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Compassionate Conservatives? Evangelicals, Economic Conservatism, and National Identity

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In the United States, white evangelicals are more economically conservative than other Americans. It is commonly assumed that white evangelicals oppose redistributive social policies because of their individualistic theology. Yet Canadian evangelicals are just as supportive of redistributive social policy as other Canadians, even though they share the same tools of conservative Protestant theology. To solve this puzzle, I use multi-sited ethnography to compare how two evangelical congregations in the United States and Canada talked about poverty and the role of government. In both countries, evangelicals made sense of their religious responsibilities to "the poor" by reference to national identity. Evangelicals used their theological tools differently in the United States and Canada because different visions of national solidarity served as cultural anchors for religious discourse about poverty. To understand the political and civic effects of religion, scholars need to consider the varied ways that religious groups imagine national community within religious practice.

Keywords: *evangelicalism, social policy attitudes, economic conservatism, poverty, national identity.*

INTRODUCTION

In 2001, the Bush administration established the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, and generated a public controversy about the role of religion in providing public services (Sager 2010). Prominent evangelical leaders advocate a "compassionate conservative" approach to poverty, claiming that decentralized, voluntary caring is a superior alternative to state-initiated, structural solutions (Olasky 2000). Many scholars argue that evangelical Christians are particularly resistant to redistributionist social policy and more supportive of economic laissez-faire (Barker and Carman 2000). Pundits have characterized rank-and-file evangelicals as "compassionate conservatives": personally generous towards the poor, but critical of the welfare state as a means to address poverty (Brooks 2006).

But in cross-national perspective, this link between evangelicalism and economic conservatism is hardly universal (Andersen and Heath 2003; Norris and Inglehart 2004). This becomes clear when one compares the United States with Canada, where about 10 percent of the population is evangelical Protestant, compared to 25 percent in the United States. In both countries, evangelicals maintain strong subcultural boundaries based on a shared set of theological beliefs and "strict" moral standards, and are similarly opposed to abortion and homosexuality (Reimer 2003). Yet U.S. and Canadian evangelicals diverge dramatically in their attitudes toward income inequality, the government's role in society, and the welfare state (Hoover et al. 2002;

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Malloy 2009). Both evangelical and nonevangelical Canadians are more concerned about economic inequalities and more supportive of government's role in alleviating them than are their American counterparts (Bean, Gonzalez, and Kaufman 2008). This leaves us with a puzzle: Why is the evangelical subculture linked to economic conservatism in the United States but not in Canada?

This is an important question, since scholars often assume that evangelicals' individualistic theology makes them economically conservative.[1] In their work on American evangelicals, Emerson and Smith (2000) argue that most Americans are individualists, but white American evangelicals subscribe to "accountable individualism," which emphasizes moral accountability before God, and tends to reject any attempts to evade responsibility for one's situation by pointing to structural forces. This "anti-structuralism" makes white evangelicals resist structural explanations of inequality and government attempts to remedy them. Instead, evangelicals prefer to transform unaccountable individuals using the "relational strategy," by addressing the good and bad influences of personal relationships like family and friends. Because of this theological emphasis on accountable individualism, evangelicals are even more intensely committed to the values of individualism than other Americans. By contrast, African-American Protestants have an alternative tradition of collective struggle for racial equality, which counterbalances their theological concern with individual accountability (Emerson and Smith 2000; McRoberts 2003). Mainline Protestantism sustains a Social Gospel tradition, which advocates policy reforms that fight structural sin and achieve social progress (Hart 1992; Steensland 2002).

Multiple studies find that theological conservatism and economic conservatism are correlated among white, middle-class evangelicals in the United States. Theological conservatism and membership in evangelical denominations are strong predictors of anti-welfare and small-government attitudes (Barker and Carman 2000). White evangelicals are divided along socioeconomic lines, with middle-class evangelicals more inclined towards economic laissez-faire than poorer ones (Greeley and Hout 2006; Pyle 1993). But controlling for socioeconomic status, religious commitment leads to strong, significant increases in anti-egalitarian and small-government attitudes among evangelical Protestants, but not mainline Protestants or Catholics (Layman and Green 2005). White American evangelicals are also sensitive to framing effects related to personal responsibility. While all Americans tend to be more generous to "people in need" rather than "people on welfare," white evangelicals are particularly punitive towards "undeserving" target populations (Will and Cochran 1995; Wilson 1999). This fits the argument that redistributive social policy clashes with accountable individualism.

But why do white American evangelicals draw on this *particular* tool to evaluate welfare policy from their broader theological toolkit? Conservative Protestant theology is a mix of ideas about scripture, sin, and salvation, which contains a logic of compassion as well as a logic of judgment (Hempel and Bartkowski 2008). In their personal charity to the poor, white evangelicals are more likely to draw on theological tools about compassion, rather than judgment. Theological conservatives give more generously to the poor than other Americans, if generosity is measured in terms of charitable giving, rather than social policy attitudes (Brooks 2006). While religiosity increases charitable giving for liberal Protestants and Catholics, it increases giving the most for conservative Protestants (Regnerus, Smith, and Sikkink 1998). Why don't American evangelicals draw on the logic of compassion to affirm the welfare state? Conversely, why don't Canadian evangelicals draw on accountable individualism to reject the welfare state? This raises an unanswered problem in the sociology of culture: "whether and how some cultural elements control, anchor, or organize others" (Swidler 2001:206).

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[1] Following Smith and Emerson, I define evangelical Protestantism as a transdenominational movement that emphasizes personal conversion, missionary activity, adherence to religious orthodoxy, and greater tension with the wider society. All four churches emphasized the same four distinctive characteristics of evangelical theology: the authority of the Bible, Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross, the need for a personal commitment to Christ, and the need for all believers to participate actively in religious mission (Bebbington 1989). See Steensland et al. (2000) for a longer discussion of the differences between mainline and evangelical or conservative Protestantism.

To solve this puzzle, I conducted multi-sited ethnography in two matched Baptist and Pentecostal churches in the United States and Canada, and compared how they talked about poverty and the role of government. Though all four churches drew on the same repertoire of conservative theology, their religious discourse about poverty was very different. In both American churches, the growth of the welfare state was associated with America's decline as a Christian nation. American evangelicals defined "pure" compassion by opposition to government programs, which were seen as degrading and morally corrupting. Compassion toward poor people was not interpreted in terms of national solidarity, but instead as "grace" toward people presumed to be undeserving. By contrast, both Canadian churches talked about compassion toward the poor by reference to *positive* collective memories about the welfare state. Acts of religious charity towards domestic poor people were interpreted as expressions of national solidarity and social inclusion. Canadian churches did not rely as extensively on the language of "grace" to talk about poverty because they extended cultural membership to "our" poor as fellow Canadians. Comparing across sites, I found that constructions of national identity worked as an *anchoring mechanism* (Ghaziani and Baldassarri 2011) for religious talk about poverty, leading U.S. and Canadian evangelicals to use their shared theological tools in very different ways.

Based on this analysis, I argue that *visions of national solidarity* play a critical role in linking religious practice to political attitudes and civic engagement. In the sociology of religion, there is growing recognition that religious subcultures imagine their broader national context in varying ways (Edgell 2012; Edgell and Tranby 2010). This sense of national community can motivate the faithful to bridge social inequality and group boundaries in a way that parallels the notion of religion as social capital (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006; Brown and Brown 2003; Putnam and Campbell 2010). Alternately, religious groups can define cultural membership in ways that exacerbate social inequality, enforce exclusionary social boundaries, or weaken the links between religion and civic engagement (Beyerlein and Hipp 2005; Blanchard 2007; Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann 2006). Racial and class-based stratification may interact with religious identity by informing constructions of cultural membership (Edgell and Tranby 2007). Yet this critical relationship between religion, cultural membership, and national identity is often treated as a separate topic, relegated to specialized debates about civil religion (Bellah and Hammond 1980; Cristi 2001) or religious nationalism (Friedland 2001; Gorski 2000; Zubrzycki 2006).

When scholars examine the political and civic effects of religion, they do not regularly consider how religious groups draw boundaries of cultural membership (Lamont and Molnár 2002), or draw on "the nation" as a schema within religious practice (Brubaker 1994). Instead, the subfield has focused on measures of religious *belief, belonging,* and *behavior* as the primary mechanisms that shape civic engagement or political attitudes (Leege and Kellstedt 1993). In this article, I show that economic conservatism among American evangelicals is anchored by religious constructions of national identity in ways that previous scholarship attributed to theology alone. I conclude that scholars should expand the trinity of belief, belonging, and behavior to consider the varied ways that religious groups imagine *broader cultural membership*.

A "Thin Coherence" Approach to Political Culture

Comparing evangelicals in the United States and Canada, we gain greater analytical leverage to understand how American religious subculture became so closely tied to political conservatism. As Lipset famously observed: "Knowledge of Canada or the United States is the best way to gain insight into the other North American country. Nations can be understood only in the comparative perspective (1990:xiii). But I reject Lipset's (1990) approach to "national values" as internally coherent, consensual, integrated, and stable over time. Below, I lay out an alternative approach to cross-national comparison that assumes a relatively "thin" coherence between elements of political culture (DiMaggio 1997:277; Sewell 1999:49–50).

In a classic comparative study, Lipset (1990) argued that the United States was more like Canada than any other country, yet each society was organized according to different "national values." As former British colonies, Canada and the United States had shared roots in a broad liberal tradition. But through its revolutionary founding, the United States developed a more individualistic political culture, while Canada sustained a stronger collectivist and social-democratic tradition that deferred to state authority (Lipset 1990). Following Parsons, Lipset (1963) conceptualized political culture as values that held societies together.[2] For many postwar political sociologists, "national values" shaped the development of individual personalities and the evolution of social institutions (Almond and Verba 1963).

But in the 1980s, scholars began to reject the idea that societies are organized around a coherent set of national values (Berezin 1997; Orloff 1993; Skocpol 1992). The "strong program" in cultural sociology replaced Parsons's thin analysis of values with thick description of culture's internal structures (Alexander 2003; Kane 1991). Denying that values motivated behavior, Swidler (1986) redefined culture as a "repertoire" of symbols and strategies that people draw on to guide practical lines of action. New comparative-historical research showed that "essential" U.S.-Canada differences were actually shaped by power struggles and pathways of institutional development, not different national values (Boychuk 2008; Kaufman 2009; Smith 2008). A nation's "founding moments" were not permanently imprinted; rather, collective memories about a nation's "founding moments" changed over time, as elites constructed the past to meet the needs of the present (Olick and Robbins 1998; Schwartz 1982). Working in diverse fields, scholars converged on a critique of "national values" and its associated cultural paradigm.

Political culture was increasingly reconceptualized as a *repertoire* of internally heterogeneous elements, contested by members of different subgroups and susceptible to change. Comparative scholars now argue that different national contexts make some tools more available than others, through historical and institutional channels (Lamont and Thévenot 2000). Cross-national differences in public opinion cannot be reduced to American individualism versus Canadian collectivism. On a variety of survey measures, Canadians are as committed to the values of individual self-reliance and personal responsibility as are Americans (Grabb and Curtis 2005:192). Americans and Canadians are equally likely to say that there should be more incentives for individual effort rather than an equalization of people's incomes; that unemployed people should be obliged to take any available job rather than remain idle; and that individual freedom from government is good for the economy (Grabb and Curtis 2005:182). Yet Canadians also report higher levels of support for the idea that "government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for" (Andersen and Curtis 2011). These survey findings are consistent with the idea that political culture is internally heterogeneous.

At the same time, scholars should not overstate the internal incoherence and strategic malleability of political culture. Social policy attitudes vary cross-nationally in patterned ways that endure over time (Inglehart and Baker 2000) and contribute to different trajectories of policy change and stability between countries (Brooks and Manza 2007). To make sense of these cross-national differences, analysts must identify sources of limited or "thin" coherence that run along national borders. For example, "cultural anchors" hold internally diverse social movements together by organizing internal differences and providing sufficient coherence for collective action (Ghaziani and Baldassarri 2011). Likewise, particular objects and events may be more likely to endure as symbols of national identity if they afford meaningful ground to organize *contention* as well as consensus (Spillman 1998). Comparing how elites commemorated founding moments in the United States and Australia, Spillman (1997) has shown that symbols and collective memories endure within national identity when competing groups can appeal to them for different purposes.

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[2] See Somers (1995) and Alexander (1988) for an extended discussion of how Parsons shaped the concept of political culture in postwar sociology.

In this article, I consider how constructions of national identity inform these Canada-U.S. differences in social policy attitudes. National identity can bolster or undermine public support for the welfare state, depending on the *collective memories* and *categories of cultural membership* that are associated with social policy. Different collective memories about national origin and state building (Olick and Robbins 1998; Schwartz and Schuman 2005) enshrine different roles for government as essential to national identity. In countries where redistributive social policy is more popular, these programs are linked to collective memories of national pride (Béland and Lecours 2005; Brooks and Manza 2007). Unpopular social policies lack this association with national pride and solidarity (Larsen 2006). Universal policies are more easily linked to nationalism because eligibility is defined in terms of shared citizenship: recipients are categorized as deserving members of a national community (Rothstein 1998). Targeted social policies are more vulnerable to popular backlash; by stigmatizing recipients as members of a morally inferior or racialized category (Gilens 1999; Mettler 2002; Schneider and Ingram 2005), they can trigger backlash against "undeserving" policy recipients (Schram, Soss, and Fording 2003). National identity drives welfare backlash when the public draws symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnár 2002) that exclude "welfare recipients" (Handler and Hasenfeld 1991) from the imagined community of the nation (Anderson 1983). Conversely, redistributive social policy is legitimated when constructions of cultural membership include "the poor" as part of "us" (Lamont 2000).

By considering the construction of national identity, we can gain a more complex understanding of Canada-U.S. differences. In comparative perspective, the United States and Canada are both considered liberal welfare states with individualistic, market-based approaches to inequality, as opposed to conservative or social-democratic regimes (Esping-Andersen 1990). But there are small differences with big consequences for public discourse about poverty (Banting, Hoberg, and Simeon 1997; Myles 1998). Both government and charitable aid to the poor is structured by cultural categories of worth (Mohr 1994; Steensland 2006) within a moral order of who deserves what kind of assistance. Historically, American welfare debates have been structured by durable distinctions between the "deserving poor" (who were not expected to work because of age, gender, family status, or physical limitations), and the "undeserving poor" (who were expected to work and thus merited only limited government assistance) (Rothstein 1998; Schneider and Ingram 2005). These categories laid the groundwork for a contemporary anti-welfare backlash, which culminated in the Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act, or PRWORA (Hays 2003). By making welfare benefits conditional upon work, this reform only reinforced popular animosity towards "the poor," and failed to raise public awareness of the invisible "working poor" (Soss and Schram 2007). The law was passed with bipartisan support, with both parties invoking a narrative that blamed poverty on "welfare dependency" and its corrosive effects on the moral discipline of poor people (Hudson and Coukos 2005; Somers and Block 2005). This jeremiad constructed national identity in ways that excluded "the poor" from cultural membership in the imagined community of good Americans (Morone 2003).

By comparison, the Canadian liberal welfare state still partly institutionalizes an ideal of social citizenship, or nonstigmatized welfare provision (Brodie 2002). In Canada, this ideal is embodied most visibly through the popular universal health-care program known as Medicare. Canada's provincially administered health insurance has become a symbol of national pride—indeed, the founding of Medicare has become part of Canada's collective memories of nation building (Béland and Lecours 2005:222). This program has no American counterpart besides Medicaid, which targets only the indigent poor, and the U.S. Medicare program, which enrolls the elderly (Maioni 1998). American Social Security remains a popular universal benefit to seniors (DeWitt, Béland, and Berkowitz 2008), but is not publicly recognized as a symbol of national pride or solidarity in response to poverty (Howard 2007). Like the United States, Canada has experienced anti-welfare backlash and a shift towards "workfare" models of social assistance

(Rice and Prince 2000). But at the same time, Canada has continued to support more generous benefits for the working poor, creating greater public recognition of this "worthy" category of fellow citizens (Zuberi 2006). The rhetoric of retrenchment is still punctuated by the message that taking care of "our" poor is central to who "we" are as a nation. This social citizenship framing of national identity has never gained the same traction within American politics (Fraser and Gordon 1998; Katz 1986).

In summary, U.S. and Canadian cultural repertoires share elements of individualism, but provide different resources to construct national identity. National identity affects public support for redistributive social policy, through collective memories about the welfare state and categories of cultural membership.

Evangelicals and National Identity

Within this approach to political culture, scholars expect that different groups within the same society will elaborate collective memories about "the nation" from distinctive vantage points (Brubaker 2006), and draw boundaries of cultural membership in different ways (Lamont 2000). Visions of national identity may foster consensus between groups, but they also can serve as *cultural anchors* that organize differences. Previous work suggests that national identity plays an important role within the distinctive civic and political attributes of American evangelicals (Edgell and Tranby 2010). For U.S. evangelicals, American national identity has a distinctive religious meaning that goes beyond a generic civil religion (Bellah 1975). While civil religion has diminished in American public life, American evangelicals continue to practice a potent form of religious nationalism (Wuthnow 1988).

Some American evangelicals assert that Christianity is the rightful foundation for national identity and a moral code for public life (Hunter 1991). While nationalism often draws on mythic or religious forms, the term "religious nationalism" refers to stories and symbols that sacralize American national identity in terms of a supra-empirical reality (Gorski 2000; Smith 2003; Zubrzycki 2006). Within this nationalist narrative, America was founded as a Christian nation, but has drifted from these founding values, leading to moral decline and generating social problems. According to Smith (1998), many evangelicals use this nationalist narrative to strengthen their subcultural identity by generating threat and tension with the larger society. These American evangelicals do not aspire to impose a theocracy, but rather to base national solidarity and social norms on a common Christian heritage.

Because American evangelicals imagine national community as inextricably tied to a Judeo-Christian core of values, they tend to draw the boundaries of national solidarity more exclusively. When asked about abstract *values*, American evangelicals seem to share a broad set of national ideals with other Americans, valuing a balance of equality and freedom, moral standards and respect for diversity (Smith 2000; Wolfe 1998). But when evangelicals are asked to draw the symbolic boundaries (Pachucki, Pendergrass, and Lamont 2007) of "their" America, they are more inclined to exclude people from cultural membership in the nation if they are perceived as symbolic threats to this vision (Edgell and Tranby 2010). For example, religious nationalism is a strong predictor of evangelical opposition to immigration (McDaniel, Nooruddin, and Shortle 2011).

Yet when scholars seek to explain the civic and political effects of religion, they regularly ignore *religious constructions of national identity* as a mechanism. More commonly, researchers use measures of religious networks, congregational attendance, and civic activities to assess whether religious participation generates "bonding" or "bridging" forms of social capital (Campbell 2004). But as Lichterman (2005) has demonstrated, we should not assume that particular meanings about "bonding" or "bridging" naturally emerge from particular kinds of religious networks or civic activities. By comparing similar groups in different national contexts, we gain greater analytical leverage on how religious traditions imagine broader forms of cultural membership (Zubrzycki 2012).

ANALYTIC APPROACH: MULTI-SITED ETHNOGRAPHY

This comparative investigation started with a puzzle raised by survey findings: Why is the evangelical subculture linked to economic conservatism in the United States but not in Canada? This ethnographic study was designed to identify the social mechanisms (Gross 2009; Tilly 2001) that linked economic conservatism to religion among rank-and-file American evangelicals. To solve this puzzle, I adopted the approach of *analytic ethnography* to contribute to theoretical development through a sustained engagement between existing theory and new empirical data (Lofland 1995; Snow, Morrill, and Anderson 2003). Analytic ethnography aims to go beyond the purely interpretive goal of "thick description" (Geertz 1973) or understanding "what is going on" in a particular site.[3] Taking this analytic approach, I set up a multi-sited ethnographic design to extend or refine existing theory, starting with a puzzle raised by previous research. By comparing American and Canadian evangelical congregations, I looked for differences in how local churches talked about poverty and the role of government. This cross-national comparison was combined with careful site selection based on theoretical criteria.

The data are drawn from a larger ethnographic comparison of four Baptist and Pentecostal churches as sites of political socialization in the United States and Canada. I conducted one year of in-depth observation in four congregations to compare how evangelical congregations in the United States and Canada construct subcultural identity. To isolate the effects of cross-national differences, as opposed to differences between churches, I matched two Baptist and two Pentecostal congregations in middle-class, suburban neighborhoods in Hamilton, Ontario, and Buffalo, New York that occupy the same niche within the area along a number of important dimensions identified by previous work on the sociology of religion: denominational traditions, theological and behavioral strictness, socioeconomic and ethnic profile, and suburban location.[4] I also conducted 60 semi-structured interviews with a cross-section of clergy and laity within these four churches to evaluate how individuals' private attitudes differed from the culture expressed in public interactions.

Buffalo, New York and Hamilton, Ontario were chosen using a "most similar" strategy of comparison (Mahoney 2000), recognizing important regional variation within each country (Grabb and Curtis 2005). In the United States, the South shows more anti-redistributionist attitudes than the North, tied to its particular history of slavery, civil rights backlash, and mistrust of the federal government (Grabb et al. 2009). In Canada, Quebec shows much more pro-redistributionist attitudes than English Canada, due to its own history of substate nationalism (Béland and Lecours 2006). Lying between these regional extremes, the "most similar" comparison of Buffalo and Hamilton tests the idea that national context matters for how evangelicals talk about poverty and social policy. Given the diversity of evangelicalism in North America, findings in these four congregations cannot be generalized to a larger population of congregations in a statistical sense. Rather, these four congregations were chosen to be theoretically generalizable to reveal mechanisms that can help interpret the patterns found in cross-national survey research.

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[3] Exemplars that fit this definition of analytic ethnography include Smilde (2007) and Mische (2008). Following these exemplars, I set up comparisons across sites to solve a theoretical puzzle identified in advance, as opposed to finding puzzles in the field in a more open-ended way.

[4] Designing the study, I found that healthy majority-white evangelical churches in Hamilton were focused on accommodating Canada's growing ethnic diversity. To match churches as closely as possible across the border, I identified majority-white American churches that had achieved some racial or ethnic diversity, rather than exclusively white churches. All four churches were majority-white with overwhelmingly white leadership, and white, native-born members set the tone for public-church interaction. Although each church had made some steps towards greater racial and ethnic diversity, none were multiracial churches by Emerson and Woo's definition (2006) because diversity did not approach 20 percent of attenders. This sampling strategy allowed me to make meaningful cross-border comparisons, while also shedding light on the distinctive characteristics of white evangelicalism in the United States.

I carried out ongoing data analysis simultaneously with data collection, using a constant comparative process informed by the tradition of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). After each period in the field, I took detailed notes of the exchanges I observed. I wrote theoretical memos at least once a week to note possible trends in the data and suggest areas where I should probe further. Following each interview, I wrote a memo highlighting the most important themes of the interview and noting any theory-generating quotes. After leaving the field, all interviews were transcribed and coded inductively using the software Atlas.ti, using a coding scheme that emerged from coding the field notes and reviews of the relevant literature (Miles and Huberman 1994).

I entered the field informed by theoretical debates about religion and economic attitudes, as well as cross-national research on political culture. From the start of my fieldwork, I observed stark differences in how the two American and two Canadian churches constructed poverty as a social problem, and how they made reference to the role of government in addressing poverty. Existing theory in the sociology of religion did not provide adequate categories to describe these cross-national differences between these evangelical churches, which were otherwise so similar in their individualistic theology. To interpret these differences, I also considered new formulations of the "political culture" concept, advanced by cross-national research on social policy attitudes. Sensitized to this comparative framework, I expected that churches in the United States and Canada would draw on different cultural repertoires that were made available in their broader societal context. But I was taken aback by the vivid ways that evangelicals drew on national identity as a category of *religious practice* to make sense of poverty in local church contexts. I then engaged in theoretical refinement, concluding that religious visions of national identity were an important mechanism that linked religious participation to civic engagement and political attitudes.

To ensure that my theoretical conclusions were valid and not just plausible, I incorporated the following verification tactics into my research practice. The first tactic was *checking for representativeness* by coding my field notes and interviews and counting the frequency of different events and themes. The second verification tactic was *methodological triangulation*, combining ethnographic observation and in-depth interviews. Conducting interviews with a purposive sample of the congregational membership allowed me to gauge the representativeness of the attitudes and events that I noted during participant observation (though a congregation's public culture is more than the sum of its members private views). The third tactic was *replicating findings* by checking whether patterns held across settings and over time. The fourth tactic was looking for *negative evidence* that suggested no significant differences in how Canadian and American evangelicals talked about poverty. The final tactic was to check out *rival explanations* for any patterns I discovered in the field. Looking for counterevidence, I particularly considered two alternative explanations. First, I looked for evidence that religious subcultures did not exert an independent influence on how local churches talked about poverty. For example, evangelicals might have simply drawn on cultural repertoires from the broader culture, without linking them to religious belief or identity. Second, I looked for evidence that any cross-national differences between evangelical churches might flow from substantively different theologies. I considered the possibility that, despite my careful site selection, there might be underlying theological differences between two Baptist and two Pentecostal churches in each country that could better explain how they talked about poverty. However, I found that these two rival explanations could not make sense of the distinctive patterns that I found in the field. A substantial refinement of theory was required to account for the different ways that evangelicals constructed poverty in the United States and Canada.

FINDINGS

Comparing the two American and two Canadian churches, I found that all four engaged in a similar repertoire of poverty-related activities (Chaves and Tsitsos 2001), fitting a well-documented pattern among evangelicals in the United States (Sider and Unruh 2001; Wuthnow 1999). In both countries, church activities were oriented towards charity rather than structural change, using the relational strategy (Smith 1998) of changing individuals through relationship building and direct service. All four churches justified these activities in the theological language of evangelism and compassion (Ammerman 2005), not the Social Gospel theology of improving society through structural reforms (White and Hopkins 1976). In each of these churches, I heard the Social Gospel regularly disparaged as a departure from evangelical orthodoxy.

Despite sharing similar activities and theology, the American and Canadian churches drew differently on the language of national identity to talk about poverty. In Canada, religious charity and outreach to the poor was framed as an expression of national solidarity in ways that extended cultural membership to poor people. Both Canadian churches publicly articulated positive collective memories of welfare state formation, which legitimated redistributive social programs. In the United States, neither church used a public language of solidarity and national membership to describe domestic poverty. Instead, these church outreach efforts emphasized individual expressions of "grace" (Elisha 2008) toward morally unworthy people. Both American churches framed their activities using negative collective memories about welfare state formation; these narratives linked the growth of government to moral decline. In short, the differences between the U.S. and Canadian churches lay not in their theology, but in the way that they made sense of their relationship as Christians to poor people in the context of a broader national community. Members drew on national identity to accomplish what Lichterman (2008) calls "mapping": to articulate in words and gestures how they should relate to poor people as people of faith living within a larger national community. Below, I analyze these religious uses of national identity in two American churches, and then compare them to two Canadian churches.

United States: Northtown Baptist Church

A recurring theme within Northtown Baptist Church was that caring for the poor and service to the community were the fruits of transformation—not good works necessary for salvation, but certainly signs of genuine transformation. However, at Northtown Baptist, religious responsibilities to the poor were often contrasted negatively with structural efforts to remedy poverty. Rejecting Social Gospel theology, church leaders framed this relational strategy of individual change as the Christian approach to poverty. For example, Charles, the youth pastor, regularly brought up issues of poverty in church. In a sermon, he urged the congregation to "look to God's heart" for "the poor" and "the down and out":

> Reading the Bible, there are few things that stick out more than God's heart for the poor.... We are so blinded by our own prosperity. God has blessed this nation, but what have we done with the prosperity that was given us? Are we not showing favoritism when we're not willing to give?... Has not God chosen the poor to be rich in faith?... We are broken by needs of people living in a trash dump. Now, people have all these utopian ideas: ... "if the U.S. would give this much, we could end poverty." But that's completely against what Jesus says. He says, "The poor you will always have with you." Jesus said, "There will never come a time when there will not be poor." I don't think poverty will ever be alleviated—that's never going to happen.

In rejecting structural reform, Charles was drawing important theological boundaries between "spiritual" and "secular" efforts to address poverty. But he was also defending a narrative of America as a blessed, but ungrateful, nation—ungratefulness that he particularly associated with domestic poor people.

While Charles recognized that God favored the poor to be "rich in faith," he did not see this spiritual blessing to fall on American poor. In an interview after the sermon, Charles told me that he felt ambivalent about addressing poverty as an American social problem. Charles saw this work as an expression of grace or compassion, but he was unwilling to extend solidarity or cultural membership to American poor people. Last year, he had sponsored a church trip to do house repair in poor neighborhoods; this fall, he was planning outreach activities in the inner city, and organizing a youth event to raise awareness of homelessness. But when I asked Charles how he wanted these activities to change how his youth participated in their own country, he answered:

> I would say there is no true poverty in America and so my inclination is not really ... to focus on that. We don't disqualify it altogether; obviously through Mission Blitz and World Changers and things like the Great Sleep-out; we address those things.

I asked Charles to explain what he meant by "true poverty":

> If you look at the poverty line in America, you give that allowance to anybody in any other country ... you are going to be a king ... I have done many houses, and you are talking about people that, more than anything, have an issue prioritizing necessities. They have the satellite cable hooked-up to the back of their house and they are having us do their roof ... I don't have cable and that's because I made a choice ... I prioritize other things, and mostly it's putting food on the table ... It's a question of how *truly* impoverished you are, it's a relative term.

Charles was highly invested in mobilizing the congregation to show compassion for the poor, in the United States and across the world. But he was also highly ambivalent toward the domestic poor: he saw this category of people as undeserving of cultural membership, and so he viewed his charity work as an expression of grace to generally undeserving people (Elisha 2008). Indeed, Charles's definition of the "deserving poor" was even more stringent than the institutionalized categories of the 1996 Welfare Reform, since *no* Americans seemed to qualify as worthy of help.

Analyzing a year of field notes, I could not find any cases at Northtown Baptist where members talked publicly about American poor people as deserving of solidarity as fellow citizens. Welfare state research has found that national boundaries affect the construction of reciprocity and solidarity, creating a tendency to privilege the needs of "our poor" over the needs of "outsiders" (Kymlicka and Banting 2006). But at Northpoint, the suffering of the global poor repeatedly is presented as a foil for the undeserving American poor. For example, when a mission group came back from Mexico, several returning mission team members exclaimed in the worship service that they had never seen such poverty, and the trip taught them to be grateful for how much "we" had in the United States. The next week in Sunday School, the Southern Baptist denominational curriculum prompted the class to talk about being grateful for our wealth, talking about how "even the poorest Americans are wealthy by global standards." This trope was often repeated in church life and in interviews as part of a larger narrative about how American wealth had made us ungrateful and materialistic, unlike poor people in other countries, who were truly grateful for what they had. While this narrative about American wealth motivated concern for global poverty, it also negatively contrasted the U.S. poor with the deserving poor of other countries.

Listening to the bundle of narratives (Fine 1995) that constituted Northtown Baptist's subcultural identity, I found that denigrating the government was a recurring theme. For example, a team of Northtown men returned from helping rebuild houses in the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina. At a church reception for new members, a middle-aged businessman told me how impressed he was with the Southern Baptist's mobile kitchens, and their ability to efficiently mobilize volunteers at such a large scale. At another church potluck, church members marveled at the capacity of the Southern Baptist denomination to respond to natural disasters like Katrina. Ann, a soft-spoken deacon's wife, shared about the church's disaster relief effort in Alabama and New Orleans:

> We do a lot of disaster relief. You know, I heard after Hurricane Katrina, the churches all around were so prepared to go in and help out. And it seems like they were even better prepared than the government. It seemed like the government really made a mess of it, they weren't prepared to respond like the churches were.

For Ann, this story carried a clear moral: churches must reclaim their rightful place in the public square, which has been wrongfully taken by government. In denigrating government's ability to respond effectively through government programs, Ann drew on the accountable individualist theme of anti-structuralism. But she also invoked a negative collective memory about the welfare state, which associated the growth of social policy with the decline of religion's public role.

This was a recurring pattern: American evangelicals used accountable individualist language, but by reference to this evangelical narrative of national identity. For example, Don, the director of a parachurch ministry, explained how the church should equip young people to be good citizens:

> Well, I think teaching them what the Bible tells us about how to love our neighbors is a big part of that . . . and so as a good citizen, as a good Christian, you are going to be a good citizen because you'll love them. You'll care for your neighbors, and their family and their friends; and the church should be the best institution for taking care of people. That's how it used to be. Although we subjugated that by giving that over to the government to take care of, but we're seeing our young people rise up and take responsibility.

Using the language of accountable individualism, Don defined the problem as a breakdown in personal responsibility among Christians. According to Emerson and Smith's framework, Don's anti-government attitudes were driven by the theological language of anti-structuralism: Christians had yielded to a sinful tendency to look to structural forces, to escape their personal obligations to "care for neighbors." But Don was also drawing on a particular collective memory that blamed a decline in the public role of Christianity on the growth of the welfare state. Redistributive social policy threatened his religious identity because it represented moral decline from "how it used to be" in America. Thus, Don drew on accountable individualism in ways that were anchored by his narrative of Christian nationalism.

United States: Lifeway Assembly of God

I found a similar pattern at Lifeway Assembly, which had an even stronger history of outreach to poor communities, particularly a public housing development located in their suburb. Through evangelism, a biweekly food pantry, and a bus ministry to poor children, Lifeway aggressively recruited "the poor" as church participants, and not just distant objects of charity. Both the pastoral team and the lay leadership were united in this active outreach to poor people, not just solidly working-class and middle-class families that resembled their current membership. Yet at Lifeway Assembly, public expressions of anti-welfare state sentiment were a way of affirming religious identity.

Audrey, a college-educated homeschooling mother in her early 40s, described her experiences of service at the church's food bank:

> The people that come to them for help know that they are appreciated, and loved and valued and encouraged. For one thing, they are way more efficient than anything government. I mean that's the other thing, there, none of them are paid. They are all volunteers and it doesn't become this bureaucratic handout program, it becomes personal, they want to express the love of God to people.

Audrey defined Christian compassion by denigrating government programs as "bureaucratic handouts." Thus, her use of theological tools was anchored by a distinctively evangelical narrative of national identity, which associated the growth of "handout programs" with America's slide from "Christian values." I frequently heard this narrative as a reference point for public interaction at Lifeway Assembly. For example, Audrey articulated this narrative explicitly during a casual conversation after church, paraphrased in my field notes. Her son had just written a college paper that compared the practice of Jubilee in the Old Testament, with U.S. programs that deal with poverty today. For Audrey, his paper proved that "God did a better job of taking care of the poor in ancient Israel than in our War on Poverty that Johnson launched." Within this collective memory about the welfare state, the War on Poverty failed because it took America away from biblical principles of personal compassion.

However, these practices of personal compassion were fraught with considerable ambivalence towards "the poor" as a cultural category. On one hand, church volunteers like Audrey desired to "appreciate, love, value, and encourage" poor people as individuals. On the other hand, I heard considerable unwillingness to extend *cultural membership* to Americans in poverty: to relate to poor people not just as individuals, but as worthy members of a national community. Service to the poor was frequently described as an expression of grace to people who may or may not deserve help. For example, Matt became a food bank volunteer after he was laid off from his blue-collar job. Matt told me that he tried not to judge people who used the food bank; he would just "love them up" and "let God sort it out." Ironically, Matt's recent unemployment did not make him identify with "the poor" as a group; in Matt's usage, poor people were by definition chronically unemployed. Matt used the language of grace to map his relationship to the poor, but he had no religious language to express solidarity with poor people as fellow citizens. Indeed, "loving people" as individuals meant deliberately ignoring the larger structural and political context of poverty.

In summary, both American churches were motivated by more than just accountable individualism when they denigrate the effectiveness of government policy. They were also defending a particular narrative of Christian nationalism. Evangelicals used the theological tool of accountable individualism in ways that were anchored by collective memories about the welfare state and constructions of cultural membership. The role of national identity becomes even clearer when we compare evangelical congregations in the United States and Canada. Both Canadian congregations talked about poverty in ways that linked the welfare state to symbols of national pride, and constructed "the poor" as deserving cultural membership in that national community. Like their American counterparts, Canadian evangelicals expressed concern for Canada's "Christian" heritage. But unlike American evangelicals, they elaborated these concerns about national identity in ways that *legitimated* redistributive social policy. This sheds light on why Canadian evangelicals are not more economically conservative than other Canadians, even though they share individualistic theology with their American counterparts.

Canada: Highpoint Baptist Church

Just as at Northtown Baptist in suburban Buffalo, Highpoint Baptist made sense of poverty through its partnerships with international missions, domestic parachurch ministries, and sister churches in poor neighborhoods. In particular, Highpoint maintained a close relationship with City Centre Church, a Baptist church plant in downtown Hamilton that did extensive outreach to poor people and immigrants. The pastor and lay leadership at City Centre frequently visited Highpoint to tell them about their work in the "urban core," and mobilized volunteers to help with their soccer camps, holiday outreach, and other ministries to their low-income neighborhood. The church often received visits from representatives from parachurch ministries that worked with poor Canadians as well as from missionaries who talked about global poverty. But in contrast to Northtown Baptist, clergy and laity at Highpoint Baptist were much more likely to talk about poverty and poor people in ways that invoked themes of national solidarity and citizenship.

These differences are puzzling, since Highpoint Baptist emphasized an individualistic theology of salvation that prioritized evangelism over all other goals. In an interview, an assistant pastor explained to me that he was wary of any kind of "social ministry" that might blur the fundamental boundary between born-again Christians and people who hadn't been saved. I repeatedly heard church leaders denouncing the Social Gospel because it de-emphasized the need for personal salvation. For example, head pastor John emphasized this point after a visit from the pastor of City Centre Church:

> Do you realize that across this nation and world, churches that say the Gospel teach works and you do not need the cross of Christ? You cannot point someone to redemption of Jesus Christ unless they recognize their need for a savior . . . . This is where sociologists can't get it right. The guys this morning from the City Centre church plant told us that they get to a point where they can't do it . . . . Christ not only forgives, but he changes lives.

Pastor John's sermon brought home a central theme within evangelicalism: the incapacity of human beings to please God through their own striving, whether through secular social change or through the much-disparaged Social Gospel. Like American evangelicals, Pastor John argued that the cross of Christ empowered believers to minister to the poor in personal ways that social-scientific knowledge couldn't comprehend. As in the two American churches, I often heard this kind of boundary work how "we" as evangelical Christians did social ministry, as opposed to secular governments and nonprofits. The main difference was Highpoint Baptist did not map its identity by denigrating government efforts to help the poor.

To the contrary, I found that Highpoint leadership and members constructed poverty in ways that linked the welfare state to symbols of national pride. Like Northpoint Baptist in the United States, Highpoint Baptist contrasted its nation's "godless" prosperity to the grateful dependence on God that it associated with poor people in the Third World. But when Highpoint Baptist members elaborated their identity as wealthy Canadian Christians, they often invoked Canada's welfare state and "good government" as sources of national pride, part of what "we" had to be thankful for as Canadians.[5] This theme emerged during a special Sunday worship service that the church's music minister planned around a theme of prayer for Canada. The music minister invited individuals in the congregation to stand and share their blessings and prayer concerns about the spiritual condition of the nation. Todd, a businessman in his 30s with two young children, stood up at the front and expressed his gratefulness for God's blessing—his comfortable house, his personal safety—in a world where many people did not have enough to eat. Next the music minister instructed us to gather in small groups for intercessory prayer. Huddled with a small group for prayer, the young man next to me prayed that Canada would be "good stewards of our prosperity."

In settings like this, Highpoint Baptist members mapped their identity as rich Canadians without creating a negative contrast between the deserving, truly needy poor in the developing world, and the undeserving, ungrateful Canadian poor. For example, I attended a presentation by a team of Highpoint members who were going to Bosnia for a mission trip to work with young orphans and at-risk youth in a hockey camp. This hockey camp was a vehicle to "build relationships" with local youth in a majority-Muslim area with the ultimate goal of converting them to Christianity. Showing compassion was also part of the mission of the camp, by providing routine medical care and regular meals to these youth. But the leader of the mission team explained this need for compassion by reference to Canada's welfare state: "Their health care system was destroyed by the war, so there's a real need for us to provide medical care." This appeal implied a particular construction of national identity: that "we" as Christians were part of a national community defined by universal healthcare, and so we should consider poor people in other countries whose national institutions had failed them. By contrast, both U.S. churches constructed global compassion in ways that denied solidarity with poor Americans.

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[5] Within the first two months of fieldwork, I found this language of national pride in "our" institutions to be jarring because analogous expressions were absent from both American evangelical churches. I began listening for such expressions of national pride related to poverty and the role of government in all four churches, particularly for counterexamples of this kind of talk in the two American churches. Because of this nonrepresentative sampling strategy, I did not include quantitative comparisons of frequency. But coding for these expressions in both Canadian churches, I found relevant examples across five different contexts—sermons, small groups, Bible studies, group prayers, and informal social interaction—as well as individual interviews. By contrast, I could not find analogous examples in any context of public church life for either of the American churches, though I was actively listening for them.

Furthermore, I also heard public talk about poverty at Highpoint that recognized the cultural membership of poor people as worthy Canadians, and sometimes fellow Christians. I regularly heard Christians publicly identify themselves as low income, or describe how they benefitted from programs that targeted the working poor. For example, we heard a guest sermon from the director of an outreach to low-income First Nation youth. Describing his ministry, the guest-speaker told us that he and his wife were about to buy a new home, with an extra guest room for youth who needed a safe place to sleep. Without a hint of embarrassment, he informed us that his new home was made possible by a subsidized loan from a provincial initiative to encourage home ownership among low-income people. Then he publicly thanked God for providing for his needs in this way, overlaying this news of secular assistance from the government with religious meaning (Ammerman 2007). His public presentation blurred the boundaries between the "poor people" being helped by his ministry, and his own status as head of a respectable, lower-middle-class family whose ministry was enabled by government assistance. By contrast, my fieldwork in both American churches did not yield similar examples of lower-income Christians who openly shared their reliance on any government program as a "blessing."

In mapping "the poor" as part of "us," church members framed poverty as a problem of social inclusion and national solidarity. This basic assumption was held even by respondents like Amanda, who was critical of unemployment "handouts" that did not require people to work. When I asked Amanda what growing inequality would mean for Canada, she framed poverty as a problem of social exclusion:

> Probably that poor people would get lost in the shuffle, cause I think a lot of times, it's the middle class that looks after the lower, because they're closer to that class than the upper—sometimes they are willing to share in their finances but not always their time, which is sometimes more important . . . . [The middle class is more] willing to work in some areas, to help integrate them into communities. Well, I think that's more in the middle class to do than the upper class, they can't be bothered to: "Here's my money and just do whatever you want with it."

Amanda was looking forward to volunteering at a homeless shelter in the fall with her church choir, which they had scheduled to do one evening a month during their regular practice time. She believed that it wasn't just up to the government to reduce differences between the rich and the poor: "people have to come together and work together to do that." But Amanda saw this kind of church outreach as an extension of the government's responsibilities to "be a support" to low-income people. Amanda stated, "the church certainly can get involved in that. You know, running after school programs for kids . . . .We don't have to be that organization, but we can certainly come alongside and help them." Unlike American evangelicals, Amanda saw church-based efforts as an extension of governmental efforts, not as a superior alternative. Religious compassion was an expression of solidarity, not an expression of grace to undeserving people.

Surveying fieldwork and interviews, I could not find any cases where the growth of welfare programs was linked to Canada's moral decline as a nation. Instead, Highpoint members mapped their relationship to poor people by invoking *positive* collective memories about the welfare state, referring to inclusive social programs as symbols of national pride and solidarity. Joan, who coordinated community volunteer work, articulated her religious narrative of Canadian national identity:

> So many of the principles that affect our way of life in North America, came directly from a biblical perspective . . . . It was basically the same progression in Canada . . . . The fact that the church felt like it was their responsibility to care for people. Way before there was all the government funding and regulations . . . and the expectations of health care in Canada . . . at their roots, at their core, it was church denominations feeling like people should be

> educated and should have medical care. But if you just pulled some Joe person off the street ... they wouldn't know that.

Here, Joan was not simply drawing on the larger Canadian cultural repertoire made available from *outside* the evangelical subculture. She was also articulating her distinctively evangelical concerns about defending a shared Christian heritage within an increasingly secular, multicultural Canada. Like American evangelicals, Highpoint Baptist defended the idea that national solidarity and social norms should be based on a common Christian heritage. But unlike American evangelicals, their religious uses of national identity worked to legitimate redistributive social policy and extend cultural membership to Canadians in poverty.

Canada: Grace Pentecostal Church

At Grace Pentecostal, talk about poverty often emerged in relationship to the church's active involvement with international missions. During my fieldwork, Grace Pentecostal conducted a major mission trip to Kenya to partner with an urban Kenyan Pentecostal congregation that was opening up a medical mission to a traditionally Muslim ethnic group in the rural areas outside their city. In a Sunday worship leading up to the mission trip, Pastor David encouraged the congregation to keep contributing generously with their time and money by reminding them of Jesus' words about the "least of these my brethren":

> You see what doors God has opened . . . I really feel that God believes in us, and God trusts us that what he gives to us, we're not seeking to hoard, but we're just a conduit . . . . This is part of our mission, helping the widows and the orphans . . . "I was in prison, I was sick, I was . . . and when did we see you?" In as much as you did it unto the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me.

In the months before the mission trip, the music minister encouraged the congregation to tell others about the medical mission as an opening to share the gospel with them. In a church announcement, he said: "We've given you this flier about the medical mission, so that you can tell your family and friends about it. We're not asking you to go door-to-door asking for money or anything. But it's a great opportunity to witness to friends and family, and say, 'This is what Christianity is all about, this is what our church is all about, this is what I'm all about.'" The flier reported that this ethnic group was devastated by severe flooding and needed basic medical care, and appealed to Canadian generosity with the reminder: "Access to a doctor and medicines, vaccinations, are things we take for granted here in Canada."

As in the two American churches, Grace Pentecostal's mission trips elaborated national identity in religious ways: by mapping "our" place as prosperous Canadians in a world of poverty, church members cultivated greater appreciation for their relative prosperity. But as at Highpoint, being a wealthy Canadian Christian also meant expressing grateful pride in the nation's health-care system, and showing compassion to those who did not live in such a well-governed country. Since Canadians at both churches measured their country's wealth in terms of national institutions as well as income, they could talk about absolute deprivation in Kenya without making a negative contrast between the "deserving, needy" global poor and the "undeserving, not truly needy" domestic poor.

Like most Protestant churches in the United States (Chaves 2004; Wuthnow 2004), Grace Pentecostal's outreach to domestic poor people was more oriented to intermittent service, like sending the youth group to participate in a city-wide Christian public service day. The church's most sustained, collective outreach to the local poor was its semi-annual Thanksgiving assistance, where the church gathered donated food and went door-to-door in low-income neighborhoods to offer holiday baskets. Grace Pentecostal did not partner with any social service providers as a church, although individuals from the church had ongoing ties to different social agencies as volunteers. Nonetheless, the problem of domestic poverty was periodically lifted up in the spiritual life of the church, even in charismatic practices of "spiritual warfare."

Pastor David explained that one of their themes for a recent prayer emphasis was interceding on behalf of Hamilton's inner-city core, which was wracked by high rates of poverty, unemployment, and violence. The congregation had been praying for job creation, poverty alleviation, crime reduction, and spiritual revival. In the language of spiritual warfare, poverty was an affliction that affected the city of Hamilton as a whole, not just individuals. Small teams from the congregation interceded for Hamilton by praying over places that symbolized the city's common life—the city hall, the public schools, a pedestrian bridge on a major road that connected the wealthier mountain neighborhoods to the urban core. Other small groups organized regular "prayer walks" through neighborhoods recently struck by violence.

Like their American counterparts, Grace Pentecostal sought to transform its city through a strategy of personal influence, consistent with its accountable individualist theology. These Pentecostal practices of spiritual warfare also drew on religious nationalism by contending that national solidarity and social norms should be based on a common Christian heritage. But unlike American evangelicals, they elaborated these concerns about national identity in ways that legitimated redistributive social policy. For example, Cindy explained to me why Canada's welfare state ultimately required Christian principles to succeed.

> When you have moral character, leaders in the country would have a total different outcome in society than individuals driven by selfishness.... as a country you have to govern both [the rich and the poor.] You have to have things that help the poor, and you have to give the rich opportunity to conduct business. I think the problem is when you don't have moral guidance in it, these plans get out of whack ... and there's nothing to build character into those programs... When you have a leader with moral character, that says: "This program is to help you during this period of time, and then it's going to move you into being self-sufficient again".... There has to be something to get them back on their feet... When you're governed that way as a person, then you would understand to do that as a country. Because you almost have to have a morally guided leadership in order to have it work for the country. And when you remove that everything gets out of balance.

Here, Cindy drew on her theological language of accountable individualism to frame the problem of welfare dependency, which violated her ideas of personal responsibility. But her focus was not on the moral failings of the poor, but on the need for morally guided leadership that overcame selfishness and governed the rich and poor fairly. Here, she was articulating a religious narrative about the growth of Canada's welfare state, but one that was very different from the collective memories that I found in the two American evangelical churches. In Cindy's narrative, the problem started when Canada's leaders stopped sharing the Christian moral character that presumably once guided the nation's welfare state. But unlike many American evangelicals, Cindy passionately believed that the government had a moral responsibility to care for the poor. As her husband Brian explained: "Spiritual mandates apply for us and kings and government as well ... it's *all* of our responsibility." Compassion for the poor was not simply the private responsibility of believers, but also an expression of cultural membership in Canadian society.

In conclusion, Canadian evangelicals drew on the same tools of accountable individualism as their American counterparts, but drew on different narratives of national identity to define their religious responsibilities towards the poor. Accountable individualism did not motivate them to reject structural solutions to inequality when used in reference to different constructions of religious nationalism.

DISCUSSION

These findings have important theoretical implications for both the sociology of religion and comparative welfare state research. To make sense of cross-national differences between evangelicals, I found it necessary to synthesize two disconnected theoretical programs. One body of theory was concerned with differences in political attitudes between religious subcultures, largely assuming an American context. Another body of theory was concerned with cross-national differences in public support for the welfare state. Below, I discuss how each literature should rethink the relationship between religion and national identity.

Within the sociology of religion, visions of *broader cultural membership* should be recognized as a critical mechanism by which religious traditions shape civic engagement and political attitudes. Using cross-national comparison, I found that economic conservatism among American evangelicals was anchored by religious constructions of national solidarity in ways that previous scholarship had attributed to theology alone. American evangelicals drew on theological tools like accountable individualism, grace, and compassion in ways that were anchored by a subcultural narrative of religious nationalism. While many Americans share negative collective memories about the welfare state, U.S. evangelicals elaborated these narratives in particular ways that linked the growth of the welfare state to the loss of a Christian America. By contrast, Canadian evangelicals drew on positive collective memories about the welfare state within local religious practice to set their personal acts of charity in a broader narrative context (Zerubavel 2003). As a result, evangelical churches in the United States and Canada drew on their shared theological tools very differently to talk about poverty and the role of government. Comparing evangelicals in the United States and Canada, I show that religious visions of national solidarity cannot be inferred based on a church's theology, network structure, or organizational characteristics.

Comparative welfare state research should consider how collective memories about the welfare state are refracted through the lens of religious identity in ways that can legitimate or delegitimate social policy within particular subcultures. In rejecting the national values framework, many scholars have swung too far in the other direction: dismissing public opinion as the epiphenomenal product of elite framing or social welfare institutions (Brooks and Manza 2007). Thus, ethnographic description strengthens the theoretical case that public opinion has a life of its own, and does not simply reflect elite discourses or political institutions.

In both the United States and Canada, evangelicals are certainly drawing on narratives of national identity that are reinforced outside of their religious subculture. Canadians generally support a greater role for government in addressing poverty than Americans do, and these sentiments are reinforced through collective memories that associate the welfare state with national identity (Brodie 2002). The design of U.S. and Canadian social policy has also institutionalized different categories of who "the poor" are (Steensland 2006), and these differences shape the public's civic identities, constructions of target populations, and notions of government responsibility (Mettler 2002; Mettler and Soss 2004; Schneider and Ingram 2005). Canada's policy design frames poverty as a problem of social inclusion, likely influencing how evangelicals make sense of their religious responsibilities to the poor. By contrast, the design of U.S. social policy has likely helped render the working poor invisible within the two American churches. The United States and Canada have also institutionalized different relationships between government and faith-based services. In Ontario, churches are more likely to work in coalition with secular and government providers than American churches, who are more likely to have freestanding services. Canadian churches undertake more social opportunities for mothers, homelessness efforts, and refugee resettlement, while American churches provide more charity healthcare (Cnaan and Handy 2000), following patterns of government involvement. Independently of religious factors, these institutional channels have made some tools more available than others to talk about poverty in the U.S. and Canadian national contexts.

But the differences between U.S. and Canadian congregations do not simply "reflect" the wider national context. In both countries, evangelicals drew on discourses about national identity for distinctively religious purposes to strengthen their subcultural identity as evangelical Christians. For example, Canadian churches interpreted religious practices like prayer walking and charity work through the language of social inclusion, *sacralizing* this language in ways that lent religious legitimacy to the welfare state. By contrast, American evangelicals drew on broader themes of anti-welfare resentment, but infused them with their distinctive religious concerns about national identity. Such diverse practices of "banal" nationalism (Billig 1995) contribute to stable, cross-national differences in political attitudes among the United States, Canada, and other countries.

CONCLUSION

To understand the political and civic effects of religion, scholars need to consider how religious groups draw boundaries of cultural membership and imagine national community within religious practice. This article shows that evangelical churches in the United States and Canada constructed *broader cultural membership* very differently, even though they drew on the same theological tools and engaged in similar activities of religious charity. Thus, religious groups imagine national solidarity in ways that are analytically distinct from their theological beliefs, their congregational activities, and the structure of religious social networks.

By recognizing these religious visions of national solidarity, scholars can better disentangle the complex relationship between religion, race, and economic conservatism. Compared to other white Americans, white evangelicals are not just more economically conservative, but more likely to reject government efforts to remedy racial inequality (Hinojosa and Park 2004). While Emerson and Smith (2000) point to accountable individualist theology, other scholars contend that this "race-neutral" language is actually loaded with racially coded meanings (Edgell and Tranby 2007) that link whiteness to cultural membership and national identity (Tranby and Hartmann 2008). My findings extend this insight, providing a theoretical framework to understand how debates over racial inequality may threaten white evangelical constructions of national identity. Using this framework, future research might profitably compare how white and black American evangelical congregations construct religious nationalism to understand how racial boundaries become inscribed within religious visions of the nation.

Finally, this analysis challenges a central claim of compassionate conservatism: that the welfare state makes passive citizens who leave caring for the poor to the government (Olasky and Gingrich 1996). Government bureaucracies allegedly crowd out Christian compassion and force evangelicals to relegate their faith to a realm of private motivations (Cromartie 2003; Olasky 1992). But as these data show, there is hardly a zero-sum relationship between social welfare programs and voluntary charity (Skocpol 1997). Canadian evangelicals see faith-based compassion as an *extension* of government-led efforts to fight poverty, and overlay secular government programs with religious meaning. Evangelicals are not easily crowded out by government programs because their subculture thrives by sustaining distinction from—and engagement with—the larger society (Smith 1998). In the United States, evangelicals define their identity by denigrating government programs; in Canada, by tackling the spiritual dimensions of social exclusion. In both countries, evangelicals are confident that their distinctive approach to spiritual transformation has no secular substitute.

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