FAITHFUL DEVELOPMENT?

EXAMINING THE (RE)FORMATIVE TENSION AT THE INTERSECTION OF
EVANGELICALISM AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between evangelicalism and international development is simultaneously rich and contentious—both currently and historically. Yet despite evangelicalism’s high levels of engagement with international development, this relationship is not often studied. This thesis examines the tensions and contradictions at the intersection of evangelicalism and international development through the lens of historical institutionalism, and considers how these tensions and contradictions might present opportunity for gradual change in the institution of evangelicalism, despite its strong path dependence. Surveys and interviews were conducted with Canadian-based staff of evangelical international development organizations in order to understand their beliefs and approaches to evangelical international development. This thesis argues that points of tension and contradiction within evangelicalism serve as spaces in which key agents have the opportunity to reform and reproduce the institution of evangelicalism. Many of these points of tension exist at the intersection of evangelicalism and international development, making evangelical international development an important space where gradual institutional change can be promoted within the structural constraints of evangelicalism. This thesis concludes there is opportunity for progressive change within evangelicalism in regard to critical development issues such as decolonization, gender equity and racial justice.

Key words: evangelicalism, international development, missions, historical institutionalism, path dependence, gradual institutional change
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1 INTRODUCTION

Around the world, evangelical Christians continue to include care and compassion for ‘the poor’ as an integral part of the practice of their active faith—something that has long been a legacy of the evangelical church. And yet, debates about what evangelicalism’s relationship with social justice should look like also seems to be one of its legacies. Still, many international development organizations actively identify as Christian and target an evangelical base, while evangelical churches continue to engage in ‘missions’—which is often intertwined with development interventions—and love for one’s (global) neighbour is as important as ever to evangelical Christian life. This thesis project emerges out of this context. In light of evangelicals’ persistent engagement with international development, as well as the current tension within evangelicalism between an increasingly far-right expression and more progressive expressions, I endeavour to ask: Is it possible to transform evangelical approaches to and understandings of development in order to divest from oppressive systems of privilege and power? If so, how?

I will open with this idea: It is not the resolution of contradiction that forms us, but rather the tension of it. Learning to face contradiction and hold it in tension is the way in which institutions like evangelicalism ultimately legitimize themselves. And yet, these spaces of tension also open up ambiguities that provide opportunity for change. We learn less about an institution from the ideas that are taken for granted and more from its ambiguity. In much of life, unproblematized ideas are not formative—contradiction, debate and discomfort are, and this thesis endeavours to lean into the tensions that exist within the institution of evangelicalism and its relationship with international development.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the way the evangelical Church and evangelical Christians in Canada understand, conceptualize and approach the development interventions they
lead, participate in and fund in the Global South. Through the lens of historical institutionalism, I
examine the contradictions that exist within evangelicalism, international development and at the
intersection of the two, and consider how these tensions and contradictions can be reconciled or
held in balance. In order to achieve this purpose, the focus of my research is specifically on
Canadian-based staff of evangelical international development organizations. The primary
research examines their approaches to, beliefs on and ideas about the work they and their
organizations do and the field of (evangelical) international development more broadly. How do
the staff of these organizations approach topics such as colonialism, development, systemic
racism and patriarchy? And how do these concepts, and the staff’s knowledge and understanding
of them, affect the way they approach, conceptualize and understand their work of evangelical
international development?

More importantly, this thesis is interested in how tension and contradiction open
opportunity for (re)formation. The intersection of evangelicalism and international development
provides a particularly salient space for this inquiry, due to the contradictions and ambiguities
present in this space. This analysis utilizes historical institutionalism’s theories of path
dependence and institutional change and, in particular, theories of gradual institutional change.
The theoretical framework of gradual institutional change is particularly useful for analyzing
institutions that experience strong path dependence, such as evangelicalism. This leads into an
examination of how and why systems of privilege and power might persist within the institution
of evangelicalism and its relationship with international development. Additionally, it allows for
reflection on how those systems might start to be deconstructed and transformed within
evangelical international development organizations and within evangelicalism more broadly.
This thesis paper argues that points of tension and contradiction within evangelicalism serve as spaces in which key actors and forces have the opportunity to reform and reproduce the institution of evangelicalism. Many of these points of tension exist at the intersection of evangelicalism and international development, making evangelical international development an important space where evangelicalism is produced and re-produced, formed and re-formed. We see this throughout evangelicalism’s history, and today in personal and corporate expressions of evangelical faith. Spaces of contention regarding race, gender, justice, scripture and theology serve as the sites of production and re-production of the institution of evangelicalism.

The remainder of this thesis paper will be structured as follows: Chapter Two provides background to religion’s relationship with international development, before presenting basic background information on evangelicalism more specifically. I also provide an introductory note on my personal positionality in relation to this thesis project. Chapter Three is a literature review which introduces historical institutionalism as a theoretical frame, and then examines the history of evangelicalism and its relationship with international development and social action within the frame of historical institutionalist ideas of path dependence and institutional change. Chapter Four outlines the methodology of my primary research and further unpacks my positionality as a researcher. Chapter Five presents the data and findings of the primary research. Chapter Six discusses the implications of these findings, positions them in the context of the literature about institutional change and provides recommendations for evangelical international development organizations and evangelicalism more broadly. Chapter Seven concludes by presenting opportunities for further research, as well as closing thoughts and reflections.
This chapter outlines the context and background for this thesis. I begin with a short review of the often contentious and sometimes weak relationships between religion and development and more specifically, the Church and development. I then move into a short review of the ‘basics’ of evangelicalism as an institution, particularly focusing on evangelicalism in the context of the twenty-first century and the context of Canada. I conclude with a short note on my positionality as it relates to the topics of evangelicalism and development.

2.1 Religion and Development

The bridge between religion and development is often a contentious one. Leaders, thinkers and practitioners on both sides have been wary of working towards common ground. Many scholars agree that religious and spiritual perspectives are widely missing from development thinking and practice (Marshall 2001; Myers 1998; Rennick 2013). Myers (1998) argues that this absence is a result of modernization theory and modernity, which separates the spiritual from the material (144). In this worldview, religion deals with spiritual matters, whereas development exists in the material world (Marshall 2001, 345). As Marshall (2001) writes, “the vocabulary and approach of spirituality seemed, often though not always, inimical to the technical, hard-nosed approach of development practice” (343).

However, I contend, along with several other authors, that spirituality was never meant to be separated from materiality. Many religions speak to the material world, such as the Islamic injunction against interest (Marshall 2001, 345), or the command in the Old Testament regarding harvest: “When you harvest the crops of your land, do not harvest the grain along the edges of your fields, and do not pick up what the harvesters drop. Leave it for the poor and the foreigners living among you” (Leviticus 23:22). Marshall (2004) calls religion “undoubtedly one of the
great blind spots of the development world” (15). Rennick (2013) argues that although secularism is growing in the Global North and religion is increasingly pushed into the individual, private life, “religion remains an important, deeply embedded expression of culture and identity for the majority of people around the world and needs to be taken seriously rather than dismissed as irrational or out of date” (184). Rennick (2013) adds that this Northern view of religion as private makes development practitioners from North America and Europe “religiously illiterate”, which could be a liability as they operate in spaces where spirituality is integral to daily life (184).

There are increasing efforts to spark dialogue between the fields of development and religion. Marshall (2001) writes extensively about her leadership of the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD), which was founded in the late 1990s out of the World Bank. Its purpose is “to use dialogue to bridge the gulf of understanding separating development and faith institutions, with poverty the central focus” (Marshall 2001, 352). Marshall (2001) states the WFDD has often been in “unfamiliar turf”, navigating historic tensions between faith groups and between faith groups and development groups (355).

All in all, it is clear the bridges between religion and development are still being constructed, as the two fields continue to sit in tension and work together. An openness to incorporating the other’s perspectives is required on both sides, with Marshall (2001) arguing that “a genuine dialogue can only take place with a commitment to openness as the foundation, with the parties open to experiencing some transformation of their own paradigms and expectations” (371).
2.2 The Church and Development

Moving to specifically focus in on Christianity and the Church, we see the Church has been involved in many development projects, programs and initiatives around the world. To say the least, the Church’s history in the Global South has often been painful, which of course has major effects on ministry and mission today. Most notably, the Church was infamously complicit in the colonial project throughout the Global South. Okesson (2016) writes about the lasting effects this complicity has had on the Church’s relationship with power. Okesson (2016) writes: “Western missions have historically been guilty of collusion with colonial institutions and/or culpable for the misuse of power, whether openly in coercive practices or more subtly through the means of articulating theology to other people through heavily policed Western cultural lenses” (146). In other words, the Church has not been good at following both Jesus and the apostle Paul’s instructions to not lord power over others (see Matthew 20:25-26 or 1 Peter 5:3). An example of this is put forward by Lugones (2007), who cites Christianity’s replacement of “gynecratic spiritual plurality with one supreme male being” as “crucial in subduing the tribes” during colonialism (199).

Stemming from this colonial legacy, ideas of modernity and mainstream development are also closely tied with Eurocentric Christianity and the Church. These ideas led to many painful legacies for the Church in the Global South. Myers (1998) argues that modernity, and more specifically, the “modern” idea that the spiritual and material realms are separate, is “deeply embedded in the Western part of the Christian church, in its theology, and in the daily life of its people” (144). Bean (2014) writes that American evangelicalism has a highly individualistic theology, leading to ideas that personal sin leads to poverty (165)—this idea has led to paternalism in American evangelical efforts to alleviate poverty. Overall, the idea of
development became a quasi-religious norm in the West where so-called ‘developed’ Christian nations were tasked with helping so-called ‘underdeveloped’ and ‘backward’ societies (Myers 2011, 27).

All of this history, Okesson (2016) argues, makes it especially important for the Church to steward power carefully today, recognizing anew the unique, humble and often paradoxical ways power is embodied in the person of Christ and written about by the apostle Paul, who writes about “power made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9) (149). Evidently, the Church’s colonial history means the Church’s relationship with power today, especially in the Global South, is highly complex and heavy with baggage, and Christian development practitioners therefore require a high level of awareness regarding their positionality within the field.

2.3 What is Evangelicalism?

The specific focus of this project is on the subset of Christianity known as evangelicalism. Asking one to define evangelicalism is, as will be seen later in the data, difficult and contentious. However, I, along with many evangelical scholars, find the Bebbington quadrilateral (put forward by British historian David Bebbington) to be useful in defining the features or characteristics that distinguish evangelicals (“About Evangelicals”, The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada 2019). The Bebbington quadrilateral puts forward four emphases of evangelicals:

1. biblicism: devotion to the Bible as God’s word;
2. crucicentrism: the centrality of the cross of Christ in evangelical teaching and preaching;
3. activism: cooperating in the mission of God through evangelism and charitable works;
4. conversionism: the conviction that each person must turn from their sin, believe in the saving work of Christ, and commit themselves to a life of discipleship and service. (“About Evangelicals”, The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada 2019)
While this definition is of course not perfect, it is widely accepted and serves as a good base for understanding who and what this project studies. More broadly, evangelicalism encompasses Christians who identify as (usually conservative) Protestants but are not part of the ‘mainline’ Church (such as most United or Anglican denominations).

2.3.1 Evangelicalism’s Formal Organizations

As an institution, evangelicalism is made up of a wide variety of formal institutional structures and organizations. Of course, the primary formal organization in evangelicalism is the Church, or rather, churches (and the denominations they are affiliated with). Other types of formal organizations within evangelicalism are parachurch organizations, NGOs, non-profits and charities. These types of organizations are of particular importance to this thesis, as the staff of a subset of this type of organization, evangelical international development organizations, are the focus of the primary research of this thesis.

Evangelical networks are another important aspect of the evangelical institution and can range from highly structured to increasingly loose (particularly in the age of social media). The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (The EFC) is one of these networks that is quite structured and formalized. The EFC has registered affiliates, runs regular events, publishes research, has a print and digital media arm and does significant advocacy work within Canada. The Gospel Coalition, which originated in the United States but has a Canadian branch as well, is another fairly formalized network that produces theological content and hosts conferences. The Lausanne Movement is a global network that primarily focuses on evangelical missions and also has a Canadian expression. Looser networks also exist, particularly enabled by social media. For example, I have personally been involved in a Canadian network of Indigenous, Black and other
Christians of colour, many of whom are evangelical or ex-evangelical, who connect through a Facebook group and regular Zoom calls.

Other important evangelical organizations include colleges, universities and seminaries, media organizations, record labels and publication houses, summer camps, student/campus ministries and youth organizations, and many other independent events, blogs and podcasts. The institution of evangelicalism encapsulates a wide variety of diverse formal organizations. Additionally, many of these organizations overlap. Evangelical church pastors publish books, megachurches have started their own seminaries, and some parachurch organizations put out content at rates that rival some evangelical media organizations. This interconnectedness is one of the things that makes evangelicalism so complex and dense as an institution, as will be discussed in Chapter Three.

2.3.2 Twenty-first Century Evangelicalism

This inquiry is of particular interest at this time in history, as I perceive evangelicalism to be facing an identity crisis of sorts in light of mass white American evangelical support for U.S. President Donald Trump and his racist, misogynistic and unjust rhetoric and policies. A blatant example of evangelical backlash against social justice is a statement released in 2018 by several primarily white, male evangelical pastors, entitled “The Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel” (SSJG). In it, the signatories criticize “postmodern ideologies derived from intersectionality, radical feminism, and critical race theory” as inconsistent with biblical teaching (MacArthur et al. 2018, Denial I). These attitudes and statements present as eerily similar to ‘The Great Reversal’ of the early twentieth century in the evangelical church.1

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1 The Great Reversal’ was a fundamentalist movement of the 1920s that marked fundamentalists’ departure from social action entirely. It will be examined in more detail in Chapter Three.
Yet in response, many women, people of colour and their allies have responded with action and activism reminiscent of evangelicals who, throughout history, have stood for justice in the face of oppression, as outlined by Soong-Chan Rah and Gary VanderPol (2016) in their book *Return to Justice*. To continue on the example given above, responses denouncing the SSJG from evangelical (or increasingly ex-evangelical) groups and leaders were released within a week of the initial release. Additionally, well-known ‘conservative’ evangelical leaders such as leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention refused to sign the SSJG. Even before the SSJG, prominent, long-standing evangelical leaders such as Beth Moore publicly distanced themselves from ‘Trump evangelicals’ and took strong stances in support of racial reconciliation, feminism and social justice.

The past several years, post-2016, have certainly heightened the question of the identity of evangelicalism. It has also brought to light significant strongholds of white supremacy and hegemonies within evangelicalism, which subsequently shape its engagement with justice and international development. With growing awareness of these questions, this research is incredibly relevant, especially to those such as me who increasingly find themselves on the margins of evangelicalism.

### 2.3.3 Evangelicalism in a Canadian Context

It is also important to speak to the distinct Canadian context of this research. This is an inquiry into evangelicalism, but specifically Canadian evangelicalism, which is influenced by American (and historically, British) Christianity, but also has some distinctives. Mark A. Noll (1997), though wary of essentializing such diverse groups as *Canadians, Americans* and *evangelicals*, puts forward five key differences between Canadian and American evangelicals:
1. Canadian evangelicals inhabit a much smaller world with respect to each other than do American evangelicals, resulting in a nimble ability to ‘make things happen’;

2. Canadian evangelicals have a different set of expectations for relations between the Church and state, especially with regard to education;

3. Canadian evangelicals have more intra-evangelical cooperation;

4. Canadian evangelicals succeeded at providing better forum for displaying their thinking and portraying intelligence;

5. Canadian evangelicals are slightly less concerned about ideological boundary-marking than Americans (6, 12-13).

Overall, Noll (1997) presents Canadian evangelicalism as a liberal, “mediating” form of evangelicalism (17), what one might today call “progressive” evangelicalism. Noll (1997) writes, “instead of militant or combative forms of evangelicalism which have flourished in the United States, Canadian evangelicalism has featured somewhat less polemics and a somewhat more accommodating spirit” (17).

Noll (1997) is, however, aware of the danger of painting Canada as a “benevolent bourgeois ‘Other’” (8), and recognizes Canadian evangelicalism’s downfalls, too, writing, “if Canadian evangelicalism has been superior to American evangelicalism, the superiority has been relative” (19). Noll (1997) also states that it is important not to downplay “significant commonalities that have always bound Canadian and American churches together” (7). In other words, there is a ‘blurry border’ between Canadian and American evangelicalism—the border certainly exists, often in ways that paint Canadian evangelicalism in a rosy light. At the same time, the border is not always clear, and where American influence starts and stops in Canadian evangelicalism is not always clear. It is also important to recognize that Noll (1997) was writing
more than 20 years ago, and with the advent of social media, I would argue that American influence on Canada in general, and particularly in the realm of religion and evangelicalism, has only intensified.

In terms of the number of evangelical Christians in Canada, at the time of the publication of Noll’s (1997) essay, approximately 16 per cent of Canadians identified as evangelical (Rawlyk 1997, xviii). Today, between eight and 12 per cent of Canadians identify as an evangelical Christian (Hiemstra 2007).

2.4 An Introductory Note on Positionality

Finally, I need to briefly address my positionality in this topic (specific researcher positionality will be addressed in the Methodology chapter). In addition to being quite relevant to the current evangelical landscape, this inquiry is, as I have already suggested, fiercely personal. Raised in the evangelical church, I now find myself increasingly on the margins of evangelicalism, identifying somewhere at the intersection of Anabaptism and neo- and progressive evangelicalism. I am certainly not the white, Calvinist, middle-aged male who has traditionally held the centre of evangelical power. Yet, I also hold privileged identities within evangelical circles: I am straight, anglophone, educated and born in North America. I often speak at evangelical gatherings, groups and conferences, and I work for Compassion Canada, an organization that partners primarily, though not exclusively, with evangelical Christians and evangelical organizations.

This inquiry is, then, as much about my personal position within evangelicalism as it is anything else, as I endeavour to study it from the location of its centre of power (North America) as someone who holds a partly-marginalized, partly-privileged identity within it. I am continuously navigating and negotiating my seemingly contradicting identities and theological
understandings—evangelical, Anabaptist, Christian, woman of colour, feminist, academic, practitioner—and even over the course of this project, I have been personally negotiating some of my own identities and beliefs as I strive to answer my research questions.

This inquiry is also, in a way, about the organization I work for. What is the future of an organization founded by a white missionary in Asia at the height of white conservatives’ hegemonic influence in evangelicalism? In what ways do I work for an organization that reinforces oppressive structures of privilege and power, and can I simultaneously challenge and work within it? My closeness to the topic has made me particularly passionate about this project, and I hope that passion is expressed in these pages.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the current issues and debates within evangelicalism and more specifically, evangelicals’ present-day understandings, approaches to and conceptualizations of international development, it is important to examine the history of evangelicalism as an institution and the processes of reproduction and change that have occurred within it. To do this, I employ the theoretical frame of historical institutionalism, examining the ways in which evangelicalism has experienced both path dependence and gradual change. I argue that points of tension and contradiction within evangelicalism serve as spaces in which key agents have the opportunity to reform and reproduce the institution of evangelicalism. These tensions influence and shape the way evangelical Christians and evangelical organizations engage with international development, as many of these tensions exist at the intersection of evangelicalism and international development.

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2 I was employed by Compassion Canada before, during and after my research process and I continue to be employed at Compassion Canada as I write this thesis. However, this project is in no way funded by or affiliated with Compassion Canada.
The first section of this chapter begins with a general overview of historical institutionalism as a theoretical frame, addresses a key critique of historical institutionalism and considers a complementary institutionalist perspective. The next section examines the concept of path dependence and positive feedback, using ideas presented by Paul Pierson (2004) in his book *Politics in Time* to illuminate the ways evangelicalism exhibits path dependence. I examine evangelicalism’s authority structures, ideational institutions and one particular event in the 1970s during which evangelicalism’s positive feedback was particularly salient. The second half of this chapter examines institutional change. First, I highlight the classic historical institutionalist theory of critical junctures, before shifting focus to theories of gradual change, particularly as presented by James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen (2010) in the first chapter of their edited volume *Explaining Institutional Change*. I use this framework of gradual change to examine evangelicalism’s history, focusing on the tensions and contradictions within evangelicalism that have shaped and set up the context for the modern-day institution and actors, which later chapters of this thesis will examine. In this analysis of gradual change, I examine the slow and ambiguous emergence of evangelicalism as an institution, the ‘gaps’ produced in its interpretation of scripture and key debates, and theological ideas that emerged at the intersection of evangelicalism and international development in the late 20th century. Overall, what emerges is a picture of a path dependent institution that at the same time, exhibits key spaces of tension that open opportunity at various points in history for gradual institutional change.

**3.1 Historical Institutionalism as a Theoretical Frame**

Historical institutionalism is interested in the “construction, maintenance, and adaptation of institutions” (Sanders 2009, 4) and focuses on how the strategies and goals of actors are shaped and constrained by their institutional context (Thelen and Steinmo 1992). Historical
institutionalism examines the story, narrative or arc of an institution over time to understand the ways in which “institutions ... are the product of political conflict and choice, but which at the same time constrain and shape political strategies and behaviours” (Thelen and Steinmo 1992, 28). In other words, historical institutionalists are interested in examining how institutions both reinforce/reproduce and change/develop themselves over time. Moreover, historical institutionalism is interested in how the preferences of actors—specifically political actors, or any actor concerned with power—are shaped by institutions and how those actors and their preferences simultaneously shape institutions.

Ideas also feature prominently in historical institutionalism, and ideational institutions are seen to be as significant as formal institutional structures. Sanders (2009) pays particular attention to ideas, writing, “ideas are relational ... [and] serve as mobilizing forces for collective action by social groups that want to create or change institutions” (4). This is also voiced by Thelen and Steinmo (1992), who write, “factors such as conceptions of class, public philosophies, historical contexts and elite and public preferences intersect with institutional structures to produce particular policy outcomes” (27). In short, ideas interact with institutions to create tangible implications for actors, in a web of intersections that illuminate the dynamic processes that factor into mechanisms of institutional reproduction and change.

I find historical institutionalism particularly useful for the analysis of this thesis for two key reasons. First, an examination of path dependence and positive feedback in evangelicalism is useful for illuminating the ways enduring power structures operate in evangelicalism and constrain possibilities for change. Second, I find theories of gradual institutional change, as theorized by Mahoney and Thelen (2010), or what Pierson (2004) prefers to call institutional development or slow-moving processes, incredibly useful in examining the history of and
possibility for change and transformation within evangelicalism. Historical institutionalism allows for an examination of long-term processes and “the ways in which institutional arrangements that are in place for an extended period can structure the conditions for their own revision” (Pierson 2004, 134). This is useful in the context of evangelicalism because change and transformation in evangelicalism has been slow-moving throughout history, as will be further illuminated throughout this chapter. Thus, the present-day openings for and constraints surrounding change in evangelicalism must be examined in the context of evangelicalism’s larger historical narrative.

3.1.1 Critiques and Other Institutionalist Perspectives

The approach of this thesis directly addresses a central critique of historical institutionalism, which is that it focuses too heavily on institutional stability, at the expense of examining and explaining institutional change. Pierson (2004) directly addresses this critique, which is why he focuses on slow-moving processes, writing, “what may seem like a relatively rapid process of reform is in fact only the final stage of a process that has in fact been underway for an extended period” (141). Koning (2016) further counters this critique, writing that institutional theories have actually become the most relevant in explaining institutional change: “The critique that institutionalism paints to static a picture of reality has become outdated. One could even argue today that institutionalism is the most promising theoretical approach to explain both stability and change” (659). The analysis of this thesis is an examination of gradual change within a path dependent institution; thus, historical institutionalism’s ability to highlight gradual change makes it a useful and constructive theoretical frame for this analysis.

It is also important to incorporate other institutional perspectives into one’s analysis, following Hall’s (2010) argument that “the greatest advances will be made by those willing to
borrow concepts and formulations from multiple schools of thought” (220). For example, Hall (2010) suggests focusing on the similarities between sociological and historical perspectives on institutionalism can be just as robust as focusing on their distinctives (220). In the context of this analysis, sociological perspectives on institutionalism provide useful tools for a study of evangelicalism’s relationship with development. First, Hall (2010) writes that sociological perspectives “tend to posit a world replete with multiple layers of institutions” (217), which is particularly useful when studying the intersection of two large and complex institutions—evangelicalism and development. Understanding how the layering of these two milieus—and others—in the lives of evangelical development staff will be valuable in considering their approaches and understandings. Moreover, Hall (2010) writes that sociological perspectives reinforce and even stress “the intrinsic ambiguity of institutions” (216), which is a key aspect in this study of contradictions within evangelicalism. Both sociological and historical institutionalism see norms within institutions as continually subject to interpretation and reinterpretation and examine how actors “take advantage of [institutions’] contradictory potential” (Hall 2010, 217). Evidently, the similarities between these two perspectives provide useful reinforcement for the analysis.

Overall, historical institutionalism provides a robust frame for the study of evangelicalism’s role in international development. It offers strong theoretical frameworks to explain both evangelicalism’s resistance to change and its potential for change in contradictory or ambiguous spaces.

### 3.2 Positive Feedback and Path Dependence

Paul Pierson’s book *Politics in Time* (2004) is a frequently cited work among historical institutionalists. The opening chapters provide a useful overview of positive feedback and path
dependence. Pierson (2004) argues that the timing and sequence of events matter in the formation and reproduction of institutions. In the broadest sense of his argument, “history matters” (Pierson 2004, 2). More specifically, the order of history matters as “the costs of switching to some previously plausible alternative rise [over time]” (Pierson 2004, 21). Pierson (2004) presents two helpful analogies to illustrate the idea of positive feedback and path dependence from the perspective of historical institutionalism. First, Pierson (2004) employs the analogy of the Polya urn, in which one red and one blue ball are in an urn. One ball is picked at random, and then is placed back in the urn along with an additional ball of the same colour. This process is repeated over and over, until the urn is full. Of course, the earlier selections have much greater effect on the final composition of the urn than later selections, or events. This analogy highlights how large consequences can result from seemingly ‘small’ events and how particular courses, once introduced, can be very difficult to reverse (Pierson 2004, 18-19). Another simpler analogy states that when one is climbing a tree, “the branch on which a climber begins is the one she tends to follow” (Levi 1997, 28, as cited in Pierson 2004, 20). In short, positive feedback and path dependence is the idea that “each step in a particular direction makes it more difficult to reverse course” (Pierson 2004, 21). Things like high start-up costs, high exit costs and cognitive bias for confirming information are all factors that contribute to positive feedback.

Pierson (2004) goes on to outline four conditions that can make path dependence and positive feedback processes particularly salient, arguing that these conditions are all characteristic of the realm of politics (as opposed to economics). These conditions are:

1. the central role of collective action,
2. the high density of institutions,
3. the possibilities for using political authority to enhance asymmetries of power,
4. intrinsic complexity and opacity (Pierson 2004, 30).

Considering the degree to which these conditions are present in evangelicalism will be useful in examining and explaining path dependence and positive feedback within the institution of evangelicalism.

3.2.1 Path Dependency in Evangelicalism

First, evangelicalism is certainly dense, complex and opaque in many ways. Evangelicalism is arguably not as dense as the Roman Catholic Church, for example, since it does not have a Pope and Vatican as a source of ultimate authority. However, it is still “based on authority rather than exchange”, which is how Pierson (2004) describes “dense” institutions (34). Evangelicalism relies heavily on soft charismatic power and leadership, while also incorporating formal institutional structures and organizations such as churches, denominations, seminaries, parachurch organizations and NGOs, media and publishing houses and networks. These organizations densely structure evangelical Christians’ lives, powerfully influencing things like how they spend their time and money. When it comes to ideational institutions in evangelicalism, while ideas are always powerful, when those ideas are about God or a higher power (theology), there can be particular salient quality or density to that power. There is also a certain level of complexity and opacity to theology, religion and spirituality, and evangelicalism certainly fits Pierson’s (2004) description of complex and opaque institutions as “lack[ing] anything like the measuring rod of price” (Pierson 2004, 38) and having “diffuse links between actions and outcomes” (Pierson 2004, 38). In religious contexts, “individual behaviour [is pushed] onto paths that are hard to reverse” (Pierson 2004, 35) due to the unique power of theological ideas, and “confirming information tends to be incorporated, while disconfirming information is filtered
out” (Pierson 2004, 39). Overall, the religiosity of evangelicalism makes it a particularly dense, complex and opaque institution, leading to significant path dependence.

Second, and of particular interest to an inquiry into evangelicalism, is the third condition in Pierson’s (2004) list, power asymmetries, and the way they “are often hidden from view” (37). Pierson (2004) argues that “where power is most unequal, it often does not need to be employed openly ... [meaning] positive feedback over time may simultaneously increase asymmetries of power and, paradoxically, render power relations less visible” (Pierson 2004, 37). In the context of evangelicalism, these power asymmetries are perhaps most evident in white supremacy’s hegemonic influence over the institution, a topic that has gained much relevance since the 2016 U.S. elections. Rah and VanderPol (2016) write that today, “the assumption of a white-dominated Evangelicalism remains entrenched” (157). They put forward multiple examples of how Black and Latin American evangelicals’ voices have been silenced and marginalized by white supremacy within evangelicalism in multiple contexts, including in local church contexts and international evangelical networks (Rah and VanderPol 2016). Another example of hidden power asymmetries within evangelicalism can be found in the authority given to scripture. Evangelicalism’s desire “to go directly ‘back to the Bible’ for its theology and practice” can often hide the ways in which tradition and culture (unconsciously) shape attitudes, behaviours and values (Rah and VanderPol 2016, 6). When the Bible is seen and held as objective, unquestionable truth, the way the interpretation and implementation of scripture are influenced by culture and context is hidden. Evidently, power and power asymmetries are crucial factors in the study of evangelicalism, and specifically its path dependence, and will therefore feature prominently in this analysis.
A notable moment in evangelical history that illustrates evangelicalism’s path dependence was a conference that was held in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974, the International Congress on World Evangelization. This conference was initiated by one of evangelicalism’s most prominent figures, Billy Graham, and “was to be Evangelicalism’s largest and most representative post-World War II missions conference” (Rah and VanderPol 2016, 169). The conference resulted in the drafting of the Lausanne Covenant, “the most widely accepted contemporary affirmation of evangelical belief” (Myers 2011, 48), and the emergence of the Lausanne Movement, an evangelical missions network that still exists today.

Evangelicalism’s path dependence was put on display at this conference through the way the voices of evangelicals from the Global South were treated. As the Lausanne Covenant was drafted, evangelicals from the Global South—most prominently, two men named René Padilla and Samuel Escobar—lobbied for the importance of social action and social justice to be included in the statement (Myers 2011, 48; Rah and VanderPol 2016, 169-176). Padilla put forward “a prophetic challenge to the Evangelical missionary establishment”, an “all-encompassing portrait of mission” and “an alternative vision not just of mission strategy but of the gospel itself” (Rah and VanderPol 2016, 171-173), while Escobar “urged privileged Evangelicals to ‘express concern for justice’” (Rah and VanderPol 2016, 174). Padilla and Escobar were met with division and scathing opposition, particularly from North American conservatives. The eventual inclusion of their views in the Covenant only resulted after a prominent white evangelical leader by the name of John Stott “skillfully mediated between North American conservatives and progressives from the Global South” (Rah and VanderPol 2016, 175). Even so, Rah and VanderPol (2016) write that “even Stott could not heal the divisions that had emerged” (175).
I argue that the perspectives of Padilla and Escobar were met with such powerful resistance because of their late emergence. As Pierson (2004) argues, “when an event occurs may be crucial. Because early parts of a sequence matter much more than later parts, an event that happens ‘too late’ may have no effect, although it might have been of great consequence if the timing had been different” (44). There is certainly a sense of ‘too late’ in this case, as the Lausanne conference came after nearly half a century of the influence of what scholars call fundamentalism’s ‘Great Reversal’, which emerged in the 1920s and marked fundamentalists’ complete departure from social action (Rah and VanderPol 2016, 10). Throughout much of the 20th century, fundamentalists were decidedly opposed to including social action in their Christian mission, arguing that evangelism was the single most important job of the Church (Myers 2011, 48). Rah and VanderPol (2016) write that “the Great Reversal had, and continues to have, significant staying power within the kaleidoscope of Evangelicalism” (176). Also in line with Pierson (2004), it is evident the hidden power asymmetries within evangelicalism that privilege white and Western voices over Latinx voices such as Padilla and Escobar’s led to path dependent outcomes and positive feedback at the 1974 Lausanne conference.

Evangelicalism’s history reveals a highly path dependent institution. Evangelicalism’s ideational institutions and the hidden (white supremacist) power structures that uphold them endure unquestioned. Pierson’s (2004) ideas surrounding power asymmetries illuminates the complementary idea posed by Thelen and Steinmo (1992): “Conflicts over institutions lay bare interests and power relations” (27). These arguments lead nicely into the following sections’ examination of conflict and contradiction within institutions and ultimately, institutional change.
3.3 Institutional Change: Critical Junctures

The study of critical junctures is a classic historical institutionalist theory of institutional change. Critical junctures are “brief phases of institutional flux”, usually triggered by an external crisis in which there is an opportunity for “more dramatic change” (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 341). While during times of steadiness, the ideas and assumptions within an institution are taken for granted, times of crisis see the emergence of new ideas and adherents to those ideas (Sanders 2009, 3). Critical junctures allow actors more agency than normal circumstances, enabling them to more easily shape—and change—the institution to their will for a short period of “relative structural indeterminism” (Mahoney 2003, as cited in Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 347). Historical institutionalists are interested in studying actors’ decision making in times of uncertainty, and “emphasize the lasting impact of choices made during those critical junctures in history” (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 341).

There are two notable points regarding critical junctures. First, critical junctures are a key part of path dependence as presented by Pierson (2004). Critical junctures set institutions on fixed paths that are prone to positive feedback. They are moments when there are fewer balls in the Polya urn, for example, or a moment when a tree climber has a choice between several branches. Second, critical junctures are not just a theory of change, but can also contribute to positive feedback. As Capoccia and Kelemen (2007) write, “re-equilibrium is not excluded … hence change is not a necessary element of a critical juncture” (352). While critical junctures provide the opportunity for change, they do not necessarily guarantee change, and can easily be part of a positive feedback loop, rather than a new path dependent sequence of events.
3.3.1 Critical Junctures in Evangelical History?

When considering critical junctures in the context of evangelicalism, there are not many strong candidates. Certainly, the Protestant reformation is a critical juncture in the history of Christianity and the Church, but not in the history of evangelicalism more specifically. Even the emergence of evangelicalism itself cannot be classified as a critical juncture, as the timing of its emergence is widely debated. Although sixteenth-century reformers did refer to themselves as ‘evangelical’ (from the Greek word evangelion, meaning ‘gospel’) to emphasize their commitment to the gospel message (Brekus, as cited in Kidd 2018), this can hardly be attributed to the emergence of the institution of evangelicalism. Rah and VanderPol (2016) write that evangelicalism “is more like a movement or a spirituality that has ebbed and flowed through many different Protestant churches and denominations since the Reformation” (7), showing that an exact moment of emergence is unclear.

‘The Great Reversal’ of the 1920s is the closest evangelicalism comes to experiencing a ‘critical juncture’, as it led to the emergence of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in the United States in the 1940s. The NAE was formed as a distinct departure from fundamentalism by younger Christian leaders who were concerned by fundamentalists’ harshness. The NAE would also inspire the formation of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (The EFC). Rah and VanderPol (2016) argue that this was the birth of Evangelicalism with a capital E (13), in the sense of increasingly formalized evangelical organizations, networks and structures. However, they also describe it as a “slow divorce”, writing that the NAE was more of a “wing of fundamentalism until at least the late 1950s” (13). Slow-moving processes and gradual change have been more prominent throughout evangelicalism’s origins and history.
Thus, a theory of gradual change, rather than the theory of critical junctures, is more applicable for this analysis.

3.4 Institutional Change (or Development): Gradual Change and Slow-Moving Processes

After explaining path dependence, Pierson (2004) puts forward the possibility of what he calls *institutional development* and *slow-moving processes* “where meaningful change in the dependent variable occurs only over the long run” (90). Pierson (2004) writes that “a long, slow erosion of the preconditions for institutional reproduction may be a crucial factor in generating institutional change” (141). In other words, change is possible over time even in path dependent institutions, though change often happens at a much slower rate. Pierson (2004) stresses the importance of considering “broad, structural features”, stating that “understanding the preconditions for particular types of institutional change requires attentiveness not only to the pressures for reform but also to the character and extent of resistance to such pressures” (141). Pierson (2004) further argues that “change and stability are two sides of the same coin” (141-142). In other words, in examining gradual institutional change or institutional development, it is important to continue to consider how the institution’s path dependence constrains change, and how it is being eroded to allow for change. Although this thesis illuminates gradual institutional change in evangelicalism, these opportunities for change should not be overstated or removed from the context of evangelicalism’s path dependence. The opportunities for change presented in this thesis exist within the context of a path dependent institution, and the extent of the “long, slow erosion” (Pierson 2004, 141) of this path dependence is an important factor in how salient these opportunities for change are.

Mahoney and Thelen (2010) posit a theory of gradual institutional change in the first chapter of their edited volume *Explaining Institutional Change*. While not dismissing critical
juncture theory, Mahoney and Thelen (2010) argue, similarly to Pierson (2004), that institutions “also evolve and shift in more subtle ways over time” (2). Their theory of institutional change includes forces of change internal to the institution, rather than just external shocks and crises typical of critical junctures. They ultimately point to ambiguity in institutions as providing opportunity for actors to spark gradual change, writing:

We see ambiguity as a more permanent feature [of institutions], even where rules are formalized. Actors with divergent interests will contest the openings this ambiguity provides because matters of interpretation and implementation can have profound consequences for ... substantive outcomes. (Mahoney and Thelen 2010, 11)

They argue that the ‘gaps’ or ‘soft spots’ between formal rules and how they happen in practice are “exactly the space[s] in which contests over—and at the same time within—-institutions take place” (Mahoney and Thelen 2010, 14). This posits an interesting lens on contradiction as a key space for institutional (re)formation. Friedland and Alford, as cited by Thelen and Steinmo (1992) similarly suggest that “these institutions are potentially contradictory. ... Individuals and organizations transform the institutional relations of society by exploiting these contradictions” (9). As will be seen, the idea of contradiction is particularly interesting in the context of evangelicalism, given the wide variety of debates, theology and practice within it.

A preliminary example of these ‘soft spots’ of contradictions within evangelicalism is found in evangelicalism’s emphasis on the infallibility and ultimate authority of scripture. *Sola Scriptura*, or versions of it, remains one of the most widely held evangelical doctrines. Evangelicals of the mid-20th century were popularly known as “true Bible-believing Americans” (Rah and VanderPol 2016, 11). Yet scripture and its interpretation are a source of contradiction and ambiguity that provide opportunity for exploitation towards the cause of gradual change (Mahoney and Thelen 2010). For example, in his book *Generous Justice*, Timothy Keller (2010) points out one such contradiction in scripture, where we read that “there will always be poor
people in the land” (Deuteronomy 15:11)—echoed by Jesus’ statement that “the poor will always be with you” in Mark 14:7 and Matthew 26:11—almost right beside the verse that states “there should be no poor among you” (Deuteronomy 15:4) (25). How can ‘true Bible-believing’ Christians reconcile this? Keller (2010) goes on to exploit some of the ambiguities in how scripture is traditionally interpreted to speak to the classic evangelical debate between evangelism and social action. Keller (2010) promotes an integration or balance of the two sides, writing: “Doing justice necessitates striking a series of balances” (146). He spends the majority of the book urging readers to shun the dichotomies between private morality and social justice, evangelism and good works, word and deed. He posits that in the Sermon on the Mount found in the Gospel of Matthew, “Jesus weaves into a whole cloth what we would today call private morality and social justice” (Keller 2010, 54), emphasizing that both Jesus and Old Testament prophets do “not see two categories of morality” (Keller 2010, 55). Keller (2010) ultimately argues that evangelism and social justice “should exist in an asymmetrical, inseparable relationship” (139). He tells Christians: “God’s concern for justice permeated every part of Israel’s life. It should also permeate our lives” (Keller 2010, 40). The book Generous Justice has become important to actors within evangelicalism who desire to see social justice more meaningfully incorporated into evangelical theology and practice, and the way Keller (2010) leans into scripture’s ‘soft spots’ is powerful and impactful in this pursuit of gradual change.

Mahoney and Thelen (2010) go on to present a robust matrix outlining the various conditions, types and actors related to institutional change. Their entire framework is outside of the scope of this literature review, but select ideas are relevant to this study of evangelicalism. First, Mahoney and Thelen (2010) present four types of institutional change:

1. displacement: replace existing rules with new ones;
2. layering: introduce new rules on top of existing rules;
3. drift: shifts in the external environment lead to a change in the impact of existing rules;
4. conversion: the strategic redeployment of existing rules leads to a change in the enactment of those rules (15-16).

Mahoney and Thelen (2010) then outline how each of these types of change are associated with a particular kind of actor:

1. *insurrectionaries* directly mobilize against institutions in order to achieve displacement (23-24);
2. *parasitic symbionts* rely on the preservation of the institution, yet act in ways that contradict its ‘spirit’ or purpose, often resulting in drift (for example, bootleggers during prohibition) (24);
3. *subversives* seek to displace, not by breaking the rules but by working within the system, which most often results in layering (25);
4. *opportunists* are ambiguous in their preferences and as their name suggests, seek change when it is easy, often resulting in conversion (opportunists exploit ambiguities to redeploy existing rules “in ways unanticipated by their designers”) (27).

Mahoney and Thelen’s (2010) theory of gradual institutional change suggest subtle ways different types of actors can slowly trigger different types of change. For example, the slow, gradual change exhibited by the NAE as outlined in the previous section is characteristic of Mahoney and Thelen’s (2010) ‘layering’. Rah and VanderPol (2016) argue that the NAE “merely added another faction to the dizzying array of conservative Protestantism” (12). The founders of the NAE can be seen as *subversives* (Mahoney and Thelen 2010) who continued to
follow fundamentalism’s rules, while layering new ideas on top of fundamentalism (hence looking more like a wing of fundamentalism than its own distinct movement for nearly 20 years).

As we move forward in examining evangelicalism’s story further into the 20th century, this framework for understanding gradual institutional change continues to be particularly salient, as it illuminates the subtle and slow change that is possible in institutions that are both path dependent and contradictory, of which evangelicalism is a prime example.

3.4.1 Gradual Change in Evangelicalism from the Late 20th Century to Present

Despite the event being indicative of evangelicalism’s path dependence, a return to the 1974 Lausanne conference (and its aftermath) provides opportunity to examine a moment where opportunity for gradual change also emerged. Though Padilla and Escobar were met with fierce opposition, they did, on the other hand, re-open and draw attention to the debate surrounding social action’s place in evangelicalism. They leaned into an ambiguous space within evangelicalism in pursuit of institutional change. This debate would serve as a ‘soft spot’ for actors to exploit. For many years since, this debate has provided space for a slow process of reforming evangelical theology to more meaningfully include social justice. Much of the resulting gradual change has occurred at the intersection of evangelicalism and international development. Notably, a 1982 gathering of the Lausanne Movement would eventually lead to evangelism and social action being acknowledged as two sides of the same coin (Slauenwhite 2018, 63). At this event, evangelical leaders recognized that both evangelism and social action work towards what would become an important concept in evangelical theology: transformation (Myers 2011, 48). Thus, starting in the late 20th century, significant efforts rooted in the evangelical church to engage in ‘transformational development’ and holistic mission have emerged (Myers 2011, 48). Rah and VanderPol (2016) describe several evangelical social justice
causes and movements that emerged throughout the mid and late 20th century—most of which closely followed along with the ongoing debates around evangelism and social action. Rah and VanderPol (2016) examine and critique the work of urban ministries like John Perkins’ Christian Community Development Association and global ministries like Compassion International’s child sponsorship model, World Vision’s community development work, and the relief and aid work of Samaritan’s Purse. They also examine the political advocacy work of evangelical groups such as Sojourners, whose political advocacy stands in opposition to that of conservative, neo-fundamental evangelicals who seem to dominate the modern view of evangelical engagement with politics.

The past few decades have also ignited a ‘catch-up’ of theological thinking in the evangelical church relating to development and social action. There is a growing realization, through authors such as Keller (2010), that “the Bible provides the very basis for justice” (xviii). This contemporary thinking among Christian development theologians sees original sin—in a collective rather than individual sense—as described in Genesis 3 as the cause of poverty and injustice. It goes beyond personal sin and redemption, and sees the effects of sin (and therefore of the gospel) as much farther-reaching than individual spirituality—their implications are cosmic in scope and affect the systems and structures of society as a whole. Corbett and Fikkert (2012), Myers (2011) and Slauenwhite (2018) argue that the Fall of humanity (as described in Genesis 3) resulted in humans’ relationships with God, self, others and creation/the environment

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3 I have chosen to reference these three specific authors based on personal proximity and popular prominence amongst the evangelical international development community. Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert’s (2012) book When Helping Hurts has become one of the most read and recommended books on evangelical involvement in international development and appears on nearly every reading list on this topic. Bryant Myers has published several books and articles on the topic of evangelical international development and more specifically, transformational development, and is viewed as a leading scholar on the topic. He teaches at Fuller Seminary in the United States and also has more than 30 years’ experience working with World Vision International. Finally, Barry Slauenwhite’s (2018) book, Strategic Compassion, capped his 36-year career in with Compassion International. As an organization, Compassion is a leader in evangelical international development.
to break, leading to the poverty and injustice we see in the world today. According to these authors’ theology, God’s response to the Fall—that is, the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, or the good news gospel—is also a response to poverty and injustice, with all of its holistic implications. Beyond this central and unifying idea, nuances exist in these authors’ thinking. Corbett and Fikkert (2012) focus on how mended relationships lead to a restored sense of self and thus, to meaningful work that leads to freedom from poverty. Slauenwhite (2018) focuses on transforming the lives of children through holistic development, which leads to breaking the generational cycle of poverty. Myers (2011) focuses on what he calls a “narrative theology of transformation” (55), in which he emphasizes the narrative of the Bible as the story of God restoring and reconciling humanity’s broken relationships—seen through Israel’s liberation from Egypt, the prophets’ promotion of justice, the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the mission of the Early Church. Myers (2011) goes on to argue that we are today in the middle of this continuing story of which we know the end, as seen in Revelation, the final book of the Bible. The point of this story, Myers (2011) argues, is restoration and reconciliation, which “must inform our understanding of transformational development” (82).

The development of these theologies is characteristic of Mahoney and Thelen’s (2010) conversion—the strategic redeploying of existing ‘rules’. These evangelical development thinkers and theologians are using the same scripture and understandings of what the gospel of Jesus Christ accomplishes to promote the idea that social action, poverty alleviation and international development should be a priority of the evangelical church. They leaned into these gaps between the ‘rules’ and their deployment, as well as into the debate that re-emerged in 1974 at the Lausanne conference, in order to promote gradual change. Today, I would argue the
evangelical church is much warmer to social action, with the vast majority of evangelical
churches involved in a form of international development work.

3.4.2 What Happens Next? Enduring Tensions in Evangelicalism

Given this dynamic historical narrative, what is the state of evangelicalism today? There
are, of course, still spaces of contradiction and ambiguity in the institution of evangelicalism.
Additionally, there is an ebb and flow of the ability to exploit these contradictions and
ambiguities. It is important one does not look for simple, linear processes when examining
gradual change. Attention needs to be paid to what Pierson (2004) calls “broad, structural
features [and] slow-moving processes” that though can promote change over time, also constrain
change (141). There is push and pull—tension within institutions intensifies and relaxes in
dynamic and uneven ways. A key question for present-day evangelicalism is whether it is
currently experiencing a critical juncture, with the rise of far-right evangelicalism in the wake of
the 2016 U.S. elections. Evidence to make an argument on either side of this question will not be
available for some time. This present moment has, however, opened up spaces of tension and
contradiction for many women, people of colour and other marginalized groups within
evangelicalism. What kinds of opportunities does this present, and in what ways is the agency of
women, people of colour and their allies still constrained by evangelicalism’s path dependence?

Rah and VanderPol (2016) spend the latter half of their book looking at movements of
racial reconciliation within evangelicalism, in which Black and Latinx theologians “voiced
disenchantment with white Christianity’s inadequate gospel” (140) and worked to call attention
to “the degree to which racism, materialism, and consumerism [has] infiltrated the church” (176).
Rah and VanderPol (2016) put forward a compelling picture of Evangelicalism as “not ... limited
to a theology of a select group of white, suburban intellectual elites” (185) but this, of course, is
not currently reflected in reality. In their examples, Black and Latinx voices ended up re-
marginalized, and racial reconciliation remains a contentious issue in the evangelical church
today. Discussions of racial reconciliation within evangelicalism have been key spaces in which
positive feedback has been particularly stark. Black churches were shut out of the early
evangelical movement (Rah and VanderPol 2016, 12) and non-white voices continue to be shut-
out of evangelicalism. As I have mentioned, Pierson’s (2004) condition of power asymmetries is
evidently at play here: “the allocation of ... authority to particular actors [in the case of
evangelicalism, white males] is a key source of positive feedback” (36). Unfortunately, this is
one of the most sinister conditions of positive feedback—as it continues over time, it only
becomes less visible (Pierson 2004, 37).

Given that the vast majority of leaders and employees of evangelical international
development organizations are white, and given the Church’s history of colonialism in the
Global South, I contend that issues of race, gender, power and privilege are important to examine
as evangelicals continue to engage with international development. Furthermore, historical
institutionalist theories of gradual change provide a unique (and hopeful) approach to examining
these spaces of tension. Though the historical narrative of the evangelical church does not
indicate room for radical and sudden transformation, a historical institutionalist perspective that
incorporates slow-moving processes of gradual institutional change does indicate that even in a
path dependent institution like evangelicalism, spaces of tension and contradiction within the
institution serve as opportunities for reform.

4 METHODOLOGY

The following section outlines the primary research I conducted in the summer and fall of
2019, while working for the Marketing department of Compassion Canada in the role of Writer
I was based in Toronto, Ontario, Canada during this time. I begin by describing the sample population, followed by an overview of my positionality as a researcher, and finally, I present my survey and interview process.

### 4.1 Sample Population

The sample population of my primary research was Canadian-based employees of evangelical international development organizations. Participants were invited to personally define and self-identify as *evangelical*.

Initially, as I endeavoured to study evangelical Christians’ attitudes and approaches towards international development, I considered a sample population of all Canadian evangelical Christians, or pastors of Canadian evangelical churches. However, after further consideration, I determined these sample populations would be too broad, relatively inaccessible and less engaged and informed on the issues I would be inquiring about. A sample population of employees of Canadian evangelical international development organizations better served the objectives of my research. They provided an intensive view of Canadian evangelicalism’s relationship with international development, as people who are leading Canadian evangelicals in their engagement with international development. They are people who are already thinking about evangelical international development and have a sense of the current issues and trends in the field. Overall, I chose to focus on this small subset of Canadian evangelicals in order to make the sample population more accessible while still being able to gain a wide view of Canadian evangelical perspectives on international development.

The sample population worked for a wide variety of organizations. All the organizations represented are engaged with development interventions in the Global South, such as child development programs, community development projects, anti-human trafficking programs, and
programs promoting education, climate justice and health. All of the represented organizations identify evangelical Christians as a significant, if not primary, part of their current and targeted donor and supporter base and identify as Christian in their public-facing information (such as on the ‘About’ page on their website).

4.2 Researcher Positionality

As I conducted this research, I was keenly aware that I could have been a participant in my own research. I am a Canadian-based employee of an evangelical international development organization. Many of my research participants are people who I do or have worked professionally with in the past. Though my research is not in any way funded by or affiliated with the organization I work for, the perspectives, approaches and culture of Compassion remain an integral part of my own personal experience and thinking.

Given this information, one may assume I am an ‘insider’ to my research field. While this is somewhat true, it is important to note that the insider/outsider binary is more of a continuum and “researchers can never be complete insiders or outsiders” (Kerr and Sturm 2019, 1145). Kerr and Sturm (2019) write about how a researcher’s various forms of capital, as theorized by Bourdieu (1984), including economic, social, cultural, physical and symbolic capital, can be entangled and complex, “at times affording access, authority, and opportunities while at other times being met with opposition, disinterest, or rendered ineffective” (1145). This is certainly true of my experience as an employee of an evangelical international development organization, which is complicated by my particular identities that both privilege and marginalize me in the evangelical milieu. I am a straight, anglophone, young woman of colour who grew up in the evangelical church, in the Global North as the daughter of Chinese-Filipino immigrants to Canada. As I briefly outlined in my introduction, these identities colour my experience with
evangelicalism in complex and entangled ways. Kerr and Sturm (2019) argue that “the goal of the qualitative researcher should not be to resolve this tension, but to find a way to work within it” (1137).

Further, it is important to note that I am a non-white researcher that primarily worked with white research participants. Eighty-one per cent of survey respondents identified themselves in some way as white (such as “Caucasian”, “European” or “Dutch Canadian”) and 90 per cent of interview participants were white. Sin (2007) writes about the “woeful lack of attention on how minority ethnic researchers negotiate ... disciplinary biases” created by Eurocentric hegemony, particularly when interviewing white respondents (478). Sin (2007) writes: “The power relations between researcher and researched can often be reversed even in the course of a single interview and this is complicated by racial/ethnic axes of differentiation and their associated sets of power differentials that are never constant” (479). In other words, the power dynamics at play between a researcher of colour and white participants are, similar to positionality, complex, entangled and in constant negotiation. For example, particularly because I was asking about the power dynamics of gender and race, some interviewees expressed “not wanting to say the wrong thing”. Underlying this sentiment is not wanting to say the ‘wrong’ thing to me, as a woman of colour.

With all this in mind, it was and continues to be important that I am aware of the biases I hold due to my personal identity and experiences, which are constantly in negotiation within myself and in relation to my research field. I continually make every effort to avoid inserting my own assumptions into the experiences my research participants shared with me. While my personal experiences certainly factor in and are important to my research and findings, my hope is they do not factor into the way I present the experiences of others, since, as Kerr and Sturm
(2019) indicate, as a researcher I can only ever possess “partial shared understandings and relationships with those in the field”, despite being a relative ‘insider’ (1145, emphasis added). This overall awareness of bias is important in any research, but particularly in this case, when I have first-hand lived experience in the domains my research participants were sharing about.

4.3 Survey and Interview Process

In late June and early July 2019, I sent a number of requests to colleagues and other contacts who work for Canadian-based evangelical international development organizations to fill out an online survey (administered through Google Forms) for this research project. This was “purposive sampling”, which Denscombe (2017) states “operates on the principle that we can get the best information through focusing on a relatively small number of instances deliberately selected on the basis of their known attributes” (41). A small portion of participants were also a result of snowball sampling (Denscombe 2017, 43), as I asked the initial sample I contacted to not only fill out the survey themselves, but also forward it to any of their own colleagues and contacts who would have relevant experience and insight. The survey questions and electronic informed consent form that all respondents completed are included in Appendix A.

Twenty-one individuals completed the survey between June 27, 2019 and November 26, 2019, though the majority of responses came in July 2019. Age and gender demographics about the survey respondents are included in Figure 1. Survey respondents represented six different Canadian evangelical international development organizations.

At the end of the survey, participants had the opportunity to indicate interest in completing an interview with me to share further insights into their survey responses and perspectives on my research questions. I conducted interviews with ten individuals (representing four organizations) between August 6, 2019 and October 21, 2019. All of these individuals had
Figure 1: Age and gender of survey respondents

Figure 2: Age and gender of interviewees

previously completed the online survey. A list of interviews conducted, along with a list of interview questions are included in Appendix B. Age and gender demographics about the interview participants are included in Figure 2. All interviewees completed an informed consent form, an example of which is included in Appendix C.
I am pleased with the diversity in age and gender that is represented in the research participants. I am disappointed with the lack of ethnic and racial diversity represented in the research participants, although I do think it is representative of the sample population more broadly. Overall, the research participants effectively represented the broad and diverse perspectives of the employees of Canadian-based evangelical international development organizations.

5 DATA AND FINDINGS

The following chapter is a summary of the data I collected through surveys and interviews. It includes the attitudes, insights and perspectives of participants on the work they do, evangelicalism and international development more broadly, the ways in which power and privilege operate in their field, and the extent to which power, privilege and critical development are discussed in and by their organizations. A discussion on the implications of the data to evangelicalism and the field of international development follows in Chapter Six.

5.1 What Is Evangelicalism?

I opened each interview with this question: What is evangelicalism? More specifically, how would the interviewee define it personally, and what do they associate with the term ‘evangelical’? Participants expressed major ambivalence to the term, despite 76 per cent of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, “I am an evangelical Christian,” and 86 per cent agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, “The organization I work for primarily targets evangelical Christians in its marketing and fundraising.” Moreover, about 83 per cent of participants stated they “always” or “often” read the Bible daily and attend church weekly. Many interviewees opened their response to this first question by mentioning this ambivalence, saying things like, “[this will be] a two-fold answer” (Interview #1), “it’s hard to
completely pin down ... hard to define” (Interview #3), “it has morphed over my life” (Interview #5), and “my initial reaction is I don’t like the question ... because the term has got so much ... baggage to it” (Interview #4). Others mentioned this ambivalence at other points in their response, using terms like, “a loaded word” (Interview #6 and Interview #9), “good and bad things” (Interview #7), and “a mixed bag” (Interview #8).

Most interviewees expressed that their complicated relationship with the terms *evangelical* and *evangelicalism* stems from the broad, changing and sometimes negative definitions and connotations associated with them. For example, Interviewee #1 said: “I feel like when you hear other people use the word ‘evangelical’, you want to confirm what it means.” Interviewee #4 stated that he believes it has become a “pejorative” term. Interviewee #9, who does not personally identify as evangelical, stated: “I guess my hesitancy to label myself an evangelical ... has to do with the time that we’re living in and some of the negative connotations that surround the label of ‘evangelical’.”

Many noted evangelicalism’s associations with (radical) conservatism, politically, morally and theologically:

“Generally speaking, I think of a certain more conservative set of beliefs. I know that’s not necessarily across the board—there’s definitely exceptions—but generally speaking I associate evangelicalism with certain moral standpoints on big hot button issues.” (Interviewee #3)

“A few decades ago, an evangelical would have been a born-again Christian. Today, it’s the far-right radical weird people that don’t agree with anybody in society, they’re non-inclusive, their viewpoints are out-dated, old-fashioned.” (Interviewee #4)

“It does associate some political identity to me. [Went on to speak about conservative evangelicals’ resistance to addressing climate change based on theological arguments.]” (Interviewee #6)

“Unfortunately, lately I think of right-wing politics and conservative issues—like politically conservative.” (Interviewee #8)
“I would now define ‘evangelical’ as a conservative understanding of biblical interpretation. ... It is probably aligned now more with fundamental conservative values and beliefs.” (Interviewee #10)

Despite this, most interviewees clarified that they themselves did not necessarily identify or agree with the far-right conservatism of many evangelicals, despite still identifying as evangelical, and offered their own personal definitions as alternatives to the conservative expressions of evangelicalism, which they saw as simpler and “purer” definitions. Interviewee #4 actually used the word ‘pure’, stating: “I personally would define [evangelicalism] in its purest form, from my perspective. An evangelical is someone who a) is a Christ-follower, b) believes the Bible to be the inerrant word of God, and c) tries to live the Bible in their daily life.”

Interviewee #5 stated that, in contrast to his earlier understandings of evangelicalism, he now believes it “has so much more to do with unity in ... our humanity. About not ever being separate from each other. And that when Christ says, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me,’ it’s that unification under one, loving—_incredibly_ loving—God. Evangelicalism is just an introduction to that, [and] living out that truth to those around you.”

Interviewee #8 referenced the Apostle’s Creed as a way to identify evangelicals. Interviewee #10 stated: “[I] would still consider myself evangelical in some of the basic beliefs, but I would place myself more on a progressive understanding.”

At the core, almost all respondents personally and more broadly defined evangelicalism as an “active” version of Christianity that values Christian witness in both word and deed. They mentioned the importance of the Bible and of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and focused heavily on actively living out one’s faith through telling others about Jesus _and_ showing them His love through tangible acts of service. They emphasized evangelicalism’s legacy of compassion, justice and social action. This focus was perhaps out of a perceived need amongst participants to compensate for a the more prominent conservative side of evangelicalism, which
they perceived as less focused on acts of justice and only focused on winning converts to 
Christianity (“[It’s about] the numbers ... how many people have you actually verbally told about 
God. It doesn’t actually count unless you’ve said the prayer with them.” (Interview #1)). Figure 3 
shows the majority of respondents associated an active faith as the duty of a Christian. When 
invited to expand on their views, many survey respondents wrote passionate responses:

“The Bible tells us to go out and make disciples and to treat others the way we want to be 
treated. If we are not responding in this way, then I do not believe we are fulfilling our 
Christian duty.” (Survey Response #3)

“The Bible tells us we should care for the poor. As a Christian I am also called to make 
disciples.” (Survey Response #13)

“We see over and over again in the scripture that Christians are called to help others, to 
be a good example and to share our faith (i.e. Matthew 25:34-40).” (Survey Response 
#16)

### Views on Evangelical Christian Duty (n = 21)

- Question 11: It is the duty or requirement of a Christian to explicitly share the gospel with people.
- Question 10: It is the duty or a requirement of a Christian to act and speak in ways that lead people to convert to Christianity.
- Question 9: It is the duty or a requirement of a Christian to help alleviate the poverty and suffering of people in countries other than their own.

![Figure 3: Survey respondents’ views on evangelical Christian duty](image)
Moreover, interviewees spoke at length about an active faith in their definitions of evangelicalism:

“What comes to mind personally for myself is that somebody is active in the Christian faith, witnessing who Christ is. ... For sure through words, but starting with modelling, being an example, building relationships and demonstrating Christ through that—just like Christ did with his disciples.” (Interview #1)

“[I think of] Christians who aren’t afraid to express their faith and are out in the world doing acts of justice.” (Interview #2)

“Christians who are very open and willing to sharing their faith, and they consider that a top priority. And they would be more likely to look to the Great Commission and different passages like that, just emphasize those in expecting all Christians to be very active in the way that they are talking about their faith or expressing their faith through service or however that might look. ... I think of ... the willingness and effort to share your faith.” (Interview #6)

Overall, research participants were ambivalent about the term evangelical, but most still identified as evangelical, were quick to provide definitions that they saw as ‘going back to the basics’ of evangelicalism and placed a strong emphasis on the association between evangelicalism and an active faith. Overall, their definitions did reflect the four points of the Bebbington quadrilateral: biblicism, crucicentrism, activism and conversionism.

5.2 What Is International Development?

Participants were similarly ambivalent about the term international development (“That’s almost in the same basket,” exclaimed Interviewee #4, after being asked to define ‘international development’ immediately after ‘evangelicalism’). They cited international development’s relationship with colonialism, dependency and white saviourism as key reasons for their ambivalence:

“Things are being done and not necessarily in a positive way. ... ‘We’—whoever ‘we’ is—going in to do something for other people.” (Interview #2)

“There are positive connotations but there are also negative connotations that go hand in hand with international development. I think that it can be done well, and it can be done poorly. ... At its very worst, ... there’s sort of that white saviour complex—this sense that
I know better, or that the way that my country does something is the best way of doing things, and so I’m just going to implement what we’ve done without any sort of knowledge or understanding of cultural complexities or religious complexities or any of those things. And I just think that can end in disaster—it can create dependency ... and at its very worst, it can make things worse. Again, international development is loaded!” (Interview #9)

“It really comes down to an attitudinal belief and that is, do we have a responsibility globally to take what we have in excess and share that with others and provide assistance—without being ... colonial or imperial and imposing Western culture and values.” (Interview #10)

Many participants made explicit links between faith / evangelicalism and international development, before being asked:

“From my perspective, international development is the outworking of loving my neighbour.” (Interview #4)

“Development is giving everyone equal opportunity to experience a full life, experience the love of God, of their families, their neighbours, of good work, respect, honour.” (Interview #5)

“I do find faith has a pretty important part of it.” (Interview #6)

“International development is really based upon generosity [and] seeing people experience ... the goodness of God.” (Interview #10)

Despite their ambivalence, like their loyalty to evangelicalism, participants expressed similar loyalty to international development. Every participant had a positive definition of development to contribute alongside their more critical definitions:

“In general, I would say ... I think it is a very positive and action-oriented thing. We’re all working together to create change.” (Interview #2)

“It is being concerned and aware of the realities of people around the world, and the way that people are living and working to promote justice and equity and allowing people to flourish worldwide.” (Interview #6)

“At its very best, development is listening and learning.” (Interview #9)

Interestingly, many participants also emphasized action as part of international development—“not just talking” (Interview #6). Interviewee #7 defined development as “practices to help others,” while Interviewee #1 defined it as “programs and physical things”. This is an interesting
parallel to participants’ emphasis on action in regard to evangelicalism, which we will further see in their thoughts on the relationship between evangelicalism and international development.

5.3 The Relationship between Evangelicalism and International Development?

When asked to describe the relationship between evangelicalism and international development, interview participants often brought up evangelicalism’s history of missionaries and missions, that is, to go to other countries to preach the gospel.

“I think of the evangelical Church being very active in terms of missions.” (Interview #1)

“When I add evangelical to international development, I’m picturing more missionaries. The ‘traditional missionary’—you know, the little old white man living wherever in Africa with his Bible (laughs).” (Interview #2)

“[Growing up in the evangelical church,] I saw a lot of missions being done, but it was like, this couple lives in India and they’re starting a school and sharing the gospel. It was very much sharing the gospel.” (Interview #3)

They also brought up evangelicalism’s legacy of compassion and justice work, bringing up evangelicals like William Wilberforce and Charles Finney (Interview #9) and stating that many hospitals and schools throughout history have been established by evangelicals (Interview #10). Interviewee #4 stated, “When you look back at history, the greatest impact in international development was done by evangelicals—Christ-followers.”

Most interviewees noted that evangelicals’ calling to love their neighbours and share God’s love with others made them particularly strong candidates to carry out effective and compassionate international development work—that to be a good evangelical and to be a good practitioner of development were actually quite similar lifestyles. Along these lines, many also cited evangelical faith as a good motivating factor to work and continue working in development (provides “lasting hope” (Interview #8)), despite it being quite difficult and not very lucrative.

“International development, in its purest form, is loving my neighbour [and] caring for those in need. Being an evangelical ought to be loving my neighbour [and] caring for those who are in need. The same outcome. ... Evangelicals are people who believe the
Bible and try to live it out. The Bible is very clear that we are put here on earth to care for one another and to care for the earth. That alone should motivate us to do international development.” (Interview #4)

“What is the reason for you being in development? You’re not here to make money. ... What is your motivation? What drives you? For some people, it’s just to ‘be a good person’, but I think for Christians, if they really believe God loves each person no matter where they’re from, ... then they would have a motivation to be involved in helping other people flourish.” (Interview #6)

“Part of God’s purpose for the Church ... is to perform holistic duty around the world. Holistic means: preach the good news, yes, but ... God also cares for the whole being of a person. So evangelicals are called to address the needs of the whole being—food, knowledge, emotional, spiritual, relationship-wise, and so on. The Church is always invited and called [into that]. International development just comes out of the mission of the Church.” (Interview #7)

“I think there’s a lot of tenacity and motivation behind Christian organizations that keeps them going and gives them hope. Our Christian identity is huge and our spiritual rhythms are huge for what motivates us and keeps us going in our work.” (Interview #8)

“When evangelicalism is paired with development, at its best it can be a beautiful outworking of Christ’s call to His followers—that we’re called to seek justice, we’re called to care for the poor and impoverished.” (Interview #9)

When asked about the effects of the relationship between evangelicalism and international development, participants were quick to identify the risk of proselytization, a ‘saviour complex’, and the risk of separating the spiritual from the physical:

“When I attach ‘evangelical’ to ‘international development’, it feels like it becomes more about sharing the gospel, not necessarily partnering or understanding the culture. It’s more like, we know what’s right and we’re gonna come in and tell you that and leave. I know that’s not always the case, but I do think of that.” (Interview #3)

“The evangelical camp ... has done itself a disfavour. They actually deserve some of the criticism that is thrown their way because they have used the concept of international development to proselytize.” (Interview #4)

“There’s so much opportunity for coercion, a lack of altruism, manipulation, having alternate plans or agendas. There’s such danger.” (Interview #5)

“It’s sometimes just seen as, ‘Ok they just need to become a Christian and then we can leave and head out of there.’ You sometimes get this almost split of the physical from the spiritual. ... You almost need to re-teach people, you know, there might actually be other ways of sharing the Good News.” (Interview #6)
“At its very worst, I think international development when combined with evangelism ... [has] that sense of, ‘I’m going to give you help, but what I really want is to save your soul,’ ... or at its very worst, ‘We’re not going to help you unless you convert and become a Christian.’ And that can be so dangerous.” (Interview #9)

“I think what happened is that we went in ... with this idea that we know what’s best and we didn’t stop and listen. We didn’t ask some questions of God’s already prevailing grace that may have already been experienced in some of these places.” (Interview #10)

While cognizant of the risks, most interview participants still saw sharing the gospel in a non-coercive and holistic way—through actions as well as words—as an important part of evangelical international development interventions. Interviewee #5 expressed it nicely like this:

No, [evangelicalism and international development] shouldn’t always be related. There is a time and place for development without any[thing] ... other than just economic development. ... Sometimes development is just for the sake of loving our neighbour, just straight up helping. [However,] I think completely separating the two forever and ever amen is also wrong. In the end, and maybe this is terrible to say, but otherwise, what’s the point? And that’s actually a legitimate question. If all of this is for a thing, then what [is that thing]? ... All of us are seeking out our identity as beloved children of God. And if there are things that are stopping people from knowing that, I think it’s my or anyone’s imperative who can enable that, to enable that. And so if development is a tool to enable one’s understanding of their status as a beloved child of God, then yes we should develop and we should make sure that we do it with the purpose of them knowing that and bringing hope and release and healing.”

Ultimately, participants saw faith-based, evangelical international development as something with a problematic history, but also as positive thing when done with humility and pure motivation to ‘love thy neighbour’. Most interviewees expressed a belief that evangelicalism and international development have natural affinity and integration points.

5.4 Colonial Legacies

It is important to specifically note that participants were highly aware of the specific colonial legacies of both evangelicalism and development. Interviewee #9 said, “We have to be really careful because there are a lot of subtleties and remnants of colonialism that we’ve accepted as normal but they’re not.” Participants were able to identify the dangers and effects of enduring coloniality and neo-colonialism in each of the fields separately, and in the two fields
being brought together. Interviewee #6 said, “You have to be really careful in how you present yourself and how you do development” and specifically gave the example of how Western-centric the process of applying for development grants can be. Many also admitted to wishing they knew more and had more opportunities to learn, saying things like, “I don’t know enough about it” (Interview #2) and “I don’t think we address it a lot” (Interview #3).

Many interviewees spoke about seeing colonial legacies in practices of evangelical churches in the Global South that have clear Western origins, such as three-point sermons, printed bulletins, Western hymns or worship songs, or churchgoers wearing suits despite living in tropical climates. They spoke of how colonial church planters did not “realize Christianity can exist apart from a Western context” (Interview #8), despite the fact that, as Interviewee #10 expressed, other cultures, traditions and spiritualities have rich understandings of God that Western Christian traditions could learn from.

All participants were clear in recognizing colonialism as destructive, devastating and evil, some even using the word “sin”:

“Colonialism, at its root, was entirely selfish. It was never, paint it up as they might, an intent to develop a nation or people. ... Colonialism is an incredibly good definition of sin. When we talk about our sinful nature, it’s just exposed in those stories. If ever anyone doubts that there is good and evil, they could just look at this history to see there is evil.” (Interview #5)

“We're doing a good job now of confessing it as sin, because that’s what it was.” (Interview #10)

5.5 Race, Gender, Power and Privilege

Moving the conversation towards race and gender in evangelicalism, it is first important to note, as I noted in the methodology chapter, that 90 per cent of interview participants were white. This is a finding in itself, and it became clear throughout the interview process that
conversations and action around racial justice (and gender equity) in the field of evangelical international development are only just starting.

Figure 4 shows a general awareness of race and gender as a factor in one’s work. However, awareness does not necessarily mean understanding or the ability to take meaningful action. Survey respondents were given the opportunity to expand on these statements, and white respondents often expressed uncertainty in engaging with conversations of race:

![Race and Gender in Evangelical International Development Work (n = 21)](chart.png)

**Figure 4: Survey respondents’ views of the effects of race and gender on their work**

“As a Caucasian person, I am sensitive that I am unaware of so much going on around me because I am sheltered and currently living in a majority.” (Survey Response #10)

“I answered ‘agree’ to the above statements because I know that I experience privilege and benefits of being a Caucasian male (though I wouldn’t claim to understand what this means for those that don’t have that same privilege).” (Survey Response #20, by Interviewee #5)

“I think as a white female, I definitely have a bend in the work I do. It is something I am and would like to become more aware of. I recognize that I come out of a place of privilege and realize I have a responsibility to educate myself even more on issues I do not quite understand.” (Survey Response #7, by Interviewee #3)
“As a white middle class male, I know that I possess a certain level of privilege that others who are not in my demographic do not. While I am becoming aware of how much I take my privilege for granted (I don’t even think about it much of the time), I realized (sic) that women, people of different sexual orientation and ethnicity are viewed differently than I am. ... There needs to be more awareness around the responsibilities that come with being in a place of power. Sadly, I don’t think that much of the Evangelical church in North America is aware of the privilege and power that they possess.” (Survey Response #6, by Interviewee #10)

Beyond these responses, there were also some responses that simply dismissed race and gender or took the ‘colour-blind’ approach to racial justice (“I ... do not believe gender, race or society should matter.” (Survey Response #3)). Finally, it is notable that respondents rarely used the terms “white”, “European-Canadian” or “[nationality]-Canadian” when asked for their racial/ethnic identity. Almost all white survey respondents used the word “Caucasian”, a term which has a severely racist history of which many people are unaware (Mukhopadhyay 2008). While this, of course, does not point to overt racism, it does suggest a lack of critical race education.

Focusing specifically on gender, many women indicated feeling implicit bias and microaggressions in the workplace. One female interviewee shared that she was passed over for projects that are in her job description by her male manager, for a less-qualified male colleague: “I felt disrespected and I feel like, Is it because I’m a woman?” She attributed it to perhaps the “conservative, Christian workplace” and identified it as an unconscious bias: “I think sometimes there are underlying gender discrepancies that maybe aren’t as equal as they could or should be. I think for the most part people don’t realize they are there.” Another female interviewee shared that she heard comments made about a female colleague going on maternity leave that she “really didn’t appreciate”, reflecting further by saying: “It made me think, Oh, I’m safe right now because I’m single. But as soon as I get married, it will be harder for me ... because I could potentially get pregnant.” Two women from different organizations said they noticed all the top
management of their department or organization are male. Finally, another female interviewee spoke about how she and her female colleagues work hard to encourage each other to speak up or take credit for work they did: “We’ve read books together about women in leadership [and learned that] women are more likely to attribute success to team effort, so we need to encourage each other and say, ‘We recognize team for sure, but you did that.’”

Interviewees did state that they believe change is happening, and expressed excitement over the changes:

“In the past, leadership was mostly men, but that is changing. Until a few years ago, it was an all-white, middle class staff. I think it is exciting that we are starting to get more perspectives. ... Usually the most heard voice is the white middle class / upper class male who are in leadership positions. I think our generation is changing that, but for the longest time that was the singular voice in international development organizations and conversations.” (Interview #1)

“[On a woman of colour stepping into leadership at a prominent Canadian evangelical international development organization]: I look at that and say, that is really cool.” (Interview #10)

There is indeed change happening. Two prominent Canadian evangelical international development organizations in Canada, Compassion Canada and International Justice Mission Canada, recently appointed women to the position of President and CEO / Executive Director, with the latter appointing a woman of colour. Several interviewees also expressed learning a lot from their colleagues of colour, who willingly shared their lived experiences and perspectives.

5.6 Are Organizations Equipping their Staff to Think Critically About Development?

The final question I asked interview participants had to do with whether or not their organizations equipped them with the tools to think critically about evangelicalism, development, colonialism, race, gender and power dynamics, or if they sought out that education on their own. I also asked them to what extent their organizations educated them about the development programs of their specific organization.
Most interviewees expressed receiving adequate education about their organizations’ specific programming, citing employee orientation programming, field visits, staff meetings and visitors from field offices as key opportunities to learn. They expressed wanting to know more about what other organizations do. Interviewee #1 put it as wanting to “understand the big picture [because] Jesus is a big picture kind of guy.”

In terms of understanding critical development issues, only staff from one organization (of the four organizations represented in the interview process) expressed having specific training from their organization on white privilege and implicit bias in hiring processes, and they stated that this only emerged recently (in the past two years) as part of a new strategic plan and global organizational restructuring. Staff from other organizations wanted more training. One interviewee expressed that critical development training for fundraising and marketing staff would be useful to help them communicate with more effectiveness and dignity. Another interviewee stated that she had her first conversation about colonialism at her workplace just the week prior to our conversation, and expressed wanting more professional development opportunities in the field of critical development:

“It would be cool to use our [staff gatherings] to talk about those kinds of things. But I feel like we use that time more for spiritual development, which is good too, but it would be cool to be learning more about the dynamics of international development. Or have the opportunities to take courses and be able to ask for that specifically. I think it would definitely be beneficial to the organization and to us as staff. I think I would be better [at my job] if I was more immersed in the world of international development.”

Another interviewee stated that she had started a master’s degree in missiology because of the questions her job had sparked and the lack of resources to address those questions in her workplace.

Overall, while organizations are great at educating their staff about the work their specific organizations do, there is a need for more education on the field of international development
more broadly and specifically on how to think critically about development and act meaningfully on issues like racial justice and gender equity.

6 DISCUSSION

Much of evangelicalism’s history has been marked by gradual change, as outlined in Chapter Three. Despite enduring path dependence, I argue that the conditions are present within evangelicalism for continuing and meaningful gradual change towards more progressive ideas—particularly that make room of women and people of colour. Evangelicalism’s relationship with international development provides particularly salient space for the emergence and promotion of this change, due to the contradictions and ambiguities present in this space. These tensions affect the way evangelical actors interact with international development in order to negotiate their claims on evangelical identity and reform the institutional norms of evangelicalism.

The first section of this chapter examines the enduring path dependence in evangelicalism that is evident in research participants’ responses. The second section outlines the contradictions and ambiguities that emerged in the data. The third section positions the emerging opportunities for and agents of change in the context of Mahoney and Thelen’s (2010) framework of gradual institutional change, arguing that, though evangelicalism’s path dependence and structural forces must not be overlooked, subversive change agents do have opportunity to exploit tension in evangelicalism to promote layering and conversion. Finally, the chapter concludes by presenting opportunities and recommendations for the future.

6.1 Enduring Path Dependence

Path dependence in evangelicalism is quite evident in research participants’ responses. First, the density of evangelicalism and the way individual behaviour is influenced by evangelicalism (Pierson 2004, 30) is clear in the way research participants cited their faith as the
motivation behind their involvement in international development. For example, Survey Response #3 represents the sentiments of almost all respondents: “The Bible tells us to go out and make disciples and to treat others the way we want to be treated. If we are not responding in this way, then I do not believe we are fulfilling our Christian duty.” The majority of research participants saw evangelism and social action as important parts of their lives as evangelical Christians, citing scripture to back this up. While they were willing to question the methods, the mission remains, and the ambiguity discussed in the next section should not be overstated, as loyalty to the evangelical institution endures.

Moreover, while gender and racial power dynamics are a key space of contradiction that will be discussed later in this chapter, these power asymmetries are also hidden in a way that Pierson (2004) argues is a source of positive feedback in favour of those in power. Pierson (2004) writes that “positive feedback over time may simultaneously increase asymmetries of power and, paradoxically, render power relations less visible” (Pierson 2004, 37). This process is certainly evident in relation to conversations of gender equity and racial justice within evangelicalism as described by research participants. There remains unawareness of racial and gender inequity within evangelical international development organizations. Beyond this, where people are aware of it, they feel underequipped to address it unless there is specific and formal training from their organization to do so, which is only just starting to emerge in evangelical international development organizations recently and in a minority of organizations. This research sample shows there are enduring hegemonies of white supremacy and patriarchy within evangelical international development organizations—positive feedback loops that in turn reinforce these institutional norms of whiteness and patriarchy. However, along with other spaces of contradiction, conversations around gender equity and racial justice are also slowly
becoming spaces where subversive actors are able to spark gradual change within evangelicalism. The following section outlines some of these spaces of contradiction and ambiguity.

### 6.2 Contradiction and Ambiguity

Ambiguity is an important factor in gradual change. Recall Mahoney and Thelen’s (2010) argument that “actors with divergent interests will contest the openings ... ambiguity provides because matters of interpretation and implementation can have profound consequences for ... substantive outcomes” (11). Therefore, in order to examine the possibility for gradual change within evangelicalism, it is important to find the spaces of ambiguity and contradiction.

Ambiguity is immediately evident in evangelicalism—even in attempts by evangelicals themselves to define the term. Interviewee #8’s comment that when he thinks of ‘evangelicalism’, he thinks “of a mixed bag. ... of right-wing politics ... but also of me, because I am an evangelical Christian” demonstrates ambiguity and contradiction—he identifies with an institution that he associates with right-wing politics, despite not associating with right-wing politics himself. There is ambiguity over what evangelicalism is, and who gets to ‘claim’ the evangelical identity—is it progressive or conservative, or can both identities simultaneously stake claim to evangelicalism? Interviewees’ desire to give ‘two-fold’ definitions immediately points to tension—between what they personally believe evangelicalism to be and how it is perceived—a ‘gap’, if you will, between the institutionalized rules or norms of evangelicalism and how they are lived out by people who consider themselves evangelicals.

There is also ambiguity within international development, with one interviewee calling it “a delicate balance” (Interview #2). When thinking then, about the relationship between international development and evangelicalism, there is even more ambiguity, tension and
contradiction. Coming out of the classic evangelical debate of evangelism versus social action as outlined in Chapter Three, the staff of evangelical international development organizations are today still trying to hold this tension in balance. They are extremely wary of the dangers of proselytization and coercion, particularly in contexts of enduring coloniality. Yet, as the previous section on path dependence indicates, they remain committed to sharing their faith and to evangelical values of loving one’s neighbour, conceptualizing development as giving others the opportunity to experience the love and goodness of God. This is reminiscent of Keller’s (2010) assertion that “doing justice necessitates striking a series of balances” (146). This is certainly one of those balances that again, exhibits a ‘gap’ or a ‘soft spot’ between formalized rules, institutional norms and what happens in practice. The formalized institutional ‘rules’, for evangelicals, come from scripture. For example, many research participants cited The Great Commission found in Matthew 28:16-20: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you,” and The Great Commandment found in Mark 12:30-31: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself.” Then there are the enduring institutional norms of missions, with several interviewees thinking of missionaries when presented with the idea of evangelical international development. And finally, we see the negotiation, in practice, of the fear of proselytization versus the desire to share the gospel and love of Christ. Evidently, the tension between evangelism and social action is still an ambiguous ‘soft spot’ that exists at the intersection of evangelicalism and international development.

Finally, explicit contradiction exists in the fact that within organizations that are committed to pursuing justice and showing compassion around the world, white privilege and
patriarchy endures. One interviewee, who holds a leadership position in his organization, stated that “it is just the very nature of [our organization] being justice-oriented, that any sniff of racial or gender injustice is called out pretty quick”, while another white male leader stated that “it would be fair for me to say, and by fair I think there’s evidence, that in [our organization], we are gender neutral”. However, while strides are being made, as evidenced by, for example, women being appointed to top leadership positions at Canadian evangelical organizations in the past two years, it is clear based on the experiences shared by female research participants that women are still struggling with implicit bias, unintentional discrimination and microaggressions. Moreover, these organizations are still struggling with the representation of people of colour, let alone promoting conversation and action around racial justice. Given that many of these organizations target women in their marketing and serve women and people of colour in their international programs, the relative deficiency of their staff’s knowledge base and capacity to address issues of gender inequity and racial injustice is a space of direct contradiction and tension.

6.3 Gradual Change: The Subversives of Evangelicalism

Of the four types of change agents presented by Mahoney and Thelen (2010)—insurrectionaries, parasitic symbionts, subversives and opportunists—the majority of research participants showed characteristics of subversives who are enacting layering and conversion, two of the types of institutional change also presented by Mahoney and Thelen (2010). Of subversives, Mahoney and Thelen (2010) write:

Subversives are actors who seek to displace an institution, but in pursuing this goal they do not ... break the rules of the institution. They instead [pursue] institutional change by following institutional expectations and working within the system. From the outside, they may even appear to be supporters of the institutions. ... [T]hey may encourage institutional changes by promoting new rules on the edges of old ones. In this sense, subversives [are] associated with ... layering, in which new institutional elements are grafted onto old ones. ... [T]hey may also encourage institutional conversion. Either way,
subversion brings change as developments on the periphery make their way to the center. (25-26)

Research participants expressed loyalty to evangelicalism, international development and the field of evangelical international development specifically, despite expressing a desire and need for change. This leads to layering—adding to the institution to which you remain loyal. Mahoney and Thelen (2010) write that “layering does not introduce wholly new institutions or rules, but rather involves amendments, revisions, or additions to existing ones” (16). Mahoney and Thelen (2010) further qualify that “layering can ... bring substantial change if amendments alter the logic of the institution of compromise the stable reproduction of the original ‘core’” (17). An example of this would be the addition of social action to balance out evangelism. As Interviewee #7 said, “preach the good news, but God also cares for the whole being of a person.” Despite their skepticism over coercion and proselytization, research participants were not willing to abandon evangelism within the practice of international development. Rather, they add social action and preaching the gospel *through actions* to their practice of evangelical international development in order to achieve a shift or change towards a less coercive and less colonial version of evangelicalism.

Moreover, subversives can also spark conversion, which “occurs when rules remain formally the same but are interpreted and enacted in new ways. ... [T]he gap is produced by actors who actively exploit the inherent ambiguities of the institutions” (Mahoney and Thelen 2010, 17). ‘Progressives’ within evangelicalism are often accused of having a lack of respect for scripture. However, it is clear that research participants, even the more ‘progressive’ among them, continued to hold scripture in high regard, quoting it and using it to support their approaches to development. For example, Interviewee #10, when speaking about incorporating non-Western culture and spirituality into Christianity, made sure to note that he sees these
practices in scripture, too. As already mentioned, research participants often cited The Great Commission and The Great Commandment from scripture, specifically the words of Jesus. This is a ‘redeployment’ of scripture to include more progressive and less coercive approaches to evangelical international development. The scriptures, of course, remain the same and remain in high regard, but they are being “interpreted and enacted in new ways” (Mahoney and Thelen 2010, 17).

Mahoney and Thelen (2010) also write that “in some cases even those who are disadvantaged by an institution can get traction out of conversion strategies” (18), which is interesting to consider in the space of racial justice and gender equity. Women, people of colour and women of colour are clearly disadvantaged by the institution of evangelicalism. However, the contradiction and growing tension that exists in this space could lead to a redeployment of the rules. Evangelicalism is certainly an institution initially built on inclusion—the heart of the reformation was to allow everyone access to scripture and to a relationship with Christ. Of course, as has been made clear throughout this thesis, exclusions have intentionally and unintentionally been introduced throughout history. But today, these ideas of inclusion, as well as key scripture regarding diversity and women, are slowly being ‘redeployed’ and ‘enacted in new ways’ to promote increased inclusion of women and people of colour.4

It is important to note, once again, that the impact of these processes of gradual change is also dependant on the “broad, structural features” (Pierson 2004, 141) of evangelicalism and the degree to which these structural features constrain change and simultaneously, are experiencing a “long, slow erosion” (Pierson 2004, 141). As the next section discusses recommendations for change, it is important not to overlook the strength of evangelicalism’s path dependence. That is

4 See, for example, The Meeting House church’s teaching series on gender, called Her Story (2019), and on race, called Peacemakers (2017).
to say, though the potential of change agents to exploit spaces of debate and contradiction within evangelicalism is promising, it is important to remember that the potential is still constrained by structural forces that are slow-moving in path dependent institutions like evangelicalism, hence the potential for gradual change (rather than, say, a critical juncture). However, the potential is also enhanced by the slow structural shifts in evangelicalism, such as, for example, the appointment of women to prominent leadership positions in evangelical international development organizations, which was previously mentioned. Another slow structural shift is the growing diaspora church in Canada and North America, with the population of racialized Christians and specifically racialized evangelicals growing alongside general demographic shifts. Overall, as this thesis moves to make recommendations, it is crucial these recommendations continue to be considered with this structural context in mind.

6.4 Opportunity and Recommendations

It is evident that there are key spaces of tension, contradiction and ambiguity within evangelical international development that can lead to meaningful gradual institutional change. They are spaces on which new institutional rules, norms and practice can be ‘layered’ on to existing ones or existing rules can be ‘converted’ to promote new realities. Subversive change agents remain loyal to the institution but are also “striking a series of balances” (Keller 2010, 146) in the midst of tensions, such as finding increasing balance between evangelism and social action after a long history of debate on this topic. Moving forward, there is continued opportunity for gradual change within the context of the existing institution, particularly when it comes to understandings and action surrounding decolonization, racial justice and gender equity.

First, organizations need to address the contradiction that exists between the experience of women and people of colour in their organizations and their global missions of empowering
women and people of colour. Women need to be given the space and permission to empower, uplift and encourage each other. Organizations should also take meaningful steps to ensure equal pay and opportunity to women, recognizing implicit bias that can unintentionally disadvantage women. Organizations could consider implementing focus groups for women, particularly women not in leadership positions, so those in leadership can better understand the everyday experience of women working for their organization. When it comes to the experience of people of colour, organizations can take similar steps, but they also need to hire people of colour to begin with. Again, an awareness of implicit bias in hiring is needed. Moreover, there needs to be an awareness of the increased labour people of colour engage in to educate their white colleagues on the lived experience of having a racialized body, as many white research participants indicated they rely a lot, if not solely, on their colleagues of colour to learn about racial (in)justice. This can be exhausting for employees of colour, and organizations should strive for an awareness, recognition and easing of this burden. It must be stressed that it is dangerous for organizations to assume that because the people working within their organizations care about justice, equal opportunity for women and people of colour will ‘just happen’. Gender equity and racial justice requires an intentionality that needs to become standard practice for evangelical international development organizations, both for the sake of justice and for the sake of their credibility and longevity.

Second, and not unrelated, organizations need to invest in training and education for their staff on the topics of critical development, decolonization, racial justice and gender equity. The evangelical church should be having these conversations more broadly, and there is potential for international development organizations to lead these conversations, but staff need to first have these conversations themselves. There is a desire for this type of training amongst staff, and an
early and small sample size shows positive feedback and outcomes when this training and education is implemented. Organizations should direct professional development resources to this end, be it though courses, books, guest speakers during staff gatherings, or team-, department- or organization-wide workshops. This is not just for its own sake—I suggest increased engagement with important justice issues will make staff more effective communicators, marketers, fundraisers and overall advocates for the mission of evangelical international development organizations. Staff of evangelical international development organizations are the ones who lead the wider evangelical church in issues of social justice, and thus, it is important they have the knowledge, understanding and training to pursue justice in effective and consistent ways.

Finally, I firmly believe the longevity of evangelicalism is dependent on an acceptance of its expanding horizons, of this ‘layering’ gradual change. Those who identify with the ‘traditional’ aspects of evangelicalism should be heartened in seeing that ‘progressive’ evangelicals are not interested in abandoning the ‘core’ of evangelicalism. Rather, they are interested in building on existing rules and in some cases, readjusting the practice of certain rules to make evangelicalism and evangelical international development more effective, and ultimately, more and more Christ-like—which, as we see from history, will always happen imperfectly, gradually and out of a constant negotiation. The ambiguity and tension within evangelicalism could lead to an eventual ‘drawing of lines’ to erase some ambiguities (like what occurred during The Great Reversal), but I suggest that this does not need to occur. Instead, evangelicals can choose to lean into ambiguity and tension and again, “strike[e] a series of balances” (Keller 2010, 146), which will lead to a more robust institution in the long-term.
7 CONCLUSION

This inquiry stemmed out of my own personal questionings of both my faith and my field: Will I continue to have a place within evangelicalism even as I pursue what are viewed as more ‘progressive’ pursuits such as decolonization, racial justice and gender equity? Is international development’s relationship with Christianity, and particularly evangelicalism, sustainable, and can it be oriented towards justice, or is it doomed to always be a stronghold of colonialism and coercion? What I have come to learn and endeavoured to demonstrate is that rather than serving to erode or destroy evangelicalism and evangelical international development, points of tension and contradiction within evangelicalism serve as spaces in which key actors and forces have the opportunity to reform and reproduce the institution of evangelicalism. Many of these tensions exist and manifest at the intersection of evangelicalism and international development, making it a key analytical space and a particularly interesting point of examination.

The history of evangelicalism and its relationship with international development is a contentious and complex one and we see that its history is rife with tension and contradiction. Debates surrounding the responsibility of Christians to evangelize versus pursue social action, and a failing track record in terms of integrating indigenous, Black, Latinx and other racialized voices and theologies into evangelicalism is the history into which today’s evangelicals and evangelical international development practitioners enter. Through primary research (surveys and interviews), I examined the approaches and beliefs of Canadian employees of evangelical international development organizations. I found they have ambivalent and complex relationships with evangelicalism, international development and the idea of the two being related, though they remain loyal to these ideas and institutions, including the concept of
evangelical international development. The primary research revealed many continuing ambiguities, tensions and contradictions within evangelicalism and evangelical international development. These ambiguities—though continuing to be constrained by slow-moving structural forces and existing in the context of a path dependent institution—serve as opportunities for evangelicals to subvert and resist enduring colonial, patriarchal, racist and coercive legacies within evangelicalism, while continuing to hold to the core aspects of evangelicalism that drew them to international development in the first place—things like love for one’s neighbour and a desire to share the love and goodness of God with others.

**7.1 Opportunities for Further Research**

There are many opportunities for further research. First, because this thesis focused on opportunities for gradual change and only briefly considered Pierson’s (2004) “broad, structural forces”, I believe there is opportunity to more deeply examine the stability of evangelicalism as an institution. What are the features evangelicalism’s path dependence, particularly in the current contemporary moment? What are these enduring structural features within evangelicalism? To what degree do they and will they continue to constrain change, and to what degree are they being eroded? Within this, there is opportunity for quantitative work on evangelicalism’s inclusion of women and people of colour both broadly and more specifically in positions of leadership over time—and perhaps in comparison to other religious or secular institutions and organizations. Moreover, the diaspora church was very briefly mentioned in the Discussion chapter. Quantitative work on the growing diaspora church in Canada and qualitative work on whether the diaspora church exhibits the same enduring and/or eroding structural features of evangelicalism is another research opportunity. I believe research like this would help map
structural change and illuminate more opportunities for gradual institutional change in regard to racial justice and gender equity.

Second, this thesis failed to examine the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community within evangelicalism. The experience of Christians who identify as queer is an important issue within evangelicalism that is growing in prominence. Because this conversation is only gaining momentum, the attention it would need, particularly as it relates to queer Christians’ relationship with international development, was outside of the scope of this thesis. However, a handful of research participants brought up this topic and it is of growing importance for evangelical international development organizations to consider.

Finally, there is opportunity to further study the experience of evangelicals of colour, particularly in their experiences of educating white evangelicals about racial (in)justice. Because of how many white research participants shared about relying on their colleagues of colour to educate them on racial (in)justice, I believe research is needed to examine the impacts this has on racialized individuals themselves, who are performing this additional unrecognized labour in the workplace. Beyond this, it would be interesting to examine how white evangelicals could gain the resources needed to seek education independently of their colleagues of colour, through books, podcasts, films and other resources that are created by people of colour but do not rely on their continued labour.

These are just some of the opportunities for further research. Overall, I believe there is rich opportunity for evangelicalism and academia, and particularly evangelicalism and international development, to learn from each other. I believe more academic research on evangelicalism and evangelical international development would be broadly beneficial. It is no secret that evangelicals and international development academics have often been ambivalent of
one another. With that in mind, it has been a privilege and delight for me to act as a ‘bridge’, in a small way, between these two fields, as both an evangelical and an academic international development researcher, and I hope to see more of these bridges emerge.

7.2 Should We Bother to Hope?

It is evident by now that my personal faith has always been at least tangentially part of this research project. I have tried to be continually aware of this. But underlying much of my inquiries and research was a question of the soul: Should I bother to hope?

Hope is a spiritual concept. It is a spiritual experience. It is the experience of, while accounting for reason and reality, believing in what is not yet realized, what is unseen. It is hardly an academic endeavour, it is certainly not a development program, a theory of change or a strategic plan. And yet, it seems to be part of the experience of so many within the field of international development. Hope for what is not yet realized—a world where everyone can flourish and live life to the full.

And so, I asked, along with many of my peers—young evangelicals, evangelicals who are women and people of colour, progressive evangelicals—should I bother to hold on to hope for evangelicalism or will I eventually have to abandon this institution if I desire to continue following Jesus in the way He is leading me? Will evangelicalism remain relevant as an institution that seeks justice, defends the oppressed and has good news—actual, tangible good news—for the poor, or will it only endure to serve hegemonic systems of power and privilege?

Hope is not enough to spark meaningful change. But it is the starting point—or the continuing point—for so many. When I look at the history of evangelicalism and examine where we are now, I am persuaded to lean into tension, have uncomfortable conversations and yes, continue to hope.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: Survey Form

This survey was administered through Google Forms.

Section 1

Faithful Development? Examining the approaches and beliefs of Global North-based staff of evangelical international NGOs

IDSD01Y3: Post-placement Seminar and Thesis
University of Toronto
April-September 2019

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The purpose of this project is to investigate the beliefs and attitudes surrounding international development within the Canadian/North American evangelical community by surveying and interviewing staff at Christian evangelical parachurch international development organizations.

Through this electronic survey, you will be asked to answer a series of questions about your approaches to and beliefs surrounding Christian evangelical participation in international development interventions in the Global South.

There are no major risks outside of the regular risks of daily life associated with participating in this study. The survey should take approximately 20 to 30 minutes.

The data collected from this survey will be stored electronically in encrypted password-protected files. Your decision to participate in this project is voluntary. You can withdraw your consent at any time during the survey and following completion of the survey, until work on research outputs begins in October 2019. To withdraw consent during the survey, simply stop completing the survey and exit the browser. To withdraw consent after completing the survey, please contact the student researcher (contact information above). You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

This research project is to fulfill the undergraduate thesis requirement of an Honours Bachelor of Arts degree in International Development at the University of Toronto. Research outputs will include a final written report and oral presentations. No identifying information of participants
(including names, position or place of work) will be disclosed in the research outputs. Pseudonyms and general descriptions of work will be used instead.

Please contact Professor Paul Kingston (contact information above) with any concerns about this project. For any questions regarding your rights as a participant in the research project, please contact the University of Toronto Ethics Office (contact information above).

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to take part in this research project. If you understand the information outlined above and agree to take part in this research study, please check the box below.

A copy of your consent and responses will be emailed to the address provided below.

*Required

*Email address:

*Full name:

*Participant consent: I understand the information outlined above and agree to voluntarily take part in this research study. [Checkbox]

**Section 2**

*How old are you? [Choose one]

- 18-24
- 25-29
- 30-34
- 35-39
- 40-44
- 45-49
- 50-54
- 55-59
- 60-64
- 65+
- Prefer not to say

*What is your gender? [Choose one]

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to say

What is your ethnic and/or racial identity? [Type short answer]
Where were you born? [Type short answer]

What degrees have you obtained through higher education? Please include your field(s) of study. [Type short answer]

Are you currently a member of a local church? [Choose one]
- Yes
- No

What church denomination(s) do you identify with? [Check all that apply]
- Baptist
- Christian Reformed
- Alliance
- Evangelical Missionary
- Anglican
- Mennonite
- United
- Other Anabaptist
- Roman Catholic
- Nondenominational
- Pentecostal
- None
- Other [Type short answer]

Section 3

What organization do you work for? [Type short answer]

What is your role at this organization? [Type short answer]

How long have you worked at this organization? [Choose one]
- <2 years
- 2-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-20 years
- 20+ years

How would you describe your organization, in a sentence? [Type short answer]

Section 4

Please agree/disagree with the following statements: [Choose one of the following options for each statement: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree, I don’t know, N/A]
• I am a Christian.
• I am an evangelical Christian.
• I do not currently identify as an evangelical Christian, but there was a time in my life when I did. (If you currently identify as an evangelical Christian, please choose “N/A”.)
• The organization I work for is a Christian organization.
• The organization I work for primarily targets evangelical Christians in its marketing and fundraising.
• The previous statement is not currently true for my organization, but it once was. (If it is currently true, please choose “N/A”.)
• I have visited a country in the Global South to see and learn about my organization’s programming in that country.
• I have visited multiple countries in the Global South to see and learn about my organization’s programming in those countries.
• It is the duty or a requirement of a Christian to help alleviate the poverty and suffering of people in countries other than their own.
• It is the duty or a requirement of a Christian to act and speak in ways that lead people to convert to Christianity (that is, to repent of their sins, profess faith in Christ’s death and resurrection, and follow Jesus as Lord).
• It is the duty or requirement of a Christian to explicitly share the gospel with people.

Recall your responses to the following statements above:

• It is the duty or a requirement of a Christian to help alleviate the poverty and suffering of people in countries other than their own.
• It is the duty or a requirement of a Christian to act and speak in ways that lead people to convert to Christianity (that is, to repent of their sins, profess faith in Christ’s death and resurrection, and follow Jesus as Lord).
• It is the duty or requirement of a Christian to explicitly share the gospel with people.

Why do you feel this way? [Type long answer]

Section 5

Please agree/disagree with the following statements: [Choose one of the following options for each statement: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree, I don’t know, N/A]

• My gender has implications for the way I do my work.
• My race / ethnic identity has implications for the way I do my work.
• I feel comfortable talking about the power dynamics and disparities in privilege that could exist between myself and people of a different gender.
• I feel comfortable talking about the power dynamics and disparities in privilege that could exist between myself and people of a different race or ethnic identity.
• I feel comfortable talking about the power dynamics and disparities in privilege that could exist between myself and people of a different social class.
• I feel comfortable talking about the power dynamics and disparities in privilege that could exist between myself and people living in the Global South.
• The work I do reinforces systems and structures established by 19th and 20th century colonialism.

Please elaborate on your responses to the following statements above: [Type long answer]

• My gender has implications for the way I do my work.
• My race / ethnic identity has implications for the way I do my work.

Section 6

Please indicate the frequency with which you do the following: [Choose one of the following options for each statement: Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Always]

• I read the Bible everyday.
• I attend church at least weekly.
• I personally support or donate to the organization I work for.
• I personally support or donate to other Christian international development organizations.
• When writing, speaking or otherwise communicating about my organization’s programs around the world, I take time to seriously consider the way in which I portray the program’s beneficiaries.
• I portray supporters and donors of our organization as the hero of our organization’s stories.

Section 7

Is there anything you would like to add? [Type long answer]

Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview with student researcher Alyssa Esparaz about your responses to this survey? (Interviews will be scheduled for sometime between now and September 2019. Typical interviews will last between 30-60 minutes and be scheduled in-person or via video call.) [Choose one]

• Yes
• No

If yes, please provide the best way for me to reach you: [Type short answer]
APPENDIX B: Interview List and Questions

List of Interviews

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Interview Questions

1. How would you define “evangelicalism”?
2. How would you define “international development”?
3. What is the relationship between evangelicalism and international development? What are the effects, positive or negative, of that relationship?
4. How would you define colonialism? Do you think it affects the way we do Christian international development work today?
5. How does (your) ethnicity/race and gender affect your work?
6. Do you feel that your organization gives you the tools to learn about and understand the specific work your organization does, international development more broadly, and some of the power dynamics in international development (like the ones we discussed today)? What is a way your organization does this well, and what is a way your organization could improve?
7. Is there anything you would like to add or anything we didn’t get to discuss?
APPENDIX C: Informed Consent Form for Interview Participants

IDSD01Y3: Post-placement Seminar and Thesis
Informed Consent Form – Interviews

Title of Project: Faithful Development? Examining the approaches and beliefs of Global North-based staff of evangelical international NGOs

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The purpose of this project is to investigate the beliefs and attitudes surrounding international development within the Canadian/North American evangelical community by surveying and interviewing staff at Christian evangelical parachurch international development organizations.

You will be asked to answer questions and discuss your approaches to and beliefs surrounding Christian evangelical participation in international development interventions in the Global South.

There are no major risks outside of the regular risks of daily life associated with participating in this study. The interview will last approximately 30 to 60 minutes.

The data collected from this interview will be stored electronically in a encrypted password-protected files. Your decision to participate in this project is voluntary. You can withdraw your consent at any time during the interview and following the interview, until work on research outputs begins in October 2019. To withdraw consent, please inform the student researcher in-person or via phone or email (contact information above). You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

This research project is to fulfill the undergraduate thesis requirement of an Honours Bachelor of Arts degree in International Development at the University of Toronto. Research
outputs will include a final written report and oral presentations. No identifying information of participants (including names, position or place of work) will be disclosed in the research outputs. Pseudonyms and general descriptions of work will be used instead.

Please contact Professor Paul Kingston (contact information above) with any concerns about this project. For any questions regarding your rights as a participant in the research project, please contact the University of Toronto Ethics Office (contact information above).

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to take part in this research project. If you understand the information outlined above and agree to take part in this research study, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Participant Name: ________________________________

Participant Signature: ___________________________ Date: ______________

Researcher Signature: ___________________________ Date: ______________