SERVANTS TO THE LENDER: THE HISTORY OF FAITH-BASED BUSINESS IN FOUR CASE STUDIES

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2017

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ABSTRACT

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Tyson, Chick-fil-A, Walmart, and Hobby Lobby’s presence within the faith-based business community is mostly thanks to corporate lineages that reached well into the previous century. Tyson was founded in 1935, Chick-fil-A in 1946, Walmart in 1962, and Hobby Lobby in 1972, each undergoing various business model and philosophical shifts along with their executives’ changing understanding of Christian faith. This thesis analyzes these businesses through a series of case studies, highlighting various uniting themes in their corporate narratives, exploring the ways they interact with their customers and the cultures in which they flourish, while noting that there is a discernible, yet-unexplored gap between faith-based business and workplace spirituality. Ultimately, this thesis concludes that faith-based businesses choose to identify as such as an expression of belief in a Christian supernatural deity’s influence in their careers rather than as a way of garnering specific markets or making a profit.
“The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender. He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail.”

- Proverbs, 22:7-8
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I’ll abbreviate this portion lest I write another thesis-length work exclusively about the people who played a part in both my life and its development over the past two years.

I am immensely grateful for all the help afforded me by the various faculty within the BGSU history department and the rest of the university. These individuals include Michael Brooks, Scott Martin, Benjamin Greene, Ian Mladjov, Walt Grunden, Rebecca Mancuso, and, finally, Amilcar Challú, without whose History of Capitalism course and expert advice this thesis would’ve never existed.

While faculty offered me the tools needed to craft a document of this scope, without my wide array of wonderful and brilliant colleagues I would’ve never had the fortitude to write more than a few pages. Nichole McCrory, Claire Smith, and Joe Lueck have all had more conversations with me about faith-based business than they ever planned to and I am infinitely thankful for their patience and support. Mike Horton, Dave Staub, Nanosh Lucas, Lindsey Bauman, Mike Ginnetti, Chris Lause, Kyle Penzinski, Alyssa Kapelka, Amira Hassnaoui, Joe Robertshaw, and David Mertz have all played instrumental roles in my graduate education thus far and I would be remiss if I did not thank them here. Continue to defend the weak, smash the powerful, and in general shake foundations and critique structures wherever you find them.

The opportunity to serve in various leadership roles within this university has been my greatest source of professional pride thus far. I can only hope that I have made half the impact on others’ lives that they have had on mine in this short period, and I wish them success as we all travel further down our own professional pathways.
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INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

By summer 2012, the Chick-fil-A Original Chicken Sandwich was an American cultural icon. The Chick-fil-A fast food chain boasted over 1600 stores in forty states and was second only to KFC among U.S. fried chicken restaurants. With this $1.1 billion empire in hand, son of founder S. Truett Cathy and company president Dan Cathy made a controversial choice: in an interview with Baptist Press on July 16, 2012, he identified that the business was “based on biblical principles” and that its founders were “guilty as charged” when accused of opposing same-sex marriage. True to his word, from 2003 to 2012 the company donated over $5 million to numerous anti-gay marriage organizations, including one that performed controversial “ex-gay” conversion therapy. The outrage was immediate and widespread.

The months that followed would bring both Mike Huckabee’s “Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day” and the “Same-Sex Kiss Day” protest, as well as an ideological crusade.1 This crusade—orchestrated by CEOs determined to express their Christianity through their businesses—reached a watershed with 2014’s Burwell v. Hobby Lobby decision, in which corporations won the power to deny their employees the morning-after pill. A brief crusade, but a significant one, especially in an age when Oreo proudly emblazoned Milk’s Favorite Cookie with the colors of the LGBT pride flag and J.C. Penney hawked polo shirts worn by same-sex models.2 However, the crusade symbolized the culmination of years of economic and ideological growth.

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These events sparked interest in the term “faith-based business” and its applications in twenty-first-century capitalism. A faith-based business refers to any profit-seeking organization that philosophically identifies with a single religion’s core tenets, often through its public relations or statements made by its founders. This should be distinguished from the concept of “workplace spirituality”; that is, an invocation of pop cultural understandings of spirituality, with no singular religious focus, as a way of maximizing profit or increasing productivity. With Chick-fil-A’s July 2012 revelation, numerous businesses began proclaiming their faith-based origins: In-N-Out Burger printed John 3:16 on soft drink cups while Forever 21 did the same on shopping bags, Interstate Batteries boasted that execs had a “self-avowed religious identity” while remaining “very open in their God talk,” and Tyson Foods hired “chaplains” to provide purportedly secular counseling services for factory floor workers. Walmart remained in the background, despite its officials claiming it was “founded on scripture” even into the twenty-first century. In every case, “faith-based” was synonymous with “Christian.”

Tyson, Chick-fil-A, Walmart, and Hobby Lobby’s palpable presence within the faith-based business community was largely due to corporate lineages that reached well into the previous century. Tyson was founded in 1935, Chick-fil-A in 1946, Walmart in 1962, and Hobby Lobby in 1972, each undergoing various business model and philosophical shifts through their executives’ changing understanding of Christian faith. This thesis analyzes these businesses through a series of case studies, highlighting various uniting themes in their corporate narratives, exploring the ways they interact with their customers and the cultures in which they flourish, while noting that there is a discernible, yet-unexplored gap between faith-based business and

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workplace spirituality. Both are products of the historical, political, and cultural contexts in which they exist. Regarding faith-based business, it is hard to imagine Hobby Lobby intervening in several institutions of higher learning—even going as far to transform at least one secular institution into a Bible college—without their close ties to Liberty University, the religious right, and neo-conservatism.\(^5\) Regarding workplace spirituality, it is equally hard to separate the corporate world’s exploration of “shamanic healing journey[s],” “vision quests” in the desert, and a number of other spiritual practices from an increasingly digital marketplace.\(^6\) However, though a faith-based business may utilize workplace spirituality as a way of motivating its employees or increasing productivity—for example, Hobby Lobby regards remaining closed on Sundays as a “perk”—this is different from companies undertaking “spiritual” activities like those listed above without being attached to a single philosophy.

*Faith, Spirituality, and Business: A Historiography*

The historical literature on faith-based business, though limited, rarely makes this distinction between Christianity and spirituality. In monographs that confront the connection between religion, business, and culture in U.S. history, writers often assume that religion in the twentieth century is almost exclusively political. R. Laurence Moore spends the bulk of *Touchdown Jesus* critiquing the Religious Right’s influence on the Reagan administration and American culture well into the twenty-first century, noting that conservative politicians make little distinction between religion and politics.\(^7\) In *Selling God*, Moore is even more specific, attributing a surging interest in Christianity throughout the eighties to televangelism’s use of

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\(^5\) David Whitford, "One family’s hobby," *Fortune* 162, no. 7 (November 2010): 70.
premillennialism, conservative politics, and the scare tactics that accompany both.\(^8\) These assumptions that religion and politics are inextricably linked, while accurate, can prevent historians from analyzing faith-based businesses on their own merits. Most notably, scholars like Nelson Lichtenstein consistently link Wal-Mart’s decision to identify with a Southern, evangelical ethos with success among Christian markets. While the qualitative connections are clear, it seems unlikely that Wal-Mart profited from establishing cultural connections with their customers as they did, for example, through total control of their products and the use of global mass-communication to promote employee productivity.\(^9\) The religious connection was important, but was more of an expression of identity than an attempt at selling themselves to a variety of differentiated markets.

This distinction is another example of the divide between faith-based business and workplace spirituality, which Lake Lambert III attempts navigating in *Spirituality, Inc.* Lambert, working from a notion of “conscious capitalism,” categorizes faith-based business as existing under the broader umbrella of workplace spirituality. Lambert’s book acknowledges a growing divide between spirituality and Christianity in the late twentieth century, but argues that the two come from the same Christian “genealogy.”\(^10\) From there, he delves into the corporate makeup of faith-based businesses, conceptualizations of Jesus as a corporate leader and salesman, and increasingly spiritual trends in management. Attempts by businesses like Hobby Lobby to gain leverage over politics escape Lambert’s analysis. *Spirituality, Inc.* is mainly an attempt at

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\(^10\) Lake Lambert III, *Spirituality, Inc.: Religion in the American Workplace* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1-3, 21-27. Lambert avoids directly defining what he means by “genealogy”; it could simply be a turn of phrase, or it could indicate a form of Foucaultian analysis. Lambert’s emphasis on symbols, word choice, and consideration of “how the meaning of work was lost through changes in the structure and organization of human labor” seem to indicate the latter.
defining “spirituality” and workplace spirituality’s role within faith-based businesses.\textsuperscript{11} This thesis draws inspiration from this argument, but takes it a step further, disconnecting faith-based business from Lambert’s “conscious capitalism” and seeking to understand it as a unique phenomenon.

By the time Chick-fil-A’s donations came to light in 2012, this division was primarily along the border between secular and non-secular. However, this was not always the case. Perhaps the most comprehensive monograph detailing faith and business’ united origins is Kevin M. Kruse’s \textit{One Nation Under God}, though it does little in the way of analyzing the four businesses detailed in this thesis. Nor does the term “faith-based business”—largely a twenty-first-century construct—receive analysis. What it does establish, however, is that American entrepreneurs treated “spirituality” and “Christianity” as synonymous well into the twentieth century. The first signs of fracture, Kruse notes, appeared with Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s decision to sell the New Deal as a form of “social gospel,” hearkening back to the Progressive Era’s specific brand of conscious Christianity. In response, anti-New Deal businessmen demanded “Freedom under God,” equating the free market with a Christianized form of American democracy.\textsuperscript{12}

From there, Kruse follows the entire business community as backlash toward the New Deal and successive regulations encourage characters like William Randolph Hearst, Billy Graham, and Joe McCarthy to unite, fabricating the notion that the United States was created as fundamentally Christian while at the same time advancing business interests. However, Kruse diminishes discussion of business and its role in forming Kruse’s titular Christian America

\textsuperscript{11} Lambert, \textit{Spirituality, Inc.}, 21-23.
toward the end of the book in favor of discussing political motivations and philosophies. In many ways, this makes sense: thanks to the efforts of business lobbies as early as the 1930s and well into the twenty-first century, the notion of the United States as a chosen nation “under God” is taken as almost a political certainty among conservatives. In contrast, this thesis insulates itself within the corporate motivations and philosophies that Kruse, along with numerous other authors, have glossed over, analyzing how corporations view their consumers, interpret culture, and establish their own identities.

Regarding the distinct notion of consumer culture, this thesis relies on Lizabeth’s Cohen’s *A Consumer Republic* to both generate a socioeconomic framework—in contrast to Kruse’s equally religious and political framework—and provide a historical environment in which this thesis’ four faith-based businesses flourished. Cohen posits that, in the aftermath of World War II, US political culture deliberately fostered consumer behavior, creating a “republic” of values, products, and landmarks centered on consumption.\(^\text{13}\) While the principal character in Cohen’s history is the individual/consumer and the principal characters in this thesis are CEOs and corporate moguls manipulating consumerism, the approaches have numerous similarities. Cohen establishes that there are few boundaries separating consumption and the culture in which it exists.\(^\text{14}\) In the early days of Cohen’s “consumer republic,” culture and its ideological closeness to consumption created an ideal breeding ground for faith-based business and the politics that justified its existence.


\(^\text{14}\) Ibid., 343-344. Cohen arrives at this conclusion primarily through her discussion of market segmentation, or how marketers attach the value of certain products to certain societal groups. By the eighties, Cohen argues, “individuals… learned that their own good fortunes… depended on identifying with special interest constituencies with clout—for example, locally-minded suburbanites, Yuppies, African Americans, senior citizens, or gun owners.” As such, culture became increasingly tied to identifying with a certain market. In faith-based business, this shift manifests itself in Walmart’s remarkable success within a Southern, Protestant, and white market and in Hobby Lobby’s executives’ sudden realization that they must put Christianity at their business’ forefront.
In *To Serve God and Wal-Mart*, Bethany Moreton presents a more specific analysis. Her discussion of the rise of Walmart and the rural, Christian demographics in which it was entrenched is centered exclusively on the titular company. As this thesis discusses, Walmart is a different variety of faith-based business than Hobby Lobby or Chick-fil-A, which both exhibit an outspoken, principled desire to sell their religion along with their product while Walmart, for the most part, keeps its religiosity to its corporate meetings and philosophy. Moreton is keenly aware of this and analyzes Walmart as a cultural entity, deconstructing how the corporation’s management attempts to construe concepts like the family, management, free enterprise, and servant leadership, attaching each to a veiled Christian philosophy both inside and outside of the environment Walmart has built for its employees.15 In this regard, Moreton’s survey comes the closest to what this thesis is attempting: a discussion of the historical development, traits, and context of faith-based business—in Moreton’s case, Walmart specifically.

Since no writer specifically addresses faith-based business on its own, this thesis divides the historiography confronting faith-based business into a variety of frameworks. Moore’s *Selling God* and *Touchdown Jesus* provide broad cultural frameworks, detailing the convergence of non-secular and secular in American society. In his definition-oriented *Spirituality, Inc*, Lambert provides a framework for workplace spirituality, though conflating it with faith-based business. Both Kruse and Cohen offer historical background for this thesis’ specific topic, albeit through a religious/political and socioeconomic perspective, in *One Nation Under God* and *A Consumers’ Republic* respectively. Finally, Moreton’s *To Serve God and Wal-Mart* provides the closest framework to what this thesis is attempting to create: a cultural analysis of faith-based business and how it has come to distinguish itself as different from workplace spirituality.

Chapter Summary

What follows are the four case studies: Tyson, Chick-fil-A, Walmart, and Hobby Lobby, unfolding chronologically in the background of the twentieth century. The third and fourth deal almost exclusively with events occurring from 1950 through the 1980s, while the first and second strive to connect the phenomenon of faith-based business to events that led up to its development and continue to unfold in the twenty-first century, respectively. Tyson Foods stands out as a bridge between faith-based business’ quasi-religious beginnings and the notion of faith-based business we have today. Chapter one deals with both Tyson and the origins of faith-based business, which Lambert speculates may lie in the “holistic workplaces” created by industrialists like George Pullman and Frederick Taylor, who built entire towns furnished with living quarters and churches to house their workers and employed YMCA chapters to lead bible studies on the factory floor, respectively. Additionally, Henry Ford’s use of behavioral sciences directly invoked Christianity, seeking to both improve his workers’ productivity and spiritual wellbeing. Eventually, however, the principles of scientific management and holistic workplaces would come to lean more heavily on the ideas of the behavioral sciences than Christianity.

In 2000, Tyson began employing over a hundred chaplains at its plants, providing “spiritual counseling” and representing the company’s “commitment to creating a faith-friendly workplace.” This turn-of-the-millennium innovation, however, reflected nearly a century of faith-based practices. Tyson’s story begins in the middle of the Great Depression, featuring a truckload of 500 Arkansas chickens and a 700-mile drive from Springdale to Chicago. From

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these humble, romanticized beginnings, Tyson would grow exponentially throughout the
twentieth century to become the largest purveyor of chicken and pork products in the entire
world.\footnote{“Tyson Foods company description,” Bloomberg. http://www.bloomberg.com/research/stocks/snapshot/snapshot_article.asp?ticker=TSN.} In this regard, Tyson establishes many of the elements of faith-based business that will
be explored throughout this thesis: the humble origin story, followed by collapse through
corporate greed and redemption through the word of God, all culminating in massive success.
With Tyson’s transference from Bible Belt-grown, evangelical Christian John W. Tyson to his
Interfaith descendants, the company’s character has transformed from pure faith-based to a more
spiritual nature that would resonate better with Lambert’s understanding of religion in business.\footnote{Lambert, \textit{Spirituality, Inc.}, 1-2.} 
In this sense, this thesis arbitrarily categorizes Tyson as a “forerunner” of faith-based business:
in its earliest iterations, it exemplifies the hegemonic Christian character of rural American
culture, but it later evolves into a uniquely faith-based business imbibing elements of workplace
spirituality.

Enough scholarship exists on Walmart’s relationship with the South, consumers, and
evangelical Christianity to show that said relationship is dysfunctional, as well as segmented
success unfolded over an entire century and Chick-fil-A’s success took a similarly long amount
of time, on both spiritual and economic levels. Walmart, however, had massive monetary success
thrust upon it in fewer than 20 years. As Bethany Moreton notes, Walmart has played both savior
and devil, airlifting in food to Hurricane Katrina survivors and forcing their Christian employees
to work overtime on Sunday alike.\footnote{Moreton, \textit{To Serve God and Walmart}, 264-267.} As chapter three will describe, the controversies that
plagued Walmart’s years of exponential growth would call into question the nature of faith-based business as based on genuine religious belief.

By far the most notable business discussed in this thesis, Walmart’s impact on consumer culture is immense. From its fundamental “big box” store model, to its carnivalesque corporate meetings, to its guiding philosophy of “Everyday Low Prices,” Walmart’s business components are equally absurd, antiquated, hyper-organized, and massively successful. Yet, though one would be hard-pressed to find evidence of it without attempting to purchase a bottle opener or alcohol on Sundays, former Walmart COO and “keeper of the culture” Don Soderquist consistently labeled Walmart as “founded on Scripture” until the end of his career. This has little other purpose than to define Walmart as a faith-based business.

As opposed to Chick-fil-A or Hobby Lobby, Walmart has never actively proselytized. Its religious priorities are drawn from the time and location in which it was founded, without trying to reach beyond the borders of cozy Arkansas. However, the not-so-low overseas price of Everyday Low Prices and discrimination against employees caused many to cast doubt on Walmart’s religiosity throughout the nineties and well into the first decades of the 2000s. At the same time, Walmart represents everything the cultures from which fellow faith-based businesses grew represented—the Religious Right, the Sunbelt, and so on. It is the symbol of the family dynamic so cherished by John Tyson, Truett Cathy, and David Green. Thus, this thesis cannot help but address these complexities—both how they reinforce and question the definition of faith-based business it is attempting to uphold.

If the symbolic residential landscape of Cohen’s “consumer republic” was the suburban sprawl, the symbolic hub or gathering place—for commercial and cultural actors alike—was the

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shopping mall. Chapter two analyzes this growing commercial culture, as well as Chick-fil-A’s role within it. As the company’s numerous examples of promotional material and corporate literature explain, from the outset, Chick-fil-A’s 1946 founding date put it in competition with authenticity-obsessed Greatest Generation-ers and suburban customers alike. Seeking to distance itself from the vapid burger chains that were becoming popular across the country, the restaurant followed a strict closed-on-Sundays policy and marketed the first-ever chicken sandwich, an act that was tantamount to blasphemy in the heyday of the Whopper and the Big Mac. Behind that iconoclastic sandwich, however, was a strict commitment to God.

Chick-fil-A founder S. Truett Cathy made the shrewd decision to open his first Chick-fil-A restaurants exclusively in malls, essentially cornering the hungry shopper market and inventing the food court. 24 Whereas the story of Tyson is one of miraculous development and innovation in terms of production and vertical integration, Chick-fil-A found success by directly engaging consumers on their level. The term “servant leadership” would later be actively used by Walmart executives, but it was already in play years before Sam Walton was running a Ben Franklin in Bentonville, Arkansas. This intimate connection between consumer and producer confronted the impersonal narrative of the “republic,” which saw capitalists directly manipulating consumers based on race, gender, and economic status.

Despite all its innovative applications of servant leadership, Chick-fil-A was still entrenched in the shopping mall, the symbol of all that semi-invisible consumer manipulation. Perhaps the 2012 revelation of Dan Cathy’s prejudices can be traced back to the restaurant’s involvement in these networks. However, Chick-fil-A’s quick reversal of its donations to anti-LGBQ organization suggests a higher philosophical commitment to its consumers—and its cash.

flow. This chapter delves into Chick-fil-A’s reorganization of Tyson-esque religious beliefs into company policy, illustrating how S. Truett Cathy and his family, in addition to inventing the chicken sandwich and the food court, reformed and redefined the notion of faith-based business.

Of the corporations listed here, the best candidate for faith-based business’ chosen warrior can only be Hobby Lobby, analyzed along with faith-based business’ twenty-first-century history in chapter four. Founded in Oklahoma City, its founders forged Hobby Lobby in the very center of the white-Sunbelt-evangelical complex. The story of David Green building the foundations of his own custom frame store on an $800 loan fits the humble origins motif more effectively than Tyson, Chick-fil-A, or Walmart. This was followed by the trials of the eighties—which purportedly nearly ended the growing company before the Green family turned to God in prayer—then the phenomenal success of the nineties, and then the ideological crusade of the new millennium. With substantial funds, Hobby Lobby and its frames, paints, and model planes would become the first business to successfully challenge the government’s stance on a corporation’s “legitimacy” as a living, idea-bearing organism.

This thesis will conclude by discussing the Burwell v. Hobby Lobby case, thus far a climactic moment in the history of faith-based business. In 2015, four organizations that had for up to nearly a century struggled against the restrictions placed on them by government, consumer culture, and outright greed would abruptly receive the power to counteract the institution called upon to regulate them. It was more than a symbolic victory: they would finally be able to express their founders’ ethos on a global capitalist scale, with the Burwell decision opening the door for an interminable number of similar cases to follow.

25 “Chick-fil-A agrees to cease funding to anti-LGBT organizations, Chicago LGBT group claims,” The Huffington Post, 2 February 2016.
26 "David Green," Chain Store Age 73, no. 12 (December 1997): 126.
Certainly, Hobby Lobby’s goals take on an ominous quality when viewed by the groups they affect and those defending said groups, not to mention anyone who views free enterprise as at least somewhat reprehensible. The purpose of this thesis, however, is not to pass judgment on the ideas espoused by, for example, David Green and his family: Its purpose is to analyze their roots, how and where they flourished, and how they compare to other businesses with similar ideological goals. It seeks to question, for each business, how they are shaped by notions of race, gender, and class. Finally, at its core, it strives to construct a definition of faith-based business as an insular, self-aware philosophy, both influenced by and separate from the environments in which it was constructed.
I. FORERUNNERS: TYSON FOODS AND THE ROOTS OF FAITH-BASED BUSINESS

By the twenty-first century, most critics were more concerned by Tyson Foods’ immense size, disconcerting ethical practices, and environmental impact than the outspoken Christian faith its executives espoused. Only four companies, one of which was Tyson, controlled over seventy-five percent of the beef market. New allegations appeared every few years: piglets were used as soccer balls and chickens were scalded alive, all while Tyson claimed that they killed animals in the most humane way possible. Finally, the EPA even went on the offensive, successfully suing the company for poisoning workers and polluting the environment with massive amounts of ammonia.27 New Millennium muckrakers had found their Jungle in Tyson’s 400 processing facilities, helmed by a veritable army of 117,000 workers and drawing in revenues of greater than $5.2 billion, with hours of stomach-turning hidden camera footage taking the place of Upton Sinclair’s evocative descriptions.28 Tyson was the figurehead of the meat empire, reviled by a massive social media audience despite its ubiquitous presence within the food they consumed.

Through it all, Tyson denied involvement, often labeling instances of animal abuse and neglectful business practices as isolated incidents on independent farms outside of their corporate control.29 Tyson employs a set of what it calls “Core Values,” a set of defining philosophies, to guide their business practices and reassure themselves of their ethics. Often, when accused of poor treatment of animals, Tyson cites a Core Value claiming that they “serve as stewards of the

29 Vinjamuri, “Tyson Foods and Piglet Abuse.”
animals, land, and environment entrusted to us.” Paired with two other Core Values, one declaring themselves a “faith-friendly company” and another noting that they “strive to honor God and be respectful of each other, our customers, and other stakeholders,” it is easy to see how the first hearkens back to God’s charge to Noah.\textsuperscript{30} Tyson is openly a faith-based business, though the nigh-incontrovertible accusations leveled against them and their own subdued religious messaging—as opposed to businesses like Chick-fil-A or Hobby Lobby, which utilize various policies to ensure consumers receive a religious message—tends to prevent their Christian beliefs from reaching the consumer.

However, Tyson has no reservations about proselytizing to employees, albeit in said “faith-friendly” manner. A continuously growing body of about 115 workplace chaplains, each assigned to their own factory floor, best illustrate this philosophy, with Tyson depicting the relationship between chaplain and employee as a sort of spiritual counselor-client dynamic. This semi-secular, nondenominational commitment is dubious at best: The intermediary Tyson uses to hire chaplains chooses from strictly evangelical Christians, and current chairman and former CEO John H. Tyson has made the claim that “[the Christian] God represents all faiths out there” on more than one occasion.\textsuperscript{31} There are a few anecdotal examples of outreach to faiths outside Christianity, namely a meeting between Tyson execs and an imam about Somali Workers at a Nebraska factory and the hiring of a “Muslim prayer leader” in 2005, but often Tyson’s leadership describes said faiths as “denominations” of Christianity rather than different religions entirely.


Workplace chaplaincy programs have proliferated since the late 1980s, beginning among Bible Belt companies like Tyson and growing to occupy their own industry by the 2000s. Arguably, they represent changing cultural concerns regarding the twofold role of spirituality and productivity in the workplace, but since this role is consistently defined by religious corporate leaders like John Tyson himself rather than the workers he employs, it is questionable whether chaplaincy is a spiritual workplace institution or simply another element of faith-based business. Chaplain job descriptions further muddle the issue, with one journalist broadly defining their roles as, “visit[ing] offices or factories weekly, greeting employees, hanging out in the break room, handing out business cards and meeting one-on-one with workers. But they're also on-call 24/7, so chaplains rush to hospitals, restaurants or homes on request, providing comfort and support free of charge to employees.”32 Tyson’s website is even less clear, referring to chaplains as simply “ministers in the workplace” who “help support, nurture, and encourage” factory workers.33 For Tyson and other faith-based businesses, there is minimal distinction than a counselor assigned to a workforce and a religious leader.

This is unsurprising considering that Tyson, a business with its origins in the early 1930s, came to prominence in a business world that openly expressed its religiosity.34 Through blue laws and deep-seated cultural beliefs that emphasized the religious significance of hard work, in the early twentieth century faith and business were one in the same. Industrialists, as Kevin M. Kruse shrewdly notes throughout One Nation Under God, carefully crafted a partnership with

clergymen throughout the thirties, forties, and fifties worked to paint the New Deal as an enemy of both religion and business. Ministers proclaimed that the New Deal’s Social Gospel legacy, “[led] Americans to worship [the federal government] over the Almighty; that it caused Americans to covet what the wealthy possessed and seek to steal it from them; and that, ultimately, it bore false witness in making wild claims about what it could never truly accomplish.”

This collaboration between faith and business would ensure that the religion was a welcome and expected presence in the marketplace for decades to come. It was only until the latter half of the century that this connection would become less apparent, allowing faith-based business to express itself more overtly.

Key demographics for faith-based businesses carry the stereotype of being white, lower-or-middle-class, rural, politically conservative, and—of course—Christian Americans. However, as noted by numerous writers and analysts, Tyson’s monolithic command of the meat industry has alienated the small-town farmers who occupy many of those demographics for decades. In The Meat Racket, agribusiness journalist Christopher Leonard depicts Tyson’s Waldron, Arkansas plant as holding the town hostage, using a quaint façade to disguise their vertically integrated, anti-farmer corporate strategy:

[T]he Tyson plant isn’t just a factory; it’s more like an entire small-town economy consolidated into one property. The complex contains its own feed mill and hatchery, its own trucking line and a slaughterhouse that covers several acres of land and processes about one million dead chickens a week… an economic dark star that has drawn into itself all the independent businesses that used to define a small town like Waldron, the kinds of businesses that were once the economic pillars of rural America.

Through years of buying out all competition a la Nelson Rockefeller and his robber baron compatriots, Tyson ensured that nearly all meat found in frozen food sections around the country

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came from one of their hundreds of abattoirs. Wenonah Hauter dedicates much of *Foodopoly* to describing Tyson’s consolidation of the meat industry, creating an empire that has gradually eradicated or subsidized all competition. Thanks to this model, Tyson is free to pin the inhumane slaughter practices they profit from on farmers who work under their umbrella.

What might be the best way to counteract this inhumane, anti-farmer reputation? Maintaining the image of a divine-inspired, “values”-centric organization that made conscious, prayerful decisions on its way to the top might be one way to do so. Though Tyson’s adherence to Christianity has played a part through its entire history, its sudden and harmful exposure in the twenty-first century could ostensibly benefit from the perception that it is an ideologically complex, purportedly caring corporation. With that in mind, why not print John 3:16 on the bottoms of their bags of food, *a la* In-N-Out Burger? The biggest step Tyson took toward proselytizing their values in recent years, aside from their army of chaplains, was establishing the Tyson Center for Faith and Spirituality in the Workplace at the University of Arkansas. Addressing faith-based business’ historical lineage is the first step in understanding the motivations behind Tyson’s execs and how they express their faith.

“Things are Born. Things Die”: The Origins of Faith-based Business

Most historians trace faith-based business’ historical lineage back to the writings of Max Weber—in particular, his early-twentieth century work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber’s thesis placed the genesis of capitalism during the height of Protestantism in sixteenth-century Europe, during which Christian ideologies emphasized the importance of

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secular work. He cited “colorless deist” Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography, which proselytized capitalist notions of hard work and competition, day-in and day-out, as examples of this inherently Protestant ideology. Utilitarianism, the Enlightenment—according to Weber, they all derived from the Puritan call to work in the name of the Lord, leading up to capitalism’s genesis.39 While it is tempting to suggest that Weber was positing that business would eventually come to contain elements of both religion and capitalism, if one wants to unpack how his ideas play into the development of faith-based business, a little more nuance is necessary.

Lambert accomplishes this with aplomb. He notes that, according to Weber, “capitalism is an economic system with inherent values, including self-discipline and rationality, that result not in profit but ‘forever renewed profit.’” From here, Lambert constructs his notion of “welfare capitalism”—that is, business conducted in the name of maximizing human wellbeing rather than simply striving to attain profit.40 This forms the basis of how Lambert defines workplace spirituality and applies it to the various business models he analyzes, which is where this thesis diverges from Lambert’s understanding to a degree. Rather than representing an offshoot of a sort of “good” welfare capitalism, workplace spirituality and faith-based business are in no way tied to ethics. Instead, ideologies that faith-based businesses hold are often simply offshoots of their founders’ upbringing or cultural ties. Similarly, workplace spirituality is rarely used as a method of reinforcing a company’s ethical practices, instead acting to motivate workers or market products.


Take Tyson Foods, for instance. Its founders had business concepts inculcated in them at a point during which most forms of capitalism expressed elements of the Christian religion. This was reinforced by the culture of the early twentieth century, in which blue laws and local customs ensured businesses remained closed on Sunday and all forms of business and social interaction were associated with Christ. In addition to noting all this, Kevin M. Kruse’s *One Nation Under God* reveals that numerous organizations that at present do not identify as faith-based businesses—among them Maytag, General Motors, Kraft Foods, Hilton Hotels, J.C. Penny, U.S. Steel, Firestone, and Gulf Oil—were all instrumental in both boosting religious conservative interests and maintaining a Christian hegemony over corporate America during the Eisenhower years.\(^4\) While Tyson’s empire was only starting to metastasize at the time, it was certainly among their number, and would later come to represent similar right-wing interests during its periods of extreme expansion during both the Reagan years and the start of the twenty-first century.

The fact that Tyson may have derived many elements of its religious corporate agenda from this nebulous early phase in the history of faith-based business, in addition to its muted religious expression during the years in which it gained immense success, only serves to validate its identity as a faith-based business. Additionally, as this chapter has already established, a hypothetical philosophy centered on using capitalism to improve humanity’s general welfare is not necessarily a requisite for individuals running a faith-based business—in fact, the two are rarely compatible, with faith often excusing, for example, ruthless treatment of animals or employees. Don Tyson illustrated these mingled philosophies in a complex episode in Tyson’s history: his parents’ 1967 death in a car accident, which secured his ascent to the top of what

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would become the largest meat production company in the United States. Reflecting on the
disaster, Don was existential and somewhat aloof: “If you’re a farmer, see, you look at things a
little different,” he said. “Things are born. Things die. People are no different.”

Comparing his parents to the billions of chickens his organization slaughtered each day
might seem harsh, but it reflected a deeply faith-based ideology. In stoically accepting their
deaths, Don acknowledged Weber’s appraisal of capitalism: It was based on expressing certain
values, and in addition to gaining some sort of capital in exchange for a good, when one operated
a business they left an eternally palpable mark on the material world. While his father may have
passed into whatever afterlife Don believed in, his deeds as a corporate leader lived on and
continued to profit.

_Becoming the “Birdman of Arkansas”_

For the most part, faith-based businesses love telling their stories, especially in the form
of banal corporate advice books: Hobby Lobby’s David Green produced _More Than a Hobby_,
Sam Walton wrote _Sam Walton: Made in America: My Story_, and Chick-fil-A founder S. Truett
Cathy published no fewer than three separate books that serve as the company’s official gospel.
Tyson, on the other hand, keeps their corporate tales to their website, with only Marvin
Schwartz’s _Tyson: From Farm to Market_ to provide a glowing, quasi-academic company history.
_from Farm to Market_ makes no comment on Tyson’s ethical or environmental, instead
providing history exclusively from the company’s perspective, thereby offering an ideal record
of the company’s faith-based core. Finding a balance between Schwartz’s delightedly

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that Schwartz published _From Farm to Market_ on his own and had no prior publication credits, which may indicate
that he had some latent ties to Tyson itself.
superficial tale and Leonard and Hauter’s fierce journalistic critiques is critical when establishing an accurate corporate history.

Much of Tyson’s history relies on mythology associated with the Great Depression. Before 1929, twenty-five-year-old John W. Tyson believed his small family farm in Missouri could support himself, his wife, and whatever other family might come along. However, as he and millions of other farmers discovered, doing so in the wake of the market crash would be impossible. Seeking job opportunities in Fort Smith, Arkansas, John W. and his wife—who was pregnant with future chicken mogul Don—migrated south, making it no further than sleepy Springdale before their money ran out. Renting a house, John W. utilized his only possession—“one rickety truck”—to begin driving fruit in between orchards in St. Louis, Kansas City, and Little Rock. According to Tyson legend, John W. arrived in Springdale with nothing more than five cents. “And that is all I had,” he recounted in a 1952 interview. “I wanted a cup of coffee, and I had the money to pay for it. I’ll never forget tossing that nickel down on the counter. I tried to make it look like I had a bankroll in my pocket to back it up. Then I went out and started looking for a load to haul somewhere.”

The times were changing, however. Demand for chicken, once reviled as “the poor man’s meat,” was growing as becoming the “poor man” turned into a reality for a far greater percentage of Americans. The chicken industry, however, was startlingly underdeveloped, utilizing short routes driven by local farmers in lieu of interstate highways and refrigerated trucks. Due in part to both this changing market and the limited fruit season, John W. began hauling poultry, inventing stackable coops for his truck bed and creating a system for feeding the birds without

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44 Leonard, *The Meat Racket*, 47-51. For the remainder of this chapter, the companies associated with John W. Tyson and his family will be referred to as simply “Tyson” while the respective members of his family will be referred to by their first names.
halting the trip. In 1936, for what would become perhaps his most famous journey, he loaded five hundred chickens into a truck and dragged them seven hundred miles north to Chicago. Earning a profit of around $235, John W.—somewhat of a stern, pragmatic character—kept only $15 for the road and sent a telegram requesting another load of chickens by the time he returned home.**45** As the Tyson website eloquently notes, he stumbled into “new opportunities… thousands of them, feathered and squawking.”**46**

Responding to rumors that chicken sold better in major metropolitan areas, John W. began selling his chickens around the country, from Cincinnati, to Detroit, Cleveland, Memphis, and Houston. Over the years, Tyson would garner a reputation for taking control of every element of its production process, and in the beginning this was true as well—largely due to John W.’s volatile temper. Describing his entry into the hatchery business, he recalled, “…I had asked my chick supplier to give me 20,000 chicks. He said I would have to wait indefinitely. That made me mad. So I bought an incubator.” Entering the feed business, he was again dissatisfied with his supplier. “He told me I could only have one car [of feed] and would have to take my chances on getting the rest ‘when and if’ available. That made me mad again, and that’s when we built a commercial mill.”**47** While John W. expanded his control over the chicken production process, World War II erupted, resulting in the numerous foodstuffs being rationed—poultry, however, remained untouched and demand soared. By the mid-forties, John W.’s fledgling company, with control over feeding, growing, and transporting its chickens, was experiencing exponential growth.

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**46** “Our Heritage,” *Tyson Foods, Inc.*  
**47** Schwartz, *From Farm to Market*, 4-6.
In 1946, John W. became the first individual to transport chickens by air when he flew in a shipment of New Hampshire Reds, part of his mission to have the “best chicks” and thereby earn “the best customers and get the best results.” Tyson’s Feed and Hatchery incorporated a year later, placing all three of its core services under the same logo.48 At the same time, Don became increasingly involved in his father’s company, in a manner Leonard describes as borderline abusive: “Don Tyson watched. He listened to his father talk at night over the dinner table. And Don saw his father fire workers with all the sentimentality of a farmer flicking the head off a rooster with a sharp hatchet.”49 This is hardly an exaggeration on Leonard’s part: John W.’s temper, as well as his general lack of sentimentality or Christian charity, was legendary—even Schwartz acknowledges that he was prone to “occasional outbursts.” In addition to the anecdotes describing how John W.’s rage led to the company’s expansion into growing and feed, Schwartz notes multiple instances in which he fired employees without reason or mercy, including a story in which he attempted to fire an entire construction crew that was not under his purview.50 Nonetheless, Don adored working for his father—willingly or not—and his maverick 1953 decision to take out an $80,000 loan in order to make triple the profit off baby chicks would earn him his father’s respect, despite enraging the Tyson patriarch at the same time. Don was twenty-three at the time.

Don’s role in Tyson’s growth is important for two main reasons: first, Don would inject crucial religious aspects into the company during his eventual years as CEO, ensuring that the business remained faith-based.51 Second, he intervened when his father nearly sold the company to Swanson in 1952, turning it into more of “a family decision than one based on impersonal

48 “Our Heritage,” Tyson Foods, Inc.
50 Schwartz, From Farm to Market, 10.
business considerations.” It was a risky decision: many of the birds were afflicted by an unknown disease and the poultry market ranged from nonexistent to overwhelming. However, through shrewd manipulation tactics such as luring supplier plants into Arkansas and cutting deals with competitors Armour and Swift, the company survived, producing ten million broiler chickens yearly by 1957. In the same year, Don convinced his father to begin building their first chicken processing plant. Knowing that construction would cost nearly $100,000, Don lied to his father, requesting $75,000 and relying on bank loans to finish up the facility within a year when John W. refused to offer any additional funds. Though the result was unpainted and barely up to code, it ensured Tyson had finally achieved full vertical integration “from breeder farm to ice-packed broiler.”

Serendipity, or the appearance thereof, is an important part of almost every faith-based business’ history. Religious beliefs lose their quaint sincerity when presented alongside stark, impersonal marketing strategies, so presenting those strategies as the result of happenstance or the grace of God becomes imperative to maintaining the company’s faith-based status. For example, corporate histories paint Chick-fil-A founder S. Truett Cathy as a man who “chafe[d] at the idea of thinking six to eight months in advance,” making split-second decisions rather than taking a more cautious approach. However, Cathy’s greatest business decisions, from recognizing the demand for chicken in fast food to foreseeing the success building restaurants within malls would bring, implied extensive planning and care. Similarly, as this chapter has already established, Tyson portrayed its founding fathers as terse, hard-working individuals who fell into success through a mixture of divine providence or luck, with Schwartz and Leonard

52 Schwartz, From Farm to Market, 9-11.
describing the creation of Tyson’s first processing plant as both a brush with disaster and reckless mismanagement, respectively.\textsuperscript{55} The truth lies somewhere in between: the chicken plant episode represents a banal certainty when running a business, from Don’s not-so-white lie to the plant’s poor construction.

For Tyson, the construction of their first plant symbolized the beginning of a new era. Rather than being led by a single CEO, the company was run by a combination of Don and his father, and his influence—less aristocratic and businesslike than his father and more reminiscent of a hard, country upbringing—would be felt. Additionally, the sixties brought about a revolution in the ways companies produced and sold meat. A society increasingly ran by consumers meant demand for faster, simpler, prepackaged food, and with the purchase of Cornish game hen producer Washington Creamery, Tyson established two things: Its road to success would be paved with the remains of companies they bought out, and it would make its name selling frozen, often pre-cooked meats—an otherwise unexplored market at the time.\textsuperscript{56} At the start of the sixties, the poultry market experienced a brief downturn, giving Tyson a ripe opportunity to eliminate their competitors. “We will weather this storm,” Don repeatedly said, running the company as if the market were healthier than ever, lowering prices and buying out competitors. His risky choices paid off, and when the downturn came to an end by 1962, Tyson was in a prime position to reassert its power over every element in their vertically integrated system, citing the financial dangers the downturn revealed.\textsuperscript{57} With frozen food’s rising popularity throughout the sixties and seventies, Tyson would experience immense growth, distancing them from both their Springdale roots and their faith in God.

\textsuperscript{56} Schwartz, \textit{From Farm to Market}, 14-17.
\textsuperscript{57} Leonard, \textit{The Meat Racket}, 77-85.
Conclusion: Faith Coexisting with Monopoly

For Tyson, God’s presence remained in the background for most of the twentieth century’s final quarter. During this period, they would develop the reputation that would haunt them into the twenty-first: As a monopoly driven by hostile takeovers, brutal treatment of animals, and unlimited greed. In the sixties, the company’s Cornish game hen became one of the first branded meat products to be sold in stores, and that fact along with Don’s aggressive leadership turned them into a household name by the end of the seventies. A consumer base clamoring for ready-to-make meals demanded a greater variety of frozen foods, and Tyson was there, lining grocery store refrigerators with their hen and, soon enough, all varieties of poultry, beef, and fish.58 In the decades that followed, they would only experience even more unimpeded, exponential growth.

By 1996, Tyson was “the largest and most profitable poultry producer,” churning out thirty-five million chickens a week after having quadrupled their size with a series of acquisitions throughout the late eighties.59 Tyson’s success in the face of its humble origins was remarkable, yet their religious faith was still a cornerstone of their business. As horrifying as their treatment of animals, other companies, and potentially employees may have been, Christianity still played into John H. “Johnny” Tyson’s decision to introduce workplace chaplain programs into his factories and create the God-focused “Core Values” that would lead the company into the new millennium. Tyson raises the question of whether or not a company can be simultaneously faith-based and morally corrupt, and even considering that capitalism in and of itself has the potential to embrace morally responsible options, the answer to this question appears to be a resounding yes. What defines faith-based business, rather than morally adhering

to a code of values ascribed by a supernatural being, is simply the belief in that being and the belief that serving it alone brings about a greater good.

As chapter two will reveal, other faith-based businesses have certainly had the question of morality placed upon them. However, for the purpose of defining faith-based businesses, we must assume that morality might play a part in an individual’s decision to found a business, but not in their choice to grow that business and draw in additional profits. Tyson, regardless of how far it has come from its Arkansan roots, shows that faith can flourish even within an inconceivably massive, violently capitalistic organization. The same is true for this thesis’ next subject: Wal-Mart.
II. APOSTATES: WAL-MART AND RELIGIOSITY AS MARKETABILITY

It took until the twenty-first century for Tyson Foods to make its faith-based mission a matter of public record. Before 2015, both Chick-fil-A and Hobby Lobby would follow suit, their contributions and outspoken views making headlines. For the denizens of the 2010s, CEOs were preachers and pundits on the side, their capitalist pursuits invested with evangelical zeal. Realistically, the idea of uniquely Christian free enterprise was far from new. It was an idea embedded in the rise of the religious right in the 1970s, the twentieth century’s swirling definition of “the market,” and the Sunbelt ethos of Chick-fil-A and Hobby Lobby’s founders alike. It was a concept embodied by Tyson Foods, but first publicly introduced and advertised by Wal-Mart.

Since its massive growth spurt in the 1990s, Wal-Mart, perhaps the most ubiquitous and unassuming of its contemporaries in the realm of faith-based business, has received an equally massive amount of scholarly criticism. Most of this centers on Wal-Mart’s ideological influence: Rebekah Peeples Massengill says the superstore “can be understood as representing both the best and the worst of capitalism and market logic.”60 “Wal-Mart is a cultural force that both remakes and destroys our idealized past world and our emotional links to it,” notes Mary Jo Schneider. “Wal-Mart is a participant in the destruction of the small-town culture that it mythologizes, while it also is recreating new patterns and identities.”61 According to Bethany Moreton, “The fate of the nation… lay in the hands of the Wal-Mart Mom.”62 All of these perspectives emphasize Wal-Mart’s ability to both revolutionize and represent ideological waves in American history. Despite

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this massive influence on economic systems long associated with greed and exploitation, Wal-Mart’s leadership would still claim that the company had a powerful, ideological “soul.”

At the 1997 company meeting, five years after founder Sam Walton’s passing, Wal-Mart executive Don Soderquist would passionately claim: “Our company does have a soul.”63 As scholars debated Wal-Mart’s ability to consume small-town America, the implications of its scope on twenty-first-century capitalism, and the business philosophies of its founding fathers, discussions of the corporation’s Christian foundations were sidelined. Wal-Mart’s attempts at Christian charity were stifled by its numerous controversies, to the point that it appeared as if there were no examples of its religiosity left. However, at the end of To Serve God and Wal-Mart, Moreton leaves readers with a profound image: Wal-Mart’s “big blue wake” crashing down on New Orleans and providing food and water to Hurricane Katrina-stricken New Orleans. The occasional display of purportedly Christian generosity, however, cannot reconcile Wal-Mart’s oft-criticized anti-union stance, exploitation of overseas workers, and discriminatory policies—not to mention its existence as the largest corporation in the world, founded on and thriving off material, not eternal, goods. Scholarly discussion of Wal-Mart often neglects that its legacy is one of apostasy, a predecessor to proselytizers like Chick-fil-A and Hobby Lobby, lost in its size and wealth, but still maintaining a faith-based ideology.

The immense scope of the superstore in the twenty-first century belies its humble, Arkansan roots, deeply intertwined with Christianity, the American South, and conservative family values. As Nelson Lichtenstein notes, “Wal-Mart exists within a cultural universe that is Protestant… even if corporate officers refrain from declaring this evangelical sensibility an overt component of the Wal-Mart culture… Wal-Mart is immersed in a Christian ethos that links

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personal salvation to entrepreneurial success and social service to free enterprise.”64 Sam Walton opened the first Walmart store in 1962, but the company itself would not experience nationwide growth until the seventies, nor would it redefine the way in which retailers do business—that is, via the “big box store” or “everyday low prices” models—until the eighties and nineties. Over this vast history, Walton’s notion of “servant leadership” and the aforementioned Christian ethos would radically change as Walmart came into conflict with the mom-and-pop stores that symbolized its roots, faced criticism for its labor policies and the conditions of its manufacturing centers, and fought religious discrimination suits in the nineties.65 “Mr. Sam” Walton died in 1992, at a point where it appeared like his company’s Christian legacy was crumbling: Walmart was becoming a more spiritual, secular company and distinguishing itself from the values of other faith-based companies.

This fact might lead scholars to believe that Wal-Mart’s Christian foundations collapsed with their founder’s death. In truth, they lived on in the form of Wal-Mart’s ideological self-image. Nowhere is this more evident than in the publications produced by Wal-Mart’s key executives. Sam Walton’s posthumous memoir, Made in America, crafts a symbolic image of a consummate southerner with all the connotations of a huntin’, fishin’, God-fearin’ lifestyle, but never once mentions a single Bible verse or Christianity specifically, with barely a nod to religion in general.66 Perhaps Don Soderquist’s 2005 guidebook to Wal-Mart’s history and philosophy, The Wal-Mart Way, is an attempt to rectify this, citing five separate Bible verses and ending with a cheery “May God bless you on your way!”67 However, nothing can rectify the

bland, Steven Covey-esque secularity of Wal-Mart’s “Ten Rules for Building A Business,” which include “Celebrate your success,” “Exceed your customers’ expectations,” and “Swim upstream” and are posted on Wal-Mart’s website to this very day. These writings are analyzed here not as contributions to a scholarly conversation, but as the gospel of Wal-Mart’s all-important “culture.” Their understandings of Wal-Mart’s history are integral to the how the same history has been interpreted by scholarly writers.

The arguments presented by Moreton, Massengill, Lichtenstein, and their contemporaries describe Wal-Mart in multitudinous ways: as a vanguard of late-twentieth-century capitalism, a symbol for the rising tide of social conservatism, and a warrior for the religious right. On the other hand, Walton and Wal-Mart’s core executives’ writings analyze the company from the ground-up, describing a culture that connects employees to employers in ways not unlike a rural community’s ties to attending church on Sunday. This chapter provides examples of Wal-Mart’s faith-based nature, observing them evolve throughout the company’s. Wal-Mart’s philosophies’ “scriptural” basis provided an adequate foundation for religious organizations, institutions, and businesses. Unlike Chick-fil-A or Hobby Lobby, whose Christian beliefs are carefully impressed upon consumers, Wal-Mart is faith-based in name only, exhibiting religious elements exclusively at corporate events and within their corporate culture.

Believing in Goals: Foundations and Initial Success

“Is Wal-Mart a Christian company?” former Wal-Mart vice chairman, CEO, and “keeper of the culture” Don Soderquist pondered in 2005. “No. But the basis of our decisions was the values of scripture.”69 Statements of ambiguous religiosity like this one would characterize Wal-

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Mart’s corporate publications following Sam Walton’s death. In reality, they were always set in stone: to “Mr. Sam” (as some associates were known to semi-affectionately call him70), religion was as much an unquestioned part of Bentonville life as political conservatism was equivalent to the act of conserving money, whether through flying coach or buying clothes from his own store or picking up pennies off the ground.71 In one of his memoir’s varied references to religion, Walton says, “Growing up, I had always gone to church and Sunday school every Sunday; it was an important part of my life. I don’t know that I was religious, per se, but I always felt like the church was important.”72 Via statements like these, scholars easily came to view the superstore as a bastion of evangelical Christianity.

Sam Walton’s memoir is the gospel of both Christ and the dollar. He characterizes himself as a man fueled by maddening ambition rather than a driving faith. His business beginnings were forged in high school as a competitive football player, and later as a college politician, “[running] for every office that came along.”73 As he entered his business career, ideological fulfillment became synonymous with revenues, and a series of seemingly random events—from his hiring as a J.C. Penney manager to his wife’s father’s wishes regarding where they raise their family—ended with him running a Ben Franklin in Newport, Arkansas, desperate to attain equal parts financial and ideological fulfillment. “I’ve always believed in goals, so I set myself one: I wanted my little Newport store to be the best, most profitable variety store in Arkansas within five years.”74 Cloistered in the evangelical South, Walton’s Newport store

71 Walton, Made in America, 5.
72 Ibid., 15. Anthony Bianco, writing in The Bully of Bentonville, takes a more cynical stance. “For Walton, religious practice was a vehicle of secular advancement; he attended church every Sunday for the same basic reason he went to Chamber of Commerce meetings every Wednesday.” (47)
73 Ibid., 11-12.
74 Ibid., 20-22.
would be inextricably knitted to the world of Christianity and ideology that was so tied to the region’s business community.

It was in that tiny Ben Franklin where Walton began crafting the philosophies that guided Wal-Mart even until the present. Hunting for the best price possible, he bought merchandise directly from suppliers, often “offbeat” ones with little to no reputation. He installed an ice cream machine on the sidewalk to foster a family atmosphere. Success was slow, uncertain, and constantly achieved under the scrutiny of the profit-hungry Ben Franklin overheads. At the end of this discussion of the first phase of his career, Walton makes an important statement about the role he attributes to religion: “Church is an important part of society, especially in small towns. Whether it’s the contacts and associations you make or the contributions you might make toward helping other folks, it all sort of ties in together.”

However, when Walton absentmindedly forgot to renew his hyper-successful Ben Franklin’s lease, he was mortified by the prospect of selling the store for $50,000, jarred back into his philosophy of putting financial fulfillment before ideological fulfillment. “It was the low point of my business life,” he said. “I felt sick to my stomach. I couldn’t believe it was happening to me. It really was like a nightmare.” The event, however, in a classic twist depicted in most faith-based business histories, turned out to be the most fortuitous moment in his life: determined to succeed by following the same ideologies he had at Ben Franklin, he moved to Bentonville and begins Walton’s Five-and-Dime, Wal-Mart’s 4000-square-foot predecessor.76 The foundations, ideological and physical, were set, and Walton was free to pursue both thanks to his sharp decision-making.

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76 Ibid., 30-32.
Walton’s buy-low-sell-low philosophy, however, was hardly a sacrament. His success was forged by a deep understanding of a Southern protestant ethic and his exploitation of it. Bob Ortega describes Walton as working against his small-town upbringing rather than flourishing from it: “small-town merchants often informally colluded to keep prices fairly uniform, and higher than in cities, where there was more competition. It was a cozy, lazy setup--and one Walton immediately decided not to follow.” Walton’s aforementioned maddening ambition prevented him from working with the prevailing culture; this is best illustrated by an episode in which he purchases “two-barred, tricot satin panties with an elastic waist” from one of his lesser-known, cheaper dealers, allowing him to sell them at a marked-down price and infuriate his Ben Franklin suppliers. The specific episode, likely one of many similar events, is played off as humorous; Walton is the patriarchal head of his retail family (not to mention his church), presumably carting around boxes of women’s underwear in the back of his pickup truck.

This patriarchal, family-oriented theme in Wal-Mart’s early history has not gone unnoticed in the scholarly conversation. Following the hiring of his smoker and drinker younger brother Bud, Walton’s installation of the ice cream machine foreshadows Wal-Mart’s future labor policies. “[Bud] paid his dues by doing… a lot of grunt work: stocking, washing windows, helping trim windows, and one odious chose his sibling had lovingly reserved for him… the messy machine had to be cleaned religiously. ‘I never forgave him for making me clean out that damned ice cream machine,’ Bud complained, not entirely in jest.” This focus on family would continue well into the new millennium, with Soderquist referring to Wal-Mart as a “family store,” its products and scope limited by that designation. As Massengill argues, this notion of

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77 Ortega, *In Sam We Trust*, 26.
79 Ortega, *In Sam We Trust*, 28.
“family,” initially literal and later figurative, would be carefully used to encourage workers to “[accept] low wages, long hours, and dead end futures,” not unlike Bud and his “grunt work.”

Moreton argues that the development of this patriarchal hierarchy within the Walton family, literal or otherwise, is based on both Walton’s personality and Wal-Mart’s early geography. In the years following WWII, she notes, a technological revolution in farming made starting a career in agriculture entirely dependent on one’s amount of land and capitalist endeavors. The hobbyists—farmers by ideology often too old to transform their career based on these stipulations—retired to the Ozarks, “a back-to-the-land Florida without the bikinis.” Walton’s success can be attested to his ability to tap into this culture and the economic weaknesses of its inhabitants, portraying himself as an everyman who engaged in the “grunt work” just as much as his employees. This was where the “Wal-Mart paradox”—the store’s capacity to both be a massively successful chain enterprise and still appeal to small-town culture—was born, infiltrating a culture that believed chain stores would literally bring about the apocalypse. In his own way, Walton was exhibiting the philosophy that would become known as “servant leadership”: maintaining a leadership or otherwise superior role while denigrating oneself or one’s own organization as providing servitude-esque resources for one’s consumer base.

However, more than Moreton’s geographical interpretation or Walton’s own perspective can acknowledge, those themes of millenarianism, evangelicalism, and “servant leadership” run in the background of all of Wal-Mart’s early history. Walton could never divorce his ambition

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81 Massengill, *Wal-Mart Wars*, 82.
83 Ibid., 67-72. See also: Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart*, 6. “‘The paradox,’ marveled one commentator in 2002, ‘is that Wal-Mart stands for both Main Street values and the efficiencies of the huge corporation, aw-shucks hokeyness and terabytes of minute-by-minute sales data, fried-chicken luncheons at the Waltons’ Arkansas home and the demands of Wall St.’”
from its evangelical roots; as Massengill notes, there is an “individualistic ethos inherent in evangelicalism, which sees salvation as a personal decision that resides between the individual and Jesus Christ. Accordingly, this individualistic ethos can color other views and attitudes.”

On the first page of his retrospective on “the Wal-Mart Way,” Soderquist notes that one of Walton’s chief desires in beginning a business was “honoring his Lord.”

Writing in the nineties, Walton may not have recalled Christianity playing a particularly large role in the foundation of his empire, but a thorough reading of his memoirs reveals less of a man who views church as a “vehicle of secular advancement” and more of a casual, southern-born Christian; Walton was a Sunday School teacher, after all. Religion was the same part of his roots that told him it was wrong to cave to the small-town monopolizing of his Newport and Bentonville competitors. The virtues of rural Arkansas were loving one’s neighbor, honesty in business, and humility, and in dealing with local, homegrown American merchandisers, Walton could respect that system of ethics. On the national stage, however, conflicts would arise.

_Growth and the “Wal-Mart Culture”_

On the local scale, the connections between Southern ideals and Wal-Mart’s business culture came naturally. Once the company grew beyond state lines, those connections blurred, becoming more bizarre and contradictory. The crux of debates over Wal-Mart’s development into a mega-corporation was the “associate”—a term for the Wal-Mart employee that would later come to dominate retail industries. “Our relationship with the associates is a partnership in the truest sense,” Walton said. “It’s the only reason our company has been able to consistently outperform the competition—and even our own expectations.”

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84 Massengill, _Wal-Mart Wars_, 183.
86 Walton, _Made in America_, 68.
87 Ibid., 126.
Bentonville allowed him a great deal of retailer freedom, ranging from buying women’s underwear at insanely low prices to having his own children sweep the floors and stock the shelves, which all represented wholesome, one-on-one interactions. All of this is fondly remembered in Walton’s memoir.

A memoir, of course, that was published in 1992, just after its author’s passing. Just prior to his death, Walton agreed to give an interview to NBC’s Dateline, presumably with the intention of extolling Wal-Mart’s success over the preceding decades. New CEO David Glass arranged the interview, only to be surprised mid-interview by NBC footage of Bangladeshi children making garments marketed as “Made in the USA” on Wal-Mart shelves: he fled the interview and denied that the workers in the footage were children a few days afterward. It was a watershed in Wal-Mart’s history, representing both years of building labor tensions and protests from groups like Wal-Mart Watch, Wake Up Wal-Mart, and even fellow evangelicals throughout the years to come. Through rapid expansion, geographic dislocation, and/or ideological shifts, Wal-Mart’s reputation transformed from representative of self-sufficient southern evangelicalism to the most exploitative corporation in the world. The first chapter already addressed maintaining a faith-based reputation in the face of massive success, and while Wal-Mart underwent increasing criticism as the nineties rolled into the new millennium, its “scriptural basis” remained strong—if only at the corporate level.

Don Soderquist’s 2005 response to Wal-Mart’s critics offers a broad rationalization for the company’s flaws: “...with more than one million people working for Wal-Mart in the U.S.,

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88 Walton, Made in America, 69. “I guess the kids thought of themselves as slave labor back then, but we didn’t work them that hard,” Walton remarks. His son, Rob, notes in a tangential interview: “In those days, we all got an allowance too, and it was less than some of our friends. I don’t know that we particularly felt deprived, but we didn’t have a lot of money. Dad was always--frugal is probably a good word for it.”

89 Massengill, Wal-Mart Wars, 19.
SERVANTS TO THE LENDER

the company has become larger than many big cities. Can you imagine a city of one million
people, for example, that is held to a standard of zero mistakes by its citizens?90 Undoubtedly,
Wal-Mart’s growth was staggering. Following the end of Walton’s resistance to incorporating
new retail technology in the sixties, Wal-Mart reached the 32-store mark in 1970, pulling in $31
million annually.91 By the end of the decade, the enterprise would encompass 276 stores and
make $1.2 billion every year.92 However, the root cause of this growth was not simply Walton’s
impressive ambition or the company’s stellar growth strategies. Even so, neither prevented the
company from becoming a “lightning-rod for criticism.”93 What truly brought about Wal-Mart’s
growth was its strategic manipulation of rural and eventually suburban areas throughout the
economically unstable seventies.

At the time, as larger corporations focused on cities and left rural areas untouched,
Walton’s franchise moved in: “[W]hile the big guys were leapfrogging from large city to large
city, they became so spread out and so involved in real estate and zoning laws and city politics
that they left huge pockets of business out there for us.” Gradually occupying additional
Southern states, Wal-Mart was able to maintain the business practices and philosophy that its
founder had established in small-town Arkansas.94 Walton would drag his labor policies along
with his corporation, recalling shorting his workers in a chuckling, grandfatherly tone in his
memoir: “In the beginning, I was so chintzy I really didn’t pay my employees very well… we
didn’t do much for the clerks except pay them an hourly wage, and I guess that wage was as little

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90 Soderquist, The Wal-Mart Way, 211.
91 Walton, Made in America, 91. “The truth is, I did want [the technology], I knew we needed it, but I just couldn’t
bring myself to say, ‘Okay, sure, spend what you need.’ I always questioned everything. It was important to me to
make them think that maybe the technology wasn’t as good as they thought it was, or that maybe it really wasn’t the
end-all they promised it would be.”
92 Ibid., 120.
93 Soderquist, The Wal-Mart Way, 211.
94 Walton, Made in America, 110.
as we could get by with at the time. In fairness to myself, though, that was pretty much the way retail was in those days… It wasn’t that I was intentionally heartless."\(^{95}\)

Just like religion, discussions of struggles with labor unions are slyly inserted throughout Walton’s memoir. He recalls early strikes by the Retail Workers’ Union, noting proudly that Wal-Mart never lost a battle with union organizers.\(^{96}\) But the body of criticism tells a far more complex story: Anthony Bianco’s *The Bully of Bentonville* fiercely claims that Walton’s “Ozark version of the conversion on the Road to Damascus that inspired him to grant workers the status of partners” was deliberately constructed to force individuality upon his “associates.”\(^{97}\) Moreton gives Walton’s resistance to labor unions religious significance: “Rather than an individualism that asserted autonomy and independence, then, [Wal-Mart’s] version resonated with the language of self-esteem, the ‘craving for significance’ in a mass society that vernacular Christian theologians popularized in the same years: not ‘Who am I?’ but ‘Whose am I?’”\(^{98}\) In his discussion of the “Wal-Mart culture,” Soderquist exemplifies this by carefully outlining “belief systems” describing the tenets through which Wal-Mart interacts with its employees—integrity, respect, teamwork, etc.—before topping off the entire discussion with “the Golden Rule.”\(^{99}\)

Numerous other Christian allusions are scattered throughout *The Wal-Mart Way*.  

\(^{95}\) Ibid., 127.  
\(^{96}\) Ibid., 128-129.  
\(^{97}\) Anthony Bianco, *The Bully of Bentonville: How the High Cost Wal-Mart’s Everyday Low Prices is Hurting America* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 55, 110-111. See also: Walton, *Made in America*, 129-130: “I have always believed strongly that we don’t need unions at Wal-Mart… historically, as unions have developed in this country, they have mostly just been divisive. They have put management on one side of the fence, employees on the other, and themselves in the middle as a separate business, one that depends on division between the other two camps.”


\(^{99}\) Soderquist, *The Wal-Mart Way*, 27, 45. Soderquist reiterates his statement on Wal-Mart’s foundations here: “I’m not saying that Wal-Mart is a Christian company, but I can unequivocally say that Sam founded the company on the Judeo-Christian principles found in the Bible.”
With Wal-Mart’s shocking growth in the seventies came widespread recognition of the “Wal-Mart culture,” a blend of cringe-inducing absurdity, cultish labor policies, and, as Walton was eager to emphasize, the company’s Ozark roots: “Some of this culture grew naturally out of our small-town beginnings. Back then, we tried literally to create a carnival atmosphere in our stores.”\(^{100}\) The most famous instance of this culture playing out on the national stage was in 1984, when Walton donned a grass skirt, Hawaiian shirt, as well as several leis and, flanked by a group of ukelele players, hula-danced down Wall St., having promised to do so if the year’s profits broke the company record.\(^{101}\) The exceptionally bizarre event was only the tip of the iceberg. “Most folks probably thought we just had a wacky chairman who was pulling a pretty primitive publicity stunt,” Walton recalled, unintentionally expressing what many onlookers were probably thinking. “What they didn’t realize is that this sort of stuff goes on all the time at Wal-Mart. It’s part of our culture, and it runs through everything we do.”\(^{102}\)

Wal-Mart managers, owners, and executives pulled off gags resonating with a wholesome, southern-fried, Greatest Generation sense of humor all throughout the country. Hearkening back to the forced goofiness of Walton’s anecdote about the truckload full of women’s underwear, one vice president was dared to put on pink tights and a blond wig and ride a horse around the Bentonville town square. Some Wal-Mart stores held women’s fashion shows with “ugly old men” as models. There were pig-kissing contests, poetry-reading contests, Moon Pie-eating contests, and baby-serenading contests. “To Walton,” Bianco notes, “these wholesome hijinks were not just a technique of employee motivation but also a defiant affirmation of Wal-Mart’s small-town roots, of its Ozark soul.”\(^{103}\) The operative word here is “soul”: Wal-Mart’s

\(^{100}\) Walton, *Made in America*, 160.  
\(^{101}\) Ortega, *In Sam We Trust*, 188-189.  
\(^{102}\) Walton, *Made in America*, 159.  
\(^{103}\) Bianco, *The Bully of Bentonville*, 57.
corporate hijinks represented a ham-fisted, deliberately clean and old-fashioned variety of undoubtedly Christian humor. The absurd displays symbolized Wal-Mart’s early methods of generating a hometown family, a sentiment that felt increasingly artificial and overstretched—though deeply loyal to the company’s faith-based philosophy—as the company gained ground and freely displayed their embarrassing antics to head-scratching spectators.

Nowhere did this bizarre culture play out more overtly than at the Wal-Mart annual meeting. As Lichtenstein notes, “top executives are put through skits, songs, and vaudeville-like routines that embarrass them before thousands of raucous associates.”104 In her illustration of the meeting itself, Mary Jo Schneider describes a cacophony of patriotism, consumerism, and religion: choirs of schoolchildren sing, married couples discuss how “the Lord gave” them jobs at the company, and laser lights accompany videos that proclaim “‘Everything That I Do That is Not Helping Sam's is a Waste of my Time.’” On more than one occasion, Walton referred to the event as “‘almost a revival.’”105 More clearly than sporadic instances of Wal-Mart executives in drag and eating contests spurred by excess product, the Wal-Mart annual meeting illustrates how intensely associates both participated in and were indoctrinated into the “Wal-Mart culture.”

These demonstrations incorporated associates from vice presidents all the way down to cashiers. The “Wal-Mart Cheer,” in the era of Wal-Mart’s exponential growth, began and ended every shift, but as of 2005 was largely relegated to corporate meetings; during the cheer, associates spell out “Wal-Mart” and perform a “squiggly” in the middle--that is, a sort of twist. “It adds some motion and fun to the cheer,” Soderquist promises, and it is difficult to not

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105 Schneider, “The Wal-Mart annual meeting,” 296, 298, 294, 293. Schneider notes that Walton was practically canonized at the meetings following his death: “Sam almost seemed physically present. One year the company unveiled an emotional film tribute and asked the crowd to sing "God Bless America" in memory of their company's founder... A prayer was offered to give thanks for Sam Walton, a man who taught us by example how to live. Walton was offered almost as a biblical prophet.”
imagine associates grudgingly going through the old-fashioned cheer’s motions before meetings.\textsuperscript{106} Beginning in 1975, Walton began having workers recite a pledge named after him: “‘From this day forward, I solemnly promise and declare that every customer that comes within ten feet of me, I will smile, look them in the eye, and greet them. So help me Sam!’”\textsuperscript{107}

As Wal-Mart’s success displaced the company from its geographic roots and Mr. Sam from his Sunday school beginnings, these cultish chants and pledges and cheers enabled the company to embody and express its religious roots. Regardless of their increasing secular presence and the absolute interminability of their antics, God was not at the core of the “corny” skits that played out on horseback and in hula skirts as Wal-Mart’s culture exploded onto the national stage.\textsuperscript{108} The invocation of God and heaven at the annual meetings and their revival-esque nature gave a sort of divine power to what might otherwise be strictly consumerist aspects of a supposed “Wal-Mart culture.” Perhaps this is best illustrated by Soderquist, writing nearly a decade after Mr. Sam’s “pass[ing] into eternity,” when he describes Wal-Mart’s key principle of “Imagine the possible by striving for the impossible,” characterizing the company as a literal miracle-worker. Taken chronologically, \textit{The Wal-Mart Way} shows the transformation of Walton’s desire to “honor his Lord” into a new foundation for faith: “as long as we remember that the only one ‘boss’ in Wal-Mart is the customer—every single one of them—and that they are the reason we are in business.”\textsuperscript{109} Wal-Mart had successfully blurred the lines between religion and consumerism, but by proselytizing in the latter’s name more than the former’s the company’s reputation would become one of greed rather than faith.

\textsuperscript{106} Soderquist, \textit{The Wal-Mart Way}, 36.
\textsuperscript{107} Bianco, \textit{The Bully of Bentonville}, 57.
\textsuperscript{108} Moreton, \textit{To Serve God and Wal-Mart}, 93-94.
Conclusion: A Church, But Not a Crusader

In its first decades, Wal-Mart showed the country that it could balance the “Wal-Mart paradox” and prove that a mega-corporation could stand for both unrepentant capitalism and the Judeo-Christian principles of the American South. It was founded by a Presbyterian patriarch who was in church every Sunday—except during quail season, of course. Nurtured in the homegrown atmosphere of Bentonville, Arkansas, where the most fearsome element of consumerist evil were the general storekeepers who conspired to inflate their prices in the face of hard-working, church-going farmers, Christian principles were easy to maintain. Once the company moved beyond the confines of the South, however, their once quaint and silly culture became hard to palatable. Mr. Sam’s sense of community and “family” failed to appeal to union-seeking employees being paid less than their peers. The annual meeting was a cabal of consumerism and star-spangled banners, religious symbols amply sprinkled throughout.

Without a doubt, this figurative “apostasy” had already begun before Walton’s death, but the event certainly represented a turning point. Not long afterward, in 1993, a religious discrimination suit would ensue when an Ozarks Wal-Mart refused to give a Christian worker time off on Sunday, and managers from Wal-Marts around the country were forced to gather for, as Moreton notes, “an intensive training course on respecting the very religious belief they were widely perceived as exemplifying.” Throughout the rest of the nineties, grievances swelled in a variety of forms, whether due to Wal-Mart’s expulsion of small businesses, human rights abuses among their overseas manufacturers, and their weak advocacy of religious conservatism. Bianco enumerates the various complaints: in 1999, Wal-Mart refused to stop stocking Preven, a morning-after contraceptive, when at least one evangelical organization pressed them to do so.

110 Moreton, To Serve God and Wal-Mart, 90.
111 Ibid., 89.
Throughout the early 2000s, the store battled more than one Jesuit group for command of various zoning policies. Similarly, African American congregations have accused Wal-Mart of underpaying and mistreating its minority employees.112

And then there are the activist groups—Wal-Mart Watch, Wake Up Wal-Mart, and the like—which consistently attempted to mobilize Christian opposition to Wal-Mart’s reign over the evangelical demographic.113 As evidenced by Soderquist’s business advice text, *The Wal-Mart Way*, characterized by Bible verses and exhortations of Wal-Mart’s biblical foundations, there has been some attempt by Wal-Mart executives to revitalize the notion that they are a business with a “soul.” However, as Bianco notes, censorship of the occasional book or CD does not constitute spreading the word of God to one’s customers. “Bentonville has come to understand that it needs the secular dollar no less than the Christian dollar if it is to meet its ambitious revenue-growth goals. In other words, Wal-Mart now must find a way to make both God and Mammon serve it.”114 Compared to Hobby Lobby, which endured an entire lawsuit to reinforce its power to restrict access to birth control, and Chick-fil-A, which grows increasingly successful even as it closes every Sunday, a true business “founded on the Judeo-Christian principles of the Bible” would adhere to God’s side.

All this evidence might lead one to ask: Why even classify Wal-Mart as a faith-based business? Just as different Christians practice their religion differently, different faith-based businesses have different philosophies guiding how their profits might better serve God. Regardless of whether it has openly proselytized outside its carnivalesque annual meetings, Wal-Mart’s massive size mingled with its underlying corporate philosophy spread a Southern,

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113 Massengill, *Wal-Mart Wars*, 139.
evangelical ethic throughout every community it invaded, through providing the cheapest goods possible it came to represent rural, Christian values all throughout the country rather than simply within the confines of a tiny Ben Franklin in backwoods Arkansas.

If Tyson Foods was one of the first faith-based businesses, Wal-Mart was one of the first to understand that businesses can utilize Christianity to bring employees together, attract consumers, and create a guiding corporate philosophy. As Moreton notes, it reached into a deeply populist, anti-corporate heartland and infused the mindless pursuit of capital with moral fervor. Massengill synthesizes those aspects in the context of the twenty-first century, turning Wal-Mart into a symbol of a new “moral populism.” The company’s massive size by the latter quarter of the twentieth century, however, would distance it from openly expressing its foundational corporate ideology. Therefore, Wal-Mart represents an “apostate” among other faith-based businesses, its beliefs demanding reformation by a new generation of crusaders.
III. REFORMERS: CHICK-FIL-A AND THE FOOD COURT AS TEMPLE

Moving from massive success in retail to massive success in the food industry, this thesis now turns its lens on the first faith-based business to openly proselytize to its customers through almost every interaction: Chick-fil-A. As of 2016, the restaurant was the most profitable fast food chain in the United States. Outdistancing even McDonald’s and Chipotle, the chain boasted sales of $3.9 million per restaurant—nearly quadruple those earned by fellow fried chicken icon KFC. Publications analyzing Chick-fil-A’s success often cite its employees’ polite and accurate service, bolstered by a just-slightly-higher-than-minimum wage of $8.44 hourly. Additionally, an increasing demand for alternatives to red meat situated Chick-fil-A to out-sell American standard McDonald’s while widespread listeria contamination in 2015 stymied Chipotle’s once-gargantuan popularity. However, these analyses, while adequately describing the various situational forces that thrusted Chick-fil-A to the top, neglect the chain’s distinct cultural appeal, which is inextricably tied to the company’s faith-based foundation.

Like Tyson, Chick-fil-A’s executives consider Christianity an integral part of how they shape corporate policy and interact with the consumer. Founder S. Truett Cathy espoused the fundamentals of this combination in an address to the business-oriented Newcomen Society in 1997: “The two statements of our corporate purpose are as follows: To glorify God by being a faithful steward of all that is entrusted to us [and t]o have a positive influence on all who come in contact with Chick-fil-A. These simple phrases… summed up why we were in this business, and we hoped that it would give others in our company a similar sense of purpose at Chick-fil-A.”

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Over the company’s near-sixty-year history, Cathy and his subordinates built Chick-fil-A to reflect their politically conservative, family-friendly, and religious ideologies through their corporate publications, hiring practices, and even their restaurants’ day-to-day operation.\textsuperscript{117} As this thesis has already discussed, these practices continued even after Cathy’s decreased involvement from the company and death in 2014, with his son and COO Dan continuing to affirm their beliefs. "We know that it might not be popular with everyone, but thank the Lord, we live in a country where we can share our values and operate on biblical principles," Dan said in a 2010 interview, further placing Chick-fil-A alongside Tyson in the faith-based business pantheon.\textsuperscript{118}

Unlike Tyson, Chick-fil-A openly markets its products with a specific corporate philosophy in mind. Any history or analysis of the restaurant would be incomplete without describing the environment each dining room strives to create: a physical reflection of the ideas to which its founders attempt to adhere. The restaurants are clean and well-decorated, with ubiquitous greenery and placards describing the company’s history on every wall. Their off-white and red color scheme is warmer and more welcoming than the stark gray or white interiors of a McDonald’s or Burger King. Cashiers bring food to customer tables and reply with “My Pleasure” when thanked—a Southern throwback to the chain’s Atlanta origins. Some symbols are more overt: faint Christian Muzak plays over the loudspeakers in every store; Crayons, activity booklets, and community bulletin boards all generate a comfortable environment for children; and the restaurant’s staunch closed-on-Sundays policy explicitly allows employees to

\textsuperscript{118} O’Connor, “Meet the Cathys.”
“set aside one day to rest and worship if they choose.” Whereas Tyson’s religious origins and corporate philosophies might be lost on a customer purchasing a bag of pre-cooked chicken nuggets, everything in the Chick-fil-A environment assures that their ideologies are carefully advertised to the consumer.

These philosophies represent years of both spontaneous success and strategic growth for Chick-fil-A. Concurrent with the consumer revolution of the twentieth century’s latter half as well as various waves of religious conservatism in U.S. politics, the company’s history became an ideal example for other faith-based businesses to follow. This is true for reasons other than its impressive success and scope: Despite 2012’s donation controversy, Chick-fil-A was responsive to its critics, revising the foundations they funded in the years following. Regardless of whether this represents an artificial, public relations-driven choice, it marks the company as different from, for example, Tyson or Hobby Lobby’s strict adherence to religious policy and suggests that it might be possible to run Christian business with an eye for nuance and changing political climates. In the fallout after the anti-LGBT controversy, the company affirmed that it was “taking a much closer look at the organizations it considers helping, and in the process, will remain true to its stated philosophy of not supporting organizations with political agendas.” Whether doing so is possible for any faith-based business at the helm of multiple not-for-profit organizations is up for debate.

More than likely, Chick-fil-A maintains this responsive and “apolitical” stance to please its massive, generation-spanning customer population, but this raises questions about how the

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120 Josh Voorhees, “Never mind, Chick-fil-A still has a way to funnel cash to anti-gay marriage groups,” Slate, 21 September 2012. This article, among others, notes that while Chick-fil-A openly stated that its WinShape Foundation would no longer donate to anti-marriage equality organizations, the company was still affiliated and donating to those organizations via other means.
restaurant generated such a huge consumer base in the first place, especially when its corporate philosophy is so oriented around divisive religious beliefs. The simplest explanation may be that their chicken sandwich is just so good that it overcomes most ideological reservations. This is not entirely flippant: at least one scholar has dedicated an entire paper to analyzing how perception of chicken as a non-living, exceptionally delicious commodity enables customers to divorce Chick-fil-A’s ideas from the act of consumption.\textsuperscript{121} Additionally, their continued success following the donations debacle seems to indicate that its lack of religious expression during its early years were not contributing to the company’s exponential growth. Perhaps the most logical explanation comes from Darren E. Grem, who delves into Chick-fil-A’s signature expansion into the burgeoning shopping mall food court market. Noting that the suburban shopping mall supplanted \textit{de jure} racial segregation with limited access based on economic status, Grem concludes that Chick-fil-A “benefited directly from [the] complex spatial, racial, and economic restructurings” brought about by the shopping mall’s increasing popularity. Chick-fil-A’s popularity is directly tied to patterns of gentrification, whiteness, and specific economic strata and its marketing to these demographics helps it occupy a unique, hyper-popular cultural niche.\textsuperscript{122}

This massive success and influence within the food service industry, in combination with the company’s dubious apolitical stance, represents a degree of departure from and reformation of the faith-based business model Tyson and other companies founded in the early twentieth century established. When delving into Chick-fil-A’s history, we find an organization that was conscious of the value of marketing to a Christian demographic by embracing and upholding

\textsuperscript{121} Bradley D. Rowe, “It IS about chicken: Chick-fil-A, posthumanist intersectionality, and gastro-aesthetic pedagogy” (\textit{Journal of Thought} 48, no. 2, 2013).
\textsuperscript{122} Grem, “Marketplace Missions,” 296.
those consumers’ ideas. Also, while it is difficult to say that anything within a Chick-fil-A’s
dining room actively proselytizes the Christian religion to customers, through their various
foundations and education outreach programs, Chick-fil-A deliberately strives to instill Judeo-
Christian values in both school-age children and politically conservative adults. These practices
form a broad description of the company’s ideological core, but to develop a full, precise profile,
analysis of Chick-fil-A’s entire history is necessary.

“He Did His Best and Trusted God with the Rest”: Building a Fast Food Empire

In one of his numerous memoirs and business advice books, S. Truett Cathy recalls
developing a driven, capitalist mindset while coming of age during the Great Depression. “It was
the 1930s, and we shared schoolbooks... My teacher paired me with an A student, and no matter
how fast I read, he always turned the page before I was ready. Every time the page turned, my
self-concept fell a notch.” Cathy’s inability to find academic success grew into the notion that
hard work was a far more valuable commodity. “My parents didn’t have a lot of money, so I
knew that if I wanted nice things—and I did—the only way to get those things was to work hard
and save my money.” Citing Tom Brokaw’s The Greatest Generation, he identifies as part of an
era where self-reliance and employment were key values and individuals who “didn’t dream big
dreams” and “didn’t set out to become heroes” were the most successful.123 Cathy does not
identify what the nice things he sought exactly were, but this early emphasis on material
possessions stands in stark contrast to a humble, charitable Christian ethic. However, he attempts
to exonerate himself to some degree through his discussion of the Greatest Generation, framing
his burgeoning greed as the necessity of a time in which people were simply trying to get by. As
noted in Chapter One, the businessmen of the early twentieth century bought and sold in a

123 S. Truett Cathy and Dick Parker, How Did You Do It, Truett? A Recipe for Success (STC Literary, LLC, 2007):
3-5.
ubiquitously Christian environment, and despite his desire for material goods, it is likely that Cathy already associated capitalist endeavors with religious ones.

Cathy notes that, during his youth, his mother was unable to attend church, instead preparing lunch for boarders every Sunday at noon. He describes her cooking in detail, noting that, in a large family that barely made ends meet, chicken was a staple, his mother employing a complex marinating and frying process from memory almost every night. He even references the genesis of his future invention, the Chick-fil-A chicken sandwich: “If you’ve ever seen a big platter of chicken passed around a table, you know that the breast is usually the first to be taken.” It was clear that poverty and family were influencing Cathy’s business aspirations, but religion was working its way into the mix as well. In an aside, he writes, “Sometimes at night I would walk out and lie down in [the] well-manicured grass, gaze up into the sky, and realize the presence of the Lord, despite our dire financial circumstances.”

Cathy’s youth came to an end with World War II. Drafted, he narrowly avoided being sent overseas when he was afflicted by a “strange sensitivity to sunlight,” limiting his service in the war to administrative work at a typewriter and ultimately leading to his medical discharge. Citing Romans 8:28, Cathy believed that God bequeathed the illness on him to protect him from danger and death in the South Pacific, allow him to spend more time with his aging mother, and take his first steps into the world of owning a business.124 The result was the Dwarf House, a tiny establishment featuring four tables, ten stools, and offerings that included “hamburgers, french fries, small steaks and a typical Southern breakfast menu.” Cathy and his brother Ben opened the 7500-square-foot restaurant on May 23, 1946 in the Atlanta suburb of Hapeville, marking the

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124 S. Truett Cathy and Dick Parker, Eat Mor Chikin: Inspire More People (Decatur, GA: Looking Glass Books, 2002: 15-16, 28, 32-34. Romans 8:28 reads, “All things work together for good to those that love the Lord, to them who are called according to His purpose.”
genesis of what would eventually become Chick-fil-A. As Cathy gleefully recalled in his address
to the Newcomen Society, they instituted their signature “closed on Sunday” policy within the
first week, not just because they “were that holy—we were just tired! The thought of working
around the clock that first Sunday and opening up all over again on Monday was too much to
bear.” Just like in Cathy’s grade school classroom, once in the business world he continued
treating faith and hard work in the pursuit of capital as two sides of the same coin.

Benefitting from Hapeville’s primarily white, blue collar population—who often spent
both lunch breaks from the local Ford plant and dinnertime at the Dwarf House—Cathy opened a
second location in 1951. However, tragedies intervened: in 1949, Ben Cathy died in a plane
.crash, and in 1960, as the Dwarf House reached its peak success within the greater Atlanta
community, the second location burned down. Additionally, Cathy suffered from recurrent
colon polyps and the long recovery process operating on them entailed. These struggles,
bolstered by the restaurant’s destruction, galvanized Cathy’s religious and business-related
aspirations, and he quickly rebuilt. “The fire had completely cleaned the slate,” he later wrote,
“and I knew I could do whatever I wanted with the new restaurant.” His subsequent physical
recovery led to hours of prayer and ambition in equal measures: “You’re with me, Lord… Next
time I’ll go all the way.”

That promise reflected Cathy’s decision to move into two startling new markets: fast food
and shopping mall dining. After researching McDonald’s’ nationwide growth, Cathy transformed
the new Dwarf House into the “Dwarf Burger,” streamlining operations by removing table
service and becoming one of the first fast food restaurants in Atlanta. His former patrons were
resistant to fast food’s modern, impersonal nature, and one of the two restaurants went under,
bought out by a Kentucky Fried Chicken franchisee.\textsuperscript{127} Ironically, this inspired Cathy to reconsider poultry as a staple food item. “Poultry has several positive factors,” he recalled. “It is less fattening, more nutritious, and more economical than beef, and it was popular with customers. We wanted to keep chicken on the Dwarf House menu, but chicken orders slowed down the flow of service.”\textsuperscript{128} Thus began the complex process Cathy undertook to craft what would later become the Chick-fil-A Chicken Sandwich.

Once again, credit for Cathy’s innovations went to his mother. Recalling her use of a pressure cooker to cook chicken faster, Cathy developed a special lid that held steam within his fryers, allowing chicken breasts to cook much faster and hold in the juices that traditional deep-frying released. Once again striving to satisfy the needs of blue-collar workers who frequented the Dwarf Burger on their miniscule lunch breaks, Cathy began selling his “Chicken Steak Sandwich,” placing it on a buttered bun with two pickles after ruling out sliced bread and mayonnaise. Everything about the chicken sandwich symbolized Cathy’s corporate philosophy, which centered on differentiating himself from the competition: this eventually extended beyond the sandwich, represented by the decision to sell waffle fries instead of traditional shoestring fries, as well as his choice to use peanut oil in his fryers. Later, peanut oil would prove to be a trans-fat-free, but at the time it was simply a cheaper option that distinguished the Dwarf Burger from other fast food restaurants.\textsuperscript{129} Years later, along with its Christian sentiment and closed-on-Sundays policy, these decisions would allow Chick-fil-A to depict itself in a more broad, secular manner, as an innovative, risk-taking organization.

\textsuperscript{127} Cathy, \textit{Eat Mor Chikin}, 69-72.
\textsuperscript{128} Cathy, \textit{A History Maker in Foodservice}, 12.
\textsuperscript{129} Cathy, \textit{How Did You Do It, Truett?}, 24-27.
Advised by an attorney that he could not simply patent a chicken sandwich, Cathy set out to distinguish his product. The name “Chick-fil-A” came about by banal circumstance: when experimenting with the words “chicken,” “fillet,” and even “buffet,” he simply omitted a few letters, added some hyphens, and stuck an “A” at the end to symbolize top-quality service. The Chick-fil-A chicken sandwich quickly became the most popular product at the Dwarf Burger, and fame would follow in its introduction’s wake. Cathy began Chick-fil-A Inc. in 1964, specializing in selling his trademark sandwich to other restaurants. When executives from McDonald’s showed interest, Cathy turned them down, his characteristic desire for continuous growth already turning his sights on beginning a chain of Chick-fil-A sandwich-oriented restaurants. He was already getting caught up in fame: In 1965, Lady Bird Johnson served a crowd of 250 Chick-fil-A sandwiches at a campaign stop. In the same year, Colonel Sanders tried Cathy’s chicken and called it the “second best” he had eaten.

Chick-fil-A’s early days as the Dwarf House were coming to an end. In his first two decades as an entrepreneur, S. Truett Cathy developed a philosophy that placed hard work and faith in God side-by-side, regarding any financial success as a reward for his faithfulness. Cutting a seventh of his income by closing on Sunday, however, was a small sacrifice in the face of the immense greed that beginning a successful dining franchise entailed, a reality that lead him and other Chick-fil-A executives to increasingly incorporate elements of Christianity into the business.

“To Glorify God”: Chick-fil-A’s Faith-based Mission

When establishing and marketing a faith-based business’ core principles, it is critical to maintain examples of corporate folklore. Here, corporate folklore is defined as any story or

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131 Cathy, *Eat Mor Chikin*, 81-82.
group of interconnected stories a company considers key events in its history. Usually presented in corporate publications rather than business journals or newspapers, corporate folklore may be dubiously true or unverifiable altogether, occupying a sort of mythical status for consumer who happen to interact with it. For Tyson, an example of corporate folklore might be John W. Tyson’s encounter with five hundred chickens and a long drive to Chicago. This chapter has already highlighted several instances of corporate folklore within the Chick-fil-A organization, including S. Truett Cathy discovering better method of cooking chicken through his childhood memories, the second Dwarf House’s burning, and Colonel Sanders’ appreciation of the Chick-fil-A chicken sandwich. These stories might be completely true, but their influence on and meaning within the corporation telling them could be false or used a marketing scheme at best—intentionally or not.

Each chapter in this thesis must dedicate some time to discussing a type of corporate folklore common to almost all faith-based businesses, referred to for the sake of simplicity as “the redemption.” The redemption story depicts a business in crisis: It may be failing financially, experiencing conflict among its executives, or struggling with some variety of spiritual shortcomings. Recognizing the crisis, the business’ leaders come to believe that they must publicly declare their faith in God to overcome the inherent problems afflicting them. Lo and behold, within a year of publicly expressing their religious beliefs, not only has the crisis came to an end, but the business is experiencing greater success than ever before. There may be truth to the business’ claim to success, but since the redemption often occurs before the business is publicly traded or is otherwise unreported, it is usually impossible to verify. The years that follow a redemption are marked by dramatically increased religious expression, via donations, interviews, or marketing techniques.
With its fame now growing exponentially, Chick-fil-A was on its way to its own crisis and redemption. Following the restaurant’s establishment in the sixties, the seventies were slated to be somewhat of a golden age for Chick-fil-A. Reaffirming his entrepreneurial ambitions in staving off McDonald’s’ advances, in 1967 Cathy would make ostensibly his most important decision in the company’s history: Opening the first Chick-fil-A restaurant within the Greenbriar Mall, one of the first shopping centers in Atlanta. “At the time,” Cathy recalled, “there were precious few restaurants—fast-food or otherwise—in malls. People would come to the malls to shop and go elsewhere to eat. We saw this as an opportunity to reach customers where they shopped and before they went elsewhere.” For Cathy, a man who “chafe[d] at the idea of thinking more than six to eight months in advance,” this was a remarkably prescient decision. Not only had he foreseen the opportunities in combining retail and food consumption, he had essentially invented what would become part of shopping malls’ distinct landscape for years to come: The food court.

In the late sixties, suburban shopping centers were a relatively new phenomenon, though they were poised to experience an immense growth spurt over the next decade, becoming the primary symbol of the explosive consumer movement. As Lizabeth Cohen notes, postwar suburban development drove residents further away from the downtown, urban shopping of bygone days, creating increasing reliance on cars and highways. In response, developers built shopping centers along highways and nearer to suburbs, “privatizing public space” by privileging property owners and exposing the groups once privately collected through market segmentation—characterized by race, gender, and other divisions—throughout public spaces.

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133 Cathy, *How Did You Do It, Truett?*, 12. Quote from Cathy’s son Dan.
As Cathy shrewdly predicted, all aspects of consumer life, from shopping, to eating, and to having any variety of experience that could be bought or sold, would become associated with the suburban shopping center. In emphasizing cleanliness and quality, Chick-fil-A would somewhat dodge the cheap, mass-produced connotations that would be associated with chains like McDonald’s and Wendy’s, but still subject itself to the market stratifications the shopping mall boom created.

Though the decision to expand into shopping malls may have been a spontaneous one motivated by circumstance and profit, for Cathy and Chick-fil-A, the mall would become an important part of the company’s philosophy. Following the Greenbriar Mall location’s impressive success, Cathy established four principles for governing the chain’s continued growth. The second, stating that “Chick-fil-A would build only in major shopping malls,” was a purely financial policy, but the fourth, placing the “chief emphasis… on people” was more ideological, with Cathy later calling it “the essence of the philosophy of life that God has entrusted to us.” Following the establishment of these tenets, Chick-fil-A grew exponentially, growing to seven locations in Georgia and the Carolinas by 1971 and rolling out a campaign to expand to fourteen locations over the three years that followed. Cathy’s egalitarian claim that an all-encompassing “people” were at the core of his business, however, was undermined somewhat by the types of people one would encounter in a shopping mall in the early seventies. By nature, malls were limited to middle- to higher-income individuals who owned or had access to some sort of transportation. Additionally, in the Greenbriar Mall, generally representative of most suburban malls throughout the South, only one out of four Chick-fil-A customers were

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nonwhite. Therefore, Cathy’s understanding of “people” was likely much narrower than its divine ordinance might imply.

By 1980, Chick-fil-A encompassed over 100 locations, expanding into Texas, Florida, and California. Aside from the shopping mall’s widespread popularity, other factors were weighing in on the company’s success: The price of beef was at an all-time high, consumers became increasingly aware of chicken’s health benefits, and Chick-fil-A was the only restaurant marketing a successful chicken entrée. From 1981 through ’82, however, this success ended up both a blessing and a curse. When two much larger fast food chains—McDonald’s and Wendy’s—recognized Chick-fil-A’s ingenuity and successfully added chicken sandwiches and nuggets to their menus, the far smaller Chick-fil-A encountered immense financial strain as demand for chicken ballooned. The company’s hundreds of locations shifted from profitable investments to financial burdens, and Cathy recalled spending “many days and nights in prayer that year asking God, ‘Where have I failed You?’” Outperformed by impossibly large consumer giants, Cathy could have recognized that his company’s refusal to market themselves outside of shopping malls limited their audience to only the wealthiest, whitest members of the potential consumer population. Additionally, he could have opened restaurants on Sunday and drew another full day of returns. Instead, fulfilling a central quality of the redemption narrative, Chick-fil-A’s executives came to agree that they were not fulfilling an obligation to a supernatural authority.

This decision played out at a special meeting called by Cathy in 1982. Talking in circles over potential financial changes, Cathy’s son Dan broke into the conversation with a series of philosophical questions: “Why are we in business? Why are we here? Why are we alive?” Every

137 Cathy, Eat Mor Chikin, 118-122.
individual in the room, Cathy later noted, was a baptized Christian, and as such they quickly agreed to establish a “corporate purpose” for the company, further distinguishing it from the massive, soulless corporations that were breaking into the chicken market. As this chapter has already mentioned, one of the purpose’s statements affirmed that Chick-fil-A’s primary goal was to “glorify God by being a faithful steward of all that is entrusted to us.” The other changes to corporate policy discussed at the meeting were minimal—for one, deciding to market “Quality, Service and Cleanliness,” a foregone conclusion thanks to Chick-fil-A’s food court atmosphere—in the face of this discussion of corporate purpose.

Miraculously, within six months the company had increased sales by over forty percent and it appeared as if the dark times were coming to an end. In his Newcomen Society address, highlighting all the facets of a traditional redemption story, Cathy remarked:

I feel this turnaround came about for several reasons. On a business level, we took charge of the situation and fought the competition. But I also feel that God honored our commitment to Him. Is it unusual for a business to establish such a set of statements as its Corporate Purpose? I don’t think so. All supernatural resources come from God. Just as an individual receives power, strength, and wisdom from God, so a corporation, which is a collective body of people, can enjoy power, strength and wisdom from every undertaking.

Next, Cathy concluded discussing their redemption by making something like the “apolitical” claim, reiterated for years to come. “Since then, we haven’t denied our commitment to our values and beliefs, but we haven’t tried to publicize them. I don’t want people coming to Chick-fil-A just because we some times [sic] talk about God. I want them to come because of the quality of our people, our product, our service, and the inviting atmosphere.”

However, following the company’s public reaffirmation of its faith, bolstered by the years of success that followed, it would become unclear whether Chick-fil-A was legitimately abiding by this secular statement.

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In fact, Cathy’s belief that his company’s values are not deliberately public appeared distinctly untrue as Chick-fil-A experienced another period of impressive growth throughout the eighties. As Grem points out, while the company’s “closed on Sundays” policy was hardly a mark of distinction during its formative years, with the advent of the seventies and eighties, it became more legally and socially acceptable for businesses to remain open on Sundays. As such, the company’s policy, intentionally or not, became a “corporate creed intended to mark Chick-fil-A as an upstanding corporate citizen and teach valuable lessons to a nation that Cathy deemed to be in need of entrepreneurial revival and moral renewal.” The company also preached traditional values and Christianity through its hiring practices on the associate, store owner—known as “team members” and “Operators” in the Chick-fil-A lexicon, respectively—and corporate levels. Putting it bluntly, in a 2000 interview Cathy explained the hiring practices he had embraced for years: “If a man’s got an earring in his ear and he applies to work at one of my restaurants... We won’t even talk to him. It’s not becoming for a man to wear an earring... I can’t take that risk.” Various other metaphors emphasized Judeo-Christian values, from comparing a store owner’s relationship with the company as a marriage “with no consideration given to divorce” while the company itself was meant to reflect a traditional “family.”

Adhering to these values earns Operators and team members several benefits. It is worth noting that starting a Chick-fil-A franchise is particularly easy in comparison with other restaurant franchises: Operators are only required to contribute a comparatively small $5000 to lease a Chick-fil-A restaurant, with the company allowing them a large degree of independence. Additionally, since 1975, Operators who reach excellent sales goals are recognized as “Symbols of Success” and receive a car, all-expenses-paid from the company. Likewise, since 1973, Chick-

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^{139} Grem, “Marketplace Missions,” 298-301.
fil-A has awarded scholarships to team members who spent two years with the company, working an average of twenty hours a week while finishing high school.\textsuperscript{140} Once again, Cathy’s childhood maxim of hard work equating financial success could be heard echoing throughout the company he built. Considering Chick-fil-A’s staunch ideological beliefs, it is hard to see how these various financial rewards do little other than incentivize employees to acquiesce to the company’s religious values.

Offering high school students scholarships would not be the only way Chick-fil-A would attempt offering its values to young people. In 1983, Cathy set to work purchasing and renovating the grounds of Berry College in Rome, Georgia. His vision was a foster home for children who would otherwise be unable to receive a thorough education, and despite the rest of the company’s financial concerns, they began offering $10,000 scholarships to children across the country to begin attending “WinShape Camp” at Berry College’s new form, the WinShape Centre. “Berry was holy ground,” Cathy wrote later, “for God had sanctified it for His purpose.” The ensuing WinShape Foundation began establishing homes across the country, hiring foster parents whose “work is a ministry, taking on the role of natural parents for up to twelve children.”\textsuperscript{141} WinShape quickly became Chick-fil-A’s ideological wing—while chicken sandwiches brought in profits, the organization brought in children and introduced them to the ideas by which Cathy and his executives lived. Throughout the nineties, Chick-fil-A would continue to assert their success, both financially and ideologically, becoming a phenomenon among faith-based businesses.

\textsuperscript{140} Cathy, \textit{A History Maker in Foodservice}, 14-16.
\textsuperscript{141} Cathy, \textit{Eat Mor Chikin}, 134-137.
Conclusion: The Paragon of Twenty-first-century Faith-based Business

There is little new to say about Chick-fil-A’s growth in the final decade in the twentieth century. 1997 saw the creation of a mascot: the “Eat Mor Chickin” cows, who urged consumers to stop purchasing beef, despite poor spelling skills. Sponsorships and growth were both abundant: the chain established the Chick-fil-A Charity Championship golf tour in 1995, following it with the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl college football match-up in 1996. The company went international and, perhaps most significantly, moved out of malls, ensuring that free-standing Chick-fil-A locations outnumbered mall locations by 2002.142 Despite this success, Chick-fil-A entered the twenty-first century with a brief controversial moment. Aziz Latif, a Chick-fil-A manager and Muslim, claimed he was fired after refusing to participate in a prayer to the Christian God, suing the company and settling for an undisclosed amount in 2002. The company was subject to at least twelve discrimination lawsuits between 1988 and 2007, with Operators increasingly questioning their autonomy as Chick-fil-A executives strengthened ideological restraints on their store owners.143 Despite impressive success, Chick-fil-A’s religious beliefs were both more exposed and more divisive.

For critics of said beliefs, Chick-fil-A’s ventures outside selling fried chicken seemed to increasingly target children. The WinShape Foundation only continued to grow and introduce additional foster homes along with the restaurant’s success. In the meantime, Cathy spearheaded another venture: The Core Essentials program, a “character education initiative” intended to distributed throughout participating public elementary schools. Writing in “Would You Like Values With That?,” Deron Boyles dissects every aspect of the Core Essentials program, finding a number of elements that reflect Chick-fil-A’s faith-based philosophy. The program introduces

a new concept every month, with December being oriented around “peace” and celebrating Christmas. In January, students are introduced to “orderliness,” emphasizing paying attention to nature—remember the young S. Truett Cathy gazing at the stars—and highlighting “the constellations” as a “beautiful example of the order which exists in the skies.” February’s study of “kindness” introduces the students to the Golden Rule, while March introduces “responsibility,” illustrating the concept with a metaphor involving sheep and shepherds. Christian imagery abounds, but it takes until April to begin introducing capitalist concepts. Citing Carnegie and Ford, the program instructs students that “when fate hands you a lemon, make lemonade,” and that “there is joy in work.”

This blend of the values of hard work and religion not only hearkens back to the philosophies of Cathy’s childhood, but also, as Boyles ably puts it, “becomes an unquestioned foundation for docile, naïve workers. The nexus results in a kind of confused nationalist mythology that takes Christian values for granted while accommodating… the mythology of ‘anyone can be anything they want’ given ‘free markets,’ ‘hard work,’ and entrepreneurialism.”¹⁴⁴ None of this implies that, simply because of their religious identity, in taking in numerous children who would otherwise be on the streets, the WinShape Foundation is wrong. Nor does it imply that it is strange for young people to hear numerous contradictory and Judeo-Christian value-influenced forms of instruction within public schools. What seems strange—as will be elaborated on in the discussion of Hobby Lobby’s continued investment in higher education—is the mixing of private enterprise in public education, particularly with the clear intent to impart religious beliefs or stories.

This also very much contradicts Chick-fil-A’s repeated “apolitical” and quasi-secular stance. During the 2000 U.S. presidential election campaign, Chick-fil-A dispatched its bovine mascots to request “Donkees and Elefunts” to “Vote Chikin” because “Itz Not Right Wing or Left.” However, while the political stance of the meat itself might be unclear, the hyper-capitalist, conservative, and family values-oriented contributions of the individuals selling it clearly do adhere to a specific end of the political spectrum. As another three election seasons rolled by, Chick-fil-A’s execs increasingly made themselves a part of the ongoing debate over what constituted “traditional marriage.” It all culminated with 2012, the offhand comments of an aging founder sending the company into a spiral of controversy—one that they eventually escaped, their values intact.

This was not the case for all faith-based businesses. Chick-fil-A remains a remarkable exception due to its overwhelming success, actively encouraging thousands of children to “celebrate life, love, and Jesus” without failing. Their proselytization continues even after a massive controversy and ensuing campaigns to bring about their collapse, albeit in a more covert and carefully moderated fashion. S. Truett Cathy’s twofold philosophies of religion and capitalism extend to his son, who strives constantly to replicate the values and success his company experienced in bygone years. Chick-fil-A represents a forward-thinking reformer among other faith-based businesses, which have either weakly expressed their values, fallen away from the fold as they acquire immense fame, or alienated their customers with poor products or extreme views.

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IV. CRUSADERS: THE HOBBY LOBBY MINISTRY AND 21ST-CENTURY CAPITALISM

Chick-fil-A refined the concept of faith-based business and transformed it into something in which consumers could partake. The concept, however, had existed for years prior to the devastating 1949 fire that catapulted S. Truett Cathy to entrepreneurial success. As Lake Lambert notes, faith-based business had its origins not just in Max Weber’s philosophical writings, but also in the strategies employed by industrialists like Frederick Taylor and Henry Ford, whose notion of “scientific management” stressed maintaining control over every aspect of worker life. Utilizing Bible study sessions led by a burgeoning YMCA and shelving employees in stark company towns with churches as focal points, businessmen created communities within their workforces, eased tensions with unions, and introduced the first strains of open religious expression to American corporations.147 Amid the Great Depression’s worst lows, John W. Tyson fused the desperation felt by his fellow farmers with a sense of community fostered by entrepreneurs like Taylor and Ford, capping it off with faith-based principles that would later distinguish his company from most of the business world.148 The key difference between Tyson’s religious expression and scientific management’s lied in the former using it to express a specific culture and ideology while the latter did so strictly in the interest of maximizing workflow.

The philosophies embodied by scientific management, however, would face criticism from the behavioral sciences and the business world in general as time went on. Striving for an improved relationship between employer and employee and emphasizing taking a personal interest in every worker, corporations set aside the “spiritless” nature of Taylorism in favor of a more involved, “cultural” experience. Lambert cites the rise of behavioral psychology near the

first half of the twentieth century’s end and the concurrent emergence of “personal development programs” within large corporations as two key watersheds within this trend away from scientific management. Wal-Mart and Chick-fil-A, in addition to yet-unexplored faith-based business Hobby Lobby, all illustrate this trend through their intense investment in developing cultures for their employees to partake in as they matured all throughout the latter twentieth century. Tyson introduced its workplace chaplains around the same time, blending personal and public religious expression—effectively spirituality and faith—in its quest to galvanize employees and spread its faith.

In the aftermath of World War II and during the collapse of scientific management, two chicken companies flourished, with Tyson experiencing immense growth and Chick-fil-A coming into its own. This period in U.S. history was represented by various changes in the food industry, as well as massive cultural shifts that would impact the yet-undiscovered notion of faith-based business. As a rash of fast food and shopping malls spread across the country, Cohen’s “consumer republic” emerged, its affluent, segmented population demanding instant gratification and readily available products. Tyson and Chick-fil-A brilliantly harnessed these trends, virtually creating the frozen food market and introducing America to the shopping mall food court, respectively. More remarkable than their achievements in terms of the products they sold, however, were the ways they harnessed culture: Tyson through its employer-employee dynamic and Chick-fil-A through its mastery of white, suburban demographics—secured through a potentially unintentional expansion into shopping malls. In a culture where

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consumerism was increasingly the focal point, their religious expression suddenly distinguished them from the masses, as opposed to decades prior when Christianity and free enterprise were seemingly cut from the same cloth.

Wal-Mart was yet another product of this consumption-oriented culture, and it made similarly revolutionary advancements within the retail realm that Tyson and Chick-fil-A did for chicken. However, as chapter two discussed, its invention of the big-box retail scheme and the otherwise unheard-of success that brought about limited Wal-Mart’s capacity to express its corporate faith on the consumer level. Wal-Mart’s faith basis is almost lost on anyone who neither peruses their corporate literature, nor attends a company meeting, nor attempts to purchase wine or liquor from the retailer on Sunday. Blaming this lack of expression on the retailer’s immense presence in American culture might be too simple, though. Even though Wal-Mart would come to represent capitalism’s increasingly digital, information-based, and omnipresent nature at the turn of the millennium, these stark qualities were not entirely secular. As Bethany Moreton notes, the changes Wal-Mart wrought during its heyday in the eighties and nineties were echoed in the cultural shifts that occurred at the same time: the rise of the business major, the spread of Christian colleges and majors, and the politically conservative student’s overthrow of the counterculture’s “longhairs.” Wal-Mart was expressing a faith-based ideology, albeit in a different manner than its contemporaries.

Wal-Mart was not the only faith-based business encountering sudden success in the final two decades of the twentieth century. Tyson was, as it had been for decades, overtaking the meat industry at an incredible pace. Chick-fil-A experienced a crisis and made the decision to inject God into its managerial principles as a result. Whether their ensuing success was divinely

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ordained or brought on by smart business decisions is, of course, a matter of personal belief, though historians have to assume that it was the latter, a possibility that reinforces the suggestion that Chick-fil-A execs maintain their company’s faith basis due to their religious beliefs rather than some sort of economic imperative. As it turns out, at the same time another organization was also experiencing its own crisis and redemption, a business that descended directly from Wal-Mart’s big-box store lineage: Hobby Lobby.

In many ways, Hobby Lobby represents everything faith-based business strives to be. Their religious expression is open and immediately presented to consumers. While walking through Hobby Lobby, shoppers hear Christian music playing over the loudspeakers. Seasonal décor is often overtly religious—nativity scenes for Christmas, lambs and crucifixion imagery for Easter—in contrast with the more secular holiday decorations one might find at a Wal-Mart. Throughout said holiday season, cashiers leave shoppers with a clear “Merry Christmas” as they pass the usual checkout impulse buys: candy bars, packs of gum, Holy Bibles, Christian fiction, and so on. Plagiarizing Chick-fil-A to some degree, since 2000 all Hobby Lobby stores have closed on Sunday.\(^{153}\) Despite selling Christian merchandise, the store is identified as a secular craft store along the lines of Michael’s or Jo-Ann Fabrics, albeit with a faith-based mission and set of policies.

What might be lost to the average Hobby Lobby shopper, however, is exactly how seriously the store’s founders—the Green family—take their faith-based status. This thesis has already discussed the climax of the “crusade” that began with Chick-fil-A’s pro-“traditional marriage” stance in 2012: the 2014 Burwell v. Hobby Lobby decision, which enabled the company—and any other faith-based businesses—to deny their insured employees the morning-

after pill. This chapter will delve into Hobby Lobby’s history from the outset, their unique faith-based tenets, and the case itself. Out of the most prominent faith-based businesses, Hobby Lobby distinguishes itself as the most fully realized, openly expressive, and culturally relevant of them all, through both its success and the uniqueness—and often shocking quality—of its practices.

**From Frames to Fame: Hobby Lobby’s History**

In 1970, David Green took out a $600 bank loan and started a custom picture frame business in Oklahoma City, becoming the first man in his family to not go into the ministry. By the 1990s, he would eliminate this distinction, referring to his business venture as its own sort of ministry, but in 1970, his picture frame store was simply a picture frame store. After two years of selling frames to local arts and crafts stores, in 1972 Green bought a 600-square foot building and opened a retail outlet for crafts as well as his signature frames. The store remained in local obscurity throughout the seventies, growing to fill the Oklahoma City craft store niche by the mid-eighties. It was at this point, however, that Hobby Lobby and Green fell on hard times. Green would later admit in an interview with *Forbes* that he had forced the business to grow faster than it needed to and had “committed the sin of entrepreneurial pride,” as Thomas Larson paraphrases. The days of easily paying off a $600 loan were far in the past. “The banks were threatening to shut them down. ‘We’ve become slaves to our lenders,’ [Green’s son] Steve counseled his dad, citing Proverbs 22:7. It took years to dig themselves clear.” Years later, then-company president Steve Green would recall the hard times in a more positive light, viewing it as a turning point for the company. In 1985, Larson somewhat sarcastically notes that the Green family:

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…let God take the rudder. Yes, the board would cut wages, close under-performing stores, and refinance debt. But, according to [Steve], the best business decision his father made was to get under his desk and pray. “Dad asked God, ‘If this company is going to survive, God, you're going to have to intervene. God, this is your company; I give it to you.’”

In 1986, per comments made by Steve Green years later, the company doubled its profits and began the long climb out of debt.\textsuperscript{157} Thus, the Greens crafted their own version of the redemption story, ever-present in faith-based business histories. Turning to God purportedly ended their financial duress, but it would take the Greens a decade of prosperity and sales before they put God at the forefront of their business again.

Hobby Lobby truly came into its own in the nineties, the Greens gaining media attention for their disciplined business strategies and highly organized system of suppliers and retailers. In 1997, all of Hobby Lobby’s inventory—some 37,000 items—moved through its central warehouse in Oklahoma City, ensuring that all stores were stocked with essentially the same merchandise. In-store buyers determined consumer interests to continuously adapt their products, purging some 5000 to 6000 items from their inventory every year.\textsuperscript{158} Even as the company moved into the twenty-first century and its outlets stretched far beyond its native Oklahoma City, these practices would not change.\textsuperscript{159}

In addition to their business practices, the Greens began to receive media attention for their religious beliefs toward the latter half of the nineties. While it is uncertain how much the company mission statement has changed over time, since 2003 at the latest it has opened with “We are committed to… Honoring the Lord in all we do by operating the company in a manner consistent with Biblical principles.” Since 1997, the company put out ads every Christmas and

\textsuperscript{157} Larson, “Hobby Lobby, Steve Green, and the new Bible empire,” 15
\textsuperscript{158} Kruger, “Learning a hobby,”
\textsuperscript{159} Whitford, “One family’s hobby.”
Easter that “include[d] the Hobby Lobby name, a scripture passage printed in full, and the statement: ‘If you would like to know Jesus as Savior and Lord, call the Need Him Ministry at 1-888 NEED HIM,” referring to a telephone-based evangelical ministry dedicated to spreading and educating individuals about Christianity. The Greens’ beliefs also influence how they treat their employees, and they regard keeping management staff members’ hours low and closing on Sundays as employee benefits. These religious beliefs would play an increasingly prominent role in Hobby Lobby business practices as the company entered the twenty-first century.

Of course, when analyzing the Greens’ suddenly outspoken religious conviction in the prosperous late nineties in comparison to their relative silence following the hard times of the mid-eighties—during which, according to family lore, the Greens put Hobby Lobby firmly in God’s hands—questions emerge. Religion professor Lake Lambert, in his discussion of religion and spirituality in the workplace, notes that while other “faith-based companies” like Chick Fil-A closed on Sundays from the outset, only seventy percent of Hobby Lobby stores closed on Sundays in 2000, which ultimately grew to 100 percent with the institution of new policies, based on biblical principles in 2003. “The move toward a company-wide policy of Sunday closing raises interesting questions about how Christian companies define and live that identity,” Lambert says. “Green’s move to closing on Sunday may indicate his developing understanding of what it means to be consistent with biblical principles, or more cynically, the company’s growing financial success may have provided the opportunity to honor the Sabbath in this way.”

This is important to take note of, considering the implications the Greens’ religious beliefs have had on other facets of capitalism and religion in more recent years.

In 1995, Hobby Lobby celebrated building its 100th store. By 2003, the company built its 310th store, projected yearly sales at $1.3 billion, and planned to open 91 new stores over the next three years. David Green joined Forbes’ list of the richest 400 people. In the wake of overwhelming success, many corporations choose to cultivate and evangelize their philosophies, often practicing them by taking part in various philanthropic initiatives. The Greens and Hobby Lobby are no exception. Certainly, like other faith-based businesses, the Greens set aside Hobby Lobby money for charitable organizations, Operation Christmas Child and a variety of other evangelical ministries among them. However, they distinguish themselves by participating in numerous charitable pursuits in the educational field.

Take, for example, Jerry Falwell’s Liberty University, for which the Greens purchased and donated a $10.5 million law school building in 2004. In 2006, they paid $3.5 million for the grounds of bankrupt Massachusetts college Bradford University, renovated it for $5 million, and then donated the deed to Zion Bible College. Most strikingly, in 2008, the Greens took pity on scandal-ridden Oral Roberts University, trading more than $70 million for the implementation of a strict recovery plan and a chairman position for the David Green’s youngest heir, Mart. Discussing ORU students, Green told an interviewer, “We just grieved for those kids… We felt like we were being led by the Lord to do something.” Whereas other faith-based companies

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162 “Our story,” Hobby Lobby. http://www.hobbylobby.com/about-us/our-story. Interestingly, Hobby Lobby would only grow to 386 stores over the next three and a half years, and a July 2007 Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats (SWOT) analysis would note that it lacked the necessary scale to compete. However, it noted the niches the company’s merchandise variety filled and considered their move into online retail a strength. The analyses kept the same tune until the 2010s, when the company’s “regional presence” became a strength as well.
163 Whitford, “One family’s hobby.” Operation Christmas Child is a project coordinated by Samaritan’s Purse, another evangelical organization to which the Greens contribute over $500 million. While the Greens and the media focused on them frequently refer to their charitable pursuits, finding evidence of any charitable organizations they support without a Christian evangelical basis is difficult, if not impossible.
are content with charitable donations, it appears as if the Lord is leading the Greens to take financial control of as many institutions of higher learning as possible.

Spending millions on education seems counterintuitive to a traditionally capitalist search for profit; the Greens seem to view education as a commodity, a value that suggests that the Greens treat evangelism and the crafting of certain ideas and mindsets as a higher priority than maintaining their overwhelming fortune. Since Hobby Lobby is a private company, and since it is difficult to classify buying into these educational organizations as charitable, it is hard to suggest how much the Greens can write off their investments in higher education. The notion that the Greens have primarily religious goals in their conquest of universities is corroborated by the fact that Steve Green, in addition to running Hobby Lobby, has also worked to found the Green Scholars Initiative via the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C., also founded by Steve. The Green Scholars Initiative, per Larson’s article, consists of a singular curriculum based on the vague notion of “biblical truths” that Steve Green, thanks to his massive wealth and status in the business community, is attempting to implement in a crusade against perceived American ignorance of the Bible. His goal is “to reintroduce this book to this nation because of its ignorance of what God has taught. We need to know it, and if we don't know it, our future is going to be very scary. Someday… teaching the Bible in high school ‘should be mandated.’” However little traction Green’s initiative has gained—Larson only cites one high school (in Mustang, Oklahoma, not far from the Greens’ native city), where the curriculum ultimately ended up failing, and the sixty universities who have partnered with the initiative are all religious-affiliated—his attempt at reengineering higher education in favor of a religious precedent is undeniable.164

The 2010s represent what this chapter refers to as the climax of Hobby Lobby’s history and their founders’ evangelical mission. In 2010, Congress passed the Affordable Care Act (ACA), mandating that corporations must provide their employees with some degree of contraception coverage, which includes “morning-after pills” and intrauterine devices. The Greens, though most scientific evidence says otherwise, believe these forms of contraception to be abortifacients, and using them or enabling their employees to utilize them violates their religious beliefs. Citing 1994’s Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), which states that government regulations that put substantial burden on religious individuals have to be as minimal as possible, they sued the federal government, working their way up the judicial system.\(^{165}\) In the 2013 U.S. Court of Appeals *Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc. v. Sebelius* decision, the Court ruled 5-4 that corporations “qualify as ‘persons’ under RFRA.”\(^{166}\) The Supreme Court corroborated, and in the 2014 *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* decision ruled 5-4 that religious business owners had the right to “line-item veto” contraception coverage mandated by the federal government.\(^{167}\) Hobby Lobby, a corporation, now had the legal right to express religious beliefs associated with it, however strange that might seem.

The *Burwell* decision, in many ways, capped off Hobby Lobby’s history as a representative of the transforming, increasingly spiritual face of twenty-first century capitalism. In their early years, Hobby Lobby was as much a ministry as entrepreneur David Green, growing up in a family dominated by clergy, was a minister. Religion was little more than unrelated context. The Greens’ outspoken religious expression did not begin when they “let God take the

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\(^{167}\) Liptak, “Supreme court rejects.”
rudder” in the mid-eighties, but rather with the advent of the internet, their financial success, and the inevitability of the new millennium.\textsuperscript{168} It was at that point that God truly took the rudder, with the Greens using their financial muscle to infiltrate the education system and spread their own evangelical doctrine. To make sense of Hobby Lobby’s sudden evangelism beyond a kneejerk, cynical analysis, this chapter now turns to the work of philosophers, legal experts, and other scholars.

\textit{“Searching for Meaning”: What is Faith?}

“So you build a $1 billion company. What does that mean a hundred years from now?” David Green asked in a 1997 interview.\textsuperscript{169} Lambert’s suggestion that Green’s beliefs were becoming more consistent with biblical ideas may not be so removed from the cynical alternative, and may offer evidence suggesting that faith-based business is genuine rather than seeking potential Christian markets. In \textit{Spirituality, Inc.}, Lambert seeks to reconcile religion and business, suggesting that twenty-first century business is characterized by attempts at generating consciousness and beneficence rather than the Darwinian practices of the past. He spends an entire chapter discussing “finding meaning in business” and the American workplace, entering a dialogue with business writer Patricia Aburdene by suggesting that “[i]ndividuals are seeking to bring their whole selves to the workplace, including their spirituality, and businesses today are dependent upon the creativity that only ‘consciousness’ and spirituality can provide.”\textsuperscript{170} Seeing Green’s quote and accompanying philosophy through this lens transforms it into an aspect of a much larger trend—one embodied by Tyson and Wal-Mart and elaborated upon by evangelistic faith-based businesses like Chick-fil-A.

\textsuperscript{168} Larson, “Hobby Lobby, Steve Green, and the new Bible empire.”
\textsuperscript{169} “David Green.” \textit{Chain Store Age} 73, no. 12 (December 1997).
\textsuperscript{170} Lambert, \textit{Spirituality, Inc.}, 2, 66.
Lambert’s suggests that religion and business working in tandem is evidence of an overarching movement. He notes the influence spirituality has on individuals in the workplace:

Personal fulfillment, increased economic productivity, and moral guidance occur simultaneously amid new economic realities and new forms of economic institutions. But perhaps more important, expressions of workplace spirituality are best interpreted as creative collaboration between the practices and values of contemporary commerce and the diverse meanings of religious and spiritual life.171

In the complex environment of the twenty-first century, where the Burwell decision gave corporations their own legal way of expressing religious belief, this influence applies contingently to Hobby Lobby as an individual in its own right. This is especially true given the remainder of Lambert’s book, throughout which he cites Weber’s idea of “elective affinities”: he discusses the roots of workplace spirituality in nineteenth century industry and, later, Ford’s assembly line; he constructs a set of recurring tropes for spiritual businesses; and he compares the managerial philosophy of Jesus and other religious leaders to that of CEOs and coaches.172 It is easy to look at Hobby Lobby’s history and interpret at which points the Greens began implementing their religious philosophy in company policy, identifying as a business built on faith, and treating their employees in the same way a religious leader might.

But Lambert does not validate the notion that spiritual business began to proliferate in the twenty-first century, aside from his notion that religion and business are part of a vague, developing trend. His connection between the Ford assembly line’s strict industrial philosophy and its impact on culture has more in common with Lizabeth Cohen’s ideas regarding the

171 Lambert, Spirituality, Inc.. 18.
172 Ibid. Lambert’s definition of “elective affinity” (p. 5) is worth noting here: “For his ‘Protestant ethic’ thesis, Weber asserted that on the economic side, capitalism demanded hard work and asceticism; on the faith side, Calvinism’s teaching on predestination produced anxiety and a need to prove eternal salvation in this world while, at the same time, proclaiming that everyone was assigned… places and roles to which one was called to serve God. This form of faith and this pattern of economics were then attracted by their ‘elective affinity.’” Regarding the development of spiritual business, particularly regarding Ford Motors, see Lambert 37-40. Regarding the traits of spiritual business, see 74-78 as well as the entire chapter on “The Making of a Christian Company.” The bulk of Lambert’s comparison between managers and Jesus is formed by a critique of Jesus, CEO on 79-91
twentieth century. Cohen suggested that the overwhelming economic prosperity of the early
twentieth century produced a “Consumer’s Republic,” a culture in which consumption was the
central focus of American life, everything else stemming from it. What if economic scope could
accomplish something like what prosperity did, albeit with corporations and religion in addition
to consumers and culture?

Religion scholar George Gonzales asks a similar question, though in a completely
different way. Also invoking Weber, he is particularly interested in the language and metaphors
used by individuals during the Industrial Revolution, taking note of Weber’s description of
industrial capitalism as mechanical, based around technology and the regimented structure of
factory floors.

Weber… concludes the *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* with the idea
that what had begun as a religiously motivated monastic ascetic impulse to work on the
world has become an “iron cage,” an “irresistible force,” and “an order that is now bound
to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which today determine
the lives of all the individuals born into this mechanism.”

Gonzales goes on to explain that Weber had hope for a future free from the “iron cage” brought
about by irreligious asceticism, and suggests that twenty-first century managerial philosophy
might be the answer. He cites Robert K. Greenleaf’s *Servant Leadership* and Stephen Covey’s
*Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*—two books that Lambert mentions in his analysis of
managerial spirituality—and notes various examples of traditionally spiritual activities taking
place in the corporate realm:

…among the highlights of a *Business Week* article [from 1999] are stories of a Harvard
Business School educated entrepreneur who created a splash at a meeting of young
corporate presidents by leading a “shamanic healing journey,” the Xerox corporation
sponsoring “vision quests” in the New Mexico desert for senior managers and clerks,

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173 George Gonzales, “Shape shifting capital: New management and the bodily metaphors of spiritual capitalism,”
Talmud classes at a major U.S. law firm, and the outsourcing of Christian ministers to businesses as corporate chaplains. This leads him to conclude that “[t]he move to explicitly and formally incorporate language and sets of practices coded “spiritual” and/or “religious” into business management continues to grow and gain acceptance at the institutional power centers of American economic life.”

Essentially, with the advent of digitization and the fading-away of industry that coincided with the turn of the millennium, the mechanical metaphors of the past became no longer effective. This is both a cause of and caused by the growing need for spirituality in the American workplace, both in terms of economic efficiency—as exhibited by the management strategies listed above—and the need for meaning.

Gonzales’ thesis, like Cohen and her “Consumer Republic,” attempts periodization: he says the post-industrial economic world is in the throes of “spiritual capitalism” in response to the “mechanical metaphors” of the previous two centuries. While it might be somewhat extreme to suggest that, in the void left behind by industry’s departure, the entire philosophy of capitalism has acquired spiritual significance, Hobby Lobby exemplifies the transition from meaningless industrial profit-seeking to the search for meaning found outside Weber’s “iron cage” on an individual level. David and Steve Green’s decision to turn to prayer may have coincided with events that revitalized their business, but it was not enough to fill them with the spirit of evangelism that would be so apparent in their millennial business. Instead, it would be the saturation brought about by digitized capitalism—complete immersion in wealth—that would convince them to enhance the religious nature of their corporation.

Conclusion: The Hobby Lobby Ministry

The Burwell v. Hobby Lobby decision forces us to confront the relationship between faith and business—and, likewise, the relationship between religion and capitalism—in the twenty-first century. Right now, American capitalism has yet to ask his question: How we will regulate religion and business? Rather, we have refused to regulate it outright, allowing various disturbing possibilities to emerge. In Burwell’s dissent, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg warned that the justification for the Greens’ beliefs could lead to legal objections to blood transfusions by Jehovah’s Witnesses, antidepressants by Scientologists, and vaccinations by Christian Scientists. Legal scholar Jennifer Pizer goes further, worrying that “…granting Hobby Lobby and Conestoga Wood the exemptions they sought… open[s] the door to increased use of religion to deny LGBT persons, those living with HIV, and other vulnerable minorities equal compensation, health care access, and other equitable treatment in commercial interactions.”

However, legal scholar Ira Lupu takes a more moderate stance, analyzing the same factors as Pizer and suggesting that “…through emphasis on the unavailability of less restrictive means to prevent such discrimination, courts will be able to stoutly defend anti-discrimination norms against asserted religious exemptions.” This specific viewpoint is perhaps recklessly optimistic, but nonetheless he concludes, “Whatever the judicial moves, the dubious enterprise of religious exemptions will…shrink rather than prosper.” Thus far, however, they have not, and the vulgarity of Hobby Lobby’s religion remains unchallenged. Faith and business are still connected by volatile strings.

175 Liptak, “Supreme court rejects.”
They are connected, however, and genuinely so. When analyzing Hobby Lobby’s history, we see a palpable shift from purely capitalist ideals to a religious fusion ideology, “spiritual capitalism” in Gonzales’ vernacular. Before 1997, with the widespread appearance of Hobby Lobby’s Christmas and Easter ads, the Greens spurned any form of weekly or seasonal ad, relying on their capitalist philosophy of competition, especially in terms of how they handled logistics, to sustain their enterprise. When this philosophy brought them wealth and they became one of the first companies to utilize online shopping as part of their business practices, they were required to advertise themselves not just as their financial successes, but as enlightened capitalists, ministers in a supernatural system that was more than just capital, products, and competition.177

As David Green wisely notes, financial success bears no long-term meaning in a constantly shifting world of competition.178 Neither do the purely economic contributions one makes to philanthropic organizations. Therefore, the Greens turned to educational pursuits, seeking to proselytize their beliefs and defy the purely economic nature of other business not based on faith. What better method proselytizing, for the Greens, was there than for them to pave the way for other groups to express their beliefs just as effectively as they had? Thanks to the Greens’ diligent pursuit of “religious liberty,” representatives of Wheaton College have already successfully appealed that the college, like Hobby Lobby, has individual religious beliefs.179 Hobby Lobby is baptizing adherents to its capitalist religion.

Now we return to Cohen, Lambert, and Weber. In the wake of an ideological consumer culture, the denizens of Cohen’s “Consumer Republic” have been replaced by adherents to a

177 Kruger, “Learning a hobby.”. See also the 2007 SWOT analysis regarding Hobby Lobby’s online business practices.
178 “David Green.”
capitalist religion. There is incontrovertible evidence that religion—whether in the form of spirituality or something else—thrives in corporate environments, and vice-versa, and regardless of whether faith-based businesses see a form of regulation, the two will continue to mix. Lambert speculates about directions this may take:

   Economic shifts will certainly influence other aspects of workplace spirituality [and faith-based business] as well… Huge debts may make economic and spiritual asceticism popular as an antidote to previous excesses, and calls for spirituality in business tied to high moral standards may also be heard as Americans lament the corporate greed and outright dishonesty that was at least partially to blame for the mess.\textsuperscript{180}

As this thesis has explored in each of its four cases, morality and faith-based business are often as compatible as morality and business in general. However, Lambert’s point is worth mentioning here. If capitalism thrives, its adherents will strive to strengthen its greatest weakness: the perception that business is devoid of spirit, morality, or altruism. While twenty-first-century Americans might increasingly question religion’s role in their lives or reject it outright, it still draws some associations with values otherwise disconnected from business.

Hobby Lobby is evidence that faith-based business, fully expressing its beliefs and purpose, can exist outside a century that opened with a corporate world full entrenched in religious ideas. As new forms of workplace spirituality and corporate philosophies emerged in the twenty-first century and business became almost entirely secular, introducing religion into business not only remained relevant, but also became a unique method of expressing one’s beliefs. Start a business, then put your soul into it. Hobby Lobby continues to make headlines for its controversial practices: in July 2017, the company, following a Justice Department probe, revealed that it had been illegally smuggling numerous cuneiform tablets and other ancient artifacts from Iraq into the United States through the United Arab Emirates. “In 2009, Hobby

\textsuperscript{180} Lambert, \textit{Spirituality, Inc.}, 175.
Lobby began acquiring a variety of historical Bibles and other artifacts,” the company said in a prepared statement. “Developing a collection of historically and religiously important books and artifacts about the Bible is consistent with the company’s mission and passion for the Bible.”

Fined $3 million—practically spare change for a Hobby Lobby-sized company—president Steve Green noted that the company “should have exercised more oversight” when purchasing the 5548 artifacts, which they concealed as “ceramics” and “samples” to be sold in their stores.¹⁸¹

By evangelizing outright, offering corporate funds to Christian organizations, and actively attempting to introduce its philosophy into various private colleges, Hobby Lobby represents a faith-based business actively striving to further its ideals and ensure the propagation of future businesses of a similar nature. It fulfills the lineage of all the faith-based businesses that have come before it, whether they identify with all its tenets or not. As long as religious conservative ideas hold sway over the American people and the notion that capitalism is an ideology that can be conducted with any sort of spirit or guiding morality, they will doubtlessly continue to grow and appear, whether within the confines of their Sunbelt home or as far away as the West Coast, unregulated and selling a blend of products and ideas. Thus, the crusade continues, with Tyson, Wal-Mart, Chick-fil-A, and Hobby Lobby’s blessing going out to any organization ready to take up the faith-based banner.

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