

[McCrary on Gloege, 'Guaranteed Pure: The Moody Bible Institute, Business, and the Making of Modern Evangelicalism'](#)

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Timothy E. W. Gloege. *Guaranteed Pure: The Moody Bible Institute, Business, and the Making of Modern Evangelicalism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. xv + 307 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4696-2101-2.

Reviewed by Charles McCrary (FSU) **Published on** H-AmRel (April, 2016) **Commissioned by** Bobby L. Smiley

Timothy Gloege's *Guaranteed Pure* opens with a problematization. A small group of businessmen and ministers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries fashioned a set of ideas and mentalities that constituted "a 'corporate evangelical' framework, a mutually reinforcing model of reality" (p. 2). It was funded by corporate cash and born of business deals, but the belief that "God created this 'natural order,' chose to operate by its principles, and promised spiritual and material success to believers who did likewise" (p. 2) obfuscated the framework's manufacture while simultaneously imbuing it with authority. This is not an uncommon strategy for social formation: *bricolage* plus naturalization equals ideology. Or some variant of that equation. The problematic history, then, uncovers the undergirding logics by which the ideological system makes sense—and feels right. That system, the corporate evangelical framework, helped birth the fundamentalist movement and continues to be a powerful force in American evangelical Protestantism.

Now that historians have corrected the mistaken narrative that fundamentalists "retreated" from culture and politics following the 1925 Scopes trial and suddenly rematerialized a half-century later, there is another popular and historiographical myth to dismantle: that fundamentalists were antimodern. This idea is vaguer—it depends what we mean by "modern"—and even more deeply entrenched. Gloege's subjects, including the fundamentalists who commissioned, wrote, and distributed *The Fundamentals* (1910–15), imagined themselves as opposed to "modernism" and the "modernists" who pushed Higher Criticism, atheism, and foundations of knowledge apart from and contradictory to the Bible. However, their methods for opposing it were in many ways modern. Through a narrative organized around the Moody Bible Institute (MBI) and the web of characters, ideas, and capital spun around it, Gloege launches "a wider investigation into the intersection of religion and class in America during the birth of modern consumer capitalism" (p. 5). Gloege recognizes not only that business history and religious history were coexistent and concurrent, but that they were co-constitutive. In other words, "modern consumer capitalism" is not just the setting for a religious history; it is more like a character in the story. This is a welcome corrective. Historians of fundamentalism and evangelicalism often have given short shrift to the centrality of consumer capitalism in the creation and maintenance of products like "old-time religion," "Bible-believing," the "fundamentals," and *The Fundamentals*. In describing these processes, historians can be general or specific. There are broad intellectual currents to trace (such as Max Weber's "Protestant ethic" or American anti-institutionalism), as well as very specific personal relations and institutional histories

to untangle. *Guaranteed Pure* does both.

The interpretive frame on which *Guaranteed Pure*'s argument is built is a re-theorization of American Protestant history. Gloege argues for two basic Protestant orientations: rather than liberals versus conservatives or evangelicals versus mainline, "churchly" versus "evangelical." I expect that this smart and useful argument will be engaged, utilized, and disputed by historians of American Protestantism. The two orientations represented different ways to determine what was true. Churchly Protestants, the older of the two American styles, "assumed that an authentic faith required sincere and active membership in a particular church and that religious authority, though rooted in the Bible, was exercised by that institution" (p. 5). In other words, when deciding whether a particular doctrine or idea was good or true or biblical, churchly Protestants had ordained ministers, creedal statements, and denominational publications to guide them. Evangelicals, on the other hand, opted for a more ostensibly individualist, antitraditional approach. This led to its own problems, of course. To sketch the problem in tangible, if perhaps oversimplified terms: once one has gone the evangelical route, how does he or she know what to believe? Or whom to trust? This is a question, really, about branding.

The first half of the book, "Christian Work," describes the founding of Moody Bible Institute in its economic, political, and social contexts. Dwight Moody has received considerable treatment from historians already, but Gloege brings new insights by focusing on Chicago politics, the Haymarket Incident, labor unions, and racial segregation. Gloege discusses theological ideas and debates about Christian piety, but he shows how these issues were bound up with others, and how, for instance, the erosion of Moody's "faith in human institutions and bolstering [of] his religious individualism" was more the result of railroad strikes and Jim Crow than an academic theology (p. 50). Those of evangelical orientation must, almost as a rule, define themselves by finding the boundaries of acceptable—and, in Moody's case, "effective" or "productive"—beliefs and practices. This logic had its limits, which it found when Moody associates veered toward "radical" forms of evangelicalism. A pair of engaging chapters detail Rueben Torrey's advocacy for "Baptism of the Holy Spirit" and, eventually, divine healing and "signs and wonders" in the style of contemporary Chicagoan (by way of Australia) John Alexander Dowie. Torrey spoke the language of Moody and utilized the same individualistic and consumerist worldview (he wrote a book called *How to Study the Bible for Greatest Profit* [1896], a testament to the entwined nature of religious and capitalist logic and language), but, amid the medical establishment's crackdown on quacks and faith healers and the "scandal" of Torrey's own untreated child's death, he took them too far. "Moody's death [in 1899]," Gloege concludes, "marked the end of respectable evangelicalism's hermeneutical influence, when a 'plain' meaning of the Bible could be embraced, at least ostensibly, without concern of negative externalities" (p. 112). MBI and their affiliates needed, as they say in advertising speak, a rebranding effort.

The book's second half, "Christian Consumers," opens by introducing Henry Parsons Crowell, owner of Quaker Oats, skillful marketer, and, starting in 1900, the president of MBI. Crowell's mission was to expand Moody's network, and to sell its intellectual and material products to consumers. Crowell largely was carrying on Moody's project in spirit, but his methods were improved and modern, and they had been refined and tested in the business world. He sought to solve the familiar problem of trust and authority faced by evangelical (as opposed to churchly) evangelicals. MBI's modern antimodernism was predicated on protecting orthodoxy, but, as Gloege notes, "they were grasping

for a nondenominational 'orthodoxy'—a modern 'old-time religion' that did not yet exist" (p. 161). To create that orthodoxy, Crowell partnered with other evangelical leaders, including the oilman Lyman Stewart and others at the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, to produce the influential set of essays *The Fundamentals*. And Crowell could sell them. Before *The Fundamentals*, Gloege argues, "other projects to formulate a nondenominational 'orthodoxy' had always failed in the past. But Crowell had new tools at his disposal that his predecessors did not, born of modern business" (p. 163).

Crowell was a skilled salesman and well-connected businessman, and he used both roles to his and the Institute's advantage. He recognized that this fundamentalism or old-time religion or Bible Christianity would have to be defined not only by its propositions, but also by what it was not. "The most important outcome of *The Fundamentals*," many of which exposed some heresy or theological error or dangerous sect, Gloege argues, was its creation of "an imagined community of Protestants united in their opposition to theological modernism" (p. 181). Other than antimodernist tract, what content did get the stamp of approval? How was a religious consumer to know which products were pure? This was (and remains) a thorny issue for evangelicals, often decided affectively as much as doctrinally. To this end, Crowell worked to establish and build the Moody brand, which Gloege describes in the final chapter, "The Name You Can Trust." By assuring consumers of the purity and legitimacy but also uniqueness of a product, "Moody was indeed serving the exact function of a trademark" (p. 222).

Gloege admits in the introduction that his narrative contains few actors who are not white men. However, race and gender do receive some treatment. He mentions how, as part of its effort to brand itself as "respectable," the Institute implemented a new policy in 1909 requiring African American students to live off campus (p. 159). There are also a few short discussions about the Institute's occasional nonwhite students, as well as its admission and training of international students. Gloege also offers a few remarks on MBI's stances on eugenics and segregation. Similarly, women are largely absent. But so is the question, "Why are women largely absent?"—not from the book, necessarily, but from the historical events the book narrates. *Guaranteed Pure* for the most part confines its discussions of race and gender to the appearance of nonwhites and women, and thus leaves out consideration of masculinity and whiteness. There were ample opportunities for these analyses, though, from the more obvious to the subtler. (Example: a white, "grandfatherly" Quaker who carries around a scroll with the word "PURE" on it—and being a symbol of reliability and trustworthiness—is not without racial coding.) Even the model of selfhood on which consumer culture and modern evangelicalism are based—"a definition of what it meant to be authentically human that placed a particular emphasis on choice" (p. 141)—was implicitly a white male self.

While *Guaranteed Pure* often uses a wide lens to situate historically its detailed discussions of individuals, private correspondences, and institutional politics, it generally foregoes theoretical discussion. Readers will not find long discussions of Max Weber, or ruminations on Protestantism and secularity, or reflections on how this troubles our conception of the "modern." Gloege clearly had those thoughts, and he hints at them occasionally and in carefully written footnotes; he just leaves them out of the text, for the most part. Readers' responses to this style will vary based on their preferences, but I found it effective, even despite my general preference for theory and meta-discussion over narrative. There are two reasons. First, *Guaranteed Pure* is not undertheorized in the way that some histories are, relying on naïve and uncritical assumptions about human agency and individual choice. The book does not have a blind spot for "conditions of possibility." Second, readers

can think about Weber and secularity themselves—and they will; the book is thought-provoking. What they cannot do, or at least have not, is do detailed archival research on Moody. In that way, and more, *Guaranteed Pure* is, to use some adjectives Henry Crowell would appreciate, an effective, productive, and valuable contribution to our field.

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