J. Wilbur Chapman and American Evangelism

by Mark Sidwell[1]

Christians sometimes think of "worldview" in terms of how Christianity applies to cultural issues in such areas as economics or the fine arts. But a true biblical worldview must be centered on understanding what the Scripture both teaches and emphasizes. For example, however one views the Christian's cultural mandate that many Christians espouse, it is more important for a Christian to fulfil the gospel mandate stressed in the NT. Part of this gospel mandate is evangelism. This article is the third in a series on noted evangelists in American history—their work, methodology, and philosophy—a series that is intended to deepen understanding of the successes and failures, strengths and weaknesses, of historic American evangelism.[2]

J. Wilbur Chapman, like many American evangelists of the past, is vaguely familiar to twenty-first century American Christians who are nonetheless unsure of precisely who he was. Even those who recognize him as falling in the same category as D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, and Billy Sunday would be hard pressed to explain what distinguished Chapman from the rest. Commonly, Chapman is considered the link between the two most famous evangelists of America's citywide campaigns, Moody and Sunday. Chapman began as an associate of Moody and later became Sunday's mentor. Although "Chapman as link" has a historical elegance to it, the notion fails to measure his full impact on American evangelism.

Chapman was not simply one in a line of notable evangelists but an innovator in and promoter of evangelism. He displayed a flexibility that embodied Paul's admonition to be "all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9:22). Chapman weighed matters of theory and theology, of promotion and organization. If not precisely a theologian of evangelism, he was nonetheless an evangelist with a sense of what evangelism was, what it ought to be, and how it ought to be conducted.

Life of Chapman

John Wilbur Chapman was born on June 17, 1859, in Richmond, Indiana.[3] Chapman's mother was a Methodist, and he made his public profession of faith in a Methodist Sunday school. His father

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[2] The earlier installments are Mark Sidwell, "George Whitfield and the Rise of American Evangelism," *JBTW* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2023): 53–75; idem, "Between Whitefield and Finney: The Evangelism of Asahel Nettleton," *JBTW* 4, no. 2 (Spring 2024): 33–47.

[3] The best biography of Chapman is Ford C. Ottman, *J. Wilbur Chapman: A Biography* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1920). Ottman was a close friend of Chapman and made extensive use of Chapman's

was a Presbyterian, and the year before he went to college he united with a Presbyterian church and remained with that denomination (or other Reformed groups) for the rest of his life. Chapman did not recall the precise time of his conversion, and he said that this fact bothered him for a time. He stopped worrying, however, when he realized that "I should know I was living physically even if I did not know my birthday, and I may know that I am living spiritually even though I do not know when I 'passed from death unto life.'"[4] Although he did not commit himself to the ministry until he was in college, he later said he was called to preach as a boy when he conducted a meeting of the YMCA in Richmond. Chapman did not think the meeting went particularly well, but a business acquaintance of his father who was at the meeting told him that "somehow I have the impression that you will some day be a minister of the Gospel."[5]

Chapman spent his freshman year of college (1876–77) at Oberlin College, entering the year after the death of the school's famous president, Charles Finney.[6] For his sophomore year, Chapman transferred to Lake Forest College in Illinois, where he graduated in 1879. Chapman made two acquaintances at Lake Forest that shaped his later career. One was B. Fay Mills (1857–1916), another divinity student, who became a sensationally successful evangelist in the 1880s and 1890s. Chapman and Mills became close friends, and Mills led his classmate into evangelism.

Chapman's other notable acquaintance at Lake Forest was D. L. Moody. Chapman attended a series of meetings the evangelist held in Chicago, and Moody's directness and warmth impressed him. Moody personally counseled Chapman in an inquiry meeting.[7] When Chapman professed his lack of assurance of his salvation, Moody read John 5:24, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life." He asked, "Do you believe this?" Chapman replied, "Certainly." Moody asked, "Are you a Christian?" The younger man said, "Sometimes I think I am, and again I am fearful." Moody said, "Read it again," then asked again if he believed it, and Chapman again said that he was unsure. "Then he seemed to lose his patience," Chapman recalled, "and the only time I

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papers and correspondence. Although uncritical (it lacks footnotes, for example), it is thorough. Also somewhat useful is John C. Ramsay, *John Wilbur Chapman: The Man, His Methods and His Message* (Boston: Christopher, 1962). Derived from Ramsay's dissertation, the work is not well organized, and, like Ottman, has no footnotes. Ramsay is better than Ottman in describing the details of Chapman's evangelistic work. Also valuable in studying Chapman's life are the J. Wilbur Chapman Papers (hereafter referred to as JWCP) housed in the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia. See also William G. McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: Ronald, 1959), 377–88, for a helpful, if unsympathetic summary of Chapman's career. A very helpful, more recent work is Ross A. Purdy, "The Development of John Wilbur Chapman's Life and Thought (1859–1918)" (PhD diss., University of Stirling, 2016). He focuses particularly on Chapman's thought and theology as well as his methodology, noting the strong influence of dispensationalist premillennialism on Chapman's views.

[4] J. Wilbur Chapman, *Received Ye the Holy Ghost?* (New York: Revell, 1894), 77–78.

[5] J. Wilbur Chapman, *The Minister's Handicap* (New York: American Tract Society, 1918), 16.

[6] It is uncertain how much influence Finney had on Chapman. In one of his early books he devoted a chapter to Finney as "The Prince of Modern Evangelists" and devoted another chapter to Finney's evangelistic theory. J. Wilbur Chapman, *Revivals and Missions* (New York: Lentilhon, 1900), 39–58, 69–79. He referred to Finney less often in later works and discussed his theory not at all. For further discussion of Chapman's views of Finney, see Purdy, 135–36, 173.

[7] See Ottman, 29–30. McLoughlin mistakenly says, "Moody personally converted him from a nominal to born-again Christian," *Modern Revivalism,* 377. In reality, Chapman's experience was more in the form of assurance of salvation. He certainly did not date the meeting with Moody as his conversion.

can remember Mr. Moody being sharp with me was when he turned upon me and said, 'Whom are you doubting?'" After Chapman thought this over, Moody said, "Read it again." He did and Moody asked, "Do you believe this?" Chapman replied, "Yes, indeed I do." Moody asked, "Are you a Christian?" He answered, "Yes, Mr. Moody, I am." Chapman concluded, "From that day to this I have never questioned my acceptance with God."[8] Later Chapman worked in some of Moody's campaigns, preached at his Northfield Bible Conference, and served as vice president of Moody's Bible institute in Chicago.

After finishing his baccalaureate work, Chapman went to Lane Seminary in Cincinnati (1879–82). Shortly after graduation from Lane, Chapman married and took his first pastorate. The charge was a dual one, serving two small churches located in Liberty, Indiana, and College Corners, Ohio. Chapman served these towns only a year, thanks to B. Fay Mills, who was filling the pulpit of the Dutch Reformed Church of Greenwich, New York. When Chapman visited Mills, the latter arranged for Chapman to supply a vacant pulpit in the nearby Dutch Reformed Church in Schuylerville. The congregation, duly impressed, called the young Hoosier as its pastor in 1883.

Chapman thereafter took the pastorates of progressively larger, more prestigious churches. In 1885 Chapman moved to the First Reformed Church of Albany, which grew by 500 members under his direction. In 1890 he became pastor of Bethany Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, serving twice, 1890 to 1893 and 1895 to 1899. Finally, in 1899 he took his last pastorate, Fourth Presbyterian Church, New York City, where he served until 1903. All these churches were congregations of higher social status. Bethany, for example, was the church of the Wanamakers, a leading family in dry-goods merchandising and Republican politics.[9]

Although Chapman's greatest fame came in the field of evangelism, he always considered his experience as a pastor a key component of his evangelistic career. His pastoral work gave him a deeper understanding of the work of the ministers and churches he cooperated with in his campaigns. In particular his experience at Bethany Presbyterian exposed him to the possibilities of innovation and flexibility in Christian work. As William Glass has noted, Bethany was a prime example of the "institutional church," the attempt of churches in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to meet the challenges of the cities with varied forms of outreach.[10] Before, during, and after Chapman's pastorate, Bethany had modeled inventive means of extending its ministries. Begun before the Civil War as a Sunday school, as it grew the church offered poverty relief, arranged social activities, dispensed medical treatment, and provided vocational training. During his time at Bethany, Chapman

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[8] J. Wilbur Chapman, *The Personal Touch in Service,* 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1912), 14–17.

[9] His salary grew commensurately. His beginning salary at Bethany, $4,000 per year, grew to $5,000 by 1895. At Fourth Presbyterian he began at $6,000 and was making $8,000 by 1902. See "Resolution of the Congregation of Bethany Presbyterian Church," January 8, 1890, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 3; "Resolution of the Congregation of Bethany Presbyterian Church," December 2, 1895, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 3; "Resolution of the Congregation of the Fourth Presbyterian Church," March 13, 1899, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 3; and J. Wilbur Chapman to John Converse, October 14, 1902, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 4.

[10] William R. Glass, "Liberal Means to Conservative Ends: Bethany Presbyterian Church, John Wanamaker, and the Institutional Church Movement," *American Presbyterians* 68 (1990): 181–92.

successfully changed the Sunday evening service into an evangelistic service followed by an after-meeting, an innovation that saw numerous conversions.

After 1903 Chapman's ministry was devoted almost entirely to evangelism, but he pursued other ministries as well. With his song leader Charles Alexander, Chapman promoted the Pocket Testament League, the goal of which was to encourage Christians to carry pocket New Testaments to read, of course, but also, with the help of markings and annotations, to use in witnessing to others. In 1895 he also became the founding director of the Winona Lake Bible Conference in Indiana. The conference was more than a series of meetings held in the summer. The founder of the Winona organization, Presbyterian Sol Dickey, envisioned establishing several institutions to promote Christian renewal, including schools and a Chautauqua (a popular course of adult education, concerts, and lectures by noted speakers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). The Bible conference was one component of that vision. Winona became a rallying point for conservative Christians, foreshadowing the parachurch ministries that would later characterize American evangelicalism. Chapman built a summer home at Winona Lake and used the conference as a means of promoting evangelism.[11] He remained director until 1908.

Evangelistic Career

J. Wilbur Chapman's entrance into full-time evangelism was gradual, growing out of his own interest and the influence of several mentors. He recalled that his first inclination toward evangelism occurred at Lake Forest College, but it was several years before he actually entered the field.[12] His career as an evangelist divides into several periods, with different approaches characterizing each.[13]

Evangelistic Influences

D. L. Moody had a profound influence on Chapman, who wrote a flattering but sincere biography of his mentor.[14] Chapman assisted Moody in campaigns at the Chicago World's Fair, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and New York. Moody's World's Fair campaign (1893) was particularly interesting in that it prefigured Chapman's "simultaneous" method of evangelism (discussed below). Beyond Moody's evangelistic example, Chapman also drew from him the Keswick idea of spiritual power. The focus of Keswick holiness ideas (named for the English conference where its adherents met) took different shapes depending on it varied proponents. To Moody and those around him, Keswick meant,

[11] See Mark Sidwell, "The History of the Winona Lake Bible Conference" (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 1988).

[12] Chapman, *Revivals and Missions,* vii.

[13] There are two dissertations on Chapman's evangelistic career, in addition to the one on which Ramsay's biography is based: Scott Sterling Hobbs, "The Contribution of J. Wilbur Chapman to American Evangelism" (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997), and James Paul Cogdill, "A Major Stream of American Mass Evangelism: The Ministries of R. A. Torrey, J. W. Chapman, and W. E. Biederwolf" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990).

[14] J. Wilbur Chapman, *The Life and Work of Dwight L. Moody* (Boston: J. A. Haskell, 1900).

as George Marsden notes, "power for service": the endowing of the Holy Spirit to accomplish the work of God.[15]

Among those of Moody's circle who influenced Chapman toward Keswick teaching was British Baptist minister and staunch advocate of holiness teaching, F. B. Meyer. Chapman heard Meyer at the Northfield Bible Conference and was deeply affected when Meyer asked, "If you are not willing to give up everything for Christ, are you willing to be made willing?"[16] The question changed Chapman's ministry. Chapman dedicated his book *Received Ye the Holy Ghost?* to Meyer, "because two years ago, in a single sentence, he opened up a new life to me when he led me to know more about the Spirit of God."[17]

The idea of a Keswick-like experience runs through Chapman's ministry, not only as a basis for Christian living but also as a key preparation for evangelism. In his evangelistic campaigns Chapman designated certain meetings as "Quiet Hour" services focused on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. He taught that the basis for Christian service was found in such matters as "presentation of the whole being to Christ as our master and king," "an abandonment of every known sin," "acceptance by faith of the Holy Ghost as God's gracious provision for holiness of life and for power in his service," and "a continuous dying unto self that Christ may be all in all."[18] In a sentence fully consonant with Moody and Meyer, Chapman wrote, "To know him [the Holy Spirit] aright has always meant POWER."[19]

Another great influence was B. Fay Mills. Nearly forgotten today, Mills was briefly America's leading evangelist, as well as a cautionary tale to evangelicals. He began conducting evangelistic work while still a pastor and from 1886 served some ten years as a full-time evangelist. Mills pioneered some methods that became standard for most evangelists, such as using cards to record responses (on which he reputedly recorded a total of 500,000 conversions) and to direct inquirers to churches from the sponsoring committee of the campaign. He also experimented with the decentralized method that Chapman later refined, what Mills called the "District-Combination Plan." This scheme, Nelson observes, arose from "the notion that he [Mills] could best conquer a city by first dividing it."[20] Instead of a central mass meeting, Mills held meetings in different locations in an urban area. Perhaps his most

[15] George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870–1925,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 78–80.

[16] Chapman, *The Personal Touch in Service,* 18.

[17] Chapman, *Received Ye the Holy Ghost?* dedication. He later recounts the experience from Meyer's teaching, 86–87.

[18] J. Wilbur Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism* (New York: Baker and Taylor, 1903), 48–49.

[19] Chapman, *Received Ye the Holy Ghost?* 34. Bryan Gilling questions whether Chapman's Keswick "full surrender" theology squared with his Reformed heritage, notably the doctrine of total depravity and the idea of a Christian granting "permission" to God in surrender. Bryan D. Gilling. "Revivalism as Renewal: J. Wilbur Chapman in New Zealand, 1912–1913," *American Presbyterians* 70 (1992): 87–88.

[20] Daniel W. Nelson, "B. Fay Mills: Revivalist, Social Reformer and Advocate of Free Religion" (PhD dissertation, Syracuse University, 1964), 85. For a more detailed discussion of Mills's relationship with Chapman, see Purdy 38–40, 201–3.

famous campaign was held in Columbus, Ohio (1895).[21] The Columbus campaign, however, also foreshadowed a drastic shift in his theology. Mills first embraced the social gospel, then moved to Unitarianism, only to leave the confines of that system (such as they were) to embrace "free religion," becoming a sort of "evangelist for liberalism" in Los Angeles and Chicago. There he preached government ownership of utilities and support for the labor movement, proclaiming Christ "as the Savior of the social organization rather than of individuals." He took as his motto "What is the loving thing to do?"[22]

While serving as a pastor in Albany, Chapman invited Mills—still in his orthodox period—to hold a series of evangelistic meetings in his church. After Mills had finished his commitment, Chapman wanted to continue the meetings, and the congregation prevailed upon him to serve as the evangelist himself. Mills then invited him to assist his campaigns in Cincinnati in 1892 and Minneapolis in 1893. When Mills departed from orthodoxy shortly afterward, Chapman maintained ties as best he could and even visited Mills when Chapman was on the west coast. When, shortly before his death, Mills publicly professed a return to orthodoxy, Chapman was among those who welcomed him.

Early Evangelistic Career

Chapman's experience with Mills in the 1892 Cincinnati crusade convinced him to pursue evangelistic work. Over the protests of his congregation, he resigned his pulpit and launched into his new work.[23] Surprisingly little is known of Chapman's first attempt at full-time evangelism (1893–95). During this period Chapman hired Billy Sunday as an assistant, luring him from an irregularly paying position with the YMCA. Chapman held campaigns in Saginaw, Michigan; Burlington, Vermont; Saratoga, New York; Ottawa, Illinois; Bloomington, Indiana; Boston (at the close of 1895), and Brooklyn.[24] One of his meetings was a one-week evangelistic "Camp Meeting" in Winona Lake in 1895 to help launch the Bible conference.[25] Ramsay observes that in this period Chapman used the method of "single mass meeting," the standard approach of Moody-era evangelists, not the

[21] See Henry Stauffer, ed., *The Great Awakening in Columbus, Ohio, under the Labors of Rev. B. Fay Mills* (Columbus: W. L. Lemon, 1895).

[22] On Mills, see Daniel Nelson's dissertation on Mills, and McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism,* 329–46.

[23] Chapman initially persuaded his church in Philadelphia to allow him six months out of the year to conduct evangelistic work, the church approving "a plan allowing the Pastor [Chapman] a full half of each year for [evangelistic] work in or out of the city and outside of The Bethany Church." "Resolution of the Board of Elders of Bethany Presbyterian Church," October 18, 1892, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 3. Then, before this plan had time to take effect, Chapman abruptly decided to go into evangelism full-time.

[24] Ottman, 88–89. The guide to Chapman's papers from the Billy Graham Center lists some fourteen cities for this period but identifies the date for all as "c. 1893–1895 (?)," reflecting how uncertain Chapman's itinerary is for this period. In addition to the cities mentioned by Ottman, the Graham Center lists four cities in Chapman's home state (Indianapolis, Evansville, Terre Haute, Fort Wayne), Paris and Peoria in Illinois, and Montreal. Collection: Collection 077 Papers of J. Wilbur Chapman | Archives of Wheaton College (accessed July 23, 2024). Another campaign possibly from this period is the work in Jacksonville, Illinois, that Chapman describes in his book *Revivals and Missions,* 86–106.

[25] Billy Sunday actually spoke at the opening service before Chapman arrived. See "Great Camp Meeting," *Warsaw* (Ind.) *Daily Times,* August 21, 1895, 3; "The Union Meeting," *Warsaw Daily Times,* August 26, 1895, 3.

"simultaneous" method he later developed from Mills's practice.[26] In 1895 Bethany Church successfully urged Chapman to return to its pulpit, a decision that induced Billy Sunday to enter evangelism, which he did with Chapman's assistance.[27]

Evangelism and the Presbyterian Church

In 1901 Presbyterian layman and millionaire John Converse, president of the Baldwin Locomotive Works, urged the General Assembly to create a special committee to promote evangelism within the Presbyterian Church, and he lent both his wealth and energy to this effort. The Assembly approved of the idea and chose Chapman as the corresponding secretary of the twelve-man committee. Converse served as chairman. The denomination wanted Chapman's services full time, but Fourth Presbyterian of New York balked at losing their pastor. Chapman therefore tried to juggle his responsibilities to the committee and his church as well as his duties at the Winona Lake Bible Conference. Unable to maintain this load, Chapman finally persuaded his church to release him in 1903.

John Converse was the driving force behind the evangelism committee. The concept was for the denomination to organize and finance meetings in places where financial resources were limited, such as rural, thinly populated areas and impoverished areas. The plan originally called for no offerings to be taken, with Converse supplying the money through the treasury of the committee. However, offerings from the local supporters dropped off almost entirely, so offerings during the meetings were revived, and the Committee supplemented them.[28] Chapman later memorialized Converse for having given liberally to evangelistic efforts: "He never said 'no' to any appeal which I presented to him."[29] Converse also provided financially for Chapman himself, so he labored in full-time evangelism under less financial pressures than most evangelists.[30]

Chapman's duties for the committee included organizing campaigns across the country and, after he left Fourth Presbyterian, preaching himself when possible. For the first year and a half, his work focused on organizing and overseeing committee-sponsored meetings through a staff of over fifty

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[26] Ramsay, 108.

[27] An indication of the deep influence that Moody had upon Chapman is reflected in the fact that Chapman says that when he went back to the pastorate after this first experience in evangelism, Moody "seemed disturbed." Moody hoped he would stay in evangelism. Chapman, *The Personal Touch in Service,* 17.

[28] See Ottman, 121–22, for a description of the committee's organization. Chapman described the original plan: "Mr. John H. Converse suggests that the money necessary for such evangelistic services be secured by contributions from those willing to aid in the work, and not from church collections. It is also suggested, that, if possible, no collections be taken in the tents." Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 224.

[29] Chapman, *The Minister's Handicap,* 99.

[30] While still pastor of Fourth Presbyterian (1901–03), Chapman received $2,000 a year from the Presbyterian Church for his services to the committee, funds underwritten by Converse. John Converse to J. Wilbur Chapman, October 23, 1902, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 4. With the start of his full-time work for the committee, Chapman's salary increased to $6,000 annually, again with Converse's support. Beyond that, John Converse established a trust for Chapman, assuring the evangelist of at least $4,000 a year above the committee's salary. The millionaire also guaranteed a large sum to Chapman in case he became incapacitated. Although Converse died in 1910, he made provision in his will to continue Chapman's trust. "Deed of Trust of John H. Converse to the Rev. J. Wilbur Chapman," February 1, 1905, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 4.

evangelists and the leadership of local pastors.[31] Then after leaving the pastorate, Chapman began conducting campaigns from 1904 to 1908 in Pittsburgh, Minneapolis, Dallas, Cincinnati, and several smaller cities.

Winona Lake and Evangelism

Chapman also helped the Winona Lake organization promote evangelism. Because the Winona leadership envisioned their organization as the vanguard of a movement to spread Christian influence across America, they threw themselves wholeheartedly behind Chapman's efforts.[32] Chapman made Winona Lake a center for evangelism. Winona participated directly through its "Camp Meetings," campaigns held just before or just after the conference that featured various evangelists. Chapman also scheduled evangelistic conferences in connection with the Bible conference. These evangelistic conferences provided support and instruction for evangelists with a focus on methodology, philosophy, and exhortation. At first Chapman led the conferences personally and later organized them under the auspices of the Interdenominational Association of Evangelists, a professional organization for evangelists he was instrumental in founding at Winona Lake (discussed below).

The Chapman-Alexander Campaigns

J. Wilbur Chapman's greatest fame as an evangelist came after his decision in 1908 to join forces with evangelistic song leader Charles ("Charlie") Alexander (1867–1920). Alexander had already spent several years in evangelism, most notably as music director for R. A. Torrey. Chapman and Alexander united in what was officially called "The Chapman-Alexander Simultaneous Mission."[33] Chapman told Converse that the meetings would follow the pattern of the simultaneous meetings he was currently conducting except "that Mr. Alexander and myself are to have a larger central district."[34]

The Chapman-Alexander work began in Philadelphia with a large campaign (March–April 1908) followed by several others in the United States and Canada, notably their famous Boston campaign (1909). But from the start both were eager to conduct evangelism abroad. Their first, and in many ways greatest, international effort was in Australia during the first half of 1909. Ottman, Chapman's

[31] See Ottman, 122–24.

[32] Thomas Kane, a member of the Winona board, noted the movement to promote evangelism in America and said that "since the organization of the General Assembly's Evangelistic Committee under the chairmanship of Mr. John H. Converse, of Philadelphia, and Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman . . . as Secretary, both our staunch friends, Winona has become the center, or, rather, the right arm of the entire movement." Thomas Kane, "The Present and Future of Winona," in *1903 Program of Winona Assembly* (Indianapolis: Wm. B. Burford, 1903), 9. Converse expressly allowed room in the terms of his trust to Chapman for "the summer work at Winona." John Converse to J. Wilbur Chapman, October 17, 1902, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 4.

[33] "Memorandum of Agreement between Rev. J. Wilbur Chapman and Charles M. Alexander," dated January 30, 1908, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 4.

[34] J. Wilbur Chapman to John Converse, January 24, 1908, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 4. In describing the new partnership to Converse, Chapman told his benefactor, "It has always been understood that Mr. Alexander was rather the heavier and better part of the combination [with Torrey]." J. Wilbur Chapman to John Converse, January 21, 1908, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 4.

biographer and a participant in these campaigns, said that in the more than three months of the Australia meetings Chapman "preached three hundred times, an average of three times each day" and that the entire team held a thousand meetings altogether.[35] Some 15,000 attended his concluding meeting in Melbourne.[36] Between 1911 and 1914 Chapman and Alexander followed this effort with campaigns in England, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland as well as a second one in Australia and the rest of Australasia (1912–13). While Billy Sunday was the most famous American evangelist in the 1910s, Chapman took the opportunity to explore international opportunities. The First World War, however, cut short Chapman's work abroad and aborted his plans for further international work. The rest of his career was spent in the United States.

Evangelistic Theory

Two characteristics of Chapman make him stand out among evangelists of the period: his education and his published writings. Unlike the pastoral ministry, the office of evangelist has not often been associated with either educational attainment or skill in research or writing. The most famous evangelists, Moody, Sunday, and Sam Jones, were not highly educated. Chapman, however, along with Torrey and Biederwolf, not only attended graduate school and seminary but also wrote books on evangelism and the ministry that explained their philosophy and methodology.[37] Chapman's writings are not profound, but his style is clear and his thinking systematic.[38]

Philosophy

Chapman believed that the evangelist held a definite office in the NT era, that evangelism was not simply an extension of the work of the minister.[39] Yet he by no means separated the evangelist from the overall life of the church; he certainly did not conceive of evangelism as the province of evangelists only. Chapman argued that "the real soul winner is the pastor, his first assistant is the church-member and the evangelist is the specialist who comes to perform a needed service at a critical time."[40] The work must be cooperative and manifest none of the rivalry that sometimes emerged between the evangelist and local ministers. He declared that "no evangelistic campaign is worth while if it disturbs

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[35] Ottman, 155. In the sections on the foreign campaign, Ottman's narrative often lapses into a travelogue, perhaps because of his personal participation.

[36] Ibid., 171.

[37] It is this characteristic of these three men that motivated James Cogdill to consider them jointly in his dissertation. Cogdill, "A Major Stream of American Mass Evangelism," 3. The original observation appears to go back to William McLoughlin's description of them as "college graduates with formal seminary training and sufficient theological knowledge to entitle them to the doctor of divinity degrees they were awarded." *Modern Revivalism,* 365.

[38] One irritating quality of Chapman's writing was inserting into his narrative lengthy quotations from other writers (all duly credited). One of the worst examples is Chapman's *Revivals and Missions,* in which only a little under half of the book is Chapman's own writing.

[39] Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 181.

[40] Ibid., 185.

too much the regular life of the Church" and "that evangelistic work, if it is to be permanently effective, should be simply an added emphasis given to the regular work of the Church."[41]

Chapman insisted on a close relationship between pastors and evangelists. He argued that pastors should be evangelistic, not simply on the personal level, but in their pulpit ministries and the organization of their churches. He once suggested that a pastor hold a month of evangelistic services in his church, doing the preaching himself.[42] Practicing what he preached, Chapman began his ministry at Bethany Presbyterian Church with such a month-long evangelistic campaign. Likewise, Chapman thought evangelists should have experience as pastors so "that they may be in sympathy with pastors whom they help."[43] Chapman himself was even referred to as "The Pastor Evangelist."[44]

Another key characteristic was Chapman's willingness to consider innovation. "The evangelistic Church," he wrote, "is one that is willing to use any method until one is found that can turn the attention of lost men to Christ."[45] He said that "we must be wedded to no particular method if we would be successful in our work. There are some men who seem to be constitutionally opposed to anything that savors of variety or change."[46] For instance, he was willing to hold services on fairgrounds where there would be not only ample room but also where the "novelty" might attract people "who never would think of darkening the doors of a church."[47]

Chapman saw urban mass evangelism as but one component of overall Christian evangelism—and not necessarily the primary component. While believing that mass union meetings and professional evangelists still played an important role, Chapman thought a greater emphasis should be laid on pastoral evangelism and personal evangelism.[48] His books on evangelism and outreach included chapters on how the church might bend all of its ministries to focus on reaching the lost. For example, having himself made a profession of faith in a Sunday school class, Chapman laid great stress on making the Sunday school an evangelistic outreach.[49]

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[41] Chapman, *The Problem of the Work,* 178, 179.

[42] Chapman, *The Problem of the Work,* 121. He did write that "the extra [evangelistic] service is almost a confession of failure of the regular means of grace" (130–31), but he seems to be emphasizing here the need for a constant evangelistic theme to be woven into the church ministry.

[43] Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 187. Elsewhere he quoted with approval an unnamed evangelist who said, "The ordained evangelist should be one who has formerly been a pastor." Ibid., 184.

[44] Ramsay notes this description from Frank Beardsley, *Heralds of Salvation* (Philadelphia: American Tract Society, 1939), 168–77. See Ramsay, 157.

[45] Chapman, *The Problem of the Work,* 138–39.

[46] Ibid., 36. See also Chapman, *Fishing for Men,* 36.

[47] Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 222. He suggested using tents for evangelistic services for similar reasons. Ibid., 219–26.

[48] Ibid., 23–24.

[49] See, for example, his chapters "Evangelistic Sunday School" (Chapman, *The Problem of the Work,* 202–13) and "A Revival in the Sunday School" (Chapman, *Revivals and Missions,* 121–32). As a child, Chapman attended a Presbyterian Sunday school in the morning and a Methodist one in the afternoon. It was his Methodist teacher who encouraged him to take a public stand for Christ. Chapman said of this incident, "I do not know that that was the time of my conversion, but I do know that it was the day when one of the most profound impressions of my life was made upon me." Chapman, *The Personal Touch in Service,* 12, 14.

Even in connection with his own campaigns, Chapman emphasized the importance of other means of evangelism. Of his meeting in Swansea, Wales (1911), he reported that "literally hundreds of people were won to Christ by personal invitation, some of them never came to the meetings at all."[50] In short, evangelism was not just what evangelists did. "One may be evangelistic just by the way he enters the pulpit, by the way he announces his hymns, by the spirit of his prayer, by the yearning influence of his sermon. In other words, he may be evangelistic because of what he is."[51]

Nevertheless, Chapman unquestionably viewed the evangelistic crusade as an important component of evangelism. In addition to pastoral or personal evangelism, "the special evangelistic service is a necessity."[52] An evangelistic church, he advised, "is not of necessity a Church which holds extra services although these are as a rule advisable, for it is by the extraordinary service that the attention of some is called to Christ who would not otherwise think of him in their busy lives."[53]

While the evangelist ought not to usurp the place of the pastor, he was nonetheless important to the function of the church. The evangelist "ought to sustain the same relation to the Church at large as a specialist in the medical profession."[54] For instance, he called for evangelists to help with home missions on "the western frontier" and in "smaller cities and towns" where they could help overburdened pastors.[55] He saw the evangelist helping even in "larger and more successful churches" where they could build on the pastor's work and bring to fruition work the pastor had been doing.[56]

Although Chapman clearly had a philosophy of evangelism, he never offered what one could call a theology of evangelism. Believing the evangelistic call to be an obvious mandate for the Christian, he rarely delved into the biblical rationale for the work. Although he was himself undeniably a conservative in theology[57] and often stressed the deity of Christ and the inspiration of the Bible as the foundation of Christian belief and of evangelistic work, he did not become a theologian of revival like Jonathan Edwards. In his earlier years he equated revival and evangelism,[58] but rather than exposit biblical teaching on evangelism, he focused more on exhortation and matters of practical organization.

Chapman's "Social Gospel"

Because he ministered in the Progressive era of political reform and at a time when the church wrestled with the newly minted "social gospel," Chapman commented on the social purpose of the

[50] Quoted in Ottman, 222.

[51] Chapman, *The Minister's Handicap,* 69–70.

[52] Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 203.

[53] Ibid., 99.

[54] Ibid., 206.

[55] Ibid., 189.

[56] Ibid., 190.

[57] Cogdill gives a good overview of the heart of Chapman's theology, 176–96, especially as his theology related to evangelism, but Cogdill has to piece this together from Chapman's writings and sermons. Chapman did not write or preach systematically on theology, even the theology of evangelism.

[58] This is most evident in his book *Revivals and Missions* (1900), although even here the exposition is more by lengthy quotations from other writers, notably Charles Finney. See also Cogdill, 199–202.

church, sometimes at length. Ottman accurately summarizes Chapman's view as being "that social wrong is only the symbol of spiritual wrong and that spiritual remedies will alone heal what is ultimately a spiritual malady."[59] Chapman did not disdain social reform, but he nuanced his pronouncements. For example, he wrote, "There is what men call 'A Social Gospel,' and it is well to keep it in mind, for there is great danger in neglecting the social side of the Christian life, in being so well satisfied that we ourselves are saved that we shall forget all about the needs of others. We cannot over-emphasize the importance of personal salvation, but we may easily under-emphasize our responsibility to others less fortunate than ourselves."[60]

Chapman commented on "how impossible it is to be a true Christian, and then be indifferent to existing conditions in the social and business world which make for the oppression of the poor." He said that "no believer in the 'social gospel'" could be stronger than he was "in his determination to overthrow, if possible, the influences which cause us much of sorrow in the world." Yet "at the same time no one could insist more strenuously than I upon the individualistic message of Jesus when He said to one whose moral life was above reproach, 'Ye must be born again.'"[61] Chapman's emphasis was not on correcting unjust social structures, as advocates of the social gospel argued, but on reform that allowed individuals to live righteously within society. As for the evangelists themselves, he said directly, "Evangelists should be primarily soul winners and not reformers."[62]

Critics of evangelism are less antagonistic to Chapman than to others such as Sam Jones or Billy Sunday. Usually, criticism falls on Chapman when he is lumped with the others. McLoughlin charges Chapman with being one of the major evangelists who "transformed" American urban evangelism "from the pious soul-winning of D. L. Moody to the barn-storming 100 per cent Americanism of Billy Sunday," an assertion that frankly does not stand scrutiny.[63] Eric Crouse notes that during Chapman's Canadian campaigns some working-class critics tied the evangelist to what they viewed as hostile capitalist interests.[64] Chapman was certainly comfortable with capitalists, as shown by his own close friendship with John Converse, but there is no evidence that he ever served as a tool of repressive social forces.[65]

In fact, Chapman displayed a concern for extending evangelism to the poor. A common shortcoming of urban evangelism, despite its focus on the city in general, was that it found greatest

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[59] Ottman, 314. It is not clear from the context whether these words are actually Chapman's or are Ottman's representation of his view, but it is an accurate summation.

[60] Chapman, *The Minister's Handicap,* 49.

[61] Ibid., 50–51.

[62] Article "Evangelism," n.d. (internal evidence indicates a date during World War I), JWCP, Box 5, Folder 26.

[63] McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism,* 364.

[64] Eric Crouse, "Great Expectations: J. Wilbur Chapman, Presbyterians, and Other Protestants in Early Twentieth-Century Canada," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 78 (2000): 165. See also the expanded discussion in Crouse's *Revival in the City: The Impact of American Evangelists in Canada, 1884–1914,* Volume 35 in McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion, Series 2 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), particularly Chapter 5 on Chapman, "Transition," 116–32.

[65] Purdy, 17, argues that Chapman's pro-business views were moderated by his advocacy of social reform and by his premillennialism, which reduced his interest in economic issues.

success in reaching middle-class audiences. Rarely did it reach the working class and even more rarely did it reach the urban poor. Chapman felt this weakness keenly. He believed true evangelism must reflect the words of Christ to John the Baptist that "the poor have the gospel preached unto them" (Matt 11:5). He wrote to John Converse in 1908, "I would like also to have before me as an ambition, a ministry to the unchurched and the poor."[66]

Chapman pursued this goal in part by promoting the work of urban rescue missions to evangelize the poorest and most destitute. He became a close friend of Samuel H. Hadley, director of the Water Street Rescue Mission in New York, one of the pioneer rescue missions. Chapman promoted Hadley's work and even wrote a biography of him.[67] Chapman established special conferences at the Winona Lake Bible Conference to bring rescue-mission workers together and expose other Christians to their work. He entrusted these meetings to Hadley and also attracted other noted rescue-mission workers, such as Mel Trotter of Grand Rapids.

Chapman attempted to incorporate outreach to the lower classes into his own work. Among his associates in his evangelistic campaigns were William and Virginia Asher, Christian workers noted for their success in reaching alcoholics, prostitutes, and others of the urban underclass. Chapman also brought Charles Stelzle into his campaigns to reach workers. Reared, as the title of his autobiography states, in the slum-ridden Bowery of New York,[68] Stelzle took a keen interest in ministering to the poor and working classes. He served as Superintendent of the Presbyterian Church's Department of Church and Labor from 1903 to 1913 and left the denomination when it sought to curtail this work. In his efforts to reach laborers, Stelzle spoke at factories and served as a delegate to meetings of the American Federation of Labor.

During Chapman's Boston campaign, churches raised money to buy food and other goods for the poor and then recruited volunteers to package and deliver them.[69] Also in Boston, Chapman, Alexander, and their team, in connection with the Salvation Army, held services at Scollay Square among the down-and-outers.[70] One method that Chapman adopted to reach poorer areas was to march publicly into the seamier districts of cities as a testimony and then conduct meetings and personal evangelism. In a typical, if unusually large march, he led 15,000 people through Seattle's red-light district.[71] Chapman did not see large numbers of converts from the lower classes, but it was not for lack of trying.

In particular, the idea of reaching men (as opposed to women) with the gospel also characterized Chapman's work. Margaret Bendroth, analyzing Chapman's Boston campaign of 1909, notes Chapman's success in drawing middle-class businessmen to the church, an allegedly difficult group

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[66] J. Wilbur Chapman to John Converse, January 27, 1908, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 1.

[67] J. Wilbur Chapman, *S. H. Hadley of Water Street* (New York: Revell, 1906).

[68] Charles Stelzle, *A Son of the Bowery* (New York: George H. Doran, 1926).

[69] Arcturus Z. Conrad, ed., *Boston's Awakening* (Boston: The King's Business, 1909), 119–20.

[70] Ibid., 137–43. Salvation Army leader Evangeline Booth was among the associates with the Chapman team during the Boston campaign.

[71] Dale E. Soden, "Anatomy of a Presbyterian Urban Revival: J. W. Chapman in the Pacific Northwest," *American Presbyterians* 64 (1986), 53–54.

for evangelical Christianity to reach.[72] Analyzing the reports and sermons of the campaign, she says that Chapman presented a masculine ideal and tailored his messages to draw men.[73] Yet her observations demonstrate only that Chapman sometimes expressed himself in "gendered" terms, not that gender issues dominated his thinking or drove his message. A close look at Chapman's ministry does reveal an emphasis on reaching men. One should take the title of his book *Fishing for Men* literally—its purpose was to show how to reach men with the gospel, to attract them to Christ. The last half of the book consists of sermons by different preachers (William Biederwolf, L. W. Munhall, etc.) reputed to be effective in reaching men. In his campaigns he often held (as many evangelists did) meetings for men only as well as special meetings aimed at businessmen.

Yet Chapman does not seem to have adapted his message as much as some evangelists. While others pushed a "muscular Christianity" that allegedly appealed more to men, Chapman focused on simply reaching and confronting men with the same message urged upon women and children. Even his sermons to men seemed not so much crafted to "male interests" but rather straightforward evangelistic messages typical of those he delivered to mixed audiences.[74] A reporter reviewing the Boston campaign noted, "Men fill the [Tremont] Temple at the noon meetings; in the evening women predominate. But always there are more men than women who sign the decision cards."[75] Reaching men was a part of reaching people in general.

Methods

Chapman's openness to innovation led him to experiment. His goal was not novelty, except insofar as novelty might capture people's interest and thereby promote evangelism. Refusing to be bound by tradition, or even his own previous practices, Chapman remained flexible and open to suggestions.

Simultaneous Campaign

A method closely associated with Chapman was his simultaneous campaign. Borrowing from B. Fay Mills's district-combination plan, he decentralized the evangelistic campaign. Previously, the usual approach had been a single mass meeting, as used effectively by D. L. Moody.[76] Such a campaign

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[72] Margaret Bendroth, "Men, Masculinity, and Urban Revivalism: J. Wilbur Chapman's Boston Crusade, 1909," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 75 (1997): 235–36. See also her *Fundamentalists in the City: Conflict and Division in Boston's Churches, 1885–1950,* Religion in America Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Chapter 7, "Civic Revivalism: J. Wilbur Chapman's Crusade, 1909," 128–40. For further analysis of Chapman's campaigns from a social and gender-related perspective, see Thekla Ellen Joiner, *Sin in the City: Chicago and Revivalism, 1880–1920* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), Chapter 3, "'Convert Chicago through Its Women!' The 1910 Chapman-Alexander Simultaneous Campaign," 109–67.

[73] Bendroth, 240.

[74] See, e.g., "A Solemn Talk to Men," January 23, 1916, JWCP, Box 5, Folder 19, and "A Message to Men," November 7, 1915, JWCP, Box 5, Folder 20.

[75] Conrad, 82.

[76] Moody himself experimented with a form of the decentralized campaign, notably the effort in Chicago in 1893 in connection with the World's Fair. Chapman was one of Moody's associates in this effort. See McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism,* 378.

established one central location for meetings, and all efforts were bent to promoting those meetings. Mills had tried holding meetings in several places within an urban center to see whether he could more effectively blanket the area. Chapman modified this concept further, restoring some of the focus of the single mass meeting. The main evangelist still had a central location that was a major focus of the campaign, but other evangelists held smaller meetings in other venues. Sometimes these smaller meetings had a special focus, such as meetings for young people, children, or factory workers. At other times the meetings were simply focused on geographic areas. He held the first of his simultaneous campaigns in Pittsburgh in 1904, and results were encouraging enough to warrant further exploration of the idea.[77]

The largest and most famous of his campaigns, the Boston campaign of 1909, was the acme of the simultaneous method. Evangelical forces in the city mobilized to deliver the largest evangelistic wallop possible. Some 160 churches cooperated and held meetings six nights a week for three weeks in different areas of the city. Organizers divided the city into twenty-seven sections, each led by an evangelist or pastor aided by a team of lay workers. The lead and associate evangelists held 990 services over the course of the campaign. The central district focused on Tremont Temple, where Chapman and Alexander labored. The effort climaxed with four days of meetings (no other meetings being held at this time) in Mechanics Hall, the largest auditorium in Boston, where over 10,000 people crowded in for each of the final sessions.[78]

The simultaneous method had its advantages. Crouse notes that the novelty of the simultaneous method caught the attention of newspapers in Canada,[79] as it likely did elsewhere. The sheer size of the effort fostered a high degree of organization, efficiency, and wholehearted local involvement. Chapman wrote early in his career, "The Holy Ghost is not to be bound by rules, as we have already said; but it certainly cannot be displeasing to Him to have a well-defined plan and nearly as possible a perfect organization."[80] Dale Soden suggests that with the simultaneous method Chapman owed a debt to "the overall culture of the Progressive period," saying, "Clearly the values of specialization and efficiency dominated the thinking of people in every field from business to city government."[81] Almost as a by-product, the approach provided a training ground for other evangelists. Among the Chapman associates who went on to notable careers in evangelism were William Biederwolf and Irish evangelist W. P. Nicholson.

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[77] Hobbs provides a good summary overview of the 1904 Pittsburgh campaign, 123–29.

[78] The best source on the Boston campaign is Conrad's, *Boston's Awakening.*

[79] Crouse, 159.

[80] Chapman, *Revivals and Missions,* 83.

[81] Soden, 51. The pragmatism Chapman displayed in his evangelistic methodology is not unusual for Presbyterians, even conservatives, in this era. Consistent with the emphases of the Progressive era, Presbyterians in general stressed a concern for efficiency in all phases of church work. For a general discussion of this trend, see John Wiers, "Pragmatic Evangelical Presbyterians: Theological Moderates in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1870–1920" (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1995).

Yet because of the time, labor, and money expended, the simultaneous method raised unrealistic expectations for results.[82] Ottman says of the simultaneous approach, "In some respects these meetings, though most carefully arranged, were disappointing, but in other respects the success was phenomenal. . . . In all campaigns Dr. Chapman was the central sun around which the other evangelists as satellites revolved. The ill success of the lesser lights was charged against the general movement."[83] When Chapman used the method overseas, foreign critics echoed those in America who charged that the results of the subordinate meetings did not seem commensurate with the effort. Ottman claims that "in his later years" Chapman concluded that the simultaneous method was "not the best method."[84] In the last few years of his ministry Chapman reverted to the single mass meeting approach.

Evangelistic Music

An emphasis on music came naturally to J. Wilbur Chapman. He was musically inclined, having played the violin until finances forced him to sell the instrument while in college. He later edited hymnbooks[85] and wrote songs himself, most famously "Our Great Saviour" ("Jesus, What a Friend for Sinners") and "One Day."[86] While pastor at First Reformed in Albany, Chapman won over a staid congregation through the use of gospel music. A member of the Albany church said that at the beginning of Chapman's pastorate the "congregation had an atmosphere only less alien to the fervour of evangelism than the North Pole."[87] D. L. Moody advised him to raise this spiritual temperature through spirited singing. Moody sent Chapman hymn sheets, but an elder who found the pastor putting these into the pew racks told him he could not do this. When he told this to Moody, the older man replied, "Dear Chapman:—You do not know how to get along with church officers. Slip those hymns in when they do not know it and sing them." Chapman said that he "was much more afraid of disturbing Mr. Moody than any church officer," and did as Moody advised. The church sang "Ring the Bells of Heaven" the next service, and that won over even the elders.[88]

Chapman thought so much of the role of music that he devoted a chapter to "The Evangelist in Song" in one of his books.[89] In that chapter he foreshadowed the partnership he later enjoyed with Alexander. Of musical evangelists he said, "They are not and they ought not to be the business agent of the evangelist; they are not to serve in the capacity of a private secretary, they are not to be his

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[82] The Boston campaign cost around $20,000, which Conrad says comes down to about sixteen cents per person in the 120,000 members of evangelical churches that supported the effort, but this was still a substantial amount. Conrad, 43.

[83] Ottman, 125–26.

[84] Ibid., 207. He adds, "But what is the best method? Perhaps pastoral evangelism which he afterward—in fact, always—so ardently advocated."

[85] See the listing in Ramsay, 147–48.

[86] A sermon by Chapman on Psalm 45:8 also inspired Henry Barraclough to write "Out of the Ivory Palaces."

[87] Ottman, 55.

[88] Chapman, *The Minister's Handicap,* 103–5.

[89] Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 192–202.

servant, for the position of the evangelist in song is side by side with the evangelist who preaches the Gospel."[90]

Understanding Chapman's attitude toward the song leader goes far to explain his smooth and successful relationship with Charles Alexander and how Alexander became a key player in his campaigns.[91] Alexander, like most of the major evangelistic song leaders of the period, served as the master of ceremonies for the meetings, warming up the audience and drawing them into the spirit of the service. A reporter attending the Boston campaign said that "after a half hour of song and prayer under the leading of Mr. Alexander, the audience was in good humor, enthusiastic, ready for the message of the sermon, feeling more like a company of old friends than like a crowd of chance neighbors."[92]

Mechanics

The work of evangelism required not only theory but also nitty-gritty details. A basic example is Chapman's use of decision cards. Popularized by Mills, the decision card served evangelists as a source for statistics and were key in follow-up work by directing respondents to one of the supporting churches. Chapman used at least two forms of the decision card. The first was for those who showed interest in the message but were uncertain of their own spiritual status:

> I have an Honest Desire Henceforth to Live a Christian Life.
> I am willing to follow any light God may give me.
> I ask the People of God to Pray for me.[93]

The other was for those who definitely wanted to commit themselves to Christ: "Turning from all past sins, and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, I do hereby decide, God helping me, to henceforth lead a Christian life. This I do, freely, fully and forever."[94]

Chapman viewed the decision card not as an end but as a step in the process of conversion. The local chairman of the Boston campaign said, "It is well understood that a card is not a convert, but an opportunity" to be followed up by "the pastor and Christian worker."[95] Chapman himself said in a letter he sent to pastors preparing for his campaigns, "I wish very much to make it plain to you that I do not count every one who may sign the inquirer's card a *convert.* They may be (for one could accept Christ in so simple a manner as this), and in many cases they are, but if they are not, they are in a

[90] Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 200.

[91] On Alexander and his career, see J. Kennedy MacLean, *Chapman and Alexander: The Story of Their Lives and Work* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1915), and Helen Cadbury Alexander, with J. Kennedy MacLean, *Charles M. Alexander: A Romance of Song and Soul-Winning,* 3rd ed. (London: Marshall Brothers, n.d.).

[92] Conrad, 85. See also the full description of how Alexander used music and prepared a crowd in one service in the Boston campaign, 74–76.

[93] Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 126.

[94] Ibid., 127.

[95] Conrad, 31.

position where they may be easily won."[96] He said in Boston, "I haven't a particle of ambition about the number of cards that may be signed. I never make any announcement of the number that may have been signed at the meetings that I conduct. They go right to the pastors named in them. Neither you nor I know if a person has been converted. God alone knows the heart."[97]

As his use of the decision cards indicates, Chapman laid great stress on follow-up. For him, the "call to repentance or an invitation to come to Christ . . . is only the beginning."[98] He called for "widening the scope" of evangelism beyond calling for repentance and seeing repentant sinners brought into the church; he wanted "to reproduce the Spirit of Christ in the world. It is a call to men to live in such fellowship with him that the world taking knowledge of them shall know that they have been with Jesus."[99] At times, Chapman's call for discipleship blended into his individualistic version of the social gospel: "We may make fine distinctions as to dispensational truth in which I confess I believe with all my heart, but this wicked world waits for the manifestation of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, in home life, in Church activities, and in the business world, and will be satisfied with nothing less. Evangelistic effort which stops short of the training and culture of the one saved is not such preaching and service could merit the divine approval."[100]

Chapman devised a four-step plan for following up decisions: immediate visit by pastor or dependable helper, urging of those who made some decision to offer a public commitment at a regular church service, enrolling the convert in a special class in church, and putting the convert to work in Christian service.[101]

Chapman varied the mechanics of his invitations at the close of the service. When he served as a pastor, for example, one method was to have church officers go through the congregation near the conclusion of the service. They were to seek those who seemed affected by the sermon and give them cards to sign that said they would be willing to have a visit from the minister.[102] Chapman included the traditional altar call among his methods, inviting people to come and kneel at the front or stand by the pastor as he prayed. Whatever method the preacher chose, Chapman advised, "Do not simply preach about Christ and tell how to come to him; but give your hearers an opportunity to make a profession of faith. It is true that the Holy Spirit is waiting to do his work; but it is also true that past history shows that He elects to work through God's people. We are His chosen instruments."[103]

Despite his own experience as a young inquirer with Moody, Chapman does not seem to have often used an inquiry room, asking respondents to go to another room for counseling and prayer.[104] Instead, his preferred method was an after-meeting, asking concerned persons to remain in place after

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[96] Chapman, *Revivals and Missions,* 84.

[97] Quoted in Conrad, 92.

[98] Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 60.

[99] Ibid., 57–58.

[100] Ibid., 63.

[101] Ibid., 235–36.

[102] Chapman, *The Problem of the Work,* 101–2.

[103] Chapman, *Revivals and Missions,* 119.

[104] Conrad, for example, said that Chapman rarely used the inquiry room in the Boston campaign. Conrad, 30.

the rest of the crowd left. Once the audience was reduced to inquirers, the after-meeting could include fuller explanation or exhortation by the evangelist or other worker and then an opportunity for workers to deal personally with those who needed help. Chapman apparently came to believe the after-meeting was the best method, even giving instructions about how one should be conducted.[105]

Structure and Accountability

Chapman desired to find some means of bringing structure and accountability to the field of evangelism. By its nature, evangelism, particularly of the interdenominational kind, defied regulation and invited independence. W. P. Nicholson, for a time an associate of Chapman, recalled, "I came across some evangelists who, when asked what church they belonged to, would say, 'I belong to the Lord.' I always felt a wee bit suspicious about them."[106] For most religious work of that time, denominations provided structure, regulation, and accountability. Denominations controlled not only individual congregations but also missions, publishing houses, colleges, seminaries, and other outreaches. Evangelism was different. Furthermore, evangelism was one aspect of church work for which there was no professional training.

Chapman lamented this lack of accountability. "Evangelists should not be permitted to be free lances," he said. "They should be men approved by their brethren in the ministry."[107] In advising churches on how to conduct union evangelistic meetings, Chapman cautioned that the evangelist "should certainly be accredited."[108] He believed the field of evangelism would be more credible "did only the Church exercise her authority in training, in oversight, and even in discipline."[109] It puzzled Chapman that standards could be so low for evangelists. "We train our ministers and give them special oversight," he said. "They are not licensed if they are not orthodox. Their license is recalled if at any time they become heterodox either in living or teaching." He noted that YMCA secretaries and even some Sunday school superintendents received professional training. But where, he asked, are evangelists educated? Education for evangelism should be, Chapman argued, in the seminaries. "I cannot understand how it can at all be inconsistent with the highest scholarship to train men to evangelize nor why the seminary should not be a place where men's souls would be set on fire for God. It is because the church has exercised little oversight in this matter that irresponsible evangelists have gone forth into the church."[110]

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[105] See, e.g., "The After-Meeting" in Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 124–36, and "The After Meeting" in Chapman, *The Problem of the Work,* 99–111. In a section he quotes from an evangelical Anglican writer on parish missions, there is even a description of "a second after-meeting" in which all those in the first after-meeting are asked to leave if they do not want personal counseling. Chapman, *Revivals and Missions,* 179.

[106] Mavis Heaney, ed., *To God Be the Glory: The Personal Memoirs of Rev. William P. Nicholson* (Belfast: Ambassador, 2004), 33.

[107] Article "Evangelism," n.d., JWCP, Box 5, Folder 26.

[108] Chapman, *The Problem of the Work,* 178.

[109] Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 20; see also 25–26.

[110] Ibid., 186–87.

One answer was to rely on the denominational structure. Chapman, after all, served as secretary on a committee on evangelism sponsored by the Presbyterian Church, and his campaigns after leaving Fourth Presbyterian in 1903 were launched under Presbyterian auspices, although almost always with interdenominational participation. In addition, as secretary he oversaw campaigns, meetings, and missions led by Presbyterian ministers and evangelists, held under the oversight of local presbyteries. He endorsed the vote of the Presbyterian Church in 1909 to expand its evangelistic work by promoting overseas cooperation. Ford Ottman says Chapman returned from his tour of Australia buoyed up with the idea of uniting Christian forces "for an interdenominational, world-encircling, evangelistic campaign."[111] He thought Christians could do this by harnessing Presbyterian groups worldwide, and he tried to coordinate such an effort through the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, though hopes never materialized.[112]

Nevertheless, Chapman realized that denominational oversight had its limitations, especially in a field where so much work crossed denominational lines. Likely, this was the reason he took the lead in founding the Interdenominational Association of Evangelists (founded 1904, incorporated 1906) at Winona Lake. Chapman envisioned this association as a professional organization for evangelists, providing a uniform code of ethics and maintaining an orthodox doctrinal foundation for their work. The organization also helped secure meetings for its members. Although many leading evangelists joined the IAE—its membership peaked at around one thousand—it remained a voluntary organization with little machinery to enforce its guidelines or decisions.[113]

Style

Chapman recalled that once he tried to memorize "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" by Jonathan Edwards. Although finding its message relevant, he said, "I was soon convinced that the sermon in itself, while its truth was still great, was in its expression and vocabulary not for this generation."[114] Chapman's own style was suited to his times.

W. E. Slemmons of the First Presbyterian Church of Washington, Pennsylvania, said of Chapman after a campaign in his city, "Not one word of slang has escaped the preacher of righteousness. There has been no brow-beating of the minister. There have been no rhetorical exercises in vituperation."[115] Gilling accurately describes Chapman's preaching as not theological, like Torrey's, but more like Moody's in emotional appeal.[116]

Chapman's sermons are suffused with sentiment and abundant illustrations. His evangelistic sermons, which are by far the largest portion of his sermons that have survived, did not so much

[111] Ottman, 205.

[112] Ibid., 205–6.

[113] For more on Chapman and the IAE, see Purdy, 109–11.

[114] Quoted in Conrad, 52–53.

[115] Ottman, 285. One notes that Slemmons offers his observation after Billy Sunday had climbed to prominence, but it is not clear that Slemmons had this fact in mind.

[116] Gilling, 83.

exposit the Bible as take a biblical theme, lay out three or four ramifications of the idea, and illustrate the points richly. His sermons are filled with heart-rending accounts of young men and women gone wrong, of repentant sons returning to faithful mothers, of death-bed scenes in which children utter flowery phrases worthy of Louisa May Alcott (though not as well crafted). If Chapman was right that Jonathan Edwards's style was only for his day, then too was Chapman's. Yet clearly, in Chapman's own day, audiences responded.

Conclusion

Chapman continued to hold campaigns throughout the 1910s, usually in connection with Charles Alexander. The scope of his work diminished after 1914 when World War I ended his international efforts, but he remained a popular evangelist in the United States. Although by then Billy Sunday had surpassed him in public notice, there is no indication that he resented his former assistant's prominence. He always expressed delight in Sunday's success.[117] In 1917 the Presbyterian Church rewarded Chapman's lifetime of service by electing him moderator. Health problems began to afflict him, in part because of his refusal to slow his pace. He died unexpectedly on Christmas Day 1918 of complications from gallstone surgery. He was fifty-nine years old.

Evaluating an evangelist's success is always difficult. The primary means is usually numbers: How many people did the evangelist reach? Of course, trying to quantify spiritual decisions is by its very nature uncertain. In Chapman's case, numbers are even more problematic because Chapman did not publish his results. Although newspapers tried to provide numbers, Chapman's use of after-meetings hindered reporters from estimating the number of converts.[118]

One can also note the influence of Chapman on his successors. As already mentioned, Chapman launched Billy Sunday into his evangelistic career, and Sunday continued to revere Chapman as his mentor. Yet Sunday followed a method different from Chapman's and certainly preached in a different style. As mentioned earlier, others influenced by Chapman include William Biederwolf, who became a leading evangelist known not only for his preaching but also, like Chapman, for his writing on evangelistic theory and philosophy. One should also note Irish evangelist W. P. Nicholson, who served as an associate to Chapman. Hobbs observes, "Perhaps more than any prior evangelist Chapman took his distinctively American revival techniques and applied them to an overseas setting."[119] Hobbs likely undervalues the famed Moody-Sankey campaign in England of 1873–75 in this regard, but he has a point. Nicholson, influenced by Chapman, transplanted the American style of evangelism to Northern Ireland and in the 1920s led one of the most profound revivals in twentieth-century Europe.

Ironically, for all his willingness to experiment and innovate, Chapman left little mark on evangelistic methodology. He is best known for pioneering the simultaneous method of evangelism,

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[117] Cogdill preserves an interesting quotation from an interview with Chapman (233–34). Chapman admitted, "Sunday is a sensational evangelist; but he is the highest type of sensational evangelist." He denied that Sunday did things "merely for the sake of sensationalism" but because "he has an overmastering passion to win men to God."

[118] Gilling, 91.

[119] Hobbs, 204.

but that approach faded even in his own lifetime. Still, specialization and organization, the hallmarks of the simultaneous method, continued to play a role in evangelism. If Chapman was not responsible for originating these ideas, he at least promoted them and emphasized their necessity in his own work. In addition, Chapman always remained flexible, demonstrating a willingness to become "all things to all men" so that he "might by all means save some."

In his flexibility, Chapman challenged the church to keep an evangelistic focus. In an apt summary of his own ministry, Chapman wrote, "For every lost individual in the community every Church has a measure of responsibility from which it cannot be freed until at least every legitimate means has been tried for his salvation."[120] Chapman, for one, would not be stopped until all those means had been sought and tried.

[120] Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 206.