

Political Theology through a History of Preaching: A Study in the Authority of Celebrity

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Abstract: *This article shows some of the ways that historical studies of preaching can open into normative reflections on political life. A focus on embodied practices reveals the ways those practices circulate between religious, political, and other spheres of society. This transmigration of practice means that reform in one sphere leads to changes in others. Practical theology becomes public theology. And the ritual and rhetorical forms of preaching can have at least as much political significance as any overtly political content of sermons. The argument proceeds through an extended case study of the ways that Charles G. Finney's techniques for preaching helped create a distinctive authority of celebrity that has grown in significance for late modern mass democracies.*

These days, critical reflections on politics are not usually done through histories, let alone through histories of preaching. It is more common to proceed in the manner of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, which presents itself as abstract discourse about universal norms in the timeless present of analytic philosophy. But I want to argue that a history of preaching offers distinct resources for critical and theological reflection on the present political moment. I think this is true in a broad way, but I will make a preliminary case through one particular example: a history of the revival preaching of Charles Finney that opens up fresh lines of critique of the growing power of celebrity to authorize political leaders in late modern mass democracies. A close study of Finney's preaching both reveals deep fissures in the authority of celebrity and begins to suggest what it would mean to hope for the redemption of this mode of politics.¹

A Turn to History

In the last forty years scholars in religious ethics have come to remember (again) that all knowledge has a social location. It has become a truism that there is no view from nowhere—and that the somewhere from which all views look is shaped by things like gender, class, race, ethnicity, and religion—a group of categories that are often gathered together under the sign of “culture.”² And so, as I have argued elsewhere, a surprising variety of scholars in religious ethics have shared in what might be called a turn to culture. Communitarians like Stanley Hauerwas have insisted that ethics must begin from a turn to some distinctive culture of the church. Womanists like Joan M. Martin have turned to African American women's culture as found in literature and in practices of survival and resistance. And a pragmatist like Jeffrey Stout swerves

¹ This essay originated as a lecture at Vanderbilt Divinity School. Parts of the essay are adapted from Ted A. Smith, *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Chapter 5. Used with permission.

² The phrase a “view from nowhere”—and an elegant argument for the place of such a view—appeared in Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). I borrow language of a “cultural turn” and analysis of a swollen cultural sphere from Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, *Post-Contemporary Interventions* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991), ix-xxii. Kathryn Tanner neatly parsed and problematized what I am calling the cultural turn in theology in her *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997). Another good discussion of the cultural turn appears in Sheila Greve Davaney, “Theology and the Turn to Cultural Analysis,” in *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism*, ed. Delwin Brown, Sheila Greve Davaney, and Kathryn Tanner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3–16. Like Davaney, I am trying to point to “common themes with broad credence,” not some “spurious consensus.”

away from states of nature and original positions and turns instead to democratic cultures of the United States. The list could extend across multiple movements and schools of thought throughout the major guilds in the study of religion and theology. The best accounts of culture do not take it as an accomplished, almost ontological thing. They rather remember cultures as complex human creations made in time and over time through contentious and power-laden practices. Thus the best turns to culture will include turns to history.

Ethicists have been much more interested in calling for people to turn to culture than in doing it themselves. Hauerwas has appealed to a “church” that is notoriously abstract. Just where is this community of character? And while Stout has written that “the ethical inheritance of American democracy consists, first of all, in a way of thinking and talking about ethical topics that is implicit in the behavior of ordinary people” his definitive book on the topic gave a short history of the ideas of extraordinary people like Ralph Waldo Emerson and James Baldwin—and said very little about the lived stuff of everyday democracy. A later book began to make good on the promise of a turn to what Stout calls “grassroots democracy.”³ Years earlier, womanist and Black liberationist scholars had made this turn to historical, sociological and anthropological work. Books like Joan Martin’s *More Than Chains and Toil*, for example, take seriously the task of history for the sake of ethics. In doing so they call the discipline back to the genre of some of its formative texts: books like Ernst Troeltsch’s *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches* and H. Richard Niebuhr’s *The Kingdom of God in America*. I am trying to join Martin, Troeltsch, and Niebuhr in this much-demanded but rarely-performed genre of history told for the sake of ethics.

If it makes sense to turn to history (along with ethnography, anthropology, sociology, and other studies of culture) for the sake of political theory, how does it make sense to turn to a history of *preaching*? Shouldn’t we turn instead to histories of things like political parties, or the Constitution, or religious movements for political reform? One could turn to any of those topics, and with good results. But I want to argue that one can also turn to practices that are not native to the political sphere. Practices might start in the religious sphere—in preaching, say—and then migrate to other spheres. Seeing this *transmigration* of practices depends on a theory of practice that stresses body and performance rather than intention—that is, a theory of practice like that of Pierre Bourdieu rather than that of Alasdair MacIntyre. Bourdieu’s theory depends not on the intended *telos* of the practitioner, as MacIntyre’s does, but on the *habitus* of the action, the embodied template for improvisation, the “structured structure predisposed to function as a structuring structure.”⁴ A *habitus* can carry a whole world with it as it migrates between social spheres. Preachers and politicians might share a *habitus* even as they have dramatically different intentions, and make very different arguments. Because of the transmigration of practices, reflection on a practice of preaching can open into reflection on cultural, political, economic and other spheres.⁵

In this essay I focus on that *habitus* of preaching rather than the content of sermons. I focus on the deep pattern of action, and the politics implicit within it, rather than on the politics explicitly stated in the text of the sermons. I don’t mean to draw a sharp line between form and content. But I do mean to stress a pattern that was repeated in all kinds of performances in

³ See Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 7; and Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72.

⁵ For more on the transmigration of practices, see Smith, *The New Measures*, 28-30.

preaching, politics, and entertainment. Because it is so often repeated, often unconsciously, a *habitus* can become a little ritual that creates ways of seeing, relating to other people, and making sense. A *habitus* can form political imagination, and it can be very difficult to name and resist. And so I investigate practices of preaching with an eye to the rituals and habits of modern, mass democracy.

More particularly, I want to consider the bundle of practices that make up what I call the authority of celebrity. I try to show how these practices developed in the “new measures” revivals of the 1820s, 30s, and 40s—revivals associated especially with Charles Finney. I try to show the deep fit between these practices and an emerging mass democracy. And I try to follow these practices into some of the deepest fissures within our social and political order.

A Country in Masquerade

In the decades immediately after the Revolution, people in the United States felt rising anxiety about what they understood as public representations of private realities. These anxieties crossed social spheres. In the economic sphere, new forms of exchange depended on abstract representations of goods, money, agreements, and persons. In the domestic sphere, new patterns of intimate relationships stressed the importance of a person’s true feelings even as an emerging White middle class marked its respectability by its ability to mask and repress those feelings. In everyday social interaction, international immigration and internal migration meant that people who had grown up in small towns where they knew everyone increasingly had the experience of meeting people whom they did not know. New social mobility—unleashed in part by democratic revolution and an expanding economy—only intensified the sense that you didn’t know the “real” person. (She may dress like European royalty, and he may present himself as a free man, but who are they *really*?) In nearly every social sphere, new practices of representation emerged – and produced anxiety. In 1808, eight years after leaving the Presidency, John Adams expressed the concern many felt: “Our country is in masquerade! No party, no man, dares to avow his real sentiments. All is disguise, visard, cloak.”⁶

Questions of faithful representation arose with special intensity for persons seeking to participate in emerging public spheres. In the eighteenth century *the* distinguishing mark of fully public speech became the ability to address an abstract, generalized audience. Like Jean-Jacques

⁶ John Adams to Benjamin Rush, 20 June 1808, in John A. Schutz and Douglas Adair, eds., *The Spur of Fame: Dialogues of John Adams and Benjamin Rush, 1805-1813* (San Marino, Calif.: The Huntington Library, 1966), 110. Charles Brockden Brown, *Three Gothic Novels: Wieland or, the Transformation; Arthur Mervyn or, Memoirs of the Year 1793; Edgar Huntly or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (New York: Library of America: Distributed in the U.S. by Penguin Putnam, 1998), John Witherspoon, *Serious Inquiry into the Nature and Effects of the Stage: And a Letter Respecting Play Actors . . . Also a Sermon on the Burning of the Theatre at Richmond; by Samuel Miller . . . Together with an Introductory Address, by Several Ministers in New York, Etc.* (New York: Whiting & Watson, 1812). Witherspoon’s inquiry was first published in Glasgow in 1757. Alexis de Tocqueville registered the effects of novelty and mobility on democratic language. Because old conventions of meaning did not bind word usage in the United States, Tocqueville wrote, its citizens had the freedom to make and assign new meanings. As a result people often encountered one another’s words, as one another’s persons, as opaque and difficult to decipher. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey Claflin Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), II.1.xvi, p. 455. For more on social mobility in antebellum America, see chapter two of this book. For an account of self-presentation in the time of Finney’s adulthood, see Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). The present chapter has been greatly influenced by Jean-Christophe Agnew’s superb analysis of anxieties of representation in early modern England. See Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Rousseau pleading his case before all of heaven and earth at the end of his *Confessions*, the public person spoke or wrote to a universal body. The “greatness of democratic oratory,” Alexis de Tocqueville observed, was just this drive to speak of “general verities,” and to speak of them to all humankind.⁷ Such speech required the development of a “prosthetic person,” a public voice distinct from any private qualities and authoritative precisely because of its ability to transcend particulars of history, heritage, or biology. Authoritative public personae, by definition, stood alienated from the private lives of the people who created them.

Anxiety arose because people like Adams created and encountered these public personae—even as they believed that the *real* identity of a person was the self of private spaces and relationships. If a minister preached the gospel in public and sipped whiskey at home, they had no doubt that these identities were mutually exclusive and that one of them was real and the other artificial. The man was what he was in private. He was a drunk. This basic assumption structured and encoded with moral and epistemological value a whole world of oppositions: public selves were representations, but private selves were real; public selves were self-conscious fabrications, but private selves were natural; the public speech of oratory was suspect, because it was planned, but the private speech of conversation was trustworthy, because it came spontaneously, “from the heart”; and printed matter (the definitive public form) could deceive, but the spoken word could be trusted. Qualities associated with the private sphere—natural, conversational, spontaneous, expressive, and spoken—glowed with the aura of reality and reliability. But exactly those qualities had to be suppressed in order to form a fully public persona. And so questions of sincerity, the harmony of public and private selves, came hard-wired in to the bourgeois public sphere. And sincerity became the cardinal virtue for public figures.⁸

Questions of sincerity followed every public figure, but they hounded ministers with special intensity. Traditional systems of legitimation for clergy eroded steadily through the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the colonies and then the United States. Democratic sentiment, progressive disestablishment of churches, the rise of itinerant exhorters, and the proliferation of religions and denominations meant that pastors no longer had authority simply because of their office. Preachers who wanted to compete in the new economy of attention needed to form public personae. But the rising importance of sentiment in religion also made a minister’s private, emotional life increasingly important, even more important than that of other public figures. Preachers faced a sharper form of the dilemma faced by every public figure: on the one hand, the loss of traditional legitimation forced them to project public selves; on the other hand, the very act of projection called their sincerity into question. Preachers had to choose between publicity and sincerity, between getting heard and being trusted.⁹

⁷ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, II.1.xvi, pp. 475–76. The poverty of democratic oratory, Tocqueville noted in parallel, was that each person seemed to feel not only able but also obligated to speak, whether or not they had ability or even anything to say. “The inhabitants of the United States,” he wrote, “bear witness to their long practice of parliamentary life not in abstaining from bad speeches, but in courageously submitting to hearing them. They resign themselves as to an evil that experience has made them recognize as inevitable.”

⁸ Michael Warner, “The Mass Public and the Mass Subject,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 379–82. Warner borrowed the apt phrase “prosthetic person” from Lauren Berlant. For more on the importance of a mass, abstracted public for new measures sermons, see chapter four.

⁹ Harry S. Stout rightly connected the rising importance of sentiment in religion to the differentiation of social spheres and the rise of a mass public: “As the public sphere grew more impersonal and abstract, the private self gained proportionate importance as the repository of spiritual experience.” Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), xvii.

Measures of Sincerity

The genius of the “new measures” for preaching was to turn this dilemma into a complex set of resources. New measures preachers found, made, and handed on practices for the public presentation of private lives. They fused the veracity of private selves with the omnipresence of abstracted public selves. And no one joined public and private more famously than Charles Grandison Finney (1792–1875). Finney was a star.

Finney projected a sincere public persona by adapting habits of body and voice associated with private spaces and relationships. He carried private—and so reliable—ways of speaking and moving into public media like the pulpit and the press. A quick sketch of these habits would highlight the natural, conversational, expressive, and extemporaneous qualities of Finney’s sermons.

Finney rejected the studied, neo-classical rhetoric of Noah Webster and Joseph Dana. Webster taught particular tones and devices for particular purposes; Dana suggested different standardized gestures for every part of a speech. Finney swept all that aside. If a preacher just felt as he should, Finney promised, “He will naturally do the very thing that elocution laboriously teaches... Let him speak as he feels, and act as he feels, and he will be eloquent.” Finney’s public display of natural tones and gestures gave his preaching the trustworthiness of the speech of a natural, true self.¹⁰

Webster and Dana called for a high rhetorical style deliberately distant from everyday speech. But Finney spoke personally to a mass.¹¹ “The gospel will never produce any great effects,” Finney told his listeners in New York in 1835, “until ministers *talk* to their hearers, in the pulpit, as they talk in *private conversation*.” Finney used the truthfulness associated with private speech to secure the trustworthiness of his public preaching.¹²

Finney found ways to express emotions usually limited to private life in respectable public forms. He denounced both the effusiveness of the one he denounced as an “ignorant ranter” and the restraint of the one he called a “mannered fop.” He found ways to rant with reason and to engage in respectable theological disputation with tears rolling down his cheeks. Again, he fused public and private ways of being – like a star.

Being sincere meant being spontaneous, speaking from the heart. And so Finney preached from outlines, not manuscripts. And he took great pains to tell people that all of his “written” works—even his *Systematic Theology*!—were nothing more than transcriptions of extemporaneous speech. He went into print not as a scheming, careful, tricky writer, but as a natural, sincere, spontaneous speaker.

¹⁰ Ibid., 214, 18. Finney made fun of the gestures of the Rev. Peter Starr, a Congregationalist minister in Warren, Connecticut whom he heard while working on his uncle’s farm (c. 1812–1814). Charles G. Finney, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney: The Complete and Restored Text*, ed. Garth M. Rosell and Richard A. G. Dupuis (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 8–9. Henrietta Matson, *Recollections of Rev. Charles G. Finney* (Nashville, TN: Pentecostal Mission, n.d.), 11. For the contrast with Webster and Dana, see Joseph Dana, *A New American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking ...* (Boston: Samuel Hall., 1792), Noah Webster, *An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking ...* (Philadelphia: Young and M’Culloch, 1787).

¹¹ For more on personal mass address, see chapter four.

¹² Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 208. Finney’s declaration that the preacher should speak “like a lawyer” depended on a very contentious and particular view of the ways in which a lawyer should speak. Justice Joseph Story put forth a very different picture of the barrister’s form in his 1827 Phi Beta Kappa address. Story defended an elegant, neoclassical style in opposition to a rising Romantic style that appealed to “the sublime” and individual “genius.” See Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965), 144ff.

Presenting private personae in public required not only new ways of modulating tone, face, and body, but also new spaces for the display of those modulations. New measures preachers replaced high, boxed pulpits with open lecterns set on raised platforms. The crowd had to be able to see the preacher's body. Finney's Broadway Temple was perfectly adapted to this need – and a real break from traditional spaces for preaching. It moved the preacher towards the center of the room, closer to more people. This move, coupled with a simple, open pulpit, made the preacher's body visible to all those gathered. It facilitated the preaching of a star.

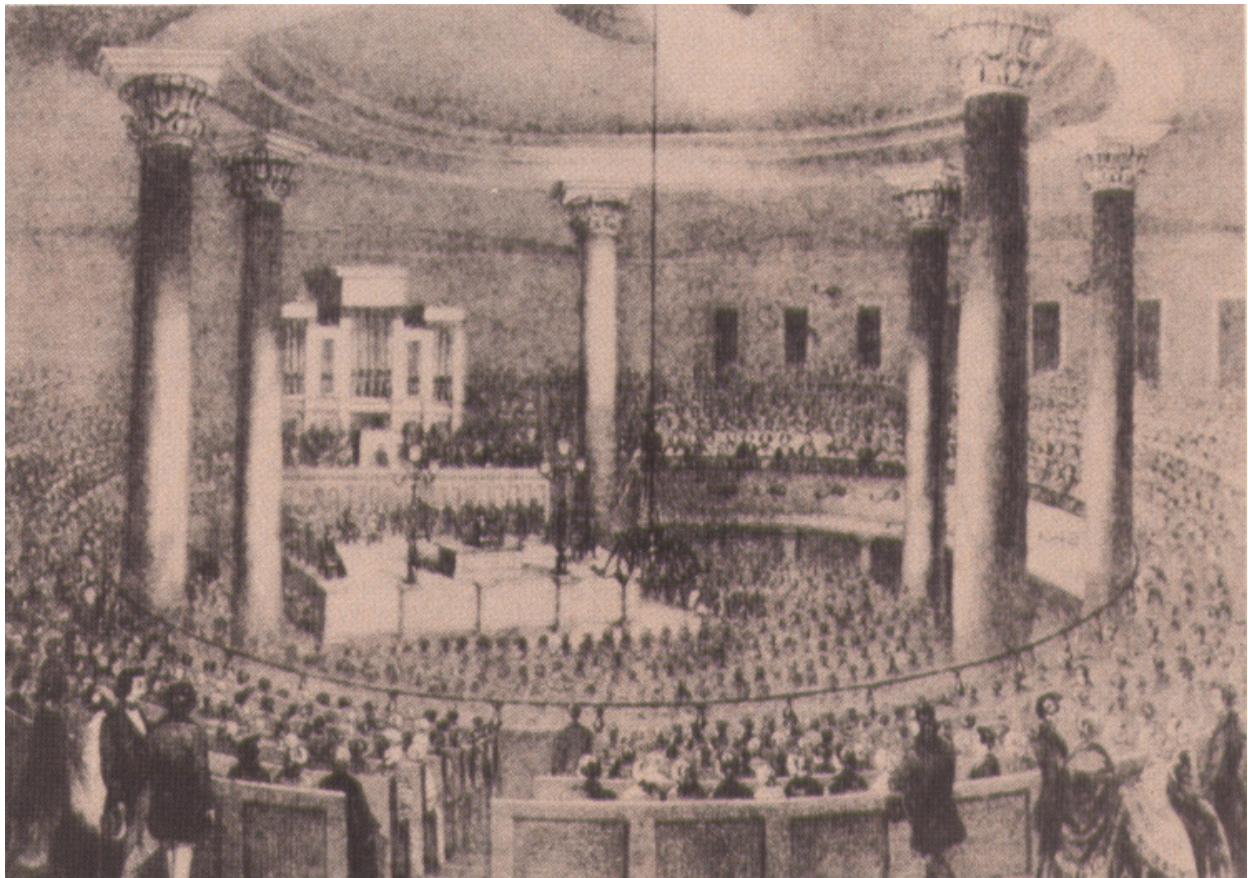
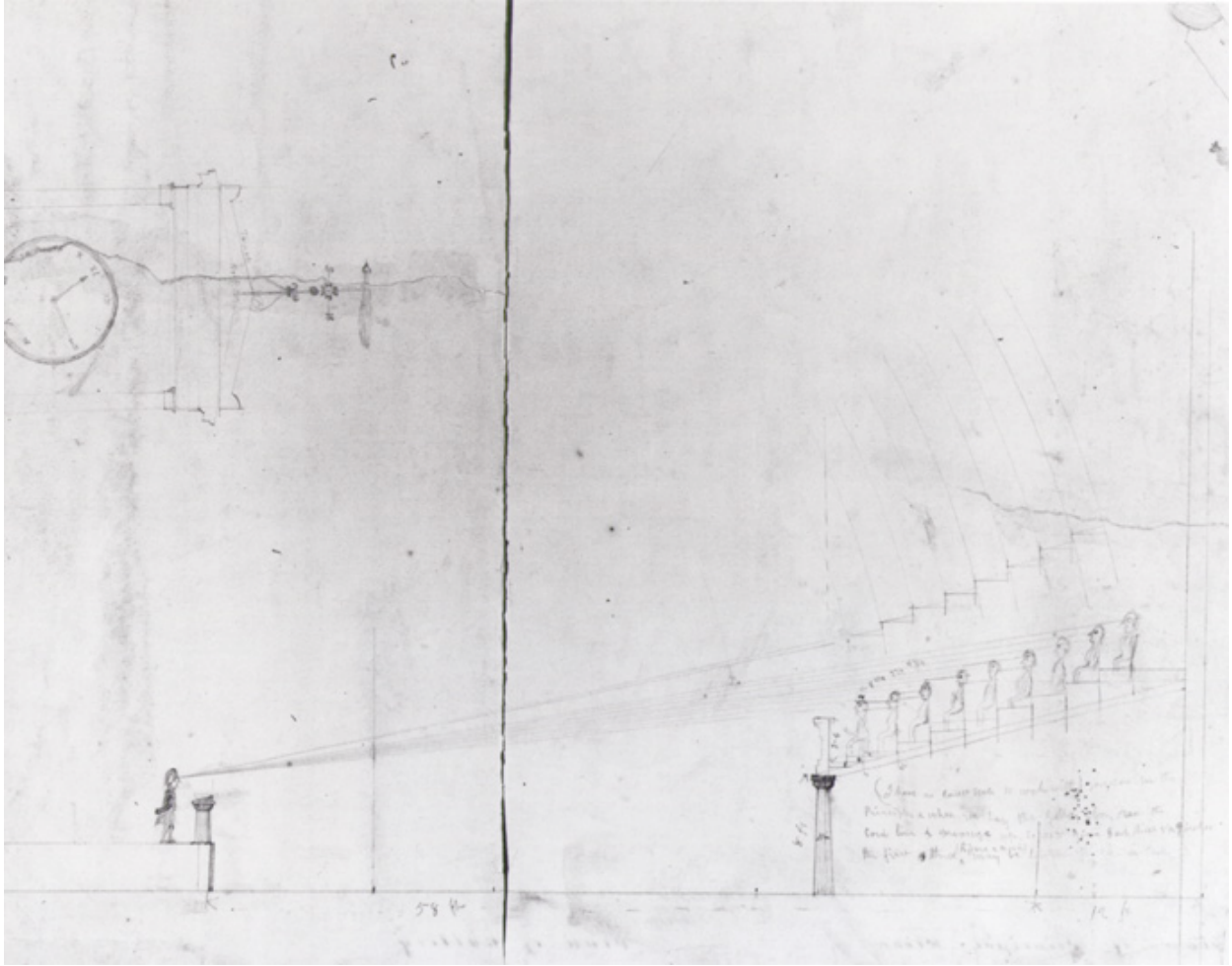


Fig. 1: F. Palmer & Co. lithograph of the interior of the Broadway Tabernacle, New York, New York (c. 1845). Courtesy of the Eno Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints, and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

Above all, the crowd had to be able to see the most private part of the speaker—the eyes. Finney used his eyes to great effect, and nearly every account of his preaching mentions his “searching” or “blazing” blue eyes. The planners of the Oberlin meeting house valued eye-contact so much that someone, perhaps Finney himself, sketched tiny lines on the architectural drawing to make sure that an unobstructed line of sight existed between each person in the building and the preacher in the pulpit. Oberlin’s founders had to cut some other corners to save money on the building, but they spent the extra money necessary to install raked pews in the gallery (where the students sat) in order to guarantee these lines of exchange.



Anticipated sight lines drawn on the reverse side of Richard Bond's architectural plan for Oberlin College Chapel, 1841. Courtesy of Oberlin College Archives, Oberlin, Ohio.

Finney's amalgamation of public and private forms of discourse let him fit the prevailing definition of sincerity, and his perceived sincerity proved to be one of the most winsome aspects of his style. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, writing 70 years after she gave her life to Christ at a Finney revival—she later took it back—had little use for Finney's theology. His "preaching worked incalculable harm to the very souls he sought to save." He cast people into despair. He filled them with fear, reasoning with them in a way that robbed them of reason. But, she concluded, "He was sincere, so peace to his ashes!"¹³

¹³ George Washington Gale, *Autobiography of George Washington Gale (1789–1861), Founder of Galesburg, Illinois and Knox College* (New York: n. p., 1964), 183. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Eighty Years and More (1815–1897 Reminiscences of Elizabeth Cady Stanton)* (New York: European Publishing Company, 1898), 43. On doubts about Finney's sincerity, see Robert Samuel Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College: From Its Foundation through the Civil War*, 2 vols. (Oberlin, OH: Oberlin College, 1943), I.16.

The Authority of a Star¹⁴

To display a private persona in public, a preacher had to set aside the trappings of traditional authority. New measures preachers gave up high pulpits, distinctive dress, powdered wigs, and the mannered rhetoric of Webster and Dana. Those older practices showed the connections of a preacher to an institutional church whose legitimacy could be taken for granted. Authority radiated from the institution to its agent. But that traditional authority was crumbling, and new measures preachers knew they had to give it up. Finney did not say, as some of his allies did, that every preacher relying on traditional authority was insincere. He said you could not tell if someone was sincere or not, and that was the problem. He wrote with pity about one traditional minister in particular. The man's ministry was failing miserably by Finney's standards. But, Finney said, the man was in fact a sincere believer. What he did not understand was that it was not enough to *be* sincere. He needed to *show people* that he was sincere. And the poor man's attachment to traditional sources of authority kept him from doing that. The practices of traditional authority required submerging any private and particular aspects of one's self behind the emblems of the institutionalized role. They completely occluded the private self – and so prevented hearers from comparing public and private selves. A public display of sincerity required stepping out from behind the insignia of office and making visible a distinct, private self.

New measures preachers did just this kind of thing. They gave up the authority of office and tradition for a new kind of authority better suited to a mass democratic age—what I call the authority of celebrity.

Historians have more often named the authority of new measures preachers as “charismatic.” Relying on Max Weber's famous typology of authority as “charismatic,” “traditional,” or “legal,” some historians have argued that the new measures replaced a traditional mode of authority with a charismatic one. For if Finney did not have traditional authority—and for the most part he did not¹⁵—what other kind of authority could he have?

Finney's power did not rely on the legitimation of tradition, but neither did it rely in a pure form on what Weber identified as charisma. Rather Finney should be understood within the context of the emerging “star system” that appeared most clearly on the stage but also arose in religious and political spheres. Performers like Edmund Keane, Clara Fischer, and P.T. Barnum swapped practices back and forth with politicians like Senator Davy Crockett and President Andrew Jackson ... *and* with preachers like Charles Finney. They were all looking for ways to represent private sentiments to mass publics. As I have argued above, they managed to combine the intensity, passion, veracity and heightened reality of a private self with the prestige, reason, power and widespread presence of an alienated public representation. That amalgamation gave

¹⁴ Londoners began to use “star” to refer to famous actors by the 1770s. The term clearly migrated to the United States well before Finney's notoriety. “Star” was, I will show below, the preferred term of theatre manager William B. Wood. English speakers also used “celebrity” as early as 1600 to mean “the condition of being much extolled or talked about,” “famousness” or “notoriety.” But the *Oxford English Dictionary* did not record the word's applying to a person (rather than a condition) until 1849. Both words were in circulation during Finney's lifetime, though “star” probably had greater currency in the early years of his fame. Those years serve as the focal point of this dissertation, and so I use “star” rather than “celebrity.” The relatively late emergence of both of these terms adds thin support to this section's argument that “the star” was a relatively new category in the eighteenth century and represented an alternative to both traditional and charismatic forms of authority.

¹⁵ Finney's break with traditional forms of authority should not be overstated. He took pains to be ordained and then to make sure he located himself within denominations that would not withdraw that credential. More subtly, part of Finney's appeal depended on his status as a white male and on the traditions that attached special legitimation to his race and gender.

stars a distinct kind of authority, one that could neither be reduced to nor conflated with what Weber called charismatic authority.

Four quick points of contrast help to distinguish the authority of celebrity from charismatic authority. They also bring the workings of the authority of celebrity into sharper relief.

First, Weber defined charismatic authority as depending on the “extraordinary” quality of a person. Unlike a classic charismatic, though, Charles Finney took great pains to show his followers that he was just like them. He invited students to address him as “Brother,” even when he was the President of Oberlin. He spoke—quite self-consciously—in common language, and dressed in common ways. He insisted that his success as a revivalist depended on no special gifts, but rather on a method that anyone could use. His followers saw him as one just like them ... only more so. He was an icon of their aspirations. Not the extraordinariness, but the *interchangeability* of the star’s persona with that of audience members helped ground the authority of a star.¹⁶

A second, closely related contrast comes from the “proof” cited in support of Finney’s power. Weber’s charismatic leader proved her power “through miracles” that showed *divine* favor, wonders like healings and victories against overwhelming odds.¹⁷ But Finney proved himself through miracles of popularity, signs and wonders that showed *public* favor. Handbills promoted Finney as the man who had converted thousands in Rochester, just as other handbills promoted Keane as the actor who had played to throngs in London, and just as today a sign might promote a restaurant according to the number of billions served or a president might obsess over the number of people at his inauguration. The star embodied the new kind of authority that Tocqueville saw emerging in democratic nations. “As citizens become more equal and alike, the penchant of each to believe blindly a certain man or class diminishes. The disposition to believe the mass is augmented, and more and more it is opinion that leads the world.” The authority of stars arose out of their ability to relate to a mass of people large enough to symbolize the public to itself. Stars worked *social* miracles.¹⁸

Finney further shows the difference between a celebrity and a classic charismatic leader in his appeal to existing canons of reason. Weber defined the charismatic as “irrational” in the sense of leaving behind traditional norms of reason in order to appeal to “concrete revelations and inspirations.” The charismatic preacher did not reason within existing structures, but rather said, “It is written—but I say unto you...!” The ecstatic exhorters at Cane Ridge and other revivals had this kind of charismatic authority, but it cost them: to signify the divine origins of

¹⁶ On the uniqueness of Weber’s charismatic, see Max Weber, “The Social Psychology of the World Religions,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Geertz and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 294-301, esp. 295. On Finney’s public suppression of stories of powerful personal prayer, see Finney, *Memoirs*, 39. On interchangeability of star and fan, see McConachie, “American Theatre in Context, from the Beginnings to 1870,” 148.

¹⁷ Weber, “Social Psychology,” 296.

¹⁸ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, II.i.2, 409. About one hundred years after Tocqueville, another European with aristocratic sympathies came to the United States (though, it must always be remembered, as a refugee and not a tourist) and framed similar conclusions in updated language. The astrology column, Adorno wrote, reflects “changes in the pattern of authoritarianism which no longer invests real father figures with authority but replaces them with collectivities. The image of the friend [Brother Finney] invokes a collective authority consisting of all those who are like himself, but who know better since they are not beset by the same worries.” The stars function as a “messenger of society,” a symbol of the whole social process. Theodor W. Adorno, “The Stars Down to Earth: The *Los Angeles Times* Astrology Column,” in *Adorno: The Stars Down to Earth and Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture*, ed. Stephen Crook (London: Routledge, 1994), 105.

their message, they had to act in ways that transgressed emerging notions of white merchant and professional class respectability. Finney developed a style that stayed firmly within the bounds of respectability. He claimed no new revelation. He simply charged what sounded like common sense with an extra aura of emotional power. This amalgamation of passion and reason, public and private, gave Finney the authority of a star.¹⁹

Finally, Finney showed a star's dependence on routinized mass images and measures. Weber explicitly contrasted the initial burst of charismatic authority with its subsequent routinization.²⁰ With routinization charisma became regular and regulated, institutionalized and reliably reproduced. But Finney's style did not oppose routinization and charisma to one another. Instead, he joined them together. The new measures were, in a sense, reliable techniques for the reproduction of charisma. To the extent that Finney followed the measures, his charisma already depended on routinization. A Weberian charismatic might in fact follow a set routine, but Finney followed a routine with a high degree of self-consciousness *and* promised followers that the routine—and not the charismatic leader—had all the power. In stressing the power of the measures themselves, Finney managed not only to routinize charismatic expression, but also to make routinization itself gleam with a charismatic aura.

Finney's authority depended on his ability to project his private self in public, but he did not embody Weber's charismatic type. Finney might best be understood as one who found a way to be authoritative just as modernity was beginning to make classic charismatic authority problematic in new ways. As a rising egalitarian ethos made qualitative distinctions between persons more difficult to sustain, Finney's presentation of himself as a realization of the potential in every individual fit the times. As miracles involving the natural world became less believable to many U.S. citizens, Finney's miracles of the social world became even more authoritative. As charismatic and ecstatic speech took on the stigma of bodies out of control, Finney's charged common sense offered an exciting but respectable alternative. And as mass production seemed to make more and more things repeatable, Finney made repeatability itself something powerful, meaningful, and immensely attractive. The public-private authority of this star arose from the ruins not only of tradition, but also of charisma.

The authority of celebrity cannot be reduced to one of Weber's types. I am not saying that it is completely new with Finney and other new measures preachers. But if they did not invent it, they did much to perfect it and to package it for mass distribution. Neither charismatic

¹⁹ Weber, "Social Psychology," 296. Historian Perry Miller cut Finney to fit a basically charismatic model, stressing Finney's "demonic" power. But Miller, ever attentive to details, noted this exception: "What is fascinating about [Finney] is that he was not a bully, but an advocate at the bar." Miller, *Life of the Mind*, 23. Theodor W. Adorno noted this curious fusion of reason and quasi-magical authority in the astrology column of the *Los Angeles Times*, and took it as a distillation of the deepest trends of modern life: "Everything sounds respectable, sedate and sensible and astrology as such is treated as something established and socially recognized, an uncontroversial element of our culture, as though it were somewhat bashful of its own shadiness. Hardly ever does the practical advice tendered to the reader transgress the limits of what one finds in any column dealing with human relations and popular psychology. The only difference is that the writer leans on his distinctively magical and irrational authority which seems to be strangely out of proportion with the common-sense content of what he has to offer. This discrepancy cannot be regarded as accidental. The common-sense advice contains, as will be shown later, many spurious 'pseudo-rational' elements, calling for some authoritarian backing to be effective." Adorno was arguing that "common sense" did not keep its promises of effectiveness in late capitalism. (Working hard and saving money did not necessarily secure a retirement, for instance.) Because people knew, on some level, the bad faith of common sense promises, common sense required the backing of some magical or irrational authority – like the stars. See Adorno, "The Stars Down to Earth: The *Los Angeles Times* Astrology Column." (English original.)

²⁰ Weber, "Social Psychology," 297–301.

nor traditional, it is the form of authority that fits most closely with the ethos and structures of a modern, mass democracy in which people relate to representations of public figures and long to know the “real” selves behind them.²¹

The Price of Fame

Charles Finney seemed to thrive as a star. He did not mind to project his voice into text, his sentiment into argument, or his private self into public discourse. He had nothing to fear, for his public and private personae were practically identical. He was who he seemed to be, and seemed to be who he was. The star system cost Finney just that distinction between public seeming and private being.

Finney valued the consonance of public and private selves so highly because he believed the success of revivals depended on it. Finney warned his listeners that people could detect insincerity, and it would put them off. And even if a preacher could fool all of the people all of the time, a preacher could not fool the most discerning fan of all. God would withdraw God’s presence from insincere preachers, and the revival would fail. One way or another, effectiveness in revivals depended on public displays of sincerity. Sincerity became extremely important—but always in an instrumental sense. It became important as a *measure*.²²

Effective revival preaching demanded more than sincerity from preachers, Finney thought. Sincerely expressing doubt, lust, or melancholy would save few souls. A preacher needed to express sincerely *the right set* of sentiments. If a leader felt the right feelings, and transmitted those feelings clearly and powerfully, people would flock to the revival. Not just sincerity, then, but also feeling “as one ought” became a measure for revival. The emotions of the preacher—the quintessence of the private self—became a means to public ends.²³

Finney explained the importance of right feeling through a dynamic theory of sympathy. He described an “economy of grace” driven by sympathetic transactions of feeling. The Spirit of God inspired the feelings of a minister and worked through them to ignite right feelings in the hearers. Finney saw the exchange of feelings operating in two directions. The wise preacher did not simply pour out the same set of feelings, in the same order, at the same tempo, every time he preached. The soul-winning preacher had, Finney said, a “single eye” for the reactions of the congregation, and adjusted his feelings to give people the particular emotions they needed. Finney kept his eyes on a congregation constantly. He watched his congregation in order to adapt his public speech to their needs. Because sincerity required that public speech be identical to private sentiment, adapting public speech involved adaptations that went deep into the self that

²¹ The last example in this string suggests an illuminating comparison. Finney took the conditions that produced the “loss of aura” that worried Walter Benjamin (and filled him with a sense of possibility) and made them auratic. Compare “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit,” in Benjamin, *G.S.*, I.471–508. Translated as “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproducibility” in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, trans. Marcus Paul Bullock and Michael William Jennings, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), III.101–33.

²² Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 134–35. Finney may have overstated the public’s demand for sincerity. Phineas T. Barnum packed people in to see wonders even after he himself had revealed his previous “wonders” as frauds. And historian R. Laurence Moore recounted the case of temperance lecturer John Bartholomew Gough, who drew big crowds on the lyceum circuit in the 1840s in part because people wanted to see if he would be drunk or sober when he spoke. At least some people in the United States in the 1830s and 40s enjoyed watching the play of seeming and being so much that it trumped any desire for sincerity. On Gough, see R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 57.

²³ Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 137.

Finney and his listeners considered most authentic. Finney made eye contact not just to express himself, but also to transform himself.²⁴

Understanding these self-transformations by the speaker clarifies the nature of celebrity and the dynamics of power in the spaces in which it was enacted. Historian Jeanne Halgren Kilde understood eye contact in the Oberlin meeting as a way for preacher-professors to control the room. The gaze from the pulpit monitored and molded students, as in Michel Foucault's analysis of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon. But new measures preachers used the space differently than did Bentham's observers. The Oberlin meetinghouse did allow a preacher to make eye contact with an entire congregation, and it did facilitate attempts to discipline the feelings of students and other congregants. But a preacher in this new democracy disciplined others by reading their faces and then disciplining himself to feel the feelings he wanted them to feel. Disciplinary power therefore flowed along lines of sight in two directions. Eye contact made a preacher like Finney both observer and oblation, supervisor and sacrifice.²⁵

There are at least two ironies at work in the complex dynamics of this practice. First, because the authority of celebrity transforms and then displays the private self for the sake of public projects, it gradually erodes the very private self it celebrates. Stars of many kinds and many magnitudes—from preachers to politicians to actors to workers in service and culture industries—find the public projects of their work claiming every aspect of their lives. It is not just a matter of work taking more time. It is rather that the authority of celebrity requires the display of whatever counts as private, and so as real. This leads to the instrumental, public use of all kinds of interests, feelings, activities, and relationships. Children get pressed into service as props that display wholesomeness. Pets become emblems of character: Consider Tinkerbell, the Chihuahua Paris Hilton carried as something like an insignia for her brand; or Socks, the cat Bill Clinton once featured on his official Christmas card; or the corgis whose public display has done so much to humanize Queen Elizabeth in the years after Diana's death.²⁶ Like children, pets get used to reveal the "real" self. Within this logic, religious practices become some of the most powerful accessories of all—not only for preachers, but also for stars in every field. The authority of celebrity can display and make use of every aspect of life. And so the price of public sincerity runs through institutions, and bodies politic, and deep into the lives of stars.

I believe this drive to mobilize so much of private life for the sake of the authority of celebrity is a primary reason for the burnout and hollowness that can set in for so many people who rely on this kind of authority, including politicians, musicians, actors, and preachers. When all of life becomes at least potentially a resource for one's authority, and so for one's work—even if that work is for the best of causes—then no part of life is safe to exist as a good in itself. Relationships are under constant pressure. Leisure activities lose the quality of free play. And, as

²⁴ Finney, *Memoirs*, 88. Gale, *Autobiography*, 258. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 211.

²⁵ Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America*, 51-52. Adorno named an interaction like this in his description of what musical performance became in the era of the virtuoso – a close analogue to the star preacher. The virtuoso, like a priest, "slaughtered" the piece for the delight of the audience. "Of course, as in our dreams, the ritual characters in the concert can become conflated [sich verwirrt]. Oftentimes we no longer know who it is that is sacrificed: the work, the virtuoso, or in the end ourselves." Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 20 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977), 16.310. In English: "The Natural History of the Theatre," in Theodor W. Adorno, *Quasi Una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1992), 66.

²⁶ For one of the most insightful studies of the role of pets in the projection of a star's persona, see Michael Joseph Gross, "Queen Elizabeth and Her Corgis: A Love Story," *Vanity Fair*, August 2015, <http://www.vanityfair.com/style/2015/07/queen-elizabeth-corgis-a-history>.

Jesus knew, prayer is transformed when it is performed to be seen, or to be described in a later sermon. All those things that keep human life human are threatened by the drive to turn them into resources for the authority of celebrity.

A second irony is costly in other ways. As the authority of celebrity erodes the self it frames as private, this mode of authority undermines the conditions of its own legitimacy. When the private self is deployed for public purposes, it ceases to appear as all those things that made it authoritative. It no longer seems given, spontaneous, natural, pre-social, and prior to every project. It no longer seems like the “really real.” For instance, when George W. Bush told the nation a story about something his spouse Laura said to him while they were reading in bed, just before turning out the light, discerning observers knew that the story has been scrutinized and judged fit for public presentation, perhaps in Bush’s own mind and perhaps in more formal conversations with spin doctors. Even if the conversation really happened—especially if it really happened—we know, on some level, that this story does not give us a direct look at some private, natural, pre-political George Bush. In the same way, the running story about Barack Obama’s struggle to quit smoking—and Michelle Obama’s role in urging him to quit—was not a simple glimpse inside the workings of a marriage. The public came to understand this, and the story lost its allure over time. Consistent public displays of private selves eventually wear away the aura of the self we take as private—and so the authority of celebrity, in the long run, undermines the basis of its own legitimacy.

This loss of legitimacy has not prevented the growth of the authority of celebrity. The election of Donald Trump shows that it may be more important than ever before. Trump appealed to people because he projected an air of authenticity. Supporters cited his willingness to speak his mind without counting the political cost. He seemed “real” because he said things in public that his white base usually kept behind closed doors. His manner seemed unpolished, unstudied, natural. This celebrity style of presenting a private self in public was central to Trump’s appeal. If the election of Trump shows the power of the authority of celebrity, it also shows the ironies of this mode of authority. When even marriage seems designed for display, it is hard to know what is left of any pre-political life or self. As the vacuum at the center of the star’s private life becomes more apparent, the public display of that private life loses its aura.²⁷

Even in decay, the authority of celebrity continues to circulate through multiple spheres of society. Practices of purposeful public sincerity have long migrated between politics, entertainment, and religion. But one of the features of the contemporary economy is that more and more people engage in practices for public sincerity in their work. Practices of public sincerity assume greater importance whether one stresses the expansion of the service sector, the significance of working with symbols, or the rapid growth of the so-called “gig” economy. Sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild has dubbed this management of self for public consumption as “emotional labor.” She studied the training of flight attendants for airlines with reputations for outstanding service. The attendants were trained not just to perform their duties competently, and not just to perform their duties in a warm and friendly manner, but to perform their duties in a conspicuously sincere manner. They were trained for service with a smile—a smile that they *really* meant, and, even more, a smile that the customer *knew* they really meant. This kind of service requires just the kind of slipping between public and private roles that Finney mastered. And it is exactly the kind of skill prized across multiple sectors of the economy today.

²⁷ See also Ted A. Smith, “Discerning Authorities,” in *Questions Preachers Ask* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 55–72.

Stars come in many magnitudes, and they rise in many spheres. The authority of celebrity has expanded, even as it has worn away the distinctions between public and private on which its legitimacy depends. The new measure rolls on, if in a cynical and empty form.

Four Openings to Political Theory and Some Gratuitous Theology

Social critics on all sides of recent debates about “democracy” and “modernity” have tended to resort to idealist caricature. More careful empirical work in sociology, history, anthropology, and cultural studies can break up stereotypes and deepen debate. This little sliver of history could generate a long, long list of interventions in political ethics. The glory of the world is just this bottomlessness. But I want to focus on four places where this story of the authority of celebrity opens on to debates in religious ethics and political theory.

First, it interrupts one of the standard narratives of decline told especially by “new traditionalists” like Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre. They have argued that modernity brings the dissolution of authority and the rise of a new, toxic individualism. It is true that what Weber called traditional forms of authority eroded significantly with the onset of “modernity” and “democracy.” But traditional forms of authority did not give way simply to free-floating individualism without *any* kind of authority. Hauerwas and MacIntyre see only the decline of traditional authority, and so miss the new kinds of authority and community at work, for better and for worse.

The new traditionalists also miss the threat this new order poses to an individualism that can sustain what we think of as autonomy. The practices of public sincerity associated with the authority of celebrity do not represent the triumph of individual autonomy. If anything, they undermine the kind of character that can sustain autonomy. The autonomy MacIntyre and Hauerwas worry so much about depends on a self that has and knows its own projects, purposes and desires prior to social interaction. But the authority of celebrity demands that we modify our own deepest hopes and desires for the sake of public consumption. As more and more of us engage in those practices in more and more spheres of life, the result is a political order of people who are very good at modifying and displaying what we “really” feel for the sake of public projects—and who have a very hard time saying what we really care about apart from those projects. Such selves do not use means to their own ends, but become means to other ends. Thus I would argue that the story is not one of the collapse of authority and the rise of individualism, but rather of the shift from one kind of authority to another, and with that shift a threat to the kind of character that can sustain the individualism necessary for meaningful autonomy.

Second, it is important to note that the authority of celebrity grew out of and made use of anxieties created by the emergence of modern public spheres. Jürgen Habermas has sometimes written as if the culture industry—and the authority of celebrity which is at its center—attacks the public sphere like an alien invader. But if the authority of celebrity is an enemy of proper public discourse (and is it really? but that’s a topic for another paper) it is an enemy from within, an organ turned against the body as a whole. The authority of celebrity arose precisely because of anxieties created by the differentiation of a public sphere from a private sphere that was taken as somehow more authentic. (Habermas’s notions of “system” and “lifeworld” replicate just this pairing.) That differentiation created anxieties about sincerity, and the authority of celebrity gained power and legitimacy because of its ability to soothe those anxieties. I don’t mean to say that the authority of celebrity is a logically necessary outcome of the emergence of the public sphere. History is always contingent. But I do mean to say that celebrity is the mode of authority that has in fact risen to dominance with the emergence of a public sphere. It makes use of the

stuff and structures of the public sphere. But because the authority of celebrity breaks down distinctions between public and private, it also *undermines* the public sphere. This is not a small point, for it means that the public sphere, as Habermas conceives it, has unleashed dynamics that wear away the conditions necessary for its own existence. Protecting the public sphere, then, cannot simply involve policing its borders to keep celebrity out. The stuff of the authority of celebrity is always already inside a liberal democratic order.

Third, understanding the dynamics of celebrity exposes the particular ways that race, ethnicity and gender are coded into the deep structures of authority in a modern, mass democracy like the United States. The authority of celebrity depends on a certain *frisson* that arises from acting in private ways in public. Dominant understandings of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality make those performances perilous for minoritized people. The role of public person is still deeply coded as straight, white, and male. People who present themselves in ways that match that template—people like me—can slip out of a public persona and into modes associated with the private sphere without fear of losing their status as public persons. This kind of slipping between public and private is exactly what the authority of celebrity requires. Thus—especially in political, economic, and ecclesial spheres—it is easier for those already advantaged by political structures to exercise the authority of celebrity.

Women seeking to exercise the authority of celebrity, for instance, face burdens that men do not. Consider the challenges Hillary Rodham Clinton had in replicating Bill Clinton's uncanny connections with a mass public. This was not just a matter of individual temperament. When a woman shows a private self in public she often faces charges of weakness, shrillness, or even lewdness. This is true for preachers as well as politicians, for the obstacles migrate between spheres with the practices. Billy Sunday inherited and adapted Finney's practices of public sincerity. When he made eye contact with two thousand people, they found it riveting. When Aimee Semple McPherson did the same thing, people charged her with public indecency.

Just so, the enduring power of racism in America makes it difficult for African American, Latino/a, Asian American, and Native American leaders to exercise the authority of celebrity. Analogous obstacles show up across different social spheres. When Finney spoke with tears rolling down his face, it showed that he had heart. If his contemporary Henry Highland Garnett, a powerful African American Presbyterian preacher, had done this, it would have been read as a sign that he was irrational and out of control. Just so, Barack Obama could not express outrage with the freedom that George W. Bush and other recent presidents had been able to. Comedian Keegan-Michael Key's character of Luther—the “anger translator” for Obama—played with these restraints in revelatory ways. Restraints like these not only limit what public figures identified with minoritized groups can say and do. They also make it more difficult for these leaders to access the authority of celebrity that has come to be so important in late modern mass democracy.

Seeing the ways that the authority of celebrity replicates structures of privilege already in place makes clear that deepening democracy and dismantling unjust structures of authority will require a radical rethinking of the roles, rules, practices, norms, manner, and mores of democratic life. It will not be enough to expand the number of people eligible for particular offices—ecclesial, political, or otherwise—for authority is not rooted only in office. Likewise, it will not be enough to expand the number of people who can acquire education that makes them experts in this or that field, for authority is not rooted only in technical proficiency. Deepening democracy will require opening up the ways in which all people can make use of the authority of celebrity. And that will require fundamental shifts in our shared social imaginaries.

Fourth, seeing the role of practices of preaching in creating the authority of celebrity begins to suggest a way around the paradox of public theology. Those who argue for that paradox state it like this: if a religious group speaks in language peculiar to its own tradition, it will not get much of a public hearing; but if a religious group speaks in language it shares with other groups, then it does not make a distinctive contribution. Either way, the argument for paradox goes, religious groups contribute nothing *as religious groups* to public deliberation. But if practices migrate across social spheres—as practices of the authority of celebrity have circulated between religious, cultural, political and other spheres—then religious groups might contribute to public discourse by reforming a practice as it arises in their own spaces. In its own space a group could speak in its own particular language. It could reform a practice for reasons related to commitments it would not need to justify in public discourse. A Christian cultural critic might therefore treat the migration of practices between churches and other social spheres not as a rash of impurities that must be washed or wished away, but as a series of opportunities for critical, public engagement that do not require a church to abandon its first, explicitly theological language. Through the transmigration of practices, critical, theological reflection on church practices becomes critical, theological—and potentially transformative—reflection on crucial elements of social spheres such as law, politics, economics, family life, and entertainment. Practical theology becomes public theology.

In highlighting the wider potential for reflection on religious practices, I do not mean to devalue the importance of working for changes in public policy. I do mean to recognize the difficulty of making such changes without giving up distinctly religious language. I also mean to assert—with so-called “cultural Marxists” such as Antonio Gramsci and Raymond Williams—that cultural power plays an enormous role in sustaining injustice and so that changes in the practices of religious groups could have important consequences in the political sphere. To speak more specifically, and more contentiously, about my home tradition: Mainline U.S. Protestants are far more likely to change the larger society by changing their practices of preaching than by issuing another round of denominational position papers.

The migration of practices enables a religious cultural critic to reflect in distinctly religious language on a practice as it passes through religious institutions. Reform of worship can make an intervention in a social imaginary—and not only within the religious body, for the practices being reformed will almost always be circulating between multiple social spheres.

What, then, might a Christian theologian interested in political theory say about the authority of celebrity? It can be tempting to tell the story of the rise of the authority of celebrity as a narrative of decline. This would fit with a larger story about the erosion of boundaries between public and private spheres and the steady dissolution of the modern self. But crossing the bourgeois boundary between public and private has been important in struggles against child abuse, domestic violence, clergy sexual abuse, and other evils once sheltered in the name of protecting a private sphere. The women’s movement has worked hard to make the personal political, and temporal justice has flourished because of it. This story cannot be told *only* as a narrative of decline.

The facts resist a simple, total narrative of decline. And I want to argue that a Christian theology of history also resists stories of total and complete decline. We might talk about things getting better and worse, but this is something very different from the almost ontological stories of decline told by people like MacIntyre, Hauerwas, and (too often) Adorno. If one is committed to the very basic idea that God yearns for the redemption of all creation, then no point in time—

not even late modernity—could be regarded as Godforsaken. It would always make sense to ask what it would mean to hope for a redemption of the present moment.

But what would it mean to hope for redemption at the end of a story about the dissolution of the modern self? I think that raises a contextual question of theological anthropology. Who are the people at the end of this story? What is the ground of their true identity? Who is the subject of redemption? Or, more concretely: if Charles Finney's life and person were formed through his practice of the authority of celebrity, what would it be like to hope for his resurrection? If the deepest truth about Finney was that he was the self he was in the private sphere, then his redemption, the fulfillment of the promise made in his creation, would be to make the life he lived in the private sphere perfect and total, all in all. His redemption would not involve work, citizenship, preaching or other public activities, but only the consumer pleasures and affective delights of a perfect life at home. Above all, it would involve eternal reunion with family. Finney's younger contemporary Elizabeth Stuart Phelps expressed such hope in *The Gates Ajar* (1868).²⁸ This view still dominates many sentimental understandings of redemption.

There is another possibility. If the deepest truth about Finney was that he was a self behind or apart from the role he played in every sphere, then his redemption would not even involve the perfection of these domestic pleasures. It would instead be the deliverance from body, relationship, and history of every kind, into a life unsullied by particular content. Finney's contemporary Ralph Waldo Emerson expressed such hope in "The Over-Soul" (1841)²⁹—and this view still dominates many "new thought" and liberal Protestant visions of hope.

But there is still another possibility. If the deepest truth about Finney was that he was a star—bound to a public, implicated in social orders, never quite identical to himself—then Finney's redemption would require a resurrection of *that* broken, social body. The raising of a body bound by relationships could not help but pull up other people, both intimates and crowds, with the strings attached. The restoration of a body shot through by the eyes of others would involve the cleansing of those eyes. The redemption of a body made through social orders and practices would have to raise those orders and practices with it. The healing of a body wounded by history would involve and accomplish the healing of that history. It is almost too much to hope for. But this is the kind of hope—personal, political, and more—that a history of preaching can make possible.

²⁸ Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *The Gates Ajar* (Boston: Fields Osgood, 1868).

²⁹ Emerson published "The Over-Soul" as part of *Essays: First Series*. It was reprinted in Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America, 1983), 383–400.