrive on the part of religious organizations, are primarily those found in Western Europe; monopolized religious cultures and governmental coercion.<sup>58</sup> These strictures of state endorsed and supported churches are notably lacking in the United States, accounting for the vibrancy of religion in comparison to the countries of Northern and Western Europe. This vibrancy, which is due to a lack of state coerced religion, has

been noted historically by commentators as diverse as de Tocqueville and Marx. According to de Tocqueville, “In the United States there are an infinite variety of ceaselessly changing Christian sects, but Christianity itself is an established and irresistible fact which no one seeks to attack or defend.”<sup>59</sup> Marx observed that,

there is not, in the United States, either a state religion or a religion declared to be that of a majority, or a predominance of one religion over another. The state remains aloof from all religions...and [yet] North America is pre-eminently the country of religiosity.<sup>60</sup>

A critical aspect of market based theory is that the society provides the freedom for religious entrepreneurs to address unmet needs; from a marketing professional’s perspective, finding an empty niche and filling it, precisely such as niche as was discovered by the founder of the CMA<sup>61</sup> As noted by Iannacone, the market based approach is intended to maximize utility (and benefits) for the producers as well as the consumers of religion.<sup>62</sup> As a cautionary note, pluralism in and of itself is no guarantee of religious vitality, absent the freedom to pursue those unmet needs. Societal openness is as important as pluralism.

### Critics of Supply Side Theories

Rational choice/market theory is not without its detractors, even among “new paradigm” theorists. As was the case when Berger expanded his thesis regarding secularization from a simple one describing the disconnect between religion and formal governmental structures to a broad thesis of secularization in general, rational choice encounters the same difficulty when it is claimed to be a unified theory. All Starkian claims to the contrary, rational choice fails to explain the entire constellation of religious

activity.<sup>63</sup> “It is not about today, nor is it about the United States – it purports to be *general* (ital. in original).”<sup>64</sup> The metaclaim of rational choice, that it is an overarching, deductive theory is, according to Chaves, deeply flawed. Not *all* decisions and choices at *all* times are based on cost/benefit analysis. Rational choice theory does an excellent job of explaining some religious phenomena, under some sets of circumstances, in some locales and among some populations.<sup>65</sup>

Serious objection can be made to supply side theories in that they tend to be uni-dimensional. As noted by Chaves,<sup>66</sup> they require certain additional assumptions in order to “work.” One such assumption is that people will uniformly make rational decisions, something which is contradicted by simple common sense. These theories also fail to account for issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, dominance, and power inequality. Additionally, it can be argued that supply side/rational choice theories overstate the limits of individual agency to a significant extent.

However, supply side theories need not be totally uni-dimensional. For Christian Smith, a key proponent of Sub-Cultural Identity Theory, that theory is intended to be an expansion of the marketing/economic/rational choice theories of religion, utilizing non-economic language, and advancing the concept of a new paradigm, complimenting rather than contradicting the above noted components of the “new paradigm,” concurring in the thought that pluralism exerts a positive influence on religion’s place in society.

Religion survives and can thrive in pluralistic, modern society by embedding itself in subcultures that offer satisfying morally orienting collective identities which provide adherents meaning and belonging. In a pluralistic society, those religious groups will be relatively stronger which better possess and employ the

cultural tools needed to create both clear distinction from and significant engagement and tension with other relevant outgroups, short of becoming genuinely countercultural.<sup>67</sup>

Additional critique of supply side theories can also be found among the old paradigm, secularization theorists. In an observation which may display an unconscious bias inherent in his work, Steve Bruce refers to supply side theory as an “imperialist vision,” based upon an “economics of everything.” Bruce goes on to explain that the entire concept of a maximization of utility (an idea which has been around at least since the era of J.S. Mill) may possibly work in other areas of society, but cannot operate successfully in the religious realm due to the fact (per Bruce) that the conditions for making rational choices are absent in an arena that is fundamentally irrational.<sup>68</sup> Taking this perspective requires that all supply side theories be rejected out of hand in their totality.

Bruce’s analysis and critique of supply side theory is not just based on his pre-determined philosophical perspective. Referring to the statistical work of Chaves and Gorski, he reminds readers that the statistical basis of the Stark/Finke “pluralism is good for religion” concept is based on faulty statistical work. Without going into the statistical details, he concurs with Chaves and Gorski that the positive correlation between pluralism and religious vitality is only evident when the data is controlled for Catholics in the sample.

However, even with those limitations, supply side theory exhibits high value as a tool for analysis of religious activity. Rodney Stark himself recognized, to some extent, limitations on the theory (and evidenced a bit of Swidleresque “toolbox” orientation.)<sup>69</sup>



Within the limits of their information and understanding, restricted by available options, guided by their preferences and tastes, humans attempt to make rational choices.<sup>70</sup>

Within these carefully circumscribed limits, the theory works better than when it is presented as a universal, unified model.

### Lived Religion/Everyday Religion Theory

As previously noted, this project has been undertaken from the perspective of Lived Religion theory. As a sociologist of religion, my interests lie not in high level theology, questions of ethics, or pastoral care, all vital and important in the study of religion, certainly, but not at the center of my research. My research deals with individuals and groups, large and small, and how they live their lives from a religious perspective. My undergraduate work in sociology was largely concerned with classic in-group/out-group behaviors, and that interest has carried forth into this study.

Lived Religion Theory, as put forth by Nancy Ammerman,<sup>71</sup> Jerome Bagget,<sup>72</sup> et. al. is substantially more interpretive than the data based secularization arguments of a Steve Bruce<sup>73</sup> or the economically based arguments of a Rodney Stark.<sup>74</sup> In fact, lived religion theorists often discount survey analysis as being relatively unable to get at the beating heart of what it means to be religious. For the lived religion theorists, one cannot assess religiosity or lack thereof by counting numbers of people on the rolls of conventional religious institutions. Instead, it is considered more fruitful to look at the religious component of the everyday actions of everyday people. In these studies, data continues

to be available, it is simply a different type of data, often qualitative, rather than quantitative.

Contemporary religion in the West is often no longer a matter of conventional congregations, formal institutions, and doctrinal orthodoxy. Religion is “bigger” than what surveys are capable of capturing.<sup>75</sup> Lived religion study captures the often non-conventional ideas about religion held by those who may not proclaim membership in any organized congregation, but claim to have spiritual experiences. This perspective also recognizes the validity of religious expression which does not comport with denominational orthodoxy, conventional ritual, or past practices. This viewpoint is particularly appropriate in the study of the Christian Motorcyclists Association. The CMA is strictly non-denominational in its outlook and the members of the CMA tell in their religious life stories of constantly moving from congregation to congregation in their attempts to find a good denominational and congregational “fit” for their religious tastes and evangelical Christian leanings.

Despite this aspect of the CMA member’s religious life, appearing on few congregational roles as they move from church to church and denomination to denomination, their evangelicalism is woven through every aspect of their daily lives. They wear religious symbols on their clothing (the “It’s All About Jesus” patch on their leather vests), attend bible studies at a variety of congregations, and pray literally scores of times during their day. Prayer requests are submitted in every chapter meeting, they have their own bible study during the week, and they send out a daily devotional message.

This does not make these individuals less religious than are the adherents of more conventional (and countable) religious affiliations, it makes them *differentially* religious. Differentially religious evangelicals can and do move from congregation to congregation until they find a pastor who appeals to their personal religious sensitivities. This tendency is not confined to evangelicals. Differentially religious Catholics no longer have to hide from the designation “cafeteria Catholic,” they can celebrate their individual agency and interpretive authority.<sup>76</sup> Nancy Ammerman advises that when people draw on the spiritual, even in manners which are not traditionally considered to be religious, they are “engaging in religious action.”<sup>77</sup> Thirty or so CMA members roaring down the highway “flying their colors” on a poker run exemplifies this aspect of lived religion.<sup>78</sup>

Ammerman further notes that the two main contending traditions which dominate discussion of religious activity in today’s academy have become “increasingly inadequate to the task at hand...the failure of secularization theories has been a matter of discussion for some time, but rational choice theories are no more satisfactory as an alternative.”<sup>79</sup>

Simply by measuring forms of orthodoxy, church/mosque/synagogue attendance, or registration on parish rolls, it would appear that secularization is, in fact, dominant in modern western industrial society. However, lived religion theorists maintain that this is a distorted picture. Proponents of the study of everyday religion purposely privilege non-academics and non-religious professionals and base their conclusions to a great extent on in-depth conversations with the populations which they study, they are, in a sense, the ethnographers of the sociology of religion. In their pursuit of these conversations they come to understand the ideas of individuals in their own voices, relatively unmediated by

institutional actors. These understandings of lived faith can provide a source of theological insight into broader issues of religion and society, a subject which is discussed in the concluding chapter.<sup>80</sup>

Lived religion could be considered to be part of the sociology of religion's "new paradigm" thinking, in that its proponents tend to reject the "old paradigm," secularization theory out of hand. But, that is not to say that lived religion theorists like Ammerman consider the "rational choice" component of the "new paradigm" to be any better at explaining the actions of people with respect to religion. Ammerman, for one, takes very specific aim at the Starkian economic theory of religious action. Religion is not always about spiritual rewards, and rational choice ideas represent "extreme theoretical poverty."<sup>81</sup>

There are other components of "new paradigm" theory which Ammerman, in her presentation of lived religion, discounts. Pluralism is neither good or bad, its effect on religious activity is basically null. Although individuals do attempt to make rational choices, "taking choice seriously, we should note, does not mean adopting a 'rational choice' perspective."<sup>82</sup> Although rational choice does occur, it is not the overarching, decision driving, determinant factor that Stark et. al. make it out to be. Additionally, unlike economic theories, lived religion does take into consideration issues of power, gender, and class, as well as how other cultural influences affect religious experience, subjects which are also addressed in the concluding chapter of this study. Lived religion

is not a cut and dry exercise, it resists easy categorizations and taxonomies of belief. As noted by Jerome Bagget, “lived religion is messy.”<sup>83</sup>

One clear aspect of Lived Religion Theory is the distinction made between belief and belonging. In the classic phrase of Grace Davie, many people exhibit “believing without belonging.”<sup>84</sup> It is not uncommon for conventional religious institutions to be considered largely irrelevant with respect to membership, but are considered still to “matter” to those who don’t necessarily participate in them regularly. Irrespective of church attendance, congregational identification, or doctrinal orthodoxy, lived religion is representative of the “enduring power of sacred presence in the modern world.”<sup>85</sup>

Unlike the supply side religious theories, which have a wealth of detractors as well as a wealth of advocates, it is more difficult to find significant criticism of Lived Religion Theory. In neither “God is Dead: Secularization in the West,” nor “Secularism: In Defense of an Unfashionable Theory” does secularization theorist Steve Bruce even mention Ammerman or the academic study of lived religion. Detailed searches of the academic literature locate no significant critiques of Lived Religion Theory by Stark, Finke, Chaves or Iannacone.

It could be argued that lived religion theorists fail to consider the religious structures and issues of the Global South. Indeed, it does seem that lived religion advocates do tend to fail to address religion in the Global South, but that can be explained by the fact that so much of their work is ethnographic in nature, and carried out among populations in which they live, as is the case with this study.

Perhaps the only notable critique of Lived Religion Theory is that it is not a fully articulated theory in the sense of Secularization Theory or Rational Choice. In both those cases, the proponents attempt to articulate an overarching theory, which can be made applicable to situations other than the specific ones addressed. In contrast, lived religion is essentially a largely descriptive, narrative, and analytical exercise. The work of this study is comprised to a significant extent of narrative of events and descriptions of interviews, with the associated analysis. A few concluding observations, analyses and suggestions for further research are provided in the concluding chapter.

At the theoretical level lived religion study does more to contradict other theories than to synthesize its observations into a deductive and abstracted package, seemingly lacking a serious attempt to test models of behavior which are formal and predictive. As such, lived religion studies can be placed at the interpretive edge of the sociology of religion continuum. Considering the failures encountered by the Secularization theorists and the Rational Choice theorists when attempting to universalize their concepts, it may be that the *relative* lack of such efforts with respect to Lived Religion Theory is actually a good thing.

#### A Look at Contemporary American Evangelicalism

In a phrase as memorable as Grace Davies' "believing without belonging," Christian Smith tells us that American evangelicalism is "embattled and thriving." Although many American evangelicals do consider themselves to be embattled by the secular society which they must navigate daily, an observer of the American socio-political scene may

well come to the conclusion that the “embattlement” is found more in the minds of the evangelicals than in objective reality. It is rare to view a televised discussion of voting patterns without seeing and hearing reference to great concern as to “who is winning the evangelical vote,” or which American politician is “courting evangelicals.” In early twenty-first century America evangelicals are a potent socio-political force.<sup>86</sup>

According to the 2014 Pew Religious Landscape Study, self-identified American evangelicals have grown in number over the previous seven years from sixty million to sixty-two million individuals, in a time when “mainline” Protestant and Roman Catholic churches have experienced population declines.<sup>87</sup>

Christianity, on the whole, has a long history in America, dating to well before the creation of the United States as a political entity. Through battles over slavery, to the conquest of the native peoples of the continent, through Great Awakenings, the publishing of *The Fundamentals*, holiness movements and camp meetings, Christianity in America has grown, matured, and squabbled internally over doctrine, social responsibility, and involvement with secular society.<sup>88</sup>

For the purposes of this study, I consider the contemporary American evangelical parachurch Christian movement to have begun in the mid-twentieth century when a young minister by the name of Billy Graham was put to work as its first full time evangelist by the organization Youth for Christ International. Following closely upon the creation of the National Association of Evangelicals in 1942, Youth for Christ

International began a conscious effort to dissociate from the existing fundamentalist movement in America.<sup>89</sup>

American fundamentalist Christians had long been derided by the secular American society as being backward, anti-intellectual, and (accurately) strongly anti-modernist. The narrative core of secular American society's perception of fundamentalism was epitomized by director Stanley Kramer's 1960 film *Inherit the Wind*, a retelling of the story of the 1925 Scopes "Monkey Trial," in which the fundamentalist protagonist was portrayed (in an over the top performance by Frederick March) as a buffoon, with minimal grasp of reality.<sup>90</sup> George Marsden advises that it was to counter this perception that Billy Graham began the move towards "the respectable centers of American life."<sup>91</sup> This move, accompanied by Graham's acceptance of sponsorship by the local Protestant Council of Churches "precipitated a definitive split with the hardline fundamentalists in 1957."<sup>92</sup> For those hardline fundamentalists, separation from both secular society and the liberal "mainstream" Protestant churches was an essential hallmark of authenticity.

From these beginnings, contemporary American evangelical Christianity has become, in the words of Christian Smith, "an open and fluid transdenominational identity-movement. Evangelicalism is less an organization than a vast, loose network of small denominations...ministries, missions, agencies, and educational institutions."<sup>93</sup> Just as lived religion is "messy," definitions of evangelicalism are difficult to pin down precisely. Considering the vast array of denominations which comprise contemporary evangelicalism, it may be best to simply describe what evangelicals themselves consider to be their salient characteristics.



Amid the “bewildering diversity” of denominations comprising the movement, most evangelicals “agree in a general way on the essentials of evangelicalism.”<sup>94</sup> According to Christian Smith, “evangelicals are coordinated by a set of minimal, baseline, supradenominational theological beliefs.”<sup>95</sup> Although numerous evangelical organizations publish their own, somewhat expanded, statements of belief, one definition by Grant Wacker appears to be accurate in a minimalist sense. “The sole authority in religion is the Bible and the sole means of salvation is a life-transforming experience wrought by the Holy Spirit through Faith in Jesus Christ.” This statement of minimal beliefs, quoted by George Marsden, is, in the words of Marsden’s own footnote, “not an exhaustive definition. But it is economical and carefully framed.”<sup>96</sup> For a somewhat broader explanation of evangelical beliefs we can look to the belief statement of the National Association of Evangelicals, as noted elsewhere in this study, and replicated here.

We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.

We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the father, and in His personal return in power and glory.

We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful people, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.

We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by those whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.

We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved into the resurrection of life and they that are lost into the resurrection of damnation.

We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>97</sup>

This statement of belief, although not necessarily applicable to *all* evangelicals is sufficiently applicable in a broad sense as to be descriptive of evangelical belief in general. In a movement which is characterized less by denominational orthodoxy or life-long adherence to any specific denomination, belief is more dispositive than denominational membership rolls.

In addition to published statements of belief, contemporary American evangelicalism, as a movement, exhibits certain characteristic attitudes and perspectives, key among those attitudes being the evangelical perspective on gender roles, homosexuality, and sex outside of marriage. Evangelicals typically consider the male father figure to be the decision making leader of the family, and by extension, the leader of other social units as well. In early evangelicalism, these disparate gender roles were conceived of, and articulated as women being “subservient” to men. Helen Hardacre observes that religions in general, and evangelicals in particular “invest the family with sacred significance, and this extends to gender and interpersonal relations.”<sup>98</sup> The classic evangelical position on gender roles could be summed up in the words of Jerry Falwell, “scripture declares that God has called the father to be the spiritual leader of his family...the husband is to be the decision maker.”<sup>99</sup>

Although this perspective is claimed to be scripturally based, “wives, in the same way accept the authority of your husbands.....It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands,” to a large extent it is conditioned by an abstracted and idealized view of the “traditional” western family; a father who works to support the family unit, a mother who

stays at home and provides the nurturing, and several children who obey the father.<sup>100</sup> This traditional perspective on gender relations is described by Bartkowski as being “predicated on a notion of radical gender difference that links manhood to rational thinking while naturalizing patriarchal authority.” This discourse “is unabashedly anti-feminist and decries the devaluation of traditional masculinity in contemporary American society.”<sup>101</sup>

This essentialist view of gender relations has softened somewhat in recent years among certain evangelicals and some evangelical men and women are now pursuing a revisiting of the hierarchical male narrative. The Christian men’s organization Promise Keepers, has postulated more egalitarian forms of gender relations in their articulation of what they refer to as the “Expressive Egalitarian” family leader.<sup>102</sup> In *God’s Daughters*, her ethnographic account of the Women’s Aglow Fellowship, R Marie Griffith tells of that organization’s work which engages with “the task of recasting the traditionally Christian doctrine of female submission to male authority into formulations appealing to women.”<sup>103</sup>

This reformulated, or “softening” position with respect to gender hierarchy is often characterized by the conceptualization of gender roles as being complementary, as Hardacre explains, “both are necessary, but not interchangeable.”<sup>104</sup> It is possible to view these, and other similar reformulations, as simply being apologia for submission, framed in a new language of female empowerment.

Evangelical perspectives are also undergoing change with respect to views on homosexuality. The traditional evangelical view of homosexuality is framed in a biblical narrative which considers homosexuality to be a paramount sin, from Leviticus to

Corinthians, and which as a broad generalization, considers human sexuality to be merely a function of procreation. Paul's injunction in Corinthians chastises "sodomites" and "male prostitutes," along with thieves, idolaters, and fornicators (among others).<sup>105</sup> The classical evangelical position is summed up by one of Tanya Erzon's study participants, who reported to her, simply, that "homosexuality is not what God has planned and not what God wants."

Recent studies indicate that the classical evangelical attitude towards homosexuality is shifting, along with the attitudinal shift accompanying generational change. Balmer notes that "[societal] attitudes towards homosexuality have shifted dramatically over the past several decades even though to a lesser extent) among evangelicals."<sup>106</sup> According to Robert Wuthnow,

between the early 1970s and the late 1990s, young adults became markedly more tolerant of homosexuality, and young evangelicals shifted in this direction in larger numbers than non-evangelicals did. By the late 1990s young evangelicals were less tolerant of homosexuality than non-evangelicals were, but the gap had shrunk.<sup>107</sup>

Wuthnow goes on to say that, although evangelicals are still largely convinced that homosexuality is a sin, they are not particularly interested in restricting LGBT civil rights, such as public speaking or teaching in college classrooms. However, this toleration of LGBT civil rights does not extend to expansion of gay rights, often viewed as the "homosexual agenda." Wuthnow notes that the "2004 Religion and Ethics Newsweekly" survey reported that fully 63% of white evangelicals voiced "strong opposition to gay marriage," with only 15% in favor.<sup>108</sup>

Evangelicals traditionally also take a dim view of sex outside of marriage. Again according to Wuthnow's study, (and remembering the many scriptural prohibitions) "evangelicals are the most likely to say it [sex outside of marriage] is always wrong," and perhaps surprisingly, evangelicals have "become more likely to say this over the past quarter century."<sup>109</sup> However, "behavior does not always follow convictions," with 69% of Wuthnow's young evangelicals admitting to pre-marital sex.<sup>110</sup> This became evident among evangelical leadership amid the sex scandals of the 1980's and 1990's. This dichotomy was also found to be present among the CMA membership, as will become evident in the narrative portion of this study as well.

In the early twenty-first century, the transdenominational aspect of American evangelicalism is clearly evident, as I found it to be among the participants in this study. According to Marsden, one of the most "striking features of much of evangelicalism is its general disregard for the institutional church." When choosing where to worship, many evangelicals "seem as likely to choose a church because it is 'friendly' as to do so because of its particular teachings."<sup>111</sup>

This aspect of the evangelical movement is not lost on the movement's leadership. Rick Warren of Saddleback Church and *Purpose Driven Life* fame, advised Randall Balmer that, although both he and his church are technically members of the Southern Baptist Convention, "we remain in the denomination more for their sakes than for ours. Denominations are dying, even evangelical ones."<sup>112</sup>

Contemporary American evangelicalism is therefore characterized by being a loose confederation of relatively theologically and socially conservative Christian

denominations, the members of which are comfortable with moving from one denomination to another, hold certain, minimal beliefs in common, are engaged with the secular world in which they find themselves, and, according to Robert Wuthnow, often actually “play down denominational traditions.”<sup>113</sup>

Further in-depth discussion of evangelical practices and beliefs with respect to issues such as gender relationships, homosexuality, biblical inerrancy and salvation is contained in the final chapter of this study in which these aspects of evangelicalism are engaged with in respect to my findings among the membership of the CMA.

### Methodology

The confidential interviews represented in chapters four through seven took place over a period of just over one year. I had been riding with the Rocky Mountain Christian Riders chapter of the CMA for one full year prior to the inception of the interviews and had, by that time, established a relatively close relationship with the chapter membership and I was generally well accepted as a fellow rider who happened to be, as they put it, “writing a book” about the CMA.<sup>114</sup>

I conducted interviews with eighteen participants. All participants read and signed the documents which were prescribed for the study by the University of Denver Institutional Review Board. The interviews were presented to the participants as being private and confidential, however, married couples were given the option of interviewing together, if they so desired.

The interview process was presented to the participants as not only being confidential and anonymous, but also having the further level of confidentiality of being reported as composites. The purpose of reporting the interviewees as composites was to ensure that, not only would other researchers and the general public not be able to identify any individual life stories, but even CMA chapter members would find it difficult, although perhaps not totally impossible, to identify individual stories. This decision, to report the interviews as composites, led to unforeseen difficulties. This reporting structure required that sufficiently consistent life stories, attitudes and behaviors be identified as to constitute valid composites of CMA members. These composites not only had to be identifiable in terms of this study, but also be identified and accepted as “prototypical” by the membership itself. Additionally, the decision to create composites led to a number of difficult decisions regarding gender identification and the resultant grammatical usages.

The timing and location of the interviews varied with the choices made by the participants. Three interviews took place at member’s places of employment; one of which was a modern, high rise corporate structure, two others at a run down, one-man motorcycle shop. Four interviews were conducted at coffee shops and budget buffet restaurants. Eleven interviews were conducted in the subject’s homes, which ranged in location from upscale suburban to rural and rustic. At each of the at-home interviews I was offered soft drinks or snacks and at one of them, a “couples” interview, I was invited to the house for dinner. One couple had a well-appointed bar in their built-out basement, but during the interview we drank coffee and ate cookies. Most of the interviews lasted from ninety minutes to two hours, with several lasting well beyond the scheduled time

frame of ninety minutes. None of the interviews were recorded, instead, detailed field notes were taken which were later expanded into formal interview records.<sup>115</sup> A few interviews, such as the dinner table conversation, generated relatively sparse on-the-spot notes, due to the nature of the conversation. These notes were quickly formalized and expanded within a day.

At the beginning of the interview process I had no idea of how many composite, “typical” CMA members would result from the interviews. To constitute a valid composite, a number of participants would have to exhibit sufficiently similar characteristics in life histories and/or beliefs for a composite character to be created. An additional requirement was that the composites be recognizable as such by the CMA membership, a requirement which was tested and found to be accurate in later conversations with members. By the end of the interview process, and after having coded the stories and responses to questions asked, I generated five composite CMA members; the “Cradle Christian,” the “Broken One,” the individual for whom “The CMA IS my family,” the individuals for whom “Love Conquers All,” and the individual who distinctly believes that, although they consider themselves to be “saved,” with respect to their Christianity, they are still “Workin’ On It.”

Although the profiles presented in these chapters are primarily the result of the specific, confidential interviews which were conducted in the second year of this study, certain aspects of the composites represent information which I received during my two years of riding with the CMA. Over that period of time I had many conversations with members at a variety of events, which were not under the aegis of formal, confidential



interviews. However, certain aspects of the CMA member's lives which I learned of during these casual conversations and observations were simply too significant to exclude from the composites.

One other aspect of the methodological approach to these interviews deserves mention. When preparing to undertake this study I was encouraged to take a graduate class specifically geared to the writing of ethnographies. In that class the question arose as to how much personal information and self-expression of identity and belief was appropriate for the researcher to share with the participants in the study. This was of intensely personal concern to me, as I was a Catholic undertaking a close, personal study of evangelical Christians, not all of whom might prove to be particularly enamored of Catholics.<sup>116</sup>

After a great deal of spirited discussion, we, as members of the class, came to the conclusion that a certain amount of explanation of the researcher's background was absolutely necessary if the required level of trust was to be obtained. This was not intended to lead to detailed discussions of my own belief structures and how they may coincide or differ between the researcher and the participants, but rather to establish some common ground for religious conversation.

"Richard is a Christian who chooses to worship Jesus in the Catholic Church." This was the explanation given by a senior CMA officer, who was my mentor and sponsor for this study, to CMA members who asked early in the study about my religious identity.

When he shared that with me, it appeared to me to be a somewhat overly cautious explanation, but one which was, to a great extent, valid. After all, Catholics do consider themselves to be Christians, and they do worship Jesus as the Second Person of the Trinity. The only point in which this explanation may run have into difficulty is that certain evangelicals do not consider Catholics to be Christians at all, or only marginally Christian, at best. In his work “Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America,” Randall Balmer recounts the story of his interaction with his young friend Stanley. When Stanley claimed to be Christian, the youthful Balmer thought to himself, “Stanley, I knew, was a Roman Catholic, not a Christian, a plight in some respects worse than outright paganism.”<sup>117</sup> This attitude is evident among certain evangelicals, even within the CMA.

In fact, the subject of my personal religious beliefs turned out not to be a problem at all. By the time the interview process began, I had been riding with the Rocky Mountain Christian Riders (RMCR) chapter and attending their events for a year, so the members knew me well. We had shared many conversations about God, faith, and Christianity, as those are constant topics of conversation among the members. With time, and trust, my sponsor’s explanation was quite sufficient. As it turned out, any tension between myself and the participants in the study was not a matter of religious convictions, but one of perspective on the interviews. For most participants, the opportunity to tell their story was a type of “testimony,” something which evangelicals are quite comfortable with. This relatively minimal type of tension is described well by Tanyz Erzen in her work *Straight to Jesus*, dealing with the homosexual “recovery” movement, when she

describes as the “inherent friction and incongruities between the biblically based language of evangelicalism, and the language of ethnography.”<sup>118</sup>

The interviews were primarily focused on collecting the subject’s religious life histories, and how they came to be members of the CMA. I was interested in how their faith manifested itself in their daily lives. The conversations were not intended to deal in-depth with theological issues. As I am a sociologist of religion and not a biblical scholar, it was understood and accepted by all involved that the participants of the project probably knew more about the Bible than I did. It turned out that this acknowledgement on my part led to a comfortable reduction in power relationship issues which might have surfaced had the interviewer been a “professional” biblical scholar of some sort.

Given this extant situation, the interviews only dealt with two theological/biblical/belief issues; justification, and biblical inerrancy with respect to creationism. These were two of the very few theological/biblical/belief issues with which I was somewhat familiar. Having done a certain amount of detailed study of Paul’s Letter to the Romans, including Luther’s commentary on same, I felt comfortable discussing justification through faith, as contrasted with justification through works. I had also done some work with the ideas of Creationists and Intelligent Design theorists, accordingly, I engaged in some discussion of that subject during the interviews.

Most of the interview participants seemed to be well acquainted with the ideas about justification put forth by Luther in his commentary on Romans, without being familiar with the commentary itself. They were believers in salvation through having “accepted

Jesus as their personal savior,” and academic disputations on the subject were irrelevant. They were totally unfamiliar with the Catholic Church’s rebuttal of Luther at the Council of Trent, which was largely based on references to the book of James. Most had heard the phrase “faith without works is death” at one time or another, but never really considered the implications of that theological position.<sup>119</sup>

With respect to the discussion of Creationism, young-Earth/old-Earth, and Intelligent Design, most of the participants were firm believers in the biblical creation narrative, including the Fall and the Flood. None of the participants were at all comfortable with scientific explanations such as the “Big Bang,” and most were not even comfortable with the quasi-religious, quasi-scientific proclamations of the Intelligent Design theorists.<sup>120</sup> A few had friends who were believers in ID, but had “agreed to disagree” on the subject.

## Chapter Three

### The Founding of the Christian Motorcyclists Association, The CMA Colorado State Rally, and the Resulting Non-Confidential Interviews With CMA Leadership



Figure 1: Photo by author  
Honda Gullwing motorcycle captioned with quotation from John 3:16  
Photographed by author at CMA 2014 Colorado State Rally

## The Founding of the Christian Motorcyclists Association

The CMA was founded by an itinerant and financially strapped Christian preacher named Herb Shreve in 1975. Shreve, born in Monticello, Arkansas, was the son of a Christian minister, Reuben Shreve, and his wife Pearl, and was one of seven children, five boys and two girls. Shreve's father spent his time attempting to earn a living preaching, while cutting hair and planting trees for the forest service in order to feed the depression era family. Reuben, zealous Southern evangelical preacher though he was, never managed to find steady employment in the ministry, moving from congregation to congregation, and would never find a congregational home. The family was intensely religious though, and, coming from such a devoted evangelical family, the young boy Herb had been encouraged towards a career in the ministry from an early age. While his mother was pregnant with Shreve, she considered an abortion for a number of depression era financial reasons.<sup>121</sup> The family legend holds that a friend discouraged her from obtaining the abortion, telling her that she had a "little preacher in there."<sup>122</sup>

Following the urging of his family, Herb Shreve graduated from the Ouachita Baptist College with a BA degree and embarked on his own itinerant missionary journey. Much like his father, Herb Shreve had great difficulty in maintaining pastoral relationships with a succession of congregations, serving in one ministerial capacity or another in ten churches in the span of sixteen years. His uncompromising perspective on biblical inerrancy caused him to be at odds with even the typically conservative evangelical

congregations of the rural south. The story is recounted in *Fisher of Men* of how Herbie, his older son, found in a piece of literature distributed by Herb's then-current congregation, a description of the story of Jonah as being "allegorical," suggesting that no one actually lived inside a fish for three days and was then regurgitated. Herb confronted the congregation's managing committee and succeeded in annoying them to the extent that he was summarily fired as pastor.

Herb Shreve experienced much of the same difficulties as his father. Having failed to secure steady employment in a ministerial capacity at any of the congregations to which he presented himself, Shreve instituted his Herb Shreve Evangelistic Association, a one-man, traveling Christian ministry. The ministry consisted of rudimentary "tent show" revivals in the small towns of Arkansas and proved not to be financially successful. Nor was he successful in creating a congregation of his own. This situation, notable for its lack of success either evangelically or financially, continued until his older son, Herbie, entered his teenage years. Confronted by his son with the typical teenage "acting out" proclivities; drinking, smoking, associating with the "wrong crowd," Shreve decided to buy two motorcycles in an effort to reach out to his son in a manner which might be productive. Considering that the Herb Shreve Evangelistic Association was a complete failure in every sense, it was time for a new direction.

As Shreve and his son began to travel the southern and western United States on the motorcycles, Shreve was inspired to begin yet another ministry, this one directed at bikers. The inspiration came from a confluence of events. Heading from his home in Arkansas to a Baptist convention in Portland Oregon on the bike, Shreve stopped at every

biker event found along the way. Seeing the drunken and disorderly behaviors prevalent at many of these events, “Herb saw the motorcycle culture across America as a field waiting for ministry, ripe for the harvest.”<sup>123</sup> When it was suggested to him that these bikers were simply not the type of individuals that would be receptive to evangelization, Herb is reputed to have claimed that “their sinful behavior is the very thing that qualifies them for salvation.”<sup>124</sup> Shreve then began a practice of riding his bike to weekend biker events in hope of achieving evangelical recruitment results. Arriving at a campground, he would approach the organizers and offer to help in any manner needed, reception table, parking, cleanup...whatever was needed. This would lead to his request to “hold a small service” on Sunday morning, a request that was generally granted and generally resulted in his speaking to a half dozen, hung over, bikers. Shreve would refer to this process as “earning the right to speak”<sup>125</sup> The relative ease with which he was allowed to preach at these events led him to see if he could make a go of ministering to bikers as a full time occupation and ministry.

Leaving home on the motorcycle with \$17 worth of Tupperware profits from his wife’s business, Shreve began another of his motorcycle preaching tours, this time with the intent of creating a ministry where he could actually continue to visit biker rallies as his life’s work. As he had agreed with his wife, he would give the project thirty days, relying largely on donations and charitable handouts, to see if the ministry could be made to work.

While having his motorcycle serviced at a dealership in Mississippi, he came across for the first time an actual motorcyclist’s magazine, “Road Rider,” which had been



founded by 1969 to cater to touring riders. Shreve invested a small sum to place an equally small ad in the magazine, asking anyone interested in forming a Christian motorcycle ministry to contact him. It immediately appeared to Shreve that he had touched what Stark, et al, would refer to as a niche market. It seemed that bikers, at least the ones which read Road Rider magazine, were ripe for evangelization. Within months, local CMA ministries were popping up across the country, initially with no rules, no bylaws, no management structure or organization. Thirty five years ago, The Rocky Mountain Christian Riders chapter of the CMA, the subject of this project, joined the fledgling organization.

#### The CMA Colorado State Rally

The CMA Colorado State Rally is a yearly, four day, event which attracts CMA members from across the entire state. Late on a Friday afternoon in June of 2014, I arrived in Gunnison, Colorado for the last two days of the rally. Unlike many of the other CMA events, which I attend on my Harley, I drove to the state rally in the family car, accompanied by my wife, a pleasant journey of about three hours over winding Colorado mountain roads.

Despite constant, friendly invitations from members to include her, my wife and I make it a point to not involve her in virtually any of the CMA events, so as to maintain professional boundaries. Introducing my family, to any significant extent, was never my intent.<sup>126</sup> My wife, Leta, was interested in a weekend getaway to Gunnison, a mountain

resort town of about 7,000 inhabitants, resting at just under 8,000 feet elevation in the Rocky Mountains.<sup>127</sup>

We decided to spend a three day weekend in the town, with Leta spending time exploring the town, while I attended daytime CMA events, and the two of us getting together in the evenings. We booked rooms several miles away from the rally motel.

Prior to our arrival, on Thursday and Friday, the events consisted primarily of a variety of motorcycle rides over different types of terrain, either paved road, gravel or dirt, depending on the type of motorcycle ridden. In addition, there were what the CMA refers to as “Ladies Activities,” such as “Praise Moves” exercise, or a beading class, for those who chose not to ride, followed by a brief service in the evening.<sup>128</sup>

The Saturday morning kickoff began at 7:30 AM in a large barn structure at the Gunnison County fairgrounds with a spirited sermon in both English and Spanish, presented to a crowd of about 150 people. Inside the structure were immense speakers hanging from the ceiling and a basketball court at one end. Moveable chairs were set up in rows, with additional chairs and tables in the back of the room. One side of the building was devoted to a display of CMA and motorcycle items laid out on tables for a silent auction. An adjacent room was set up with tables for what the CMA refers to as their “goodie store,” a large selection of CMA clothing and riding gear which is for sale.

At 8:10 the initial sermon concluded and recorded guitar music began to play over the speakers. A second speaker took center stage and began a highly emotional testimonial speech, followed by a succession of additional testimonies. These emotional Christian

testimonies lasted for eight to ten minutes each, with four women and one man delivering them. The testimonies ranged from humble, to dramatic, to highly theatrical, including a great deal of arm waving and not a few tears, all of them describing how the individual's life was changed by "giving their life" to Jesus and "accepting him as their [my] personal savior." At times the weeping by the individuals giving the testimony was sufficiently intense as to make the testimonies difficult to understand. They seemed to evoke similar emotional reactions from members of the audience. I saw crying and hand wringing spreading across the room.

Even though four of the five testimonials were given by women, the emotion which swept the assembly appeared to me to include both men and women equally. The overall emotional level of the group as a whole was not gender specific. I had previously experienced a similar high level of emotionalism among large groups when attending all male Promise Keeper events. The men that I met while attending the Promise Keeper events were every bit as emotionally involved as were the men and women which I met at this event, evidencing behaviors described by Bartkowski as "sustained periods of quiet reflection, tender exchanges between men, and manifestations of masculine gentility."<sup>129</sup> These male CMA members acted in much the same manner as those at the PK's huge stadium rallies.

Although most evangelicals tend to be adverse, to a certain extent, to the rituals of Catholic, Episcopal, and other "high church" services, these CMA members exhibit distinct communal rituals of their own, as exhibited here.<sup>130 131</sup> As the speakers made their emotional statements of faith, members of the congregation/audience swayed back

and forth in their seats, occasionally stood up, and waved their right arms gently in the air in ritualistic communion with the speakers. Their actions were consistent with what Balmer refers to as the “protocols,” avoiding use of the word “rituals,” of evangelical gatherings.<sup>132</sup>

The testimonies came to a conclusion, and at 9:00 AM, the formal program began with a welcoming speech by the Colorado State Representative, the highest-ranking CMA member in the state. He is a large, bearded man of middle years. Before he begins his speech, the entire group, now numbering between 200 and 300 people by my estimate, stands for the Pledge of Allegiance, facing an American flag, a Christian flag, and a bible.

After the pledge, the state representative gave a rousing, almost pep-rally like presentation. He introduced the state and local officers, and the visiting dignitaries from out of state who travel to the various state rallies and conventions. He engaged the assembly in another of their rituals...he shouts, “it’s not about me,” to which the audience responds “IT’S ABOUT JESUS!” This continues through three iterations, becoming louder and more forceful with each repetition. He follows this with the second of the CMA ritual chants, the traditional evangelical Christian refrain of “God is good,” which elicits the shouted response “ALL THE TIME!”

Immediately upon the end of the chant, a rock band begins to play contemporary Christian praise music at a high volume. The audience stands, sways, and sings along with the words projected on a screen in the front of the room. From observation of the

individual members, it appears that most of them do not need assistance with the lyrics as they appear to know them by heart. I stand with the others and attempt to keep up with music with which I was not familiar. The attempt brings me approving looks and remarks from those around me. After a half hour of music, the moderator calls for the first break.

The break allowed me and many others to take a look at the items for sale in the “Goodie Room.”<sup>133</sup> There was a vast collection of t-shirts, sweatshirts, and riding apparel, also coffee mugs, wall hangings, and kitchen gadgets, all with Christian themed artwork. Having received a rally t-shirt as part of my registration package, and having previously worn shirts commemorating Seasons of Refreshing, a CMA event discussed in detail in chapter five, I found myself buying a particularly interesting t-shirt with a portrait of a very pained Jesus on the front, along with the words “He went to Hell and back for you.”

Slipping into the men’s room, I changed out of my rally t-shirt and into the newly purchased one. After doing this, and while looking at the items on the silent auction table, I felt a hand gently placed on my shoulder from behind, and heard the words “I didn’t know you’d joined.” Turning, I saw my mentor standing there and smiling at me. “I haven’t joined,” I responded. I then learned that I had inadvertently committed a CMA faux-pas. This particular t-shirt, in addition to the front artwork, had printed on the back, the CMA “colors.” This was forbidden to non-members. The logo on the back of the t-shirt was considered to be just as much the official “colors,” as was the patch on the back of the member’s vests. I was gently told to go to the men’s room and remove the shirt. Upon doing so, I passed another member who knew me and was aware that I was not a

member, who stopped me and told me the same thing...not so gently. Assuring that member that I was on my way to the restroom to remove the shirt, I hurried on.

Among any biker assembly, wearing colors that you are not authorized to wear is a grievous violation of norms. I was lucky to escape with a mild reprimand, indicative of the CMA's Christian ministry orientation. Had I made that mistake among members of any "MC," a mild reprimand would have been out of the question. The error would have likely led to a physical altercation of some sort.

Resuming the program after the break, the audience was introduced to "Hiram" and "Sharon," CMA "evangelists,"<sup>134</sup> who travel throughout their assigned territory as paid emissaries of the national organization. This portion of the day's activities was less reminiscent of a pep rally and more concentrated on religious themes. Their highly formalized, multi-media presentation opens with additional testimony by Sharon, which finds her occasionally breaking into tears. After ten minutes or so Sharon turns the microphone over to her husband, Hiram. Hiram began his presentation with some remarks in praise of the CMA as an organization, mentioning its growth, the fact that it is not a motorcycle "club," (it is a ministry) and that no one pays dues to belong.<sup>135</sup> Hiram notes that CMA members, as they are not a club, wear no territorial rockers on their colors. When dealing with "clubbers" CMA members are urged to observe "clubber" protocol, and to "not do anything stupid while wearing the patch." "You guys are different," he tells the assembly. The CMA is a ministry which presents "no barriers to women," and, "you don't even have to own a bike." After that preamble, Hiram turned to the major themes of his talk, which were religious in nature. Beginning with a discussion

of the Book of Revelation, Hiram presented a discourse on the End Times and the fate of non-Christians, which is an eternity in a quite literal hell.

Transitioning from his discussion of the End Times, Hiram began to preach on the Great Commission, linking the New Testament instruction to teach, with the Old Testament Book of Jeremiah. “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”<sup>136</sup> I wondered why this Christian missionary would key his remarks to the Old Testament, rather than to Christian scripture’s entreaty to “teach all nations.” Up until that time, I had never seen or heard a reference to Hebrew Scripture (Old Testament, to the CMA). It soon became apparent that spending most of his time on Jeremiah provided Hiram with the opportunity to tie together prophesying, teaching, and the issue of human life beginning at conception, leading to a discourse on contemporary public morality and abortion, both of which are key to contemporary American evangelical thought. A discussion of the evangelical perspective of these participants can be found in the concluding chapter of this study.

In closing, after a good two hours, Hiram turned to a discussion of how contemporary morality is conditioned by the existence of Satan as a very real, living entity which inhabits the world.<sup>137</sup> He recounted the story of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife, reminding the audience that the devil takes every opportunity to “exploit” the “victim mentality” which Hiram holds to be so common in contemporary American society. He reminds the assembly of certain fundamental beliefs which he holds dear; that God created a perfect

world, that God did not create pain and suffering, those ills are due to the Fall, and that we, as humans, had abused our God-given free will.

As Hiram began to summarize his presentation, he used the crucifixion as an example of a “bad thing,” for the sake of “ultimate good.” During this summation, I noted that his presentation was, overall, intended to be an inspirational homily about a “turn to God,” in which pain and suffering must be endured. Quoting from Paul’s letter to the Romans, he reminded the assembly that being saved “isn’t about actions, it’s about one’s personal relationship with Jesus” and faith in received grace.

In a final call to action, Hiram ended his presentation with an “altar call,” even though, as is often the case in evangelical churches, there was no actual altar.<sup>138</sup> I was amazed that not a single person answered the altar call. My field notes for the day indicate my surprise, and the notation, “either they’re all already saved, or they’re all really shy.” At this point, and perhaps motivated by the altar call, a CMA member approached me asking, “have you joined us yet”? I admitted that I had not.<sup>139</sup> There was remarkably little pressure exerted on me to join them during my two years of riding with the CMA, however subtle remarks to that effect were made from time to time, and all seemingly in good spirit. As Tanya Erzon has noted in her work, I was seeking data, they would have liked to save my soul.<sup>140</sup>

At that point, the moderator closed the plenary session for the day. This was followed by the officers of the local and national CMA going up to the front of the room, arranging themselves along the room’s wall and inviting participants to join them for small prayer



groups. Well over half the participants took advantage of the invitation and joined the various officers in small group prayer during which they gathered in a circle, put their arms around each other's shoulders, and bowed their heads. The small, remaining audience took the opportunity to review the bidding at the silent auction table, care for children, who had been ushered in at the end of the plenary session, or to use the restrooms.<sup>141</sup>

After fifteen minutes of small group prayer, the entire assembly adjourned and left the hall to engage in a variety of biker rodeo events to end the plenary festivities for the afternoon.<sup>142</sup> At 4:00 select members went to another pair of locations for officer's meetings and new member's meetings. As I was neither of the above, I left the rally for the day and took my wife to dinner at a riverside Italian restaurant some miles out of town. Arriving well before any of the CMA members, my wife and I took the opportunity to share a bottle of wine with our meal, a practice that I studiously avoid when among CMA members out of respect for their traditions.<sup>143</sup>

The Sunday service began at 9:00 AM with a recorded song with a hard rock beat blasting over the immense speakers. As the music played, the large projection screen at the front of the hall showed a montage of bikers; riding, praying, and giving testimony. The song being played was the anthem of the CMA, "Riding For The Son," "we once were dead men walking, now we're riding...riding...for the Son."<sup>144</sup>

The moderator then introduced John Ogden, the CEO of the Christian Motorcyclists Association, and, along with the national evangelists, its only paid employee.<sup>145</sup> Ogden's presentation was the shortest of the entire rally, mentioning CMA growth, missionary data from overseas missions, motorcycles donated to overseas missionaries, and the formation of a new youth group.<sup>146</sup>

Following Ogden's remarks, the program returned to another series of inspirational testimonies, which ended with the entire audience standing to sing Amazing Grace. As we all sat down after the singing of the old hymn, the state representative returned to the stage to present the keynote address of the rally.

The keynote address centered on the image of the Good Shepherd. "I am the good shepherd."<sup>147</sup> Although Jesus himself is the "good shepherd," all CMA members are shepherds as well. Launching this discussion with citations from John, chapter 21, he claims that all CMA members are not only shepherds, but sheep as well. "We're all sheep...we're all shepherds." "We are all engaged in a spiritual battle...all 230 people attending the rally...whether yellow badge, white badge, or no badge."<sup>148</sup>

After the hour long keynote address, the entire audience rose for singing of the CMA anthem, Riding for the Son. The program closed with recitations of the chants "It's not about me...IT'S ABOUT JESUS!" and promises to change the world "heart by heart," "one heart at a time." By midday the CMA members left the hall to end the festivities for the year.

Interviews with the Colorado State Representative and the RMCR chapter President



Figure 2: Photo by author, taken at subsequent Diaper Run



Figure 3: Photo by author, taken at Denver Motorcycle Expo, a subsequent secular event

Unlike the other interviews in this study, my interviews with Bill, and separately, with Dave,<sup>149</sup> were on the record and non-confidential, as they were in the best position to explain to me much of the inside details of CMA structure and operation. The interview with Bill took place in his rustic home, situated on horse owner property well out onto the eastern plains of Colorado. This was horse country and hunting country, well situated for upland bird shooting in the fall. Arriving in the general vicinity quite early for the scheduled meeting, and with an eye to the upcoming fall pheasant hunting season, I took the opportunity to drive the country dirt roads, examining them for the possible presence of pheasants.

Bill is a burly man in his mid-fifties with tightly shorn gray hair and is a high ranking law enforcement official in his county, northeast of Denver. He explained that the CMA had twenty-three chapters in Colorado as of the time of the interview, with one additional chapter in “formation.” The Colorado chapters have a total membership of 2,300 individuals, with approximately 600 of those considered to be highly active.

Each chapter has officers consisting of a president, a vice president, a secretary, a treasurer, a road captain, a prayer coordinator, and a chaplain. All officer posts are available to both men and women, although women tend to be elected to the positions of secretary and treasurer. Of the twenty-three Colorado chapters, three of them, Cross Country Crusaders, Steel City Thunder, and the new chapter forming in the Sangre de Cristo mountains, have female presidents. The new chapter is the only one with a majority of non-white members.<sup>150</sup> The chapter with which I spent most of my time, the

Rocky Mountain Christian Riders, is chapter number ten, of 1,300 chapters nationwide, and it recently celebrated its thirty-fifth anniversary.

In addition to the chapter officers, there are a number of state and area representatives. The top CMA official in the state is the State Representative, the position held by Bill. The state is divided into six areas, each of which has an Area Representative which is responsible for overseeing anywhere from four to seven chapters, depending on chapter size and geographical location. Statewide offices also include the Run for the Son Coordinator, a youth Ministry Coordinator, and a Fast Lane Coordinator.<sup>151</sup>

Since these interviews were my only on-the-record, non-confidential interviews of the study, I was determined to utilize them to learn something about the internal workings of the organization, decisions and actions that were not public, and which I could not observe. By the time of this interview I had ridden with the CMA for over a year and was familiar with much of its public operations. But, I had no concrete information on internal conflict resolution, informal, unpublished codes of conduct, and methods of discipline.

I asked how conflicts within the various chapters were resolved. I had seen no open conflict at any chapter meetings or events and was curious if it existed behind the scenes. According to Bill, there was, in fact, relatively little conflict that required resolution. There was almost none at an institutional level, as the organization was voluntary, with virtually no paid positions, leading to literally no issues of pay or promotion. Most leadership roles consisted of much more effort, time spent, and responsibility than any

monetary compensation or other benefits, resulting in individuals often having to be coaxed into running for office.

Bill's position with respect to conflict resolution at the chapter level, is that intra-chapter conflict, regarding management, activities, and so on, is generally resolved through the membership changing leadership at the next general election. Having personally associated with the RMCR chapter through two election cycles and three presidencies, my observation was that the elections were extremely genteel in nature, with minimal election posturing, and none of the venom typically associated with local, political electioneering. I observed that the president of RMCR had been re-elected two times, for a total of three consecutive terms, and that would appear to indicate minimal internal discomfort with his leadership.

"How is individual discipline carried out, and for what offenses?" I wanted to know. Bill told me the story of one member who broke a cardinal rule of the CMA, drinking alcohol in public, while wearing his CMA patch. Unfortunately for this individual, a member observed him with the beer, and informed CMA officials. The member was called into a meeting with his chapter president to discuss the issue, the meeting resulting in no resolution. Rather than admitting to the error and agreeing not to repeat it, the member argued that the next time he wanted a beer in public, he would "put his colors into his bike's saddlebags." The chapter president considered this solution to be lacking in terms of the spirit of the rule. Accordingly, the issue was up-channeled to the state representative level. Bill met with the individual, who finally agreed to not drinking alcohol at all when in public.<sup>152</sup> Bill decided that a suitable punishment was to "pull" the

members colors for six months.<sup>153</sup> Six months later the colors were returned to the member and he has not since violated that particular rule.

My interview with RMCR president, Dave, allowed additional discussion of some of the issues that were also discussed with Bill. This interview took place in Dave and his wife's home, where I was invited to dinner. Dave is also a burly man who works as a laborer, but one who sports a long gray beard and shaves his head. I asked Dave about conflict resolution and he concurred that there was very little at the institutional level and was more prevalent regarding "moral issues." "What constitutes a moral issue in the CMA?" Dave responded with the same story about drinking beer in public, adding that the issue was first discussed at the chapter level in the monthly officer's meeting, before referring it up to the state level.

It struck me that, when asked about issues and member discipline, the two officers recounted the same story about the same individual. I concluded that such issues must be relatively rare and relatively minor if two officers, asked the same question separately, recounted the same story regarding the same individual and incident.

I asked Dave about other moral issues which may, from time to time, confront the CMA. He responded that unmarried couples who cohabit would not be allowed to join CMA. "Could one of them join?" "Not if we knew about the cohabitation."

"What about gays and lesbians, can they be members?" Dave responded that he really did not know if there was a policy regarding gays. When asked about membership by celibate gays, Dave told me that was "above his pay grade"...the issue had never come

up, but, in any case, he thought a gay individual “would be uncomfortable” in the CMA. This discussion of gays and lesbians led to Dave telling me an interesting story.

He said that at a recent Run for the Son, he had come across some women on Harleys, members of the Denver chapter of Dykes on Bikes.<sup>154</sup> In Colorado, the yearly Run for the Son fund-raiser is held in conjunction with a secular fund raising poker run put on by ABATE.<sup>155 156</sup> Consequently, there are large numbers of non-CMA members present. The CMA members go among the secular riders and ask them if they would like to have their bikes blessed. A surprising number of them accept the blessing, and the bike sticker that goes with it.<sup>157</sup>

One member of the Dykes on Bikes came up to Dave and told him that she didn’t expect him to be willing to do so...but “would he bless her bike”? Dave arranged for a large number of CMA members to join him and they prayed over the bike and its rider. When finished, Dave reported to me that the woman thanked him with tears in her eyes. Apparently, the CMA considered this to be an example of “hate the sin...love the sinner,”<sup>158</sup> a phrase which Dave did not use, but which came to my mind as it is common in my experience among Catholic commentaries on homosexuality.

Although evangelicals, as a whole, are not positively responsive to calls for gay civil rights (part of the so-called “homosexual agenda”) I found no overt anti-gay sentiment among the CMA membership such has been reported by others. Christian Smith recounts the feelings of one of his participants, and quotes him precisely. “The whole homosexual movement is extremely anti-Christian, and very hostile towards anybody who would



espouse a Christian view.”<sup>159</sup> In two years of riding with the CMA I never heard a similar sentiment expressed.

Dave finally recounted one more example of conflict resolution...one that went up to state level. According to Dave, at one point in time an individual was elected to the office of chapter president of RMCR. For the first few months, things went along in the normal manner regarding chapter meetings and activities. But, several months into this person’s presidency, things started to change, people became uncomfortable, an area rep noticed, and the state rep was notified. It seems that the chapter president was attempting to “start his own religion,” according to Dave. “Just what does that mean?” I asked him. Dave reminded me that the CMA was non-denominational and non-congregational, and they believed strongly in that ethos. This particular president was attempting to encourage formation of a congregation within the chapter, with him at its head.<sup>160</sup>

In the strongest example of discipline that I have either observed or heard about during the course of this study, the president was removed from office and his vice president was asked to serve out the remainder of the term. Dave went on to mention with some pride, that within two years, the miscreant was back in the fold, had his patch restored, and he was now a member in good standing.<sup>161</sup>

Subsequent to the interview, and curious as to why Dave did not appear to have an answer regarding gays in the association, I went to the CMA website to do some additional research. Although there is considerable instruction regarding sexual fidelity,

sexual addiction, and associated topics, there is no searchable mention of homosexuality, per se.

The CMA website contains, under the heading of “spiritual resources,” a searchable section which is linked to an organization called “Hope for the Heart,” a combination online and offline Christian teaching ministry.<sup>162</sup> Their pull-down list of topics, which is mirrored on the CMA website, contains over 80 specific subjects. Homosexuality is not among them. Curiously, under several other headings, a PDF focusing on homosexuality is listed as a cross-referenced document, but that piece of material does not exist on the site. We can only surmise that, for the CMA, the specific topic of homosexuality is either under review, or considered to be too socially volatile to address formally.<sup>163</sup> Informally, the observation that gays “would be uncomfortable” must suffice to represent the CMA position at this time.

## Chapter Four

### Biker Charity Runs

#### Run For The Son and the Diaper Run

#### The “Cradle Christian” and “The CMA is my Family”

#### Run For The Son

The Run For The Son is the CMA’s largest single fund raising event of the year, and the only national fundraiser, and is held on the first Saturday of May, each year.<sup>164</sup> The event is conducted in concert with three “ministry partners” which the CMA helps to support; “Missionary Ventures,” which donates motorcycles to rural missionaries and pastors around the world, “Open Doors,” which provides Bibles in countries where Christians are persecuted, and the “Jesus Film Project,” which translates the gospel of Luke into what the CMA refers to as “native tongues,” and burns it onto DVDs for showings to those peoples.<sup>165</sup>

The CMA claims to have raised over \$58 million dollars with the Run for The Son project over 28 years. Additionally, the CMA claims that these funds have funded missionary activities in 192 countries, to “reach the lost with the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” resulting in, by their estimate, the salvation of 21 million souls.<sup>166</sup> In 2015, the RFTS raised a total of \$4,461,473.30, 20% of which went to each of the three aforementioned

ministries, the remaining 40% utilized by the CMA. In 2015, three of the Colorado chapters were among the top ten fund raisers.<sup>167</sup>

In Colorado, the RFTS is conducted in coordination with a major secular event, the ABATE fund raising Poker Run.<sup>168</sup> Each year, CMA members sign up to receive fund raiser packets in which they collect monetary pledges for the miles they ride in the RFTS. At every chapter meeting, the RFTS coordinators pitch the project and work to pump up enthusiastic support.

The parking lot meeting described in the introductory chapter was my initial experience with the RFTS. On that May morning I pulled into the lot of the roadhouse on my Harley and examined the assembled crowd. There were upwards of two hundred bikers milling about, mostly on Harleys, but also some on “canyon carver” road bikes, Japanese cruisers, and homemade “trikes.” The varying types of bikers were evident by their attire. The Harley folks largely resembled outlaw 1%'ers, but without the prison tattoos. This look was also cultivated by the riders of the Japanese cruisers (which, by and large, tend to be Harley “clones”), and the riders on the homemade trikes. The riders of the canyon carver bikes were generally attired in colorful, tight fitting, head-to-toe euro style riding leathers. They tended to be noticeably younger and fitter than the Harley riders and, unlike the other groups, were exclusively male.

Before registering for the poker run itself, I went over to the group of CMA members and introduced myself to those that I had not yet met. I was warmly greeted, hugged, and

prayed over. About a dozen members then gathered around my bike, held hands, touched my bike, and blessed it. I noted that the prayer took almost three full minutes. The prayer seemed to me to be created ad-hoc, I got no sense whatsoever of a memorized or pre-prepared content. This was in contrast to the prayers of my youth, Our Fathers, Hail Marys and the like, which were highly structured and memorized by Catholic children at an early age. When the prayer was completed I was presented with a sticker reading “I’ve Been Blessed.” The sticker was small, about one inch by two and a half inches, and I placed it on the chrome front fork of my bike, enabling me to keep from defacing the paint. In over fifty years of owning motorcycles, this was the first time I had allowed a sticker of any kind to be placed on my bike. Given the circumstances, it seemed to have been dysfunctional, and somewhat insulting, to refuse the offered sticker. I was directed inside the roadhouse to register for the event. The bar was a large, somewhat run down structure at the intersection of two rural highways. The county Sheriff’s Office records quite a few calls every month to the location.<sup>169</sup> The interior was dark and smelled of stale beer. In a corner of the bar a table was set up with registration forms. You were expected to fill out the form, pay your registration fee, and sign a liability waiver. After those preliminaries, I was directed to a table with a deck of cards spread out, face down. I was instructed to pick a card, and that card was noted on my paperwork. Now fully signed in, I returned to the parking lot and watched as the CMA members circulated among the bikers, offering to bless their bikes.

As this was my initial group riding experience with the membership, I was interested to see their approach to evangelization. They were clearly operating in the mode that

marketing executives would refer to as “soft sell,” no loudspeakers proclaiming the coming Rapture, and no aggressive distribution of literature. The membership, splitting up into teams of three or four individuals, simply circulated among the bikes and offered the blessing. When one of the teams found a willing recipient, they called to other members to join them, resulting in ten to twelve CMA members surrounding the bike. Considering the generally secular nature of this run (the CMA was piggy-backing on the ABATE run) I was amazed at the number of non-CMA bikers who were receptive to the idea of having their bikes blessed. Also surprising at first (I would later come to accept this as quite natural) these CMA members needed, paraphrasing the words of Balmer, only minimal prompting to tell me their life stories.<sup>170</sup> Even after only the briefest amount of time talking with me, several volunteered to have their histories included in this study.

After an hour of circulating among the assembled riders and blessing the bikes, the CMA members began to arrange themselves into an organized group for the ride, under the direction of the road captain. After a half hour of overall organization by other groups and by solo riders, engines were started and the parking lot was filled with the roar of hundreds of bikes. Group by group, with pipes blasting, the riders departed the lot and took off down the highway, some much more assertively than others.

The ride consisted of five stops at various bars over a distance of 150 miles of country roads. The run was designed to avoid interstates whenever possible. Most riders who were members of the various groups in attendance rode in tightly disciplined columns of two, following “group ride” rules suggested by the American Motorcyclist Association,

but not always in accordance with speed limits. Every thirty miles or so, we stopped to pick another card for our respective poker hands. The card we picked was duly noted on our rider paperwork. At several of the stops, small contests were engaged in, such as throwing darts or firing paint balls at targets. Most of the stops found long lines waiting to enter the bars and buy another round of beers.

At the end of the run, in the final party bar, a band played rock music while the resultant poker hands were compared and a winner proclaimed. The winner collected his prize of a few hundred dollars and the party ensued. The CMA members, as is a part of their tradition, made the run, but did not participate in the poker hand. As with drinking alcohol, CMA members do not gamble in public.<sup>171</sup> Leaving the party early, the CMA members left as a group after several of them has made it clear to me that they wanted to tell me their stories. For these bikers, it seemed to be a matter of giving testimony in another form. As it turned out later in the study, after I had made more contacts within the group, that these early adopters ( to use a technologist's term) were among the group which I would come to label as the "Cradle Christians."

### The Cradle Christian

At the first RFTS that I attended I was approached by a retired couple, both of whom professed to be devoted Christians from birth. Upon hearing about this project, the wife, Tracy, was eager to tell me the story of her Christian life and asked to be among those interviewed. As it turned out, she was one of the first to become a study volunteer. She was both outgoing and articulate, so I quickly agreed to include her in the study. At the

time, neither of us realized that it would be fully a year from that time before we were able to sit down for a formal interview. However, she, her husband and I, saw each other regularly at other CMA events during the course of that year in which I simply rode with the membership, absent formal interviews.

My interview with Tracy, the Cradle Christian took place at her home, a modern duplex in a middle class, suburban neighborhood. She and her husband own both sides of the duplex and rent out one side while living in the other. When I arrived at the door I was greeted by their small, white dog, which lavished me with attention. As I am a dog fancier myself, this was not at all unpleasant. Tracy is a very attractive, blonde woman in her fifties who is retired from government work. Her husband, David, is a tall, well structured man who, although in his sixties, could pass for a man in his mid-fifties. They invited me into their kitchen dining area, where Tracy had set out a large tray of appetizers, along with a pitcher of iced tea.

Tracy was born into a Christian family which, although devotedly Christian, changed denominational alignment with some frequency. The family's denominational changes were not always to evangelical congregations, over the years sampling, among others, the Presbyterian, and Methodist churches as well as Southern Baptist congregations. She attended Sunday School from a young age as well as Wednesday evening church gatherings, and answered an altar call at the age of twelve in Virginia. Her involvement in her Christian faith included giving talks to other youths, working as a traveling evangelist on a Christian youth bus, and becoming a "Royal Ambassador" for her church



group. As she told me about her youth in a Christian family, she mentions that, at one time, her mother claims to have dated Oral Roberts. Adding to her Christian “bona-fides,” Tracy told me that her grandmother was active in the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. Her family was, as she put it, “staunchly anti-Catholic,” an irony given what I was later to learn.

Although Tracy was born and raised in a Christian family, she claims that she did not always remain a Christian, at times she “strayed.” After her parents divorced, Tracy discovered that her birth mother had been Catholic. Until that time she had been unaware that she had been adopted. After the failure of her first marriage, which she entered into at age eighteen, and the discovery that her birth mother had been Catholic, she joined the Catholic Church and, as she put it with a hint of disdain, “got sprinkled,” her present perception of the Catholic sacrament of infant Baptism. I detect a bit of anti-Catholic undercurrent in her conversation, although she seems to be attempting to downplay it. Tracy’s mild disdain for the Catholic sacrament of infant Baptism is evident. As Balmer notes in *Mine eyes Have Seen the Glory*, the “trademark belief” of most evangelical Christians,

is adult, or believer’s baptism, as opposed to infant baptism. Whereas Roman Catholics hold that the sacrament of baptism washes away the taint of original sin, and therefore should be done in infancy, most evangelicals subscribe to a Baptist position (regardless of whether they identify themselves as Baptists or not) that baptism is, in the words of the Saddleback brochure a ‘symbol of Christ’s burial and resurrection,’ and a ‘symbol of your new life as a Christian.’<sup>172</sup>

She noted that part of the reason that she left her evangelical congregation was that, upon her divorce, her minister approached her aggressively and offered to “service

her.”<sup>173</sup> Her second marriage also ended in divorce, as she found that her husband had been having affairs with not only his secretary, but also one of the members of the church’s youth group.

Upon the dissolution of her second marriage she returned to evangelical Christianity and had a second, full immersion Baptism in her thirties. For the last twenty years she had been an activist evangelical, although she still moves from congregation to congregation and denomination to denomination. “Evangelicalism ... has always been an open and fluid transdenominational identity-movement,” and Tracy certainly epitomizes that perspective.<sup>174</sup> She relishes missionary activity and has even undertaken a somewhat dangerous mission to mainland China, a location which is notoriously inhospitable to Christian missionaries.

Tracy has now been married to David, her third husband, for seven years. David had already been involved with motorcycles when she met him, but at the time she claims to have had a distinct dislike for bikes and bikers. David, however, was able to change her mind about both. He too was a Cradle Christian who had been baptized with full immersion, stopped drinking entirely in his early thirties, and was an ordained deacon of an evangelical congregation. Unlike many of the bikers in this study, he had a college education and had been involved in a long and successful business career.

At the time they met, David was single, having lost his first wife to breast cancer. He had adopted the biker look and had experienced unpleasant reactions to his look at some Christian churches. Accordingly, he had sought out Christian bikers to ride with and

attend church with at a biker friendly congregation. David now attends what he refers to as a “biker friendly” church. He found the CMA and joined immediately, immersing himself in their activities. As the relationship between Tracy and David matured, Tracy became comfortable with bikes and bikers. They were not all what she had imagined them to be. In a clever bit of subterfuge, she joined the CMA herself without David’s knowledge and had it announced, to his great delight and surprise, at a chapter meeting.

As our conversation transitioned from Tracy’s life story to a discussion of her beliefs, she proved to be an articulate advocate for traditional evangelical positions. According to Christian Smith, “evangelicals are coordinated by a set of minimal, baseline, supradenominational theological beliefs,” and Tracy holds firmly to many of those theological positions.<sup>175</sup> For Tracy, the Bible is inerrant in all its aspects. It is a “history book” as far as she is concerned. She is a firm believer in a young Earth, and when asked about scientific evidence to the contrary, she told me “that just doesn’t matter to me.” Evolution is an unproven theory, humans were always as they are, and the dinosaurs disappeared in the Flood. Tracy’s insistence on this perspective is remarkable. She is a living example of Ammerman’s claim that, for many evangelicals, “the Bible can be trusted to provide an accurate description of science and history, as well as morality and religion...they are more likely to question the validity of science than to doubt the unfailing word of God.”<sup>176</sup>

Tracy is a believer in a literal, physical hell and contends that those individuals who are not born-again Christians will end up there eternally. Faith in Jesus Christ as your “personal savior” is the key to avoiding that fate. Even though she is a firm believer in

justification through faith alone, she does not discount the value of good works. She tells me that she and her husband donate 10% of their income to their church, noting that they “give 10% to let God know that they know where the 100% came from,” a reference to God’s bounty. She tells me that she just “can’t not do” good works, as evidenced by her missionary trips. These good works are “not for salvation,” but to “bring the word of God.” As we finished our conversation, she made the point that “you don’t have to go to church to be a good Christian,” it’s all about faith.

#### Observations on the “Cradle Christian” CMA Member

During the course of this study I have generated a total of five composite characters that I consider to be typical of the CMA membership. This “compositing” has created a certain number of difficulties with respect to the number of individuals that comprise any one composite, and the obvious linguistic issues surrounding gender selection for the purposes of names and pronoun usage. However, this decision was made in the interest of insuring the confidentiality of the participants, not only with respect to academic readers of the study, but also any potential CMA readers of the study.

In retrospect, it appears to me that there is very little difference among the various composites with respect to their beliefs or their contemporary evangelical and CMA oriented activities. The key differentiators lie in their life stories. Observations regarding those life stories are the subject of this section.

The Cradle Christian identity is not gender specific. The naming of the composite character, and the usage of “he” or “she” has been totally arbitrary. Both men and women interview participants fit into this category.

The Cradle Christian grew up in a staunchly evangelical Christian family, which although devoted to evangelicalism, may have changed congregations and even denominations numerous times during the Cradle Christian’s youth. He/she was raised on Bible lessons, attended church services regularly, participated in Christian youth groups, and answered an “altar call” or had a “born again” experience at a very young age. These individuals exhibited a deep knowledge of canonical scripture, so far as knowing what the Bible “said.” They however, had little or no knowledge of the academic or literary aspects of the Bible; when parts of it were written, by whom, and under what circumstances...this knowledge of scripture was constrained by simply knowing what was presented on the pages of the canonical texts, most of which had been studied in depth in a variety of bible study classes. This is not surprising, as the study of the book’s genealogy is a largely academic exercise, and may not be considered to be particularly relevant to the many evangelicals.

The Cradle Christian has been taught that the Bible is inerrant. It is historically and factually accurate, leading to some interesting explanations of things like geological records and the existence of fossils of archaic creatures.<sup>177</sup> He/she is dismissive of contemporary science with respect to evolution, and believes that even theories such as Intelligent Design, which attempts to reconcile science with the existence of a “creator” (of some undefined sort), are non-biblical, and therefore, invalid.

Among members of the CMA, the Cradle Christian tends to be abstemious, not drinking alcohol either privately or in public. However, the Cradle Christian and his/her family is not exempt from what they consider to be sin. Several examples were given of extra-marital affairs, often with clergy or other church members, as being responsible for divorce.

The Cradle Christians in the study do not discount the value of good works in leading a good, productive life. But, they feel that any such good works do not lead to salvation, they are merely the productive but ancillary outgrowth of having faith in Jesus.

Finally, there is a distinct strain of anti-Catholicism in the Cradle Christians represented in this study, similar to that noted by Balmer, which leads them to refer to Catholics as not being “really” Christian, and infant baptism as being “sprinkled,” not really a valid baptism at all. Real baptism, often fully emergent baptism, must be done voluntarily and in a thoughtful manner by a participant old enough to understand what he/she is doing. This evident anti-Catholicism is often either played down by the CMA members, or is seemingly subconscious in nature.

### The Diaper Run

On a Saturday in June, a small group of riders assembled at a nearby gas station after the monthly chapter meeting of the RMCR. Unlike most of the other charity runs which CMA members attend, this group was made up of less than twenty riders and I was among them. They assembled for the yearly “Diaper Run,” which supports a women’s

center on the eastern plains. For several weeks, members had been collecting diapers, baby food, and other infant supplies as well as soliciting cash donations.

After gassing up, the group, which included three “trikes,” headed out the interstate, leaving the suburbs of Denver far behind. The first stop was at (as usual) a roadhouse bar with a huge dance floor and an equally huge stage for live performances. This location proved to be the only drinking/entertainment establishment for miles in any direction. As it was shortly after noon on a Saturday, the bar was practically deserted other than the CMA riders. The group bought Cokes and socialized for a while, waiting for some additional riders to join up.

After the arrival of a few more participants who were members of another CMA chapter and also members of the “Women In The Wind” riding club, we left for the straight, largely untraveled, two lane country roads of the plains. The inclusion of these additional riders brought the female contingent to over fifty percent of the total riders, every one of which rode her own bike. As will be noted in the final chapter of this study, notable aspects of CMA life differ significantly from traditional evangelical concepts of gender roles. Life in the CMA is significantly more egalitarian than might otherwise be expected among such a group. As we rode, we witnessed the amount of damage caused by the recent hail storms which plague Colorado in the late spring and summer. The ride was dry and dusty, the only living things we encountered for miles being the insects which flew into our faces from the roadside crops.

Our second stop was at an almost bare intersection in a town comprised of two, intersecting streets. Small, run down businesses lined the minimal downtown area. I was surprised to see that a very young reporter from a small, weekly, local newspaper, having been notified of the event, showed up to talk with the riders and take a few pictures. The reporter interviewed the road captain and finished with a group photograph which she said would be in the paper that week. At this stop we were also met by several women from the center, who had a table set up with popsicles to hand out to the riders. I noted that, oddly I thought, they did not distribute any bottled water, only the popsicles. They were extremely gracious and thanked the riders profusely for, among other things, the stacks of diapers strapped to the bikes.

Our third, and last, intermediate stop was at a country general store at the intersection of the country road we were on, and the interstate. The store, with a statue of a rearing horse on the roof, provided the opportunity to buy gas and bottled water.



Figure 4: Photo by author at subsequent Diaper Run





Figure 5: Photo by author at subsequent Diaper Run

The women's center which the chapter supports is located in a small, stand alone, building, on a dusty, dry street in a very small town on the Colorado plains which sits at an elevation of just over four thousand feet and which has a population of barely six hundred souls.<sup>178</sup> It is a faith based organization which aims to provide a variety of services to women in a Christian atmosphere. The center's mission statement claims that its work is centered around four main themes.

Prevention: to educate young people to be truly free through sexual abstinence except in marriage.

Intervention: To educate those in a crisis pregnancy about the consequences of their choices, and to guard and promote the sanctity of human life, and to mitigate barriers of carrying the baby to term.

Restoration: To communicate the love, hope, forgiveness, and redemption of Jesus Christ to women suffering from an abortion.

Services: To bless those who are in need of material goods by the redistribution of new and gently used donations from the community.<sup>179</sup>

In brief, the purpose of the center is to provide support and education for young, primarily single, women who have chosen to keep their babies rather than undergo an abortion. The clients of the center are largely poor and lacking in education or the opportunity for good jobs. The center aims to provide a different, Christian based, approach to the support of these mothers than the approach found in other, secular agencies.

Rather than simply distributing food and badly needed baby supplies to the women at no cost, the center engages them in a variety of educational experiences through which they “earn” vouchers for the various items which they require for themselves and their babies. A young woman may take a class on pre-natal care and earn credits to be spent on clothing for her newborn. The classes are intended to provide the young mothers with the tools to raise their babies in a healthy environment.

After our arrival at the center, we were greeted by the woman who manages the facility and are taken on a tour. We found child care and play rooms in the front, nicely but simply, decorated and filled with donated furniture. In the store room in the back we observed row after row of children’s goods; baby food, diapers, formula, and even strollers. A carton of diapers may be “bought” by a client for a single voucher, while it may take twenty vouchers to “purchase” a stroller.

After the tour, the riders lined up at a desk to contribute their supplies, or the badly needed cash donations. While we did this, the women of the center, along with local supporters, laid out a light buffet lunch as a thank you. Finally having the opportunity to

ask a few one-on-one questions of the woman who manages the facility, I asked her how their clients found them. She responds by telling me that the center uses small amounts of their donated funds to place ads in the local, weekly newspaper, and also posts flyers in local churches. After two hours spent with the women and children of the center, we left as a group.

### “The CMA is my Family”

As I concluded my visit to the women’s center with the CMA riders, it struck me that several of the riders in the group were women who had never had any children of their own. Absent any personal child rearing responsibilities, these women had devoted themselves to the CMA and assisting other women’s children. The road captain for the event, the woman who had organized the ride, was one such person, among the riders were two other women who was also childless and seemed truly interested in interacting with the center’s mothers and babies. I wondered, was there a case of “finding a substitute family” at work here?<sup>180</sup>

I met with Carolyn for a lunchtime interview at a retro version of a classic fifties diner which has been featured on a television program called “Diners, Drive-Ins, and Dives” on the Food Network, and which was located on a busy suburban thoroughfare near to her office. When I arrived, slightly before noon, the line of people waiting for seating was out the door, so I checked in, left my name for a table and waited for Carolyn. Carolyn arrived about twenty minutes late for the interview, which she explained was due to work issues

Carolyn rides a black, "Victory" brand motorcycle, 1,632 ccs, "Eight Ball" model, which is a "clone" version of a full dress Harley. The Victory, like the Harley is made in America and is an extremely large bike. Carolyn is a large woman in her mid-fifties with very short gray hair, who seems to make little effort with her appearance. She wears a black leather vest covered with numerous patches and pins. She explains that the present vest is her third one, the others having worn out over time and with much use. Her original CMA vest is mounted in a shadow box in her home.

Carolyn has been a member of the CMA for twenty-four years, having served in office positions on several occasions. She is presently the Road Captain for the RMCR chapter. As such, she is in charge of setting up the details of all group rides, leading the ride itself, and maintaining a safe, orderly presence among the members. On a ride, the road captain's word is law.

She was married briefly to a physically abusive husband and has never had children. She reports that she was one of six children of a physically abusive, alcoholic father, and a mother whom she characterizes as having been "rowdy." Her father attempted suicide when she was sixteen and he has fathered a total of nineteen children with various women. In Carolyn's birth family, the three youngest children were all fathered by that same man.

As a child, Carolyn was exposed to evangelical Christianity, but only to the extent that her family "dropped her off" at church on Sunday and sent her to Bible camp. She states that she "became a Christian" at age fifteen when she underwent baptism at the camp.

As is the case with many of the CMA members, Carolyn “fell away” from evangelical Christianity when she was eighteen, at which time, she tells me, she was a “wild child.” She engaged in reckless activities, including skydiving, which led her to a near death experience, and many broken bones. Her brief marriage ended when her husband committed suicide. She wonders out loud if he might “be in heaven” despite his abuse and suicide. Although she has now returned to “being a Christian,” and has abandoned her party days, she does still skydive and recently completed her sixty-eighth jump. As evidence of the fact that she is still an adventurous woman, she notes that she bought her first bike on her own, with no input or urging from any male companion.

Upon her return to evangelicalism she considered herself to be what she called a “baby Christian,” and attempted to find a congregation which was compatible with her adventurous spirit and biker appearance. As she puts it, on more than one occasion during this process, she “was shunned.” When a friend introduced her to the CMA she found that she could connect with biker friendly congregations.

Carolyn is now single and has never had any children. There is no “significant other” in her life, and there has not been for a long time. She tells me “the CMA is my family.” However, there turns out to be a bit more to it than that. Although the CMA “is her family,” she has found a way to bring additional “family” into her CMA activities. As an avid CMA evangelist, Carolyn has reached out to a family in distress.

Seven years ago, three men sitting in a truck; a cop, a trucker, and a mechanic, two of whom were brothers, were approached by a woman in obvious pain who asked these

strangers for help.<sup>181</sup> She had five children who had been fathered by three different men, was single, and needed help desperately. The three men prayed with her and paid her utility bills for her. Shortly thereafter, they introduced her to the membership of the RMCR chapter which is the subject of this study. The RMCR “adopted” the family, and five years ago, Carolyn became their “foster mother.”

The mother of the children does not work and has substance addiction issues. Although Carolyn is extremely compassionate towards this woman, she tells me that the woman “thinks the world owes her,” “won’t go to school or work,” and is convinced that she should simply get the things that she needs to live “for free,” somehow.

Carolyn began her very unofficial foster mothering of these children by taking them with her to church weekly in an attempt to introduce them to Christianity and bring some order to their lives. Within three years this “fostering” had grown to the point where Carolyn approached child social services and became the children’s official foster parent. Initially, the chapter secured for the family a rental house and made the first rent payments. But, the woman could not keep up the rent and the family was evicted. At that point Carolyn took the children to live with her. As she is not wealthy herself, when she allowed the children to move in with her, they lived in a two bedroom home.

Today, the children accompany Carolyn to chapter meetings, the oldest daughter recently went on a bible distribution missionary trip to Africa, which was financed by the chapter, and the two boys now live with a Christian family where the father is a school sports coach who has introduced the boys to competitive athletics. Indeed, for Carolyn,

the CMA is her family, but she has expanded that family to include the children that she never had. Over the two years of this study, I came to view Carolyn in much the same manner as any doting grandparent to these children.

When asked about her perspective on the Bible, she reported that the Bible was inerrant, without using that particular phrase. For Carolyn, salvation comes through faith in “the Lord,”<sup>182</sup> or as she puts it later in our conversation, “through Jesus only.”

However, it is significant to note that she does not disdain works as being unimportant. Unlike some of the other project participants, who took a pro-actively negative approach to salvation by works, Carolyn observed that works are a “validation of faith,” and that “the Great Commission is works.” While noting this fact, she maintains that such works do not lead to justification.

She still participates in Bible study, which she began to do as a child in the church camp. Unlike several other participants in this study, she is interested in the Old Testament, as well as Christian scripture.

#### Observations on “The CMA IS My Family” Member

The individuals in the study for whom the CMA “is” their family were all women. In particular, they were women who had never had children of their own and had not experienced what would typically be considered to be long term or healthy romantic relationships with either men or other women.

Often the product of a large family with an abusive father, they have not chosen to engage in the relationships which would generate such unions. In addition to the lack of having created a “birth”/“nuclear” family of their own, they also fail to have close contact with either siblings or their own parents. No contact with their own birth family members was ever mentioned. Instead, they have “adopted” the CMA members as their family. They often refer in public to the CMA as their “family,” and they, more than any other members, center their entire social existence around the organization.

In their beliefs and practices they are not notably different from any other evangelical Christian or any other CMA member. Their key distinctive characteristic is the nature of their familial relationships. They are highly supportive of the previously mentioned women’s center and they dote on the center’s client women and their children.

One of the members in this category spends an immense amount of time, and what little money she has, on the “adoptive” family which the CMA chapter supports. She has invited the children into her small home and brings them to both church and the monthly CMA meetings. She constantly acts to insure the continued support of the chapter for this family, which has several birth fathers and whose birth mother is no longer in the picture. She even worked to arrange the fostering of the two older boys into a Christian home in which the father is a football coach as well as a devoted Christian.

This study is not psychological in nature, as I am not trained in that discipline. With that caveat, I will make one observation. To the untrained but observant eye, it appears that the CMA acts as a substitute family for some individuals who do not have any family



in the traditional (or, even the contemporary non-traditional) sense. This family substitution would be in accordance with one particular strand of evangelical thought espoused by socially conservative Heritage Foundation political activists such as Connie Marshner, who offered the observation at the Family Forum Conference, “The New Traditional Woman,” that “a woman’s nature is, simply, other oriented...women are ordained by their nature to spend themselves in meeting the needs of others.”<sup>183</sup> This perspective is reflective of the evangelical concept of “complementary” male and female roles previously discussed.

## Chapter Five

### Seasons of Refreshing and “Love Conquers All”

#### Seasons of Refreshing



Figure 6: Photo by author at 2013 Seasons of Refreshing

Seasons of Refreshing is a yearly event for all of the Colorado CMA chapters, which is reminiscent of a modern revival meeting and is held in the spring to “kick off” the

ministry year. According to the official CMA Handbook, the intent of the yearly conference is to “equip, enable, and encourage the membership of CMA for ministry in the upcoming year.”<sup>184</sup> Key to the Seasons of Refreshing is the opportunity for members in the various states to meet their National Evangelist, the main speaker at the event.

I arrived in April of 2014, my second Seasons of Refreshing, at a large, modern church facility in Greeley, Colorado to find the extensive parking lot filling up quickly with about half bikes and half cars. I noted that the arriving crowd appeared to me to be largely white, middle aged, and wearing their CMA colors. Most in attendance seemed to be heterosexual couples, some of the younger of which had brought children. I did observe the arrival of the occasional “single,” but they were few. The church complex comprised several other buildings in addition to the church proper, which provided space for youth meetings, counseling, bible study, and other activities.

On entering the building, I found a large, airy, reception area with tables set up along one wall at which individuals were lined up, signing in. Having previously attended this particular event in 2013, I was aware that it was a members-only, pre-registration event. Not being a member, I had been pre-registered by my sponsor, who happened to arrive just as I was in line and he immediately advised the registration staff that I was a guest of his and was welcome to attend all the activities. I was given the appropriate wrist band and warmly welcomed by the registration team.

Prior to the beginning of the day’s activities I had the opportunity to roam around freely and examine the facility. The church was built in what I think of as the “mini-

mega-church” style; extremely modern, with a permanent stage at one end of the main meeting room, with a full complement of audio and musical equipment, including video screens, amplifiers, and an impressive drum set. The rear of the hall contained a permanent audio/video control console with overhead projection capabilities.

In the front, mounted on the full width stage was a speaker’s lectern, but no altar in the traditional sense. Considering that most evangelicals believe communion to be representational, and not a literal sacrifice in the Catholic sense, the lack of an altar was to be expected.<sup>185</sup> I counted 340 seats filling the room. As I took note of the facility, I observed what seemed to me, to be an anomaly. Although this was a Christian church, there was not a single cross or other overtly religious feature in the room; no scriptural references on the walls, no images of Jesus. Balmer suggests that, as in his study of the Willow Creek church, this is not unusual for the sake of not offending participants who may not come from a traditional Christian background, a perspective sometimes known as “seeker friendly.” This lack of Christian iconography struck me as worthy of particular notice as it contrasted so sharply with my experience in the Catholic Church. Although, as Robert Orsi notes in his work *Between Heaven and Earth*, the post-conciliar Catholic Church has departed to a great extent from the centuries old, pre-Vatican II, veneration of saints, and with it, the associated iconography,<sup>186</sup> my own post-conciliar experience still took place in churches adorned with statues of St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mary flanking the altar, plaques depicting the Stations of the Cross hung on the walls, and the occasional large portrait of a particular saint. At my home parish, the wall

above the choir section is adorned with a large portrait of St. Cecelia, the patron saint of musicians.

One aspect of this lack of Christian iconography was the most conspicuous. Accustomed as I was to the place of honor over the altar of Catholic churches being occupied by a crucifix, including both the cross and the representation of the body of Christ, I was amazed by the lack of even a single, simple cross, the centuries old symbol of Christianity.

Despite this lack of Christian iconography on display, there were numerous Bibles placed around the room, all of which were the New International Version.

Within fifteen minutes of my arrival, I was approached by members of the RMCR chapter and asked to help with setting up the food stations in a room down the hall. I took this as a sign of acceptance, and immediately agreed to help. This food service area appeared to be the church's cafeteria, adjacent to a medium sized kitchen. In this room the walls were covered with inspirational children's posters, all of which were keyed to the theme of justification; a seemingly sophisticated subject for posters which were obviously, by their design, geared to young children with illustrations of cartoon characters and small, cute animals. I found the religious nature of this instructive wall ornamentation to be in stark contrast to the seemingly deliberate lack of Christian ornamentation in the main worship area. Perhaps, the cafeteria and food service areas were considered, in some manner, to be less public, and therefore had less need to be "seeker friendly" for casual visitors to the church. Inasmuch as this event was entirely

under the aegis of the CMA, not the local congregation, I was not able to find an explanation for this disparity in Christian iconography.

My food setup chores finished, I returned to the main auditorium to await the start of the program. As I waited, a large group of musicians tuned up. As the auditorium began to fill up with what I counted to be about 200 people, the recorded, hard rock, praise music poured from the speakers with the CMA Anthem “Riding for the Son,” praising Jesus for their change from “dead men walking in the darkness of their sins.”<sup>187</sup> As was the case at the state rally, the members stood, pumped their right arms in the air, waving them back and forth and alternating this motion with holding that right hand over their hearts, and joined in the song, another ritual practice noted by Balmer.

It was, to my eyes, an obviously, white, predominantly middle aged audience, all wearing their colors on their vests, most of which contained a patch reading “These ARE my church clothes.”<sup>188</sup> As I looked around the room, I counted only two African American members in attendance. As was the case when I was watching the arrivals, it appeared that there were virtually no “singles” in attendance, virtually all attendees were “couples.” Armed security personnel stood in the back of the room. After the traditional opening prayers, the state coordinator announced that one third of the people in attendance were first timers and asked the membership to welcome them.

A round of applause followed, during which green rubber armbands were distributed to the new members. After an additional prayer in remembrance of a fallen member, the state coordinator began his formal presentation, “God’s victorious army,” the key theme

for that year's event. At this time I found myself sitting next to the state coordinator's uncle, and learned that there were six close members of their family in attendance. After a presentation lasting slightly less than an hour, he turned the podium over to Hiram and Sharon, whom I later learned were the salaried CMA National evangelists, high ranking members of the national leadership team.

For their presentation at this event, the evangelists distributed a small, glossy, 38 page booklet entitled "Inner Armor Equipped, 2015, Part Two" a reference to "putting on God's armor." Inner Armor is a study which, referencing 1 Tim. 6:12, is "designed to empower and equip CMA members to 'fight the good fight for the true faith.'"<sup>189</sup> The outline of the study, which took several hours to go through, is worth detailing herein.

\*Introduction: "Resisting the Enemy in the Time of Evil."

\*Video: "Health of the Ministry with John Ogden Sr. Standing Firm in 2015."

\* Suit Up! Video introduction "Supernatural Protection – God's Armor; Piece by Piece"

\* Teaching: "Stand Your Ground by Wearing God's Armor."

\* Use Your Sword!

This presentation and instructional package alternated between Hiram and Sharon lecturing, giving testimony, and playing very professional and well-crafted video selections. Their methodology was consistent with what Balmer refers to as "tag-team preaching" as is practiced at Saddleback Church in Southern California. Balmer describes the technique as a "sermonic device" in which "Warren or another pastor will begin the sermon and cover the first couple of points, then disappear backstage as another

pastor does points three and four, and then reappear for the conclusion.”<sup>190</sup> Although Balmer refers to this technique in the context of a single sermon, Hiram and Sharon utilized the technique for what amounted to an almost day-long teaching exercise. I later learned that, as two of the few full time paid employees of the CMA, these presentations were part of their job description as national evangelists. In their tag-team approach, the national evangelists were totally co-equal in which of them handled which part of the presentation, alternating seamlessly between the two presenters.

The key messages of the presentation and learning activity were that contemporary American culture is evil, Christians must use God’s word to attack that evil, that the Christian Gospel is the vehicle of hope for those “drowning in the rising tide of evil in our day,” and that members must pay careful attention to the “CMA’s role in the Battle of the Ages,” which he described as “a perpetual battlefield.”<sup>191</sup> The general texture of the presentation reflects upon the perspective that Satan is real, alive, and present in this world, Christians are the embattled forces of good, and that these Christians are “misrepresented, shoved to the margins, or openly hated,”<sup>192</sup> all of which are generally accepted evangelical articles of faith.<sup>193</sup> During this portion of the presentation, the projection screen on the front wall is filled with a representation of Jesus as a mounted, crusader like warrior, at the head of an army.<sup>194</sup> At the end of the training, all of the audience members, myself included, were presented with an “Inner Armor” pin for our vests. Although I am not authorized under the rules of the CMA to wear their colors, I was told that attaching this pin to my own vest was acceptable, and I proceeded to do so.<sup>195</sup>



After a brief break for visits to the “goodies store” or the restrooms, the activities resumed with a brief presentation on how to be a better Christian, followed by what was, for me, a surprisingly tearful testimony and exhortation to support the CMA with purchases from the “goodies store.”<sup>196</sup> The morning session concluded with twenty minutes of praise music by the live band.

After an hour lunch break, Hiram turned to the subject of the CMA’s missionary activities around the world, claiming that the CMA now had run missionary trips to ninety countries, resulting in both salvations and re-commitments to Jesus, opening a motorcycle shop in Nepal, and conducting missions in locations as dangerous as Gaza and the West Bank. He then turned the podium over to a CMA member, Linda, for a recounting of her recent missionary trip to Belize. She explained that during the two week trip, her group had evangelized in the countryside and donated two dirt bikes (motorcycles), four off-road bicycles, and one four wheel ATV to the local evangelical Christian missionaries, and rural evangelical pastors. She explained that these vehicles were intended to aid the missionaries and pastors in their work, which took them from village to village over rough terrain. In an interesting interjection, Hiram mentioned that in another mission to another part of the world, the CMA had also donated three horse and buddy rigs and one camel. Linda concluded her remarks about her missionary trip with some mildly unpleasant references to the Catholic missionaries who were also working in the vicinity and which received no support from the CMA. This practice was illustrative of the mildly anti-Catholic perspective taken by some CMA members, and also noted by Balmer to be evident among some evangelicals.

Hiram described the key facets of the CMA ministry; that it is a “Christ centered” ministry, that must prepare and train to remain “battle focused,” and that the entire project is team based. He noted that “the biker community is not ministered to by local churches.” By going out to “where they are,” the CMA can “share the good news with that segment of society.” “The goal is to minister to bikers.” We are “reaching bikers with the word of Jesus Christ.” At this, the entire audience rose to their feet with applause.

As the afternoon drew to a close, and it seemed to me that both the membership, and I were beginning to grow tired, things were livened up by an amusing sketch by a group of half a dozen members. I found this to be energizing, as amid much laughter from the participants, to loud music and equally loud applause, they illustrated gearing up in God’s armor as advised in Ephesians 6; the Belt of Truth, the Armor of God’s Righteousness, the Shoes of Peace, the Shield of Faith, and the Helmet of Salvation, each of these items illustrated by use of a variety of motorcycle riding gear.

After the collection of what was referred to as a “love offering,” the final activity of the day was the playing of a video from the national leadership of the CMA. In it, the members were told that “Satan is the power of the natural world,” that “an unsaved person is controlled by the enemy,” and that, specifically contrary to the American president, America was very much “a Christian country.” With that ringing call to arms, Seasons of Refreshing 2015 came to an end.

## Love Conquers All

Throughout my entire time at Seasons of Refreshing I took the opportunity to observe, not just the choreographed events on the stage, but the interactions of the assembly as well. As previously mentioned earlier in this chapter, among the participants were numerous members of one extended family, a fact I found to be common in the CMA. I had also noticed, right from the beginning of the event, that most attendees were married couples, many of them elderly. During my frequent casual, introductory conversations with these couples, I learned that a significant number of them had been married for all of their adult lives, a fact attested to by the remark I heard some of the men make “Yes, I found her early.” This observation was key to my pursuit of the stories which ended up comprising this composite character.

This composite participant is one of two composites in this study which is entirely gender specific. This CMA member is a man who, at a young age, became enamored of a young woman from a deeply religious family. There were no female members of the CMA who told a similar story. I first considered the existence of this composite individual upon noting the number of older married couples in attendance at SOR and observing their affectionate affect. They held hands, hugged, and often seemed to me to be genuinely affectionate with one another. As per my previous observation, the almost complete lack of “singles” was obvious to me. As the significant number of these couples appeared to me to be beyond child rearing age, they must have had reasonably healthy romantic relationships as they continued to demonstrate such levels of affection.

In early conversations with some of these couples, I learned that several of them had been “childhood sweethearts.”

This individual was either not religious at all, or at best, mildly religious in his youth. He may have been raised in a nominally religious household, but was never personally engaged with any particular faith or belief structure. Either in high school, college, or shortly thereafter, he met a young woman to whom he was intensely attracted. She came from a seriously devoted evangelical family with strict rules of behavior, one of which was no dating outside of the faith. When this rule was made abundantly clear to the subject, he was happy to quickly, but only superficially, accept evangelical Christianity. This nominal acceptance, displayed at least in surface behavior, was acceptable to the young woman’s family, resulting in early marriage. Although this evangelical faith was nominal at first, the arrival of children and later life experiences resulted in the individual eventually becoming a deeply believing Christian in his own right.

Robert is a married, middle aged white man, with two grown sons. I met him and his wife at their comfortable, contemporary ranch style home on the plains of eastern Colorado. The neighborhood was one of upper middle class homes surrounding an airpark, where homeowners keep their personal aircraft in hangers right near the single, paved runway. Getting there had been difficult, as the home is located far off any paved roads. Colorado farmland is characterized by straight dirt roads with no lighting, which divide the farms, or in Robert’s case, the airpark community.

Robert and his wife Sheila live in a large modern, but woodsy custom home with their two Golden Retrievers, which are brother and sister. Robert is a retired Air Force veteran who now travels to consult on business practices. He is trim, wears a mustache, and shaves his head. Sheila is a stay at home mom to the dogs and participates in a variety of charitable and civil organizations. She is an attractive, trim, middle-aged blond woman, a bit younger than her husband.

This couple first came to my attention at Seasons of Refreshing, and again later when I attended a chapter meeting at which, Robert, gave an impassioned testimony about the recently released film, "Noah." According to Robert, it was not a film that Christians should be spending money on, as it was highly non-biblical. He was so articulate in that denunciation of the film that I asked him if he would be willing to be my first interview of the project. He readily agreed, and we met at the family's home a week later. Before the interview, I viewed the film in order to see for myself just what his issue with it might be.

I began the interview by asking Robert "just what was it about the film "Noah" that you disliked so much?" He answered, "well, I haven't actually seen it myself." This response somewhat surprised me as his denunciation of the film was pretty strongly worded. "What made you make such a strong statement against it?" "I heard that it's not biblical." "It's got some kind of rock creatures that aren't in the Bible, and Tubal-cain stows away on the ark." "Tubal-cain wasn't on the ark."

This admission caught me by surprise, that he would lecture on something after having only heard about it second hand. But, having heard that it was “non-biblical,” that was enough for Robert. He asked me what I had seen in the film. My review of the film was informed by a family background in the film industry, as well as my having studied contemporary media in general, and film in particular. This perspective allows for appreciation of a certain amount of literary flexibility/artistic license in the crafting of a story for the screen.

In Genesis 4:22, Tubal-cain is generally described, depending on the translation, as a worker in bronze and iron. That is all that is said about him in canonical Genesis. In the film “Noah,” however, Tubal-cain is portrayed as something of an originator of mining and the leader of large groups of men who are despoilers of the earth. This is in keeping with Hollywood’s environmentalist based depiction of mining industries as being fundamentally flawed.<sup>197</sup> Additionally, in the film, Tubal-cain stows away on the ark in order to introduce another conflict situation.<sup>198</sup>

The so-called “rock creatures” are broadly based on the non-canonical Book of Enoch, in which fallen angels, known as “watchers” are sent to earth and, in some manner, bound into the earth. The film has the watcher’s assisting Noah in his fight against the hordes of Tubal-cain, which action allows them a type of redemption, in which they return to heaven as beams of light.

I described these cinematic elements to Robert and found that, with explanation, he was prepared to accept that the film, given Hollywood’s tendency to “enhance” stories

with additional drama, might not be so bad after all and said that he may well watch the film.

After this excursus into cinematic critique we turned to Robert and Sheila's life stories. Sheila was raised in an evangelical Christian family, considers herself to have been "born again" at ten years old, and was a member of Campus Life in high school on Colorado's eastern plains. Sheila met Robert in high school. Her family would not allow him to date her unless he too practiced evangelical Christianity. Robert, who was raised in a Catholic home, but was not particularly interested in religion, was, on the other hand, sufficiently interested in Sheila that he was more than happy to accept the conditions set out by her family. As he put it, as a young man he "didn't know God." When I asked, "did you grow up in a Christian household," Robert answered, "no, our family was Catholic." They were married right after high school.

Robert joined the military and, although by then nominally Christian (similar to the "I'm Workin' On It" composite) he described himself as something of a "hell raiser" when on duty overseas. What Robert refers to as "his moment" came when he was thirty years old, and was occasioned by his friendship with a fellow airman<sup>199</sup> who was himself an evangelical Christian. Slowly beginning to attend church on base, and slowly lessening his "hell raising," Robert sought out immersion baptism at age thirty while on duty in the U.S. Air Force. This born-again moment cemented his relationship with his wife, who was serious about her faith from an early age.

Sheila, while accepting of Robert's initial nominalism regarding Christianity, was raised in an eastern plains, evangelical household. She was happy to see Robert become Christian, even if in name only, when they began to date, and she was particularly thrilled when, at thirty, he "accepted Christ into his life." Sheila noted that both she, and Robert, had learned much about becoming a better Christian from their home-schooled sons, who are now adults.

Sheila started a women's ministry called "Call 2 Conquer," which is devoted to assisting women whose husbands are, in Sheila's words, "sex addicts." She explained that their two sons, now themselves in the Air Force, were serious evangelicals, but were troubled by being "sex addicts." This rather forthright announcement prompted Robert to tell me that, he too, was a "sex addict," and was working hard at overcoming the addiction.

Although the American Psychiatric Association does not define "sexual addiction" or "hypersexuality" as disorders, much as it no longer defines homosexuality as a disorder, the organization does deal extensively with the subject of over-attention being paid to sexual themes in one's life. In the APA's 2014 Symposium syllabus, can be found numerous lectures and classes on the subject.<sup>200</sup> I asked just what she meant by sex addict. I discovered that, although the APA does not consider sex addiction to be a disorder, the CMA clearly does. Sheila references me to this CMA teaching.

The CMA Quick Reference Guide, in association with Hope for the Heart, asks the question on behalf of Christians, "Can those who are caught in the snare of sexual



addiction be set free,” and goes on to note “Although I am a Christian, I still have a problem with lust.” The guide further goes on to enumerate the way-stations along the “Spiral of Sexual Addiction,” curiosity, addiction, compulsive masturbation, escalation, desensitization, acting out, and finally, despair.<sup>201</sup>

According to Hope for the Heart and the CMA, there exists a “cure” for this addiction, involving admitting that you are out of control, finding the inner need that you seek to fulfill through sex, and becoming determined to find help through Jesus. The belief that programs of this nature can “cure” someone of “sex addiction” is reminiscent to me of the largely discredited programs which aim to “cure” homosexuality.<sup>202</sup>

Sheila was the one who led the couple to the CMA. One of the women who was involved with Sheila’s ministry and who was a member of the Cross Eyed Riders chapter of the CMA introduced Sheila to the program. Today Robert and Sheila are deeply involved in CMA and working through his “sexual addiction.”

When questioned about their belief structure, it quickly became evident that they believed strongly in biblical inerrancy, although they did not use the term. This is in keeping with the CMA doctrinal statement which, while also not using the term biblical inerrancy, states among their beliefs that they regard the Bible as the “inspired and infallible word of God.”<sup>203</sup> For Sheila and Robert, the Bible is as much an historical document as it is a guide for life.

As a part of this perspective, they profess a “young earth” view, in which the earth is only thousands of years old. I asked them about the existence of the fossils of large,

reptilian creatures, which appear to be millennia old. Sheila told me that, yes, dinosaurs once did exist, a few thousand years ago, and were simply exterminated in the Flood. When pressed on this, she recounted a television program that she had seen on a Christian television network. She advised me that the program proved that the rocks in which the fossils have been found just were not all that old. Regarding the giant size of the fossil remains, she claimed that “many reptiles continue to grow for as long as they live.” For Sheila, the dinosaurs are easily explained as being very long-lived reptiles which continued to grow throughout their lives and were killed in the Flood.

Robert then told me about his friend, a chemist, who was a believer in Intelligent Design (again, not using that specific nomenclature, but describing the theory accurately) and who tried to convince him of the value of that theory. They had to “agree to disagree.”

For my final question regarding their beliefs, I asked about salvation. We discussed several aspects of Luther’s initial commentary on Romans and how that affected perceptions of justification and salvation. I mentioned that I had done something of a small study on Romans, making it one of the few biblical texts with which I was actually conversant. We all agreed that, by and large, they were both much more familiar with biblical study than I was, and they enjoyed sharing their perspectives with me.

For the two of them, salvation comes exclusively through the acceptance of Jesus Christ “as their personal savior.” Nothing that you did in this world could affect your salvation, only faith in Christ. We discussed my one small bit of biblical knowledge

regarding the controversies around the translation of the original Greek text, “faith in Christ,” or “faith of Christ.” They found that interesting. They also found that it didn’t matter which translation was correct, faith was “all that counts,” however the scriptural language is translated. This is not to say that they believed that faith and works were, somehow, in conflict, or incompatible. Simply that works would not “get you into heaven.” That requires nothing more than the acceptance of Jesus Christ as your personal savior. I found this particularly interesting, as they had no knowledge at all of the historical or theological contexts in which the faith/works controversy had arisen. Although they had no knowledge of how the questions came about, they were quite sure of the answer...faith alone assures salvation.

#### Observations on the “Love Conquers All” Member

Like the composite character which I refer to as the “CMA IS my Family” character, this composite is also gender specific. I found no instances of any females who encountered evangelical Christianity in the interest of meeting or dating some young man. This was the exclusive province of male actors. As noted in the interview section, here we find a young man who is sufficiently enamored of a young woman that he is willing to go to some lengths in order to date her (“dating” being a specific young adult mating behavior during the youth of these study participants) most of whom are now middle aged.

In each case, the young woman, being part of a firmly evangelical nuclear family, was not allowed by that family to date young men who were not also evangelical, “believing”

Christians. I put the word “believing” in quotes because not all the young men who confessed to this motivation were particularly “believing” at the time of the dating and courtship. At the start of the relationships, some of the young men were Christian (or even religious at all) in name only. This information was not disclosed to the families of the young women. It was a convenient subterfuge at the time. However, during the course of their subsequent married lives, every single man in this composite claims to have become (over time) a devoted Christian in his own right. Each man had, in some manner, a later “born again” moment.

Although the young men’s conversion experience was, at first, simply convenient and expedient, by the time I interviewed the couples in late middle life, both the husband and wife were truly committed Christians, who still held hands when they walked together.

## Chapter Six

### Food and Clothing on East Colfax and “The Broken One”

I arrived a little before noon on the Sunday of the 2013 Memorial Day weekend. The area was on the east side of Denver, in a run down, but recovering neighborhood referred to as East Colfax. I observed that the revitalization efforts appeared to center on Colfax Avenue itself, with little effort yet to be made along the side streets. I went to a corner on East Colfax Blvd, near to the gentrifying influence of several nicely appointed restaurants. Set up along the cross street on the grass “runner” alongside the public sidewalk were about two hundred feet of portable tables covered with clothing and food. This was the site of the CMA spring clothing and food distribution to the homeless. Twice per year, several chapters of the CMA get together and arrange this event.

I was amazed at the number of homeless lined up for food and clothes in this newly upscale neighborhood. About eighty percent of those in line were men, and by and large they appeared to be the stereotypical homeless person; unkempt, unshorn, and dressed in shapeless masses of clothing. More than a few appeared to me to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs before noon on a Sunday; red eyed, unsteady on their feet, and with the smell of alcohol on their breath. A dozen or so swigged from bottles of something inside brown paper bags right there while waiting on line. In addition to the men, there were some women by themselves and some women with children. The appearance of the

women was in every way similar to that of the men, and some of them were seemingly intoxicated as well. Despite the sometimes intoxicated, mothers, most of the children were quiet and well behaved.

For every other CMA event, I had participated wearing my own “biker” clothes, blue jeans and either a leather jacket or my leather vest. As Colorado does not have a helmet law, I rarely wear one except in inclement weather. My vest, like those of the CMA members, is adorned with a variety of patches and pins; my pilot’s wings, a March Air Force Base pin, a POW remembrance pin, Sturgis Rally pins, and patches commemorating many other biker activities. On the back of my vest is the patch of the Harley Owners Group (HOG), a club sponsored by my local HD dealership. However, in this case, I had decided to wear my “academic researcher” clothing; new blue jeans, a collared shirt, a sports jacket, loafers, and my school ID on a lanyard around my neck.

I had chosen this garb for a very specific reason. In my “academic” clothing I could easily move among the “citizens” as well as the bikers. I had heard that this event sometimes caused a certain level of consternation among the largely upscale restaurant patrons and management. Notebook in hand, and with obvious “credentials” hanging around my neck, I wanted to be able to interact with all of them. When I finally came across the CMA member who organized the event and introduced myself, he told me, “oh, yeah...I heard that some guy in a suit was looking for me.” I was not yet well known to much of the CMA membership.

I quickly learned that the reason this event was held in the spring was because the homeless in the area generally only had one set of clothes at a time. At the moment, they were still wearing their winter clothes, and the CMA wanted to provide them with clothing suitable for the hotter months. A similar event takes place in the fall, during which the homeless are provided with badly needed cold weather clothing, which, in Colorado, is mandatory for those living outdoors, if they wish to survive the winter.

The line of tables extended, as noted, almost two hundred feet from the corner, and the line of homeless extended another hundred feet beyond that. As such, the line extended past the driveway leading to the parking lot of the corner restaurant. “How do they find out about this...do you put up flyers or something?” “No, they just know...they always know.” “Word gets out.” The CMA utilized “road captains” to keep the line orderly, not allowing the homeless into the restaurant’s parking lot, and keeping the driveway clear. Road captains on both sides of the driveway would keep the line from moving forward until there was enough room on the other side of the driveway. I was impressed by both the discipline imposed by the road captains, and the civility of the homeless standing in line. It was obvious that the CMA intended to minimize cause for complaint, if that were at all possible.

The tables were manned by groups of CMA members, many accompanied by their children. As the line of homeless slowly moved along, the members filled paper plates with hot dogs and hamburgers, which had been pre-cooked and brought to the distribution location. Near the end of the line, coolers held sodas and bottles of water. Many of the tables were piled high with all sorts of clothing, for both adults and children;

lots of jeans, tennis shoes, and socks were evident. These items, and the always important winter jackets, which were distributed in the fall, were donated by CMA members in a collection drive during the previous months. The homeless individuals examined the clothing and selected the items that they needed. There was remarkably little dissonance among the homeless, virtually no squabbling over individuals items of clothing.

Shortly after noon I noticed a disturbance in the parking lot of the restaurant. Going over, I saw the restaurant manager shouting and gesturing at the bikers to take down their tables and leave the area...claiming that they were “bad for business.” The CMA members who organized the event refused to pack up and leave the general area, and some of them became obviously agitated. The conversation quickly became heated. But, eventually, the CMA did clear the parking lot of their own membership and vehicles. “Yeah, this happened last year too.” Interested in hearing the restaurant manager’s point of view, I took advantage of my academic “look” and went into the restaurant and bought lunch...just like any other customer.

As I suspected he would, the manager dropped by my table to see if I was enjoying my lunch and if there was anything he could do for me. I identified myself, and asked him for his perspective on the CMA activity right outside his door. “It’s mainly about liability,” he told me. The manager explained that the last time this activity took place, one “drunk” broke a liquor bottle over another “drunk’s” head, a fight ensued, and blood flowed. “If something like that happens, guess who gets sued?” “None of them have any money.” I immediately recognized that he had a valid point. Although the incident



which he mentioned did not result in a lawsuit, it was easy to accept the high possibility of such a suit in the future, should a similar disturbance re-occur.

But, it wasn't solely about liability, it was about his lunchtime traffic as well. I had happened to sit at a table located at the open area right near the entrance from the sidewalk. Soon after I sat down, the table next to me was taken by a nicely dressed, elderly, woman and three of the obviously homeless men. In addition to their unkempt appearance, two of the men shook uncontrollably, and all three smelled strongly of liquor and lack of hygiene.

The woman ordered each of them an ice cream from the menu. I introduced myself to the woman and asked her about her actions. It seems that she was the mother of one of the CMA members and was visiting from out of town for the weekend. She had been going up and down the line and offering to buy ice creams for the people after they had been fed and received their new clothes. This was a key part of the manager's problems. I noticed on numerous occasions potential customers walking by, seeing the group at that table, and clearly deciding not to have lunch at that location. It seemed that the manager did have another point (although unspoken), it being clear that potential patrons, viewing this scene at the table near the entrance, chose to eat somewhere else.

As I ate lunch and chatted with this Good Samaritan, who repeatedly brought new homeless to the table for their ice cream, a Denver police car pulled up to the scene with flashing lights. Two officers got out and explained to the CMA'ers that they had received a complaint about a public nuisance. No one was arrested, but the members

hustled the remaining homeless through the line and vacated the public sidewalk which they had been using. It seems they lacked a permit of any kind for their activity. I asked about that omission, and I found that, although the CMA members had the best of intentions, they were not particularly good at dealing with civic bureaucracy.

I mentioned to the CMA leadership group that I had parked just one block away in front of a large church with an empty parking lot...had they ever looked into coordinating with that church to locate their tables? They had not thought of it. They abandoned this particular part of their ministry shortly thereafter as the leadership wanted the members to concentrate more specifically on ministering to bikers, which after all, was the genesis of the organization. This attempt by the CMA leadership to return to the core mission of the CMA is instructive. I suggest in my concluding chapter that the CMA has, to some extent, moved away from its founding principle of bikers ministering to bikers and has become more of a traditional affinity group.

### The Broken One

This encounter with the unfortunate “losers” in the pursuit of a stable, productive, and happy homelife, lead me to consider how, with very few changes to the story, their life could have been the life experienced by the CMA member which I refer to as the “Broken One.” I quickly became aware, in just the few hours of this event, how one or two very minor differences in circumstances could have left the CMA member which I identify as the Broken One out on the street. I later learned that for a period of time, one of the participants in the study was just such an individual, a client of the Denver Rescue

Mission. After “doing time” both in prison and “on the street” he managed to pull his life together and become a productive citizen. In order to replicate that CMA member’s rehabilitation any of these individuals would have to battle the same demons of drug addiction and alcoholism that he did.

The usage of the nomenclature “broken one,” rather than the originally intended “broken man” is due to the fact that this composite character came to life from a number of interviews with both sexes. The category is not gender specific, and some of the life story incidents were recounted by male respondents, some by female respondents. I have chosen to use the pronoun “he” for grammatical ease and in order to describe an individual.

For some individuals, life has dealt out some hard knocks. A combination of bad luck, bad breaks, bad timing and bad decisions have put some people into a social space that is inhabited by crime victims, the very ill, relatives of the very ill, and criminals themselves. I interviewed the Broken One at a run down, one man, motorcycle shop which was reminiscent of the old days of motorcycling. Today, in the early twenty-first century, motorcycle shops have changed dramatically from the early days. If you go into any Harley Davidson shop you will find thousands of square feet of gleaming new motorcycles, most of which are priced in the twenty to twenty-five thousand dollar range. In addition to the rows of gleaming bikes, you will find racks of expensive clothing and accessories. Well-dressed staffers treat you in the manner you would expect to be treated at any large, well maintained, new car dealership. According to Anderson-Facile, the

median income of Harley Davidson purchasers was over \$80,000 per year in 2005.<sup>204</sup>

None of this is evident in Michael's shop.

"Michael's" shop is completely "old school." It was located in two, small, dilapidated buildings on a side street within an industrial area outside of Denver. The front building was the office and sales area. Instead of finding row upon row of expensive clothing and accessories, as you would at a contemporary Harley shop, the sales area contained one small, glass display cabinet, which held just a few used tools and even fewer shabby looking motorcycle parts.

The rear of the facility contained none of the gleaming equipment associated with contemporary motorcycle shops. It was just as I remembered them to be in my youth, parts scattered about, and one motorcycle frame being worked on. Michael's shop specializes in "choppers," custom motorcycles, but there was little evidence of the upscale, custom work now being turned out by some facilities. Michael's personal bike, a beat up, older Harley "bagger" was also being worked on.

Michael himself, is approaching the end of middle age, with a long white beard and a shaved head. He is a twice married grandfather who lives with his wife and two of his grandchildren just a mile from his shop in the same neighborhood.

He was born in the industrial city of Torrance in Southern California. Raised in a nominally Catholic family with four children, he says that he "went to church on Sunday," but did not consider himself to be religious. "We knew about God, but that was about it." He broke with the Catholic Church while in the ninth grade in a California

public school. According to him, it was at about that time that he actually started “thinking about religion.” He claimed that his main concern with Catholicism was “praying to Mary.” It appears that either Michael himself, or his family, was unaware of the Catholic position on prayer to Mary, which is that one does not pray to Mary as if she were God, but rather, for intercession by Mary with her son. However, the break with organized religion may also have been on a more personal and less theological level. At a time of great life stress as a teenager, his calls to his congregation’s youth pastor went unanswered, leaving him emotionally adrift. He characterized the youth pastor’s actions as “dodging my call.” After leaving the Catholic Church, he says that he was completely unchurched for ten years.

He claims that his years of being unchurched led to a “trouble making” lifestyle, which he refers to as “acting out,” both in and out of the Navy, which ended up with his doing “hard time” in prison at the California Institute for Men in Chino, and later at the California Men’s Colony at San Louis Obispo, one of the medium security prisons in the California penal system.<sup>205</sup> Although reluctant to discuss his actual criminal history, he assures me that his incarceration was entirely appropriate, given the nature of his crimes.

It was during his time in prison that Michael turned to evangelical Christianity. Interestingly, one of his fellow inmates at the San Louis Obispo prison was Charles “Tex” Watson, a member of the so-called “Manson Family,” who was convicted of multiple murders and sentenced to prison in 1971. Watson became an evangelical Christian in 1975, and by the time that Michael arrived at the prison, in 1977, Watson was evangelizing the other prisoners. Michael began an in-depth, individual study of the

Bible. He claims to have become an ordained minister in a small, and carefully unnamed, evangelical denomination while in prison.

During our conversation it became apparent to me that Michael, who dropped out of school at age sixteen to join the Navy, although unschooled, was a remarkable autodidact. In a manner similar to other autodidacts, he possessed in depth knowledge of certain subjects which interested him, such as the New Testament, but very little knowledge of associated subjects, such as he might have encountered had he obtained his information in a structured environment. From personal observation it has always appeared to me that autodidacts often read only that which interests them, and often, read only writers who agree with positions already held by the autodidact. As we spoke, he was able to quote biblical passages in Greek, the language of its initial writing. Not being a biblical scholar myself, I simply marveled at his scholarship, and told him so.

When questioned about this amazing level of scholarship, Michael admitted that, “well, I went to seminary for a couple of years.” Michael was remarkably candid about parts of his life and equally non-forthcoming about other aspects of his life. He dropped out of school in the ninth grade, but somehow, somewhere, ended up in a non-specified seminary. He admits to doing “hard time,” but is unwilling to discuss the specific nature of his crimes.

Michael’s issues with, as he puts it, “booze and drugs,” “ruined his liver,” and led him to the Denver Rescue Mission, where he found a job, and met what he refers to as a “client” of the mission.<sup>206</sup> Having owned motorcycles from an early age, and having them

long since repossessed, he was introduced to the CMA by this client five years ago. He considers this to have been divine intervention in his life. “God was always there with me, I just didn’t always know it.”

Now, having been a CMA member for five years, and being a recovering alcoholic, he is philosophical about his life and his faith, claiming that “Christianity kept my wife and I together through all of that shit for thirty years.” That faith is also what keeps him going in the face of his own physical ailments, which are many, and the death of a granddaughter at age five from a painful and debilitating disease which he asks me not to name out of consideration for the feelings of the little girl’s mother, the Broken One’s daughter.

At the time of the interview, he and his wife were “searching” for an evangelical congregation to call home. They visit a variety of Christian congregations and “try them on.” He explains that membership in a specific congregation is not important, and tells me that all you really need to know is in the Bible, telling me that “bible” means “basic instructions before leaving Earth.”<sup>207</sup> Much like the composite which I characterize as the Cradle Christian, the Broken One simply subscribes to Christian Smith’s “minimal baseline beliefs” regarding Christianity without concerning himself to any great extent with denominational orthodoxy or participation.

As the interview ends, he talks to me about “accepting Christ’s gift,” and what it means in your life. “You can do terrible things,” Michael tells me, but Jesus “forgives your sins, past present, and future.” As I subsequently reflected on this perspective, it

struck me that taking this position almost “allows for” a certain amount of backsliding, reminiscent of the death bed baptisms which were popular in past ages.

#### Observations on “The Broken One”

Imagine my surprise when, not being previously familiar with the life stories of many evangelicals, when I was told by a CMA member that “I became a Christian when I was doing hard time at San Louis Obispo.”<sup>208</sup>

Having spent time with the CMA members collecting and donating food and clothing to the homeless on East Colfax in Denver, I was somewhat familiar with the situation of some of the more unfortunate members of American society, those seen, more or less, as the “losers” by much of the general population. Previously, I had also encountered the drug rehabilitation clients of Synanon House in Santa Monica, California while working on an undergraduate degree in sociology at California State University, Northridge, under the guidance of sociologist Lewis Yablonsky, who did pioneering work among east coast street gangs in the nineteen fifties and nineteen sixties, and who was a great believer in “street knowledge”, rather than pure academics. Yablonsky credited his ability to communicate effectively with street gang members with his continuing “direct empirical research,” which was fundamentally ethnographic in nature.<sup>209</sup>

This relatively minor, and only episodic, contact with members of society with drug and alcohol addiction issues, as well as occasional associated criminal backgrounds, did little to prepare me to encounter individuals who had done hard time, and yet considered themselves to be “saved,” even while continuing to engage in a criminal lifestyle.



In this study, the Broken One is an individual who has lived the hard life, an individual for whom criminal activity was a lifestyle, not just a single lapse of judgment. He spent a significant amount of time in the military, during which he was anything but a model soldier, continuing the trouble making actions which caused him difficulties as a civilian. In the Broken One's case, the military failed to "straighten him out."

The female example of the Broken One, was not appreciably different. She also spent the bulk of her life as a rowdy trouble maker, and, absent having done hard time in prison, largely paralleled the lifestyle choices of the male version.

Now, as a committed Christian, ex-trouble maker, recovering alcoholic, and recovering drug addict, Michael does the only work he is both fitted for and employable at, given his record. Contemporary American society does not make it easy to rehabilitate insofar as employment is concerned. Hence, he maintains a minimally successful financial existence as a self-employed mechanic.

## Chapter Seven

### The Easter Egg Hunt and “I’m Workin’ On It”

On Easter Sunday of 2015, as there has been for many years, there was an Easter Egg hunt in Denver’s City Park for local children, those residing primarily in poor, urban neighborhoods. The CMA participates in this event and has done so for over a dozen years. Ironically, considering the CMA’s constant preaching about “spreading the light,”<sup>210</sup> the event, which is now thirty years old, is sponsored by an RC called the “Sons of Darkness,” an African-American group from Denver’s Five Points neighborhood.



Figure 7: Photo by author

Despite their somewhat ominous name, the Sons of Darkness Club is a legitimate RC, with all of the typical characteristics of an RC; the president has an ever present sergeant-at-arms, bikers who wish to join go through an elaborate initiation period, and they have no female members. Additionally, typical of most RCs, members rode a large variety of motorcycles, including baggers, bar hoppers, and “rice rockets.” However, they are not a 1%’er group, and in very open conversations with several of the members, I found no evidence of initiation practices which involved criminal activity, and I observed no prison tattoos that were visible. The Easter Egg Hunt is their principal charitable activity for the year. Otherwise, they are generally engaged in typical biker activities, poker runs, and casual get-togethers.

The venue for the Easter Egg Hunt is Denver City Park, a large, downtown park and recreation area, which offers visitors a small lake, appropriate for children to fish in, and to ride in small, rental boats. The park is adjacent to Denver’s Museum of Science and Technology. This event is a “permitted” activity, and the Sons of Darkness therefore can cordon off a relatively large area for the exclusive use of their group.<sup>211</sup> The Sons of Darkness members arrived shortly after sunrise and began stringing colorful cords around the huge trees. They cordoned off a large, general area, and two smaller areas. The general area was for the use of the event as a whole, with all the clubs and their associated activities. One, somewhat smaller area was marked as being reserved for the Easter Egg Hunt itself, with a third area, the smallest, being designated for egg hunters under the age of eight.

CMA participation in this event actually began in the weeks before. For several weeks CMA members had been collecting clothing, toiletries, candy, and stuffed toys for distribution. On Good Friday prior to the event, members gathered at a motorcycle shop to assemble Easter baskets for the children and supply bags for the homeless. As I arrived at the shop I found two dozen CMA members preparing for the event. One team was assembling and decorating the baskets, while another team was organizing the bags of supplies for the homeless. As this was, at its core, a biker event, members could also get a discounted oil change for their bikes. Several of the members took advantage of this offer.

On Easter Sunday morning the CMA members began arriving at City Park at about 10:00 AM and started to set up two tables with large, tent-like coverings. On these tables were placed the fifty Easter baskets which had been prepared earlier at the motorcycle shop. The baskets were filled with candy, small toys, and stuffed animals and were topped with large, decorative bows. These baskets were intended to be special prizes. Beginning at about the same time, the members of the various biker organizations, myself included, distributed over 5,000 colorfully decorated, donated Easter eggs, which had been hard cooked and dyed by the Sons of Darkness members over the previous week, on the grounds of the park, including in the distribution that special area set aside for children under eight years old. Among those 5,000 brightly decorated, and completely edible, eggs were fifty special, gold plastic eggs. Every child who collected one of these special eggs was entitled to select an Easter basket from among those created by the CMA members.

In addition to the Easter baskets for the children, the CMA had collected a large number of kits for distribution to the homeless, another important part of the event. The kits consisted of items like toothbrushes, toothpaste, and socks; the socks being items which I learned were in high demand among the homeless population.

At 11:00 the CMA members gathered around a clearing in the park which had been equipped with audio equipment for the Easter service, which was lead by the RMCR chaplain. The homeless were invited by an announcement over the loudspeaker system and they appeared in significant numbers. The service was brief, but inspirational, themed “He is Risen.” The RMCR chaplain, although not a religious professional, is an engaging and evocative speaker. The service was quite a bit different from the highly structured Catholic Easter Sunday masses to which I am accustomed.<sup>212</sup>

The reason for the brevity is that the CMA, noting that they are often visitors at events of this nature, and not the sponsors, observe strict time limits on their group religious services. According to the CMA Handbook, which is a lengthy document containing significant amounts of rules and regulations, for “Services at Non-CMA Events [CMA members should] hold services no longer than 30 minutes, including music.”<sup>213</sup> The guidelines in the handbook remind CMA members that they are “guests and servants” of the sponsoring entity and, as such, “the ability to hold services at non-CMA events is a privilege.”<sup>214</sup> This is a residual methodology held over from Herb Shreves’ early plan to “earn the right to speak,” as noted in Chapter Two.



Figure 8: Easter Sunday Service in the Park  
Photo by author

This guideline is a continuing reminder of the tradition begun by the CMA founder, Herb Shreve, when he began his motorcycle ministry. According to the history of the organization, Shreve would travel around the country on his bike, arriving unannounced at secular motorcycle events. He would proceed to volunteer to help organizers in any way he could, assisting with parking, manning the registration table, handing out water, cleaning up the grounds, and so on. Only after having assisted the organizers in some

manner, he would request permission to hold a brief service for the participants. For Shreve, this constituted earning the right to speak.

As the Easter service ended, another group of CMA members began preparations for the distribution of food and supplies to the homeless. This portion of the activity was coordinated by Bob and Betty, an attractive couple in their early forties who were dressed in the stylish form of biker dress which can be found in the better stocked Harley Davidson shops. Both of them were quite clean cut in their appearance and, were it not for the wearing of biker garb, they would present as any typical, suburban, professional couple. In conversation with them, I was struck by the fact that they seemed to me to have a higher level of education than most of the CMA members which I had been riding with. As they were members of another chapter (not RMCR) we had not previously met. As is typical of the CMA membership, they accepted me right away. Tables were set up under awnings and covered with paper plates, coffee cups, and plastic knives and forks. Bob fired up two grills and began cooking sausages and pancakes.



Figure 9: Photo by author



Figure 10: Photo by author

As the food began to be served, homeless from all over the park began to congregate. As I talked with them, it became apparent that, similarly to other food distribution events, the homeless “just seemed to know,” and arrived in time. As I handed out the small bags of supplies, the recipients appeared to be universally pleased, although not all could express that pleasure. Some had difficulty communicating for a variety of reasons which I was in no position to assess. This supply distribution was utilized by CMA members as their best time to engage with the recipients, talking about Jesus and salvation. Many, but clearly not all, were receptive to the sharing of the CMA message, which is always



distinctly “soft sell,” with CMA members taking the position that “I’m here to talk with you about Jesus, if you’d like to.”

At noon, the rope gates were opened and hundreds of children rushed into the cordoned off areas and collected the Easter eggs. The lucky fifty children were obviously thrilled with their Easter baskets, and the CMA members promised themselves to be able to provide a larger number in following years.

An event of this nature also provides an opportunity to observe and interact with, other biker groups which were also in attendance. In this case, the event was also attended by secular MCs, notably the “Valiants.” As I wandered around the area of the event, I came across members of the Valiants, a typical MC; probably not hard core 1%’ers, but deeply entrenched in traditional MC culture. I couldn’t approach the “Prez” without authorization from their Sergeant at Arms, which I obtained. Inasmuch as I had conducted an informal interview with the president of the Sons of Darkness, I hoped to have at least a short conversation with someone in the Valiants. This would not happen. Anderson-Facile claims that there is minimal information available with respect to 1%’ers “because of the exclusiveness of the clubs. Outlaw bikers only trust other outlaw bikers.” Whether or not they are specifically 1%’ers (you really cannot ask a member a question like that) the Valiants certainly fit Anderson-Facile’s description of “not trusting” outsiders.<sup>215</sup>

I was informed in no uncertain terms not to interview any Valiants members, and pictures were out of the question. I could only conclude that, other than some clothing

distribution, which they did engage in, the Valiants were not interested in interacting with outsiders and that they likely maintained the traditional MC code of silence when circumstances dictated that they had to interact with non-members. I was not able to get close enough to observe evidence of prison or gang tattoos.

My tentative conclusion that this organization was extremely traditional with respect to MC culture in its outlook was reinforced when I noticed the patches on the vests of the women who were present. In the CMA, women are full members and their colors reflect that fact. There is no difference in the patches of men and women. The Valiants were different. Instead of reading “Valiants” as did the patches of the men, the women’s patches read “Property of a Valiant.” A traditional MC perspective, indeed.<sup>216</sup>

#### I’m Workin’ On It

The first indication that this composite character existed was when I heard a remark by a CMA member who was not a part of the interview study group. When it was first announced to the general chapter membership that I was doing a study of the CMA, the chapter president told them about my affiliation with the Iliff School of Theology, and that I was “writing a book” about the organization and would be riding with them for some time. After the meeting, I was approached by a bearded, gray ponytailed man of middle years and seemingly a great many rough miles. He said to me “I wrote a book too...when I was in the joint,” leading me to ask him “what were you in for?” “Oh...I was running some girls on East Colfax and moving some dope...but I was already saved,” an intriguing observation. In between occasional stays in county jails (he never

did “hard time” in the penitentiary) this individual lived the life of some of the street people whom I met in the park. Some of those individuals considered themselves to be Christians, and were happy to pray with the CMA members. Some claimed that they intended to straighten their lives out.

The fact that some of the individuals which I met at the park were self-identified Christians intrigued me, much as had the remark by the pony-tailed biker at the chapter meeting. Here was a large group of people who were clearly down on their luck, and yet, were claiming to be considering turning around their lives. Many among them were homeless, many others were living with their children in poverty, many were what would classically be considered “unchurched” in the sense of not belonging to congregations or attending church with any consistency. And yet, they self-identified as Christians. They had lived the born-again experience in some manner, and were in the process of “workin’ on” a better life.

Living life as an evangelical is not only event based (the born again experience) but also an ongoing process. This realization clarified for me some of the stories which I had heard in the interviews and generated the composite character typified by the idea, “I’m working on it.”

My interview with Sarah took place in a large, comfortable custom home located at the interface between Denver suburbs and the Eastern Plains, where she runs a Christian day care center which is popular enough among the local residents to have a long waiting list for admittance. Sarah is quite professional with respect to the center and provides the

children, ranging in age from three to five, with a well structured and educational day. The walls are filled with Christian devotional material and there are plenty of games and toys for their “free play time.”

Sarah grew up in a non-Christian household. According to Sarah, her father, whom she described as a “hard core biker,” “worked at being a bad boy,” and the only religious context at all was provided by her grandmother, with whom she lived for a brief period of time after her parents divorced when she was fourteen years old. Sarah told me that her father had wanted a son and nothing she could do would make him happy. Her home life was so difficult that she “wanted to be adopted,” and became suicidal. This desperate perspective was amplified when she was sexually molested as a young teen. Despite her candor with respect to suicide and her molestation, she was firm in her commitment to not discussing just who had molested her. I refrained from probing more deeply into this sensitive subject.

While Sarah lived with a number of foster families, she started drinking alcohol as a young teenager and began acting out. Several of the foster parents took her to church and one even sent her to Christian youth group activities. At the age of fourteen Sarah attended what she refers to as a Christian “revival,” at which she reports that she “gave her [my] life to the Lord,” becoming in her eyes, at least nominally, a Christian. She tells me that, at that revival, the “seed was planted.” There would be many years before it would really grow to a significant extent.

This initial “cleaning up” of her life led to better grades at school, eventually, she became student body president. But, it would not last. She married a non-Christian at age eighteen and had two sons with him. After seven years of marriage, she and her husband divorced. Having the two boys to support, she got what she refers to as a “good job,” and even returned to school at Metropolitan State University of Denver, where she graduated with a degree in social work and education.

Her turn at living a productive life did not last. She claims that she was a “Christian, but still had work to do.” She turned away from organized religion, becoming, as she put it, “not only unchurched, but actually agnostic,” she began to question even the existence of a God. She had “issues” with “her sexuality,” and made her husband’s life difficult. At thirty-nine, she found herself divorced again, and told me that, “if I had been married to me, I would have divorced me too.” She eventually ended up lying in a field, “praying in the grass.” “That was my rock bottom.” Throughout this, Sarah tells me “the Lord never let me go.” “You asked if I was a Christian all my life,” she said to me. “Have I always lived it, no,” but, “I’m a child of God.”

Sarah finally found herself making another attempt at redemption as her sons entered their young teenage years. She joined a Christian Singles group of thirty-plus individuals, at which she met her present husband. While attending the group’s Sunday School class, she met Rob, a man whose wife had committed suicide, and who had, himself, been unchurched for a number of years in his life. They “dated” for some time, in the old fashioned, non-sexually active, manner. Sarah tells me that she “gave God her sexuality.” Rob, himself a committed, though occasionally troubled, cradle Christian,

was comfortable with this relationship, and they married in 2002. Sarah is proud that they now live in a “proper,” married sexual relationship.

Up to that point in her life, Sarah had never been on a motorcycle. Rob had been riding Harleys for a long time. At a biker rally in Goodland, Kansas, while admiring their motorcycle, they met Glen and Kathy, long time CMA members. The two couples kept running into each other at biker events, leading Sarah and Rob to join the ministry several years ago. For Sarah, membership in the CMA is a matter of participating in “spiritual warfare, run by regular guys.”

Presently, Sarah and Rob attend a suburban, non-denominational, “seeker friendly,” Christian church of some two thousand members. Since her latest return to evangelical Christianity, Sarah teaches at a women’s bible study group and is highly interested in the subjects of salvation and the Rapture. At this point our conversation turned to matters of belief. Sarah considers herself to be a creationist, a young Earth believer. She offers no argument against those who believe otherwise, she chooses to ignore them. When I ask her about the seeming scientific proofs for an old Earth and evolution, she tells me that “I’ve got faith, I don’t need proofs.” However firm is her conviction of biblical inerrancy, she does admit that “it’s been translated a lot.”

Although this approach to creationism appears to be relatively inflexible, she offers subtle commentary on justification through faith. Regarding the faith/good works controversy, she observes that her salvation is through faith in Jesus, but she believes that good works are important. Sarah tells me that faith and works are not mutually exclusive

with respect to having value. She observes that her faith in Jesus is what “generates” her good works, and notes that “good works are a manifestation of your faith.” Her observation mirrors to a remarkable extent the Balmer comment that “Good works, then, are not a condition of salvation; rather, they follow in the life of the believer as a natural response to grace.”<sup>217</sup> A firm believer in the upcoming Rapture, she believes that those who have established a “personal relationship with Jesus”, will be heaven bound. Sarah is now happy and comfortable with her faith and her life, but she knows that, as far as being a Christian is concerned, she’s still workin’ on it.

#### Observations on the “I’m Workin’ On It” CMA Member

Unlike as was the case with the Broken One, the composite individual whom I refer to as “I’m Workin’ On It,” came to my attention due to an offhand remark made to me during a public chapter meeting of the RMCR, which I attended as a guest very early in my study, rather than in a confidential study interview. In fact, the meeting in question was the one in which I was first introduced to the chapter membership, which resulted in interested members coming up to me after the meeting to say hello.

The remark was made to me, as noted in chapter seven, by the member with the long gray ponytail who advised me that “I’m writing a book too, I started it when I was in the joint.” “I was running some girls on East Colfax and moving some dope...but I was already saved.”<sup>218</sup> Initially, I thought this to be an incongruity, the fact that this individual considered himself to be “saved” while continuing with criminal behavior, seemed odd to me. I came to realize, after two years of close association with the CMA

membership, that being saved was a state of being, not a state of sinless perfection. This contrasts notably from my pre-conciliar Catholic upbringing, in which the commission of a mortal sin condemns an individual to eternal hell, absent confession and absolution by a priest. For these evangelicals, there was no need for the intonation of *Ego te absolvo*, for them to remain among the saved. Their faith in Jesus Christ as their personal savior has saved them, irrespective of any backsliding on their part.

This composite individual considers him or herself to be a devoted Christian, saved by their faith in Jesus. However, this individual does not always lead an exemplary Christian life...and he/she is fully aware of that fact. In this person's eyes, this fact in no way contradicts their affirmed Christianity. My rather simple thought when entering into this project was that, once someone was a confirmed Christian, their life would reflect that fact, and for many, such is the case. Things are not that simple.

As Balmer noted in *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, backsliding among committed Christians is not all that uncommon. In that work, Balmer recounts conversations which he had at a camp meeting. "'See that girl there,' my informant said, 'she was brought up strict, but she reversed.'" "That's what happens when you go the way of the world," she had "fallen away from the Lord."<sup>219</sup> This backsliding may take the form of something as simple as a woman wearing makeup, as in the story recounted by Balmer, to a man doing time for drug dealing. My initial, simplistic view failed to account for human nature. I suspect (with absolutely no concrete evidence to base the suspicion upon) that backsliding may be more prevalent than reported. In this study, those who fit into the "I'm workin' on it" category, may be merely the most obvious cases of the phenomenon



among CMA members. Certainly, to all external appearances, the vast majority of the CMA members which I encountered now lead exemplary lives.

## Chapter Eight

### Reflections on a Two Year Ride Identity Issues “Are you a Christian...Are you a biker?”



Figure 11: Photo by author  
The Ladies Run, Fairplay, Colorado

Two years of riding with the membership of the CMA provided me with much new information, some measure of insight into the organization, and the opportunity to reflect on my own perspectives. As I rode, lived, ate and prayed with these evangelical bikers, I found that they were, by most observable measures, dedicated Christians with an intense desire to spread the Christian gospel. In this final chapter I share some of these insights,

reflect on the nature of the CMA membership in light of the work done by other researchers in the field, and come to some conclusions regarding the nature of the CMA in the early twenty-first century and how that nature has changed from the ministry originally conceived by itinerant evangelist Herb Shreve.

It is important to note that this ethnography has become, over the course of those two years, largely a study of one CMA chapter, the Rocky Mountain Christian Riders, in Denver, Colorado. During my interview with the state representative, he took pains to point out to me that the RMCR is the oldest chapter in Colorado, and also the tenth chapter formed, out of thirteen hundred nationwide at the time of the interview.

Although I have had the opportunity to be involved in a variety of events which included other Colorado chapters; the State Rally, Seasons of Refreshing, and the Easter Sunday service and egg hunt, those events cannot be considered to be completely informative with respect to the activities of those other CMA chapters. It may well be that other chapters involve themselves in different activities and different routine behaviors than does the RMCR.

After two years of riding with the CMA, I had hoped to learn something about the place of a niche religious component in the galaxy of contemporary American Christian evangelicalism. I had not hoped for any particularly powerful theoretical breakthroughs, or overarching theoretical constructions. I simply sought a bit of illumination regarding these Christian bikers. As noted in chapter two of this study, in the perspective of some sociologists, description is all that can be realistically achieved. Although an ethnography is, by its very nature, largely descriptive, I do not subscribe to the position that *only* description is possible, and aim to have provided in this study a measure of analysis with

respect to the behaviors that I witnessed and how those behaviors track to those behaviors found among American evangelicals by other researchers.

### CMA Identity

Randall Balmer observes that it is often the case, upon being introduced to an evangelical Christian, that the first words out of the mouth of that individual may well be “are you a Christian?” Balmer claims that, such a question is tantamount to meaning “Who are you...Can I trust you?”<sup>220</sup> “Are you a Christian” is a very open ended question, as it matters not to just what denomination you may belong, if any. During the course of this study it turned out that virtually every member interviewed had a history of denominational movement.

The question is more closely related to “Have you been born again...or...is Jesus your personal savior?” Christian Smith has observed that “evangelicals operate with a very strong set of boundaries that distinguish themselves from non-Christians and from nonevangelical Christians...the implicit distinction between “us” and “them” is omnipresent in evangelical thought and speech...no good evangelical operates without this distinction.”<sup>221</sup> Smith goes on to acknowledge that by “Christian” these questioners actually mean are you an evangelical Christian, or “some approximation thereof.” Generally speaking, for evangelicals, the distinction of being a “real” Christian does not include Roman Catholics, Mormons, or liberal Christians.

I encountered this question many times in my first year of riding with the CMA, less in my second year of the study as more people came to know me. At first, the honest answer to this question escaped me. How was I to phrase the answer in a manner which would reflect reality and also in a manner to which my CMA participants could relate?

The truth was that I was both a Roman Catholic *and* an evangelical Christian. At first, such a description would seem disingenuous to both evangelicals and Catholics.

Eventually, I became able to share my reality with my, by now, CMA friends as well as study participants.

I was born a Roman Catholic and am still a practicing Catholic to this day. However, I, too, had a born again experience. After many years of being unchurched I found myself dealing with malignant melanoma. After successful treatment I was declared to be cured...emphasis on the word “cured.” Oncologists typically shy away from using that particular word. They prefer “presently cancer-free” as their descriptor. After this pronouncement, I decided to return to church and say a simple “thanks.” Attending a random church on a random Sunday, I listened to a sermon recounting the story of Jesus curing the lepers...among whom was a Samaritan, who returned and gave thanks, “were not ten made clean?”<sup>222</sup> I found this to be unnerving, but effective. For twenty years I never told this story to anyone, it was just too personal. But, with the CMA members I felt totally comfortable telling the tale...they would understand...which they did.

Careful study of a work like George Weigel’s *Evangelical Catholicism*, makes it clear that it is quite possible to be both authentically Catholic and authentically evangelical at the same time. Your frame of religious reference simply changes from “the Church teaches...to ...the Bible reveals.”<sup>223</sup> Sharing this personal experience with the CMA participants quickly eliminated any confusion on their part as to my evangelical “credentials.”

A similar boundary-maintenance question arose with respect to the question “are you really a biker”? Bikers, in general, are distrustful of non-bikers. Even certain bikers are

suspect, those who are new to the sport/lifestyle. The new Harley riders, as discussed by Anderson-Facile, are referred to by old-timers, somewhat disdainfully, as “RUBs,” rich, urban bikers. During my vetting by the CMA leadership at the Denver Expo, I was questioned extensively on my experience with motorcycles. Having obtained my first bike in 1965, and being able to clearly articulate the efforts I had made to fully reconstruct a “basket case,” appeared to convince the CMA leadership that I was someone who was “inside the boundary” with respect to boundary construction and maintenance.

#### Biker Ministry or Christian Affinity Group?

As noted in the history of the CMA, *Fisher of Men*, one early interested party asked of Shreve, this isn't just a “Christian ...ride and eat bunch,” is it? Shreve told him...definitely not, it's a ministry.<sup>224</sup> Such may have been Shreve's vision, but the ensuing years have changed that. What was first envisioned as bikers going directly to biker outings and evangelizing directly to other bikers has changed significantly over the years. In this chapter I explore some of those changes and reflect on the current nature of the organization.

During the two years of this study, the first involving orientation, acceptance, and “preparing the field” as the ethnographic expression goes, the second composed of the formal interviews as well as continued participation in CMA events, I attended eighteen monthly meetings of the Rocky Mountain Christian Riders chapter of the CMA, which are held at a suburban buffet/family restaurant on the third or fourth Saturday of each month, depending on the time of the year.

These meetings are highly structured in nature, opening with a group prayer, the Pledge of Allegiance, and continuing on to observe a pre-printed and rigidly maintained agenda, reading as follows;

“Group prayer before the chapter meeting starts (SE corner of meeting area), Call to Order, *President*, Opening Prayer (please stand), *Chaplain*, Pledge of Allegiance, *Members*, Chaplain’s Devotion, *Chaplain*, Treasurer’s Report/ Offering, *Treasurer*, Secretary Report, *Secretary*, vice President’s Report/ Introduce guests and new members, *Vice President*, Welcome Guests, *President*, Road Captain’s Report, *Road Captain*, Run for The Son Report, *RFTS Coords*, Testimonies, *President* (here the members themselves go up to the front of the room and offer testimonies), Acknowledge Birthdays and Anniversaries, *Member*, (includes singing by entire membership in attendance), Extra Mile Awards, *President*, Goofy,<sup>225</sup> *President*, Wrap Up (with the bold notation “Please remember the wait staff,” *President*, Closing Prayer, *Chaplain*.<sup>226</sup>

Not once during the two years of this study did I observe any variance from the pre-printed agenda which is handed out to all attendees prior to the meeting. I regularly took notes in a small, unobtrusive notebook. This note taking, which I always did seated at the back of the room, was not a secret, but was purposely kept so as to be minimally intrusive.

Random observations from my notebook follow; (11/19) everyone eating at the buffet prior to the start of the meeting, chaplain reading from Luke 17:11-19, thirty plus people this month, recorded praise music while eating, (11/21) Chaplain James “I am a believer who rides a motorcycle,” treasurer’s report - \$345 beginning balance, \$427 ending balance, most other events during the month attract eight to fifteen participants, three collections – Run For The Son, CMA, RMCA Chapter, Area Rep says “I wouldn’t be

where I am without CMA,” discussion of “Duck Dynasty,” first mention I’ve heard of current events, one woman says “I know where I came from,” interview her, President spontaneously gives a stuffed eagle toy to a small child in a wheelchair (not part of CMA group), (3/22) Chaplain, “must fight the battle,” quotes from Teddy Roosevelt, “...the man in the arena,” Desert Storm combat story, refers to King David and the leader of his bodyguards, Benaiah, (6/19) asked the President if I could make presentation at next month’s meeting, Chaplain’s homily is on “works,” checked out if it was okay to wear a CMA t-shirt in “solidarity,” OK, as long as no colors on back.

In retrospect, the meetings are much the same structurally as any other affinity group, whether dog club, car club, or Knights of Columbus meeting, all of which I have attended over the years.<sup>227</sup> The key differentiators being the constant “love offering” collections for various causes and the consistent prayer activities. Structurally and process-wise, these meetings are almost identical in meeting style and organization with typical secular affinity group events.<sup>228</sup>

### Following the Money

Although the avowed intent of the CMA initially was to minister to bikers, where they were found, and in a manner that they could relate to, such is no longer really the case. At least not to the exclusive extent that Shreve envisioned. One method of examining the activities, intensions, and goals of an organization is, to use the contemporary political term, to “follow the money.” The money trail often indicates the key interests of an organization, what activities they believe to be important, and what individuals they are most inclined to support financially. The CMA, on the national level, is quite open about



the funds raised and how, and to whom, they are dispersed. By far the largest money raising event of the year for the CMA, The Run for The Son, has proven to be a financial windfall for a number of evangelical projects having little or nothing to do with bikers.<sup>229</sup>

According to figures published on the CMA national website, Run for The Son revenues over the last twenty-eight years have exceeded \$58 million U.S. dollars. In 2015 alone, the project garnered \$4,461,473.30. Of those funds, \$892,294.66 went to each of three individual Christian charities.<sup>230</sup>

An organization called Missionary Ventures International, founded in 1987 when an American evangelical missionary in Guatemala viewed the difficulties that rural evangelical missionaries and pastors encountered in visiting their dispersed congregations, receives twenty percent of the RFTS collections every year. The only connection that this ministry has to bikers is that they provide off road motorcycles and four-wheelers to the missionaries (as well as the occasional camel or horse and buggy). This project, although laudable from a missionary perspective, has absolutely nothing to do with bringing the Christian gospel to bikers.

Another twenty percent of the RFTS collections goes to an organization called Open Doors/Home Missions, which is dedicated to providing bibles to the populations of countries where Christians are routinely harassed, jailed, or executed for their beliefs and practices. At one chapter meeting of the RMCR which I attended, we heard a testimonial travel tale from a young woman, a CMA youth group member, who had just returned from sub-Saharan Africa, where she helped to distribute these bibles. The distribution was a classical dispensing of bibles to a population which was already Christian. There

was nothing of an outreach to those in need of “salvation” about it, and it certainly had nothing to do with ministering to bikers.

A third distribution of twenty percent of the RFTS funds goes to an organization called The Jesus Film Project, which translates the Jesus/Gospel story into multiple worldwide languages and distributes the resulting DVDs.

Accordingly, at least sixty percent of the revenues from the CMA’s largest yearly event goes to evangelical organizations which have very little, or absolutely nothing, to do with bikers. Rather, these organizations which the CMA supports financially, are traditional evangelical Christian outreach programs such as may be found supported by any other evangelical Christian affinity group or congregation.

Major events each year cater to the biker membership of the CMA, but this is often “preaching to the already converted,” not evangelizing secular riders. The annual Seasons of Refreshing reminds me of nothing so much as a 1990’s style Promise Keepers event, differing only in that SOR is family and group oriented, rather than “men as Christian leaders” oriented.<sup>231</sup> The music, the life examples provided, and the exhortations made, are remarkably similar. The State Rally certainly contains “biker rodeo” events, but as with SOR, it amounts to preaching to the converted.

This is not to say that the CMA has abandoned Shreve’s original concept in its entirety. Activities which evangelize bikers directly still do exist, there is simply not a large amount of effort or money poured into them. Four evangelical efforts, ranging in time from the middle of summer, to the middle of winter, merit mention, three of which I have attended with the CMA membership, the fourth of which I have attended more than

once, but with no connection to the CMA or this study, and all of which reach out to bikers directly.

The Brass Monkey Run, The Ladies Run, The Denver Motorcycle Expo, and the summer run to Sturgis, South Dakota each provide the CMA membership the opportunity to interact with secular bikers of all descriptions and perform the evangelization which the founder envisioned for his ministry. The CMA is an associate member of the Colorado Confederation of Clubs, the biker organization, which is comprised to a significant extent by 1%'er and other outlaw clubs, and which monitors the design and wearing of patches in Colorado.<sup>232</sup> Accordingly, Shreve's original concept has not been completely abandoned, but it has been significantly modified.

In the 1990's I attended Sturgis bike week several times and observed the general madness. Herb Shreve, the founder of the CMA first attended Sturgis in 1976 and was appalled by what he encountered there. As noted in the history of the CMA, *Fisher of Men*, Shreve was said to have remarked, "women and children don't belong here," and to a large extent, that remains the case.<sup>233</sup> Powell goes on to note that, for Shreve, the disorderly bikers were ripe for picking. "He didn't see these partying, grizzly bikers and their scantily-clad women as society's outcasts, as did most of the religious people he talked to," they were the ideal raw material for evangelization.<sup>234</sup> This perspective of the negative image of most bikers remains popular today. According to California State University, Bakersfield, sociologist Doreen Anderson-Facile, contemporary bikers are often seen as reflecting "untamed, uncivilized freedom similar to that of the "outlaw" cowboy," and biker women are still often viewed as "disorderly, promiscuous, uneducated, and poor."<sup>235</sup>

As noted in the beginning of this chapter of the study, it may be that other CMA chapters involve themselves in activities which differ from those of the RMCR. It is entirely possible that such is the case with respect to Sturgis. What I can attest to here is the relatively low level of involvement of the RMCR members. Although during the course of the study I saw and heard constant formal and structured references (presentations, appeals for participation, etc.) to some of the other activities which are discussed in this study, any discussion of Sturgis among the RMCR membership has been minimal.

In contrast to the Run For The Son, which merits a report at every meeting, Sturgis and these three other opportunities for evangelization of the unchurched are rarely mentioned, and then, only in passing. Typically, at the meeting just prior to bike week in Sturgis, the president may say something like, “Karla and I will be heading to Sturgis next Tuesday with three other people, if any of you would like to ride with us, let me know.” Unlike the missionary activities supported by the RFTS, nowhere in the CMA’s materials are any claims made with respect to conversions made or souls saved by these “biker direct” activities.

#### The CMA and Contemporary American Evangelicalism Perspectives and Correlations

What has been learned and what can be said with any level of confidence about the Rocky Mountain Christian Riders chapter of the CMA with respect to beliefs, practices, and fulfillment of the founder’s vision? Perhaps more importantly, how does what we have learned about the Christian Motorcyclists Association fit within the larger themes of contemporary American evangelicalism in the early twenty-first century, and how does

the perspective and methodology of this study enhance our understanding? In chapter two of this study I raised three key issues with respect to evangelical attitudes and perspectives; gender relations, homosexuality, and sexual intercourse outside of marriage.

Additionally, throughout the study I have engaged in dialogue with the study participants with respect to three key aspects of evangelical Christian belief; biblical inerrancy, salvation through faith, and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. In this concluding section, I amplify the results of the study in these six areas of belief and perspective.

#### A Differentially Gendered Association

Two years on the road with the CMA convinced me that the CMA membership exhibited notably different attitudes towards gender relations/hierarchy than do evangelicals in general, and remarkably different attitudes than those held by bikers in particular. Referring back to Jerry Falwell's observation noted in chapter two, "scripture declares that God has called the father to be the spiritual leader of his family...the husband is to be the decision maker."<sup>236</sup> As Sally Gallagher puts it, these relationships are often viewed as "both socially functional, and God given."<sup>237</sup> This perspective also reflects one of the Promise Keepers key archetypes of gender relationships, one which, according to Bartkowski, predates Promise Keepers itself, the Rational Patriarch, an archetype of hegemonic masculinity, which proposes "an ideology of strict essentialism – the notion that men and women are innately, categorically and immutably different from one another."<sup>238</sup>

Despite the hyper masculine biker world which the CMA members inhabit, there is little evidence of such essentialism within the confines of the CMA. Within the world of bikers in general, and outlaw clubs in particular, women are property, as noted in my description of the women wearing vests claiming them to be “Property of a Valiant.” According to criminology professor James Quinn, until recently on the faculty of the University of North Texas “women cannot formally become members of these groups but must gain acceptance through a union with a male biker. A woman’s status in this type of motorcycle club is almost completely contingent upon her affective, economic, and sexual ties to a male club member.”<sup>239</sup> Among the outlaw clubbers, the perspective is clearly misogynistic, not just hierarchical. As I had many years of experience riding among a variety of biker groups, the perspective of the CMA membership immediately struck me as being remarkably egalitarian by biker standards. Over my two years of riding with the CMA, I came to realize that the CMA gender perspective was also somewhat more egalitarian than the typical perspective among Christian evangelicals.

By contrast to the world of outlaw bikers, in Colorado, three of the CMA chapters have female presidents and all chapters have female members. Although for the two years in which I rode with the CMA, the president of the RMCR chapter was male, the arguably more significant leadership role, the Road Captain, was held by a woman. As membership years overlapped with study years, I interacted with three Road Captains in the RMCR, two of which were women, and one of which has served as Vice President twice.

Additionally, it was impossible to overlook the fact that, almost without exception, the female members of the RMCR rode their own motorcycles, which were most often large, powerful machines. It was rare to see any female member riding behind some man.

There was some minor evidence of the recent evangelical perspective on gender characterized by the concept of the “complementary” nature of male and female roles, particularly with respect to the composite member which I refer to as “the CMA IS my life.” For these individuals, a certain degree of complementarity in gender relations seems to exist. However, in the overall perspective of the CMA membership, gender is a less intrusive issue than among other biker organizations.

Three direct personal interactions which took place between myself and female CMA members, evidenced the fact that female members of the CMA feel well empowered to engage with men as (at least) equals. During my two year ride I found myself corrected on three occasions of having inadvertently violated CMA mores. In each case, the correction was quite friendly in nature, but unquestionably firm in approach.

One such incident was the previously mentioned occasion where I wore an unauthorized t-shirt at the state rally, the individual who advised me of the violation was a female member. On a second occasion, a female member approached me about my own vest. Although it is not a CMA membership vest, wearing the CMA colors, I was advised that the American flag patch was in the “wrong” location. “CMA members always wear their flag patch on the top left of the vest, in the place of honor, above all other patches.” I responded by letting her know that it is traditional among pilots that

their wings are on the top left. She smiled and said she understood. By the next time I saw her she came up to me and observed that “I see you moved your flag patch.” Yes, I had. Finally, and most tellingly, I was corrected in my use of lanes while riding in a group by the Road Captain, in this particular case, a correction made firmly and in public.

The CMA women are not, in any observable manner, subservient to men, an untypical situation among both bikers and evangelicals, which are two typically gendered sub-cultures; the evidence for this ranging from vests indicating “Property of a Valiant,” to Sally Gallagher’s 2003 observation that data indicates 90.4 per-cent of evangelicals believing that the “husband should be the head of the household.”<sup>240</sup>

My conclusion with respect to gender relations in the CMA is that the organization is differentially gendered in a manner which is unlike either typical biker culture or typical evangelical culture. Unlike other biker organizations, full CMA membership is available to women, as are the chapter leadership positions. There is no such thing in the CMA as an “associate” female member, or a “ladies auxiliary.” There is certainly no perspective which sees women as the “property” of male members. There is little to no evidence of any Jerry Falwell-like conception that the “husband is to be the decision maker,”<sup>241</sup> or pastor Larry Christianson’s assertion that gender hierarchy is part of the “Divine Order.”<sup>242</sup>

When the Rocky Mountain team of national evangelists, Hiram and Sharon, participate in their version of Balmer’s “tag team” preaching, each one of them provides instruction.<sup>243</sup> They are not bound by the more typical evangelical methodology of male



instruction and female testimony. However, on the national level, in which there are six regional teams of evangelists, all six teams are married couples.<sup>244</sup> This structure is consistent with a typical evangelical pattern of how women's authority is conceived; that of authority being granted through connection with the male principal.

### Perspectives on Sexuality

CMA member's attitudes towards sexuality do closely mirror those of contemporary American evangelicals, while tending to be somewhat more open minded with respect to both sex outside of marriage and homosexuality. This, despite the relatively older age cohorts represented by the CMA membership, is in keeping with Wuthnow's observations regarding younger evangelicals. Although, as previously noted, Wuthnow claims that evangelicals are the main religious group to maintain that sex outside of marriage is improper, "behavior does not always follow convictions."<sup>245</sup> Although six of the study participants had been married to their childhood sweethearts ("Love Conquers All"), eight others had been divorced (one of whom was divorced twice) and had more than one sexual partner throughout their lifetimes, sometimes while married.

Two respondents, one male and one female, reported sexuality as a key issues in their lives, with one having finally "given her sexuality to God," and the other claiming to be a "sex addict." The female participant who finally gave her sexuality to God claimed that her behavior during her first marriage was such that "I would have divorced me too."

Concerning homosexuality, the CMA membership and leadership are more liberal than typical evangelicals. As Christian Smith notes, “homosexuality is understood as absolutely prohibited by Old Testament law, a practice carrying – in evangelicals’ view – disastrous social consequences.”<sup>246</sup> This perspective, taken along with Paul’s admonitions in Corinthians, provide traditional evangelicals with sufficient biblical authority to condemn the practice, without ever addressing the issue of whether or not homosexuality is a “practice,” a “lifestyle,” or simply how one was born. Even though neither the CMA, nor the NAE, statements of belief specifically condemn homosexuality, evangelicals can draw both direct references and indirect inferences from the Bible with respect to that aspect of human sexuality.

Study participants largely believed that homosexuality, while morally wrong, was not something which the CMA needed to concern itself with. As observed in chapter three, leadership merely felt that a homosexual might be “uncomfortable” within the CMA. This is in contrast to the CMA position that heterosexuals would not be admitted to the CMA if the CMA leadership was aware that those heterosexuals were cohabitating. Additionally, in keeping with what Smith considered to be evangelical’s disinclination to have government enforcing particular aspects of morality (other than abortion) I found no negative feelings toward the “homosexual political agenda.” For the CMA membership, homosexuality appears to be largely a non-issue.

However, such may not necessarily be the case. Although I found no overt negativity towards homosexuality among the leadership or the membership of the CMA, that is not to suggest that there does not exist a sub-text which may include more subtle,

but existent, anti-homosexual biases within the group. The CMA's disinclination to condemn, or even discuss homosexuality, may simply be a matter of evangelical discomfort with the subject matter in general, and a resultant lack of commentary.

### Theological Perspectives Among the CMA Membership

According to religious scholar Vincent Miller, contemporary religious seekers as a whole are individuals who “carefully and thoughtfully negotiate [ing] the terms, conditions, and limits of their affiliation with a given religious group,” a perspective common among transdenominational evangelicals.<sup>247</sup> This is certainly true of the CMA membership.

Not a single one of the eighteen individuals interviewed for this study has remained in any one denomination over the course of their life. Each participant recounted stories of moving among denominations and congregations looking for a good “fit” for them. This “fit” was often characterized as being more a matter of style and personality of the pastors and congregations, rather than theological differences. However, in their present circumstances, each of the participants moved only among evangelical congregations.

This was not the case with respect to moving away from the religion of their birth and the family in which they were raised. Six of the eighteen study participants were raised in Catholic families, but had become Protestant evangelicals at a later point in their life. This is a common trend according to Wuthnow, who observes that “the main source of evangelical recruits is now former *Catholics* [ital in original].”<sup>248</sup> In a Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Study from May of 2015, the data show that over the

previous seven years since the last such study, 12.9% of Catholics have left the faith of their birth to join other denominations, mostly evangelical.<sup>249</sup>

Common observations with respect to this trend which were made during the study interviews included remarks such as “I was raised Catholic, but didn’t know God,” and “I didn’t like praying to Mary.” This aspect of CMA religiosity accounts for the mildly disparaging remarks made with respect to Catholicism in general and the Catholic practice of infant baptism as being sprinkling. “As a child I was sprinkled.”

One theological perspective which had almost 100% representation among the study participants was biblical inerrancy and creationist doctrine. For the CMA membership the Bible is a history book and a scientific text, as well as a guide to one’s relationship with God. As noted by Ammerman earlier in this study, the Bible, for many evangelical Christians is “an accurate description of science and history,” and they would rather “question the validity of science than to doubt the unfailing word of God.”<sup>250</sup>

The high regard given to creationist theory is not unique to evangelicals. According to history of science academic Ronald Numbers in his text *The Creationists*, a 2005 Gallup Poll study showed that 53% of Americans believed that “God created human beings in their present form exactly the way the Bible describes it.”<sup>251</sup> Also in 2005, a *Newsweek* poll reported that “80 percent of Americans believed that ‘God created the universe.’”<sup>252</sup>

In several interviews conducted as a part of this study, claims were made by the participants with respect to the physical reality of a great Flood (which explained the disappearance of the dinosaurs) and facts garnered from religious broadcasting which

claimed that giant lizards could grow throughout their lifetimes and that contemporary geologists, writing about the age of geologic deposits were simply in error.

Although a variety of interpretations of the creation of the Earth have been developed by those who believe in the basic tenets of the biblical creation story, the participants in this study uniformly stated their belief in the most uncompromising of the three main perspectives, that of “flood geology” or “creation science.” According to Numbers, two of the main Bible compatible perspectives allow for a creation which differs in several aspects from the literal “six natural human days” version.

The “day-age” perspective maintains that the six “days” of the biblical tale of creation could represent eons of real time. Additionally, the “gap”, or “ruin and restoration” theory holds that millions of years passed between the original creation of matter and what is referred to as the “Edenic Restoration in 4004 bce.”<sup>253</sup> For the great majority of the participants in this study, the creation of the world occurred in 4004 bce, in six “real time” days, as described in the seventeenth century by bishop James Ussher, allowing no flexibility with respect to any aspect of the story.<sup>254</sup>

Only one participant in the study, when queried about Intelligent Design and Creationism, acknowledged that perhaps the biblical narrative was scientifically inaccurate. From his perspective, he simply did not care.

One thing on which all of the participants agreed was that salvation came through accepting Jesus Christ as their personal savior. Faith in Christ is the hallmark of CMA belief, as it is for evangelicals in general. Works are incidental. Participants observed

“works are a validation of faith,” “the Great Commission is works,” “salvation is through Jesus only,” “salvation is by faith,” “works are a manifestation of faith,” “accepting the gift of Jesus’ gift, that’s salvation,” “works are not for salvation, but to bring the word,” “accepting Christ’s gift...you can do terrible things, but he forgives your sins, past, present, and future,” “I gave my life to the Lord,” and “I’ve got faith, I don’t need proofs.”

The members of the RMCR are evangelical Christians who differ, other than in affect, very little from any other contemporary Christians in the United States. They profess a belief in Jesus Christ as their personal savior, they believe in salvation through faith, and they occasionally exhibit some mild, anti-Catholic tendencies. They tend to “shop” for a denominational and congregational “fit” which suits them personally, generally being less concerned with doctrinal matters, than they are with the personal style of the pastor and congregation. Are both pastor and congregation open to Christians who “look different,” who don’t necessarily fit the traditional evangelical model of affect? If the answer is “yes,” the CMA member and family may join the congregation, even if only temporarily. As evidenced by the patch reading “These ARE My Church Clothes” worn by so many of the CMA members on their vests, the membership does not discard their biker affect in order to fit in while attending church services, and some evangelical congregations are flexible enough to make these Christian bikers feel welcome. Much like the Metropolitan Community Church, which ministers to the LGBT community, a certain amount of allowance for diversity can be found within the evangelical movement in early twenty-first century America.

Some CMA members are reformed sinners, others are Christians from birth who, from time to time, fail to live up to their own expectations and those of their family and friends. They clearly identify as Christians first, and bikers second, despite the fact that they evidenced a level of dissatisfaction with many of the evangelical congregations with which they have come into contact. Much like other revitalization movements, the CMA membership have looked within the evangelical movement, found certain aspects of it to be unappealing to them, and re-imagined a new niche for themselves.

Although contradictions exist in the mind of the general public with respect to “Christian” identity and “biker” identity, this combination of identities appears to be well integrated for most of the members. They contribute to what they consider to be good causes, both in terms of time, energy, and funds.

Almost without exception, they know, and love to tell of, the CMA’s founding myth.<sup>255</sup> That is the story of how Herb Shreve bought the motorcycles to become closer to his somewhat troubled son. As Nancy Ammerman notes, “myths are stories that ground our history in something bigger.”<sup>256</sup> For the membership of the CMA, this foundational story serves to show the working of God’s will and virtually all of the members can repeat it. However, very few of them ever mention the fact of Shreve’s repeated failures as a minister and his inability to make a living doing so, prior to his creation of the CMA. Shreve’s entrepreneurial spirit, which led him to the creation of a number of failed ministries, in the end led him to find an unoccupied niche in the evangelical movement and exploit that vacuum.

As was observed in the second chapter of this study, Rodney Stark himself has noted the limitations of his market-based theory of religion with respect to religious entrepreneurs. He notes that under carefully circumscribed circumstances, individuals will tend to make rational choices. The membership of the CMA has worked within their internal constraints to find a place in the evangelical parachurch movement. Their options were limited, by the evangelical congregations they encountered which were not comfortable with their biker affect. Given those limited options, they engaged with their natural preferences and founded, what is in effect, a congregation of their own, not limited by geographical boundaries.

Bikers are an interesting group of individuals, whether they are “outlaw 1%’ers,” tough guy “wannabes,” or Rich Urban Bikers (the latest generation attracted by the mystique of Harley Davidson and its advertising budget).<sup>257</sup> As noted by Anderson-Facile, distinctions between the different types of bikers are not obvious to outsiders; ponytails, shaved heads and tattoos have become ubiquitous in contemporary American society. To the average citizen, a group of CMA members, looking very much like outcasts themselves, seem little different from the 1%’ers. Demographically, they differ from the Harley Davidson population by appearing to be both poorer, and older.<sup>258</sup>

Upon close examination, CMA members in general, and RMCR members in particular are Christians first, and bikers second. They do not discount their biker identity, but they subsume it within their Christian identity. They exhibit profound levels of dedication to their faith, and appear to attempt every day to live that faith. They meet in member’s houses for prayer and bible study and attend each other’s churches periodically. They



practice the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy, and consider that to be simply doing God's work on Earth.

#### A Final Observation with Respect to Future Study

As previously noted, the CMA membership reflects a great similarity with certain of the conventions of contemporary evangelicalism. The CMA membership also tends to differ in certain aspects from those conventions. I believe that those similarities and dissimilarities can be characterized as being similarities regarding matters of pure belief, and dissimilarities with respect to social attitudes which are informed by belief, but subject to cultural influences.

In this final analysis I deal with six issues which have been discussed in this study; biblical inerrancy, salvation by faith alone, a personal relationship with Jesus, attitudes towards gender roles, attitudes towards sex outside of marriage, and attitudes with respect to homosexuality. The first three of these items I classify as matters of belief, the last three as matter of societal attitude which is informed by faith.

With respect to the first three of these issues, the membership of the CMA exhibits classical evangelical belief. With respect to the last three of these issues, the membership of the CMA exhibits a greater degree of flexibility than is typically found among contemporary evangelicals (with the possible exception of Wuthnow's recent work on twenty and thirty-somethings). The study interviews showed that the CMA membership is firmly convinced of biblical inerrancy, the need for a personal relationship with Jesus,

and that salvation comes only through faith in Jesus. However, as a whole, they are simply not particularly concerned with the three other religio/social issues.

It is interesting to note that, other than biblical inerrancy, neither the NAE Statement of Beliefs nor the CMA Doctrinal Statement make specific mention of these issues, other than what may be inferred from them.

If this study were to generate an interest in any further work with respect to the people and issues addressed herein, I suggest that a “deep dive” look into the apparent ability of certain evangelicals to hold fast to certain core evangelical belief structures, and yet not allow those belief structures to be wholly determinative of their social outlook. For the membership of the CMA chapter which I studied, it appears easy to emphatically endorse the biblical narrative of Genesis as well as the salvation themes of Romans, and yet be relatively unconcerned with the various injunctions against homosexuality to be found in Corinthians and Leviticus.

As noted in previous sections of this study, the Christian evangelical movement in America is thriving, much as described by Christian Smith. That being the case, the movement is large enough and expansive enough to accommodate the inception and growth of additional niche segments as they are discovered by enterprising actors. There can be, and are, segments of the movement sufficiently diverse as to cater to the needs of the LGBT community and the hyper-masculine world of bikers.

The Christian evangelical movement is healthy enough to export its brand of Protestantism beyond the borders of the United States, into regions traditionally

controlled by other faith traditions, or no faith tradition at all. The CMA actively engages in these efforts through the ministries described in this study. The evangelical movement is truly fluid and transdenominational, and that flexibility can be found in the perspectives and the actions of the CMA membership.

Nancy Ammerman tells us that stories have power, that “human beings give order to their world through stories.”<sup>259</sup> During the course of this study, members of the CMA have told their stories, how they came to their faith, and how they came to the CMA. Those stories have provided insight into both the CMA organization and the contemporary Christian evangelical movement.

## Appendix A – Glossary

**Bagger** – A large, heavyweight motorcycle with attached side bags intended to carry various objects. The bags can be either hard or soft sided, but are in either case, generally large enough to hold a few day's worth of clothing and travel supplies.

**Bar Hopper** – A stripped down, often uncomfortable, motorcycle, suitable only for short trips from one bar to another.

**Cage** – Biker expression for an automobile.

**Cager** – One who rides in a cage.

**Canyon Carver** – Lightweight, powerful motorcycle, designed for high speed running on twisting, mountain roads, often of Japanese or European manufacture.

**Chopper** – Originally, a “chopped hog,” a style of custom motorcycle developed in the nineteen sixties and seventies by riders who disdained the cumbersome fairings, windscreens and side bags which were then prevalent on factory produced Harley Davidson motorcycles. Bikers stripped off those components, as well as the large gas tanks, extended the front forks far in front of the chassis and installed stripped down seating, tiny “peanut” gas tanks, and “sissy bars.” The archetypal image of a chopper is the “Captain America” bike ridden by Peter Fonda in the film “Easy Rider.”

**Clone** – A motorcycle with a V-Twin engine, designed to resemble a Harley Davidson, but manufactured by another company. For years, clones were exclusively Japanese, as the Japanese builders attempted to compete in the heavy-duty end of the American motorcycle market. In recent years, American start-up manufacturers have begun to build Harley Davidson clones.

Colors – Also known as “cuts,” colors are the identifying club patches worn on the back of member’s jackets and vests. Colors are very important to bikers and the colors belong to the organization, not the individual member. They can be “pulled” for infractions of club rules. It is a signal honor to be allowed to be buried in the colors of one’s club. Among outlaw bikers in particular, the simple touching of a member’s colors by a non-member can be an invitation to a beating. One CMA member in this study had his colors pulled for six months for drinking a beer in public while wearing his colors. Colors can be of the one patch, two patch, or three patch variety. The three patch variety is most often favored by outlaw, 1%’er, clubs. The top rocker is the name of the club, the central patch is the club’s logo, and the lower rocker is the indicator of the geographical territory claimed as “theirs” by the club.

Cuts – Another term for colors. The term “cuts” refers to the fact that many bikers cut off the sleeves of their jackets to create vests.

Dresser – A large, heavyweight motorcycle, usually mounted with a fairing, windshield, and side bags. Dressers also often have mounted on them a large, trunk-like device behind the seat, capable of holding a motorcycle helmet.

Hang Around – A rider who associates with a motorcycle club, but is not, and probably will never be, a prospect or a member. Hang arounds often run errands for club members, such as beer runs. In sociological terminology, a hang around would be referred to as a “free rider.”

Harley Davidson – The quintessential “biker’s” motorcycle. Founded in 1906, the Harley remains the motorcycle of choice for “hard core” bikers, as well as being the bike of choice for many new, middle class, riders. A common expression is “Don’t call him a biker unless you see him on a Harley.”

Hells Angels (no apostrophe) – Outlaw motorcycle club, founded in California, now with chapters worldwide. The Hells Angels are considered to be the prototype of the outlaw motorcycle club. They refer to themselves as a “club,” not a “gang.”

Hog – A Harley Davidson motorcycle. Expression is derived from the fact that in the early days of American motorcycle racing, the Harley Davidson factory racing team kept small pigs as mascots and the drivers were therefore referred to as the “hog boys.”

HOG – Harley Owners Group. A riding club sponsored by the local HD dealership. HOG chapters conduct riding activities similar to other motorcycle clubs and are convenient places of fellowship for riders without other formal riding associations.

Mama – Female “hang around” with a motorcycle club. Often associated with 1%’ers. Among some outlaw MCs, a mama is sometimes considered to be sexually available to club members. A mama may never become a member herself.

MC – Motorcycle club. Although not all MCs are outlaw, 1%er, clubs, MCs generally follow the rules of outlaw clubs with respect to such things as not addressing the “prez” directly, not touching someone’s patch, etc. MC members ride Harleys almost exclusively.

Nomads – A designation found on the lower rocker of some 1%’er cuts. 1%’er clubs claim and assiduously protect the territory announced by their lower rockers; for instance, on Hells Angels cuts, the identifier “San Bernardino” or “Oakland.” If another club has members riding in an area controlled by a strong 1%’er club, the lower rockers of the “visiting” bikers will read “Nomad,” thereby not laying claim to the territory. Violence often erupts if members of a newly arrived club begin to sport the name of the territory on their cuts, instead of the neutral expression “Nomad.”

“Ol’ Lady” – A biker’s significant other. An Ol’ Lady can be a wife or a girlfriend. Not to be confused with a “Mama,” Ol’ ladies generally have an exclusive relationship with a club member, “mamas” do not. Like Mamas, Ol’ Ladies never become members themselves. For an in-depth discussion of Mamas and Ol’ Ladies in biker society, see James Quinn (2007).

Peanut gas tank – A very small gas tank, used on “choppers” to replace the large, cumbersome gas tanks found on factory standard “baggers.” The peanut tank is exemplified by the small gas tank on the Harley Davidson “Sportster” model motorcycle.

Prospect – A prospect is an individual who is in the process of becoming a member of an MC. An individual may remain a prospect for years, while earning the right to membership. Prospects generally are authorized to wear a club rocker on their vest or jacket, but not the actual club patch.

RC – A motorcycle riding club. RCs generally focus on actual riding activities, the members ride a variety of motorcycle brands, and the organization does not maintain the rigorous formalities of an MC.

Rice Burner/Rice Rocket – Derogatory expression for a Japanese motorcycle.

Sissy Bar – A chrome bar installed at the rear of a motorcycle seat, generally extending from several inches to several feet on classic “choppers.” A sissy bar is meant to allow a “sissy” second rider on the bike to hang on to something other than the biker himself. Generally held onto by female back seat riders as male bikers never ride on the back of someone else’s bike except in dire emergencies.

V-Twin – Motorcycle engine designed in a “V” configuration, with two cylinders, mounted at a roughly forty five degree angle to each other and longitudinally to the chassis of the motorcycle. The classic Harley Davidson engine configuration.

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## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Brock Yates. “Birth of the Terror” Arthur Veno, ed. *The Mammoth Book of Bikers*. London: Constable and Robinson, 2007. Pgs. 57, 58.

<sup>2</sup> Kathleen E. Jenkins. *Awesome Families: The Promise of Healing Relationships in the International Churches of Christ*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Jenkins (2005). Kindle Location 78.

<sup>4</sup> Jenkins. (2005). Kindle Location 109.

<sup>5</sup> George M. Marsden. *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelism*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdsman Press, 1991). Pg. 42.

<sup>6</sup> Jenkins. (2005). Kindle Location 100.

<sup>7</sup> I would come to learn over the course of this study that the CMA, unlike typical biker clubs, does not have “prospects.” See glossary.

<sup>8</sup> The Soldiers for Jesus is a Christian biker ministry that considers itself to be a club as well as an evangelizing ministry and has adopted many of the strictures of an MC.

<sup>9</sup> This, and other colloquial biker terms such as “hog,” “dresser,” and “run” are explained in Appendix A.

<sup>10</sup> See glossary.

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<sup>11</sup> Steve Bruce. *Secularization: In Defense of an Unfashionable Theory*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Peter Berger. *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*. Nancy T. Ammerman, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Pg. vi.

<sup>13</sup> Christian Motorcyclists Association (CMA), [cmausa.org](http://cmausa.org). Downloaded Mar. 10, 2013.

<sup>14</sup>[cmausa.org](http://cmausa.org). Downloaded Mar. 10, 2013.

<sup>15</sup>[nae.net](http://nae.net). Downloaded Jan. 2, 2016.

<sup>16</sup>[cmausa.org](http://cmausa.org). Downloaded Mar. 10, 2013.

<sup>17</sup>[cmausa.org](http://cmausa.org). Downloaded Mar. 10, 2013. See flyer attached.

<sup>18</sup> Rodney Stark and Roger Finke. *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Pg. 203.

<sup>19</sup> The CMA does not make use of these titles. However, various CMA members provide these functionalities.

<sup>20</sup> Jerome P. Baggett. *Sense of the Faithful: How American Catholics Live their Faith*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Table 3.1, Pg. 68.

<sup>21</sup> Stark and Finke, 2000. Pg. 276.

<sup>22</sup> Lorne L. Dawson. "Who Joins New Religious Movements and Why: Twenty Years of Research and What Have We Learned?" in Lorne L. Dawson, ed. *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003). Pg. 117.

<sup>23</sup> Christian Smith. *American Evangelism: Embattled and Thriving*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Pg. 132.

<sup>24</sup> Smith (1998). Pg. 136.

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<sup>25</sup> Penny Edgell Becker. *Congregations in Conflict: Cultural Models of Local Religious Life*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Pg. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Sally K. Gallagher. "The Marginalization of Evangelical Feminism." *Sociology of Religion* Vol. 65, Issue 3 (2004). Pgs. 215-237.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Berger. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. (New York: Anchor Books). 1967.

<sup>28</sup> This is not to say that such description is, in itself, without criticism. Ammerman tends to reject the idea of a "new paradigm" per se, but her works could be characterized as such.

<sup>29</sup> Berger, 1982. See bibliography.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Berger. Quoted in Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). 58.

<sup>31</sup> Peter L. Berger. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1967).

<sup>32</sup> Berger, 1967. 107.

<sup>33</sup> Tariq Modood. "Is There a Crisis of Secularism in Western Europe?" *Sociology of Religion*. Vo. 73. No. 2. (Summer, 2012). 130.

<sup>34</sup> Not to be confused with the U.S. Constitution, the phrase comes from Thomas Jefferson's letter to the Danbury Baptist Convention in which he assured them that they would remain free to practice their religion. This was not to say that America would be religion-free.

<sup>35</sup> Modood, 2012.

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<sup>36</sup> Steve Bruce. Quoting Bryan Wilson. *Secularization: In Defense of an Unfashionable Theory*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). 2. In this recent work, Bruce is essentially re-iterating the points he made in his earlier work *God is Dead: Secularization in the West*. (2002).

<sup>37</sup> Bruce, 2011.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Berger. (1967). 107.

<sup>40</sup> Margaret Woodhull. Masters class lecture series on Art History, Interdisciplinary Studies Program, University of Colorado, Denver. 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Berger, 1967.

<sup>42</sup> Martin, 1999.

<sup>43</sup> Berger, 1982.

<sup>44</sup> Berger, 1999.

<sup>45</sup> Stark and Iannacone, 1995.

<sup>46</sup> Davie, 1999.

<sup>47</sup> Modood, 2012.

<sup>48</sup> Jurgen Habermas. Quoted in Modood. (2012).

<sup>49</sup> Modood, 2012.

<sup>50</sup> I am utilizing this expression in order to recall the past emphasis on “muscular Christianity” in America, and to avoid the potentially negative and judgmental aspects of phrases like “Islamist,” “political Islam,” and so on. Perhaps this expression will catch on.



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- <sup>51</sup> Modood, 2012.
- <sup>52</sup> Smith, 1998.
- <sup>53</sup> Christian Smith. *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). 76.
- <sup>54</sup> Douglas, 1983.
- <sup>55</sup> William Sims Bainbridge and Rodney Stark. "Cult Formation: Three Compatible Models." In *Cults and New Religious Movements*. Lorne L. Dawson, ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2009). 59.
- <sup>56</sup> Rodney Stark and Roger Finke. *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). 193.
- <sup>57</sup> Iannacone, 1998.
- <sup>58</sup> Stark and Finke, 2000.
- <sup>59</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. 1835.
- <sup>60</sup> Karl Marx. "On the Jewish Question." *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbucher*. 1843. In *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Robert c. Tucker, ed. (New York/London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978). 31.
- <sup>61</sup> Stark and Finke, 2000.
- <sup>62</sup> Iannacone, 1995.
- <sup>63</sup> Chaves, 1995.
- <sup>64</sup> Mark Chaves and Philip S. Gorski. "Religious Pluralism and Religious Participation." *Annual Review of Sociology*. Vol. 27. (2001). 262.

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<sup>65</sup> Chaves's issue with rational choice theory is not that it is fundamentally flawed. His concern lies with what he considers to be the "imputed theoretical unification" of rational choice metaclaims.

<sup>66</sup> Chaves, 1995.

<sup>67</sup> Smith, 1998. 118.

<sup>68</sup> Bruce, 2011.

<sup>69</sup> Ann Swidler. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies" *American Sociological Review* Vol. 51 No.2 (April, 1986).

<sup>70</sup> Stark and Finke, 2000. 38.

<sup>71</sup> Nancy Ammerman. *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press). 2007.

<sup>72</sup> <sup>72</sup> Jerome Bagget. *Sense of the Faithful: How American Catholics live their Faith*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>73</sup> Steve Bruce. *Secularization: In Defense of an Unpopular Theory*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>74</sup> Stark and Finke. 2000.

<sup>75</sup> Nancy Ammerman. 2007.

<sup>76</sup> Jerome Bagget. 2009.

<sup>77</sup> Ammerman. 2007.

<sup>78</sup> "Colors" being the identifying CMA patch worn on the back of member's jackets and vests.

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<sup>79</sup> Nancy Tatom Ammerman. *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). xiii.

<sup>80</sup> Bagget. 2009.

<sup>81</sup> Ammerman, 2014.

<sup>82</sup> Nancy Ammerman. *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*. Nancy Ammerman, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). 8.

<sup>83</sup> Jerome P. Bagget. 2009. 239.

<sup>84</sup> Grace Davie. 1994.

<sup>85</sup> Robert Orsi. *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). 182.

<sup>86</sup> As the work of this study is being written the media are being flooded with information and speculation regarding American political party primary elections. In virtually all commentaries on the Republican primaries, reference is made to the “evangelical vote.” No other voting block, and certainly no other group of religious believers, is as consistently catered to by certain politicians.

<sup>87</sup> [www.pewresearch.org](http://www.pewresearch.org). Accessed 1-30-16.

<sup>88</sup> *The Fundamentals* were a twelve part paperback series of publications, written between 1910 and 1915 which were widely distributed and put forth the basic tenets of conservative Christianity. For many years, there has been open conflict between conservative Christians and those who are followers of what has traditionally been considered to be “mainline” or “liberal” Protestant denominations. I argue in this study that this distinction has eroded to some extent in recent years.

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<sup>89</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the history of fundamentalism and evangelicalism in America, see George Marsden's *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991).

<sup>90</sup> In a tribute to the power of film as a medium, large numbers of younger Americans perceive of the events surrounding the assassination of President Kennedy as being per the tendentious account put forth by Oliver Stone in his film JFK.

<sup>91</sup> George Marsden. 1991. Pg. 73.

<sup>92</sup> George Marsden. 1991. Pg. 73.

<sup>93</sup> Christian Smith. *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Pg. 86.

<sup>94</sup> Marsden. 1991. Pg. 65.

<sup>95</sup> Smith. Pg. 87.

<sup>96</sup> Marsden. Pg. 65.

<sup>97</sup> National Association of Evangelicals. [www.nae.net](http://www.nae.net). Accessed 2-2-16.

<sup>98</sup> Helen Hardacre. *Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education*. Marty and Appleby, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) Pg. 129.

<sup>99</sup> Jerry Falwell. *Listen America*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1981). Quoted in Marty and Appleby, pgs. 110/111.

<sup>100</sup> 1 Peter, 3:1-5. NRSV.

<sup>101</sup> Bartkowski. 2004. Pg. 46.

<sup>102</sup> Bartkowski. 2004. Pg. 49.

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<sup>103</sup> R. Marie Griffith. *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Pg. 14.

<sup>104</sup> Hardacre. Pg. 132.

<sup>105</sup> 1 Corinthians. 6:9.

<sup>106</sup> Balmer. Pg. 365.

<sup>107</sup> Robert Wuthnow. *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). Pg. 175.

<sup>108</sup> Wuthnow. Pg. 177.

<sup>109</sup> Wuthnow. Pgs. 138,139.

<sup>110</sup> Wuthnow. Pg. 139.

<sup>111</sup> Marsden. Pg. 81.

<sup>112</sup> Balmer. Pg. 337.

<sup>113</sup> Robert Wuthnow. *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). Pg. 81.

<sup>114</sup> Both the leadership and the membership of the CMA were fully informed of who I was and what I was doing. They knew that I was a doctoral student in the DU/Illiff PhD program, and that this study was for my dissertation. Their characterization of the project as "writing a book" was simply a shorthand description in common usage, among the CMA, when they described my work to others who were not familiar with it.

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<sup>115</sup> Recording the interviews was considered at the outset of the project, and approval was given by the IRB, should a decision have been made to make recordings. However, the final approach of detailed field notes was taken in order to make the participants more comfortable and to set a conversational tone for the interviews.

<sup>116</sup> Randall Balmer. *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey Into the Evangelical Subculture in America*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989/2014).

<sup>117</sup> Randall Balmer. *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture of America*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1989/2014. Pg. 3.

<sup>118</sup> Tanya Erzon. *Straight to Jesus*: 2006. Pg. 7.

<sup>119</sup> James 2:20 KJV.

<sup>120</sup> For a comprehensive overview of Intelligent Design Theory, from the perspective of its adherents, see *Intelligent Design 101*. H. Wayne House, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publication, 2008.)

<sup>121</sup> It is probable that certain depression era evangelicals did not consider abortion in the same manner as contemporary evangelicals, other conservative Christians, and Roman Catholics do today.

<sup>122</sup> Gene Harlan Powell. *Fisher of Men: The Motorcycle Ministry of Herb Shreve*. (Bloomington, IN: Ketch Publishing/Unlimited Publishing, 2012). Pg. 8. This story, like many “family legends,” may be apocryphal.

<sup>123</sup> Powell. *Fisher of Men: The Motorcycle Ministry of Herb Shreve*. (2012). Pg. 36.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 36.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 69.

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<sup>126</sup> In the two years of the study, my wife attended only one of the yearly Christmas parties, and no other CMA events. Her attendance at that party was the result of a very public invitation for her to do so, which was tendered during officer's reports at the November chapter meeting. We concluded that it would be somewhat insulting for her not to attend after the enthusiastic reception which the invitation received from the chapter membership. They had wanted to meet her for a long time.

<sup>127</sup> United states Census, 2010.

<sup>128</sup> The CMA membership considers yoga to be a non-Christian, and even mildly Satanic activity, along with such things as Tarot and Ouija Boards. Hence, "Praise Moves," their version of Christian yoga.

<sup>129</sup> John Bartkowski. *The Promise Keepers: Servants, Soldiers, and Godly Men*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004). Pg. 21.

<sup>130</sup> Randall Balmer. *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture of America*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>131</sup> Personal communication, Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Mahan, Iliff School of Theology.

<sup>132</sup> Balmer. (1989,2014). Pg. 239.

<sup>133</sup> Goodie Room, Goodie Store and Goodie Rep are CMA colloquialisms.

<sup>134</sup> Hiram and Sharon are the actual names of these two individuals. They have their names listed in the published materials of the CMA and were not direct subjects of this study.

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<sup>135</sup> There is a small fee to join and for the training materials. The CMA encourages prospective members to locate a local chapter and check to see if the training materials are available for loan.

<sup>136</sup> Jeremiah. 1:5. NRSV.

<sup>137</sup> The CMA website, [www.cmausa.org](http://www.cmausa.org), contains, in its Spiritual Resources section, a short PDF on the nature of Satan.

<sup>138</sup> Not unusual in seeker friendly churches. Balmer. 1989/2014,

<sup>139</sup> It was understood by all involved, that as a participant observer researcher, I would not become a member during the course of the study.

<sup>140</sup> Erzon. 2006.

<sup>141</sup> Children are always invited to CMA events and separate activities are provided for them. In practice, not many children attend, and those that do attend are generally adolescents and teens, which are members of the youth group. Newsletters are generally filled with entreaties for individuals to volunteer for child-caring duties during major CMA events. Balmer (1989/2014) reports that, at Saddleback Church, children are specifically excluded from most services as being too disruptive. This appears to me to be the same approach taken at CMA events. There are also remarkably few children evident at CMA monthly meetings.

<sup>142</sup> Biker rodeo events are contests such as seeing who can ride the slowest without putting down a foot, or riding under a beam from which is suspended an object of some sort, which must be caught and held by the rider's wife in her teeth as they pass under the object.



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<sup>143</sup> The first time I ate with CMA members in public, the president's wife graciously offered me the wine menu when it was brought to the table. I graciously declined.

<sup>144</sup> Copyright Christian Motorcyclists Association

<sup>145</sup> This is with reference to member/participants and hierarchical leadership. The CMA has a small administrative/clerical staff at national headquarters who are paid employees.

<sup>146</sup> After his speech, I was only able to meet John Ogden for a brief handshake and introduction along a reception line.

<sup>147</sup> John 10:11. NRSV.

<sup>148</sup> A reference to the differing badge colors associated with the various levels of CMA hierarchy. The general membership wears small yellow plastic badges with their name on them. National leadership wears white badges with their name and their leadership position. Different positions are indicated by the color of the ink on the white badge.

<sup>149</sup> Publicly identified in CMA literature.

<sup>150</sup> The RMCR chapter has only one African-American member which I have encountered.

<sup>151</sup> Activities described in detail in Chapters 4 through 8.

<sup>152</sup> The CMA prohibition against alcohol is only with respect to public consumption, either among the general public, or among the CMA "public," while wearing the CMA colors. Not all CMA members are abstemious and it is not a requirement that they be so. Some of the members which I interviewed did drink alcohol in private, and one couple had a lovely wet bar in their basement.

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<sup>153</sup> In the CMA, as in all MCs and RCs, the colors belong to the organization. They can be pulled at will of the organization. Although they “belong” to the organization, in both MCs, RCs, and ministries, the colors are often returned to the member upon that member’s death, for inclusion in his burial.

<sup>154</sup> This is their own nomenclature, defended as being copyrighted, by the organization. The organization considers the use of the term “dykes” to be empowering, not pejorative.

<sup>155</sup> A Brotherhood Active Towards Education. ABATE is a biker political action and educational organization which engages in instructional riding clinics and lobbies local government for biker rights.

<sup>156</sup> Although the CMA members participate in this run, they do not partake of the poker hand competition as that is seen as gambling.

<sup>157</sup> Personal observation at two Runs for the Son.

<sup>158</sup> Although I have no reason to doubt Dave’s recounting this story to me in the first person, I have heard it two other times by other CMA members, none of whom mentioned names. It may be that they were all in the prayer circle.

<sup>159</sup> Christian Smith. (1998). Pg. 142.

<sup>160</sup> Despite Dave’s claim about the member attempt at “starting his own religion,” the member was more accurately attempting to start a congregation.

<sup>161</sup> I later went on to interview that member. His unprompted version of the story was remarkably similar. He considers himself to be something of a rebel, and a bit of a troublemaker, even by biker standards.

<sup>162</sup> [www.hopefortheheart.org](http://www.hopefortheheart.org).

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<sup>163</sup> I made a conscious decision not to up-channel this question, so as to not appear to be confrontational and lose my close support among the membership.

<sup>164</sup> The RFTS is the only national fundraising event. However, the local chapters are encouraged to hold fund raising events of their own during the course of the year, such as auctions, yard sales, bake sales, and car washes. The CMA Handbook makes it clear that, should a chapter offer a bake sale, it should not include rum-cakes or bourbon-balls. As noted elsewhere in this study, chapters collect “love offerings” for a variety of purposes at virtually all chapter meetings.

<sup>165</sup> *CMA Handbook*. Jan. 1, 2014.

<sup>166</sup> [www.cmausa.net](http://www.cmausa.net). Accessed 7/21/15.

<sup>167</sup> [www.cmausa.net](http://www.cmausa.net). Accessed 7/21/15.

<sup>168</sup> “A Brotherhood Active Towards Education” (ABATE) is an educational and political action organization of bikers.

<sup>169</sup> As the final draft of this study is being written I am employed by the Douglas County Sheriff’s Office and am familiar with the local scene, much information about which I learn in daily conversation and experience.

<sup>170</sup> Balmer. (1989, 2014).

<sup>171</sup> CMA members may not drink alcohol or gamble in public. They are allowed to smoke. CMA members make the decision on their own as to what they will do in private. CMA leadership must make a pledge not to smoke, drink, or gamble at any time.

<sup>172</sup> Balmer. (1989,2014). Pg. 337.

<sup>173</sup> This was her specific phrase.

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<sup>174</sup> Smith. (1998). Pg. 117.

<sup>175</sup> Smith. (1998). Pg. 87.

<sup>176</sup> Nancy Ammerman. *Fundamentalisms Observed*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Pg. 5. This collection of writings concerning religious fundamentalism addresses fundamentalism in the broadest possible terms. In Ammerman's essay, she generally refers to fundamentalism and evangelicalism as subsets of conservative Christianity, with evangelicalism being noted as an offspring of fundamentalism. Many of her observations relate to evangelicalism as well as fundamentalism. This is true for other citations of this material as well.

<sup>177</sup> Several interview participants recounted to me stories of how dinosaurs were all killed in the Flood, or, alternatively, that many lizards continue to grow for their entire lives and, therefore, dinosaurs were merely species of particularly long lived lizards.

<sup>178</sup> Since the visit chronicled in this chapter, the center has relocated to larger, newer facilities in a somewhat larger plains town.

<sup>179</sup> Eastern Plains Women's Resource Center. [www.epwrc.org](http://www.epwrc.org). Downloaded 8-12-15.

<sup>180</sup> This ethnography does not delve into individual's motivations to any great extent. It is concerned with their actions. However, in the last chapter of this study there is a brief, speculative, discussion of suspected motivations for certain of the actions of CMA members.

<sup>181</sup> These three men are all participants in this study and participated in the interviews. They each independently confirmed this story as recounted to me by Carolyn.

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<sup>182</sup> I note her use of the term “the Lord” purposefully. All other project participants used the name “Jesus” in this sort of reference. Carolyn alone used the term “the Lord.”

<sup>183</sup> Quoted by Harvard religious scholar Helen Hardacre in *Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). Pg. 131,132.

<sup>184</sup> *CMA Handbook*. Jan.1, 2014. II:6.

<sup>185</sup> Randall Balmer. *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*. 2004.

<sup>186</sup> Robert Orsi. *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars who Study Them*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>187</sup> Copyright CMA.

<sup>188</sup> Capitalization as such on original patch.

<sup>189</sup> *Inner Armor Equipped*. Christian Motorcyclists Association (Hatfield, AR: CMA). 2014.

<sup>190</sup> Balmer. 1989/2014. Pg. 336.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid. Pg. 3.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid. Pg. 3.

<sup>193</sup> See Balmer, 1989.

<sup>194</sup> This picture was reminiscent of early twentieth century advertising materials for the Salvation Army.

<sup>195</sup> Over the two years of this study I have received from the CMA a number of pins commemorating CMS events, a tradition which is followed at almost all biker rallies, all of which are now affixed to my vest.

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<sup>196</sup> This somewhat unlikely and informal phrase is the actual CMA nomenclature. The “Goodie Representative” is a CMA officer, “appointed to office by the National Evangelist after approval from the Vice President and of Evangelistic Outreach and the Board of Directors” *CMA Handbook*. Jan. 1, 2014. II:4.

<sup>197</sup> Also, see the film “Avatar” for another example of this perspective.

<sup>198</sup> In the film “Noah,” the character Noah, played by Russell Crowe, kills Tubal-cain in a battle that I characterize as “Noah meets Gladiator.”

<sup>199</sup> All individuals serving in the U.S. Air Force are referred to as “airmen” irrespective of gender.

<sup>200</sup> American Psychiatric Association 167<sup>th</sup> Convention, New York City, May 3-7, 2014. Syllabus.

<sup>201</sup> Hope for the Heart. Biblical Counseling Library. *Sexual Addiction*. 2007-2009.

<sup>202</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the “curing” homosexuality movement, specifically her research at the New Hope Ministry, see Tanya Erzen. *Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian Conversions in the Ex-Gay Movement*. (Berkeley: University of California Press). 2006.

<sup>203</sup> [www.cmausa.org](http://www.cmausa.org). Retrieved 7/22/15.

<sup>204</sup> Anderson-Facile. 2007. Pg. 3.

<sup>205</sup> The California Men’s Colony has separate minimum and medium security sections.

<sup>206</sup> The “client” terminology was learned at the rescue mission.

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<sup>207</sup> Subsequent to the interview, I looked up the phrase “basic instructions before leaving Earth” and found that the phrase is now the title of a 2007 evangelical look at the Bible by Stacey Price Brown.

<sup>208</sup> Correctional facility, part of the California state prison system.

<sup>209</sup> See *The Violent Gang* and *The Tunnel Back: Synanon*, among others.

<sup>210</sup> One Colorado chapter is even called Riders in the Light.

<sup>211</sup> An activity for which a permit is required by the City of Denver. When such a permit is granted, the organization putting on the event is allowed to deviate from certain city regulations such as cordoning off reserved (non-public) areas, or allowing alcohol consumption.

<sup>212</sup> See Chapter Two for a discussion of my religious background.

<sup>213</sup> *CMA Handbook*. January, 1, 2014. II:11.

<sup>214</sup> *CMA Handbook*. January 1, 2014. II:11.

<sup>215</sup> Anderson-Facile. 2007. Pg. 5.

<sup>216</sup> In traditional MCs, women may not be members. They are often “property” of a member, hence, “property of a Valiant,” or “property of a Hells Angel”.

<sup>217</sup> Balmer. (1989, 2014). Pg. 240.

<sup>218</sup> This individual was not a confidential interview subject.

<sup>219</sup> Balmer. (1989, 2014). Pg. 238.

<sup>220</sup> Balmer. (1989,2015). Pg. 229.

<sup>221</sup> Smith. (1998). Pg. 124.

<sup>222</sup> Luke. 11:17. NRSV.

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<sup>223</sup> George Weigel. *Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church*. (New York: Basic Books). Pg. 30.

<sup>224</sup> Powell. (2012). 72.

<sup>225</sup> Goofy is a stuffed Disney “Goofy” animal dressed in biker attire. He is presented to the member who has made the goofiest mistake the previous month as voted upon by the membership in attendance. The stuffed animal then rides with the selected member for the next month. At each meeting a “diary” of his activities for the month, as kept by Goofy, is read in the first person to the attendees.

<sup>226</sup> Actual agenda is appended.

<sup>227</sup> In this section I am not claiming that the CMA is, in any particular manner, similar in function to either the Knights of Columbus, or a car club. I only use those as examples of organizations to which I have belonged and whose meetings I have attended. I cannot speak to the nature of meetings of other organizations such as Campus Crusade for Christ.

<sup>228</sup> There are a number of other Christian biker groups working in the evangelical field, among them Riders for Christ, tribe of Judah, Servants for Christ, and Soldiers for Jesus. Soldiers for Jesus, which has an active chapter in Denver concentrates exclusively on evangelization of the 1%'ers. Soldiers for Jesus emulates typical MCs in many respects, among them full membership in the Colorado Confederation of Clubs, and traditional “prospect” membership practices.

<sup>229</sup> [www.cmausa.org](http://www.cmausa.org)

<sup>230</sup> [www.cmausa.org](http://www.cmausa.org)



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- <sup>231</sup> Personal observation and participation at SOR and Promise Keepers events.
- <sup>232</sup> The CMA is a “one patch” organization and not subject to the strict scrutiny which is applied by bikers to “three patch” groups for whom territoriality is significant.
- <sup>233</sup> Powell. (2012) 79.
- <sup>234</sup> Powell. (2012) 36.
- <sup>235</sup> Anderson-Facile, Doreen. *Dueling Identities: The Christian Biker*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books) 2007. Pgs. 1,4.
- <sup>236</sup> Jerry Falwell. *Listen America*. Pgs 110,111.
- <sup>237</sup> Sally K. Gallagher. *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003). Pg. 39.
- <sup>238</sup> Bartkowski. Pg. 46.
- <sup>239</sup> James Quinn. “Sex and Hedonism Amongst One-Percenter Bikers.” *The Mammoth Book of Bikers*. Arthur Venno, ed. (Philadelphia: Running Press Book Publishers, 2007). Pg. 300.
- <sup>240</sup> Gallagher, 2003. Pg. 69.
- <sup>241</sup> Falwell. *Listen America*. Pgs. 110,111.
- <sup>242</sup> Quoted in Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity and gendered Family Life*. Pg. 46.
- <sup>243</sup> Balmer. 1989/2014.
- <sup>244</sup> [www.cmausa.org](http://www.cmausa.org)
- <sup>245</sup> Wuthnow. Pg. 139.
- <sup>246</sup> Smith. Pg. 200.

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<sup>247</sup> Vincent J. Miller. *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a consumer Culture*. (New York: Continuum, 2009). Pg. 90.

<sup>248</sup> Wuthnow. 2007. Pg. 79.

<sup>249</sup> [www.pewresearch.org](http://www.pewresearch.org). Accessed 1-30-16.

<sup>250</sup> Ammerman. 1991. Pg. 5.

<sup>251</sup> Ronald L. Numbers. *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006). Pg. 1. Here Numbers cites in a footnote Jeffrey M. Jones. "Most Americans Engaged in Debate about Evolution, Creation." Oct. 13, 2005. David W. Moore. "Most Americans Tentative About Origin-of-Life Explanations. Sept. 23, 2005. Ibid. [www.poll.gallup.com](http://www.poll.gallup.com).

<sup>252</sup> Numbers. 2006. Pg. 1.

<sup>253</sup> Numbers. 2006. Pgs. 10,11.

<sup>254</sup> Bishop James Ussher of county Armagh, Ireland, claimed to have calculated the exact year of the creation as 4004 bce in the seventeenth century.

<sup>255</sup> I consciously use the term "myth" in its non-pejorative, academic sense. In that sense myths are the foundational stories of a faith, their "truth" or "falsehood" not being in question.

<sup>256</sup> Nancy Ammerman. *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*. Pg. 95.

<sup>257</sup> According to figures published by the Harley Davidson Motor Company, the median family income of individuals purchasing a Harley Davidson in 2005 was \$80,000, with a median age of 47 years. See, Anderson-Facile, 2007.

<sup>258</sup> Personal observation of their homes, vehicles, and general lifestyle

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<sup>259</sup> Nancy Ammerman. *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes*. Pg. 7.