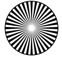

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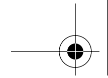
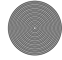
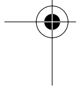
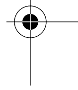

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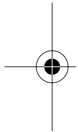
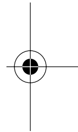
The Historical Ascent of Relational Ministry

THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

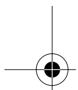
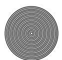



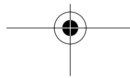
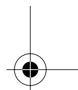
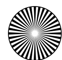
I was just told last year that Santa Claus was an invention of the Coca-Cola Company in the 1930s. It's true, the 1930s (I'm still shocked)! Of course Saint Nick has been with us for a long time, but his depiction as a fat, jolly man in a red-and-white suit was a marketing ploy (maybe the best ever) that has become entrenched in our Western consciousness. If asked, I would have guessed that the jolly red-and-white-dressed fat man had been with us from at least the seventeenth century.

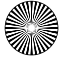
Many of my students react the same way when I inform them that adolescence, evangelicalism and youth ministry are themselves distinctly *new* cultural realities. Many of them imagine, as I had with Santa Claus, that these significant cultural realities stretch back hundreds of years. Of course, as with Santa Claus, they have their antecedents, but their present forms are not old at all.

Surprising to many of my students, the developmental "stage" of adolescence only burst on the scene of the American consciousness in 1904 with the publication of Stanley Hall's *Adolescence*. In the years following this work "adolescence" became a common way to define young people between the ages of thirteen and twenty-one.

American evangelicalism can trace its history back to the nineteenth



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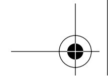
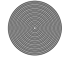
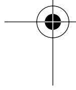
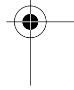
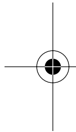
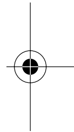





century in America and to the sixteenth century in Europe. But the evangelical phenomenon that is now present and powerful within the American cultural landscape began in the 1940s and can be traced back to the so-called fundamentalist-modernist schism within the Protestant church in the early twentieth century.

Of course, children have always played meaningful roles within societies, and the church has always worked to pass on its faith to its young people. But age-specific ministry to young people—youth ministry—is no older than the late nineteenth century.

To understand how relational ministry has become the prominent practice of age-specific ministry in our time, we will observe the inception of age-specific ministry to youth and watch it develop through a century in which it intertwined with the cultural forces of adolescence and American evangelicalism.

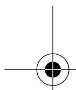
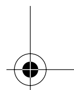
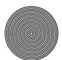



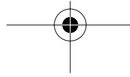
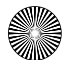
As we journey through four time periods—pre-1900, 1900 to 1940 (in this chapter), 1940 to 1960, and 1960 to 2000 (in the next)—we will unpack how the two forces of adolescence and American evangelicalism have molded the approach taken toward youth ministry in each era, eventually leading to what we have come to recognize as relational youth ministry.

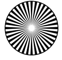
PRE-TWENTIETH CENTURY

My wife and I have recently gotten hooked on the HBO show *Deadwood*. It is a graphic picture of life in a South Dakota prospecting camp in the nineteenth century. The show is no documentary, but the creators have tried to be as historically honest as possible. What stuck out to me, besides the graphic portrayal, was that there were no adolescents in the camp. Surely there were young people, but there were no adolescent hangouts, no differences in clothes or musical tastes. Young people found themselves on the same hills or in the kitchens doing the same work as their fathers, mothers, aunts and uncles. As a matter of fact, many of these young people (as young as fourteen) left their families, not to discover themselves but to make their own fortunes as adults.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries young people in America were considered just that, "young" people. The limbo between childhood and adulthood, known since the twentieth century as "adoles-



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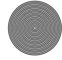
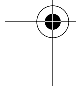
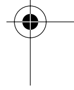
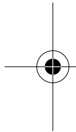
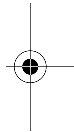




cence" (which can last over a decade), was not a category that pre-twentieth century people used to understand their children.[1] In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the transition from childhood to adulthood was most often based not on age but on size. "If a fourteen-year-old looked big and strong enough to do a man's work on a farm or in a factory or mine, most people viewed him as a man."[2] Due to the need for "people power" in both the agricultural economy of the pre-nineteenth century and the early industrial economy of the pre-twentieth century, boys as young as thirteen or fourteen worked hand in hand with their fathers and uncles on the farm, and their neighbors and fellow townsmen in mills.

This meant that what we think of as adolescence was not a distinct stage of life with its own task and purpose in society (e.g., forming an identity and becoming educated). Harvey Graff explains, "There was relatively little of what has come to be called age synchronization, a standardized march through childhood, adolescence, and youth on the road to adulthood."[3] Of course, there were distinct activities that young people participated in, for example, grammar school and apprenticeships. These tasks were nevertheless governed by their benefit to the familial structure rather than being culturally age-specific assignments. "Age norms of all kinds were rather loosely maintained. The pattern—or, rather, the absence of pattern—can . . . be seen in the records of school attendance. In virtually all the schools of the period students of widely differing ages were mixed up together, often in a single classroom."[4]

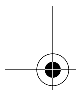
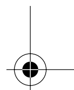
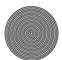



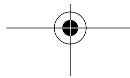
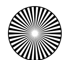
[1]Joseph Kett alerts us to the fact that before the twentieth century there was no such thing as adolescence, therefore we can say that adolescence is an invention of modernity. "If adolescence is defined as the period after puberty during which a young person is institutionally segregated from casual contacts with a broad range of adults, then it can scarcely be said to have existed at all, even for those young people who attended school beyond age 14" (*Rites of Passage* [New York: Basic Books, 1977], p. 36).

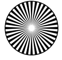
[2]Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager* (New York: Avon Books, 1999), p. 16. Clearly the physical ability to fulfill the adult workload depended on the biological arrival of puberty, but as Kett explains, puberty itself was the doorway to adulthood. " 'Full' incorporation [into adulthood] probably occurred around the time of puberty—that is, at 15 a boy was judged physically able to carry a man's work load. Prior to the middle of the 19th century, contemporaries associated puberty with rising power and energy rather than with the onset of an awkward and vulnerable stage of life which would later become known as adolescence" (Kett, *Rites of Passage,* p. 17).

[3]Harvey Graff, *Conflicting Paths: Growing Up in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 66.

[4]John Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 101.



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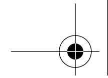
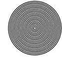
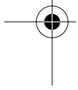
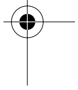
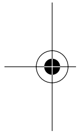
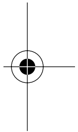





This occurred because education was often offered only in the winter months so it would not interfere with farm work, and it was only permitted at all if circumstances allowed for it. School was not the child's task or job, as we sometimes think of it today. Rather, school was an (nonessential) opportunity for personal betterment most often sought when one was young. Apprenticeship also was a common activity for young people. It was an adult task, which allowed young people to leave home and learn a skill. Yet the apprentice nevertheless remained connected and accountable to his or her family of origin.

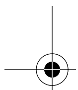
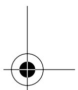
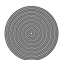
However, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, both schooling and the apprenticeship were undermined by cultural transition. With the acceleration of industrialization and the concomitant mechanization the apprenticeship received a deathblow.[5] The staggering effect of its demise was exacerbated by the influx of immigrants from Europe willing to take unskilled labor for a fraction of what former apprentices demanded. Modern mechanization and the influx of immigration drove young apprentices back home, as skilled labor was no longer needed. A machine could now make shoes or copy a document much more effectively and cheaply than a person could. This same modern mechanization pushed families from farms to cities to find opportunity in the large factories and the burgeoning construction projects located in urban centers.

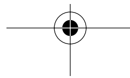
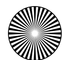



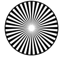
With the apprenticeship dead, the family farm gone and the machine producing more with fewer workers, young people found themselves with little to do. The rapid passage from childhood to adulthood had ceased, making way for a new understanding of the young as a cohort needing specialization through a liminal stage of education, thereby making a way for the arrival of the "adolescent," and church and parachurch ministries began to give specific attention to them.

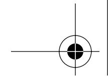
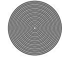
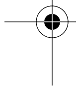
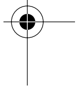
American evangelicalism. European Protestantism's flavor did not taste right in America. European Protestantism had "stressed faith as a lifelong struggle with sin and temptation, for which the teaching of and worship in the church provided assistance and encouragement. This . . . version of

[5]See William J. Reese, *The Origins of the American High School* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 18.

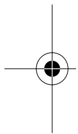
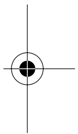





Protestantism was objective (rather than personal) in the sense that to be a church member involved being conformed to the doctrines and liturgy of the church."[6] But the first great American theologian, Jonathan Edwards, and one of America's infamous preachers, George Whitefield, seasoned Protestantism with a uniquely American theology constructed from the particular experience of colonial life. Edwards and Whitfield looked beyond European Protestantism's impersonal ecclesial-centric faith and saw instead the importance of personal conversion. This shifted pastoral concern from facilitating the liturgical and sacramental needs of a particular community to mediating new and dynamic religious experiences brought forth by feelings of crisis and despair. The pastor was "to preach in ways designed to bring hearers to a point of crisis, at which they despaired over their sinfulness and experienced the love of God in an immediate way."[7]

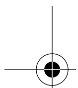
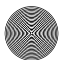
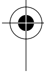
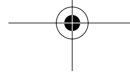
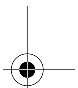
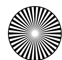
In this new American recipe of faith, what became essential was not communal commitment but personal acceptance of God's love and mercy. The convert was expected to personally exhibit his or her conversion by devotion and righteous acts as well as avoidance and disdain for worldly activities.

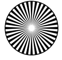



By the mid-nineteenth century, evangelical Protestantism had become what D. G. Hart calls "the functional equivalent of an established church [in America]."[8] Building on the momentum of the Second Great Awakening during the 1820s and 1830s, early evangelicalism worked fervently to bring about personal and social unity and reform in American society. Early evangelicals created groups and associations that sought to overcome evils in society and the world. "In the North this involved opposition to slavery, Sabbath-breaking, and alcohol, and an effort to provide care and education for those in need."[9] These initiatives were launched from the belief that personal conversion led to righteous living and holy societies.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, however, evangelical Protestantism was knocked off balance by the changing currents of cultural thought, leaving it exposed to the crashing wave of modernization. This wave was encompassed in skepticism of traditional authorities brought

[6]D. G. Hart, *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), p. 7.
[7]Ibid.
[8]Ibid., p. 12.
[9]Ibid.



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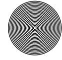

forth by immigration and, most boldly, scientific advance.

> Darwinism offered accounts of the origins of life. . . . Freudianism added naturalistic explanations for the human sense of meaning, of love and beauty, and of religion itself. Marxism . . . claimed to explain the meaning and . . . direction of history. . . . Biblical criticism turned the fire power of such scientific-historical explanation point-blank on . . . the Bible itself."[10]

As this wave crashed, the biblical foundation that evangelicals stood upon, that just decades before was trusted without question, seemed to be washed from under their feet. Consequently evangelicalism entered the first decades of the twentieth century as a movement fighting frantically for its life and authoritative foundation.

Fearful that their children would be swept away by the currents of modernization, conservative Protestants gave direct ministerial attention to the emerging cohort called adolescence. Thus youth ministry can be understood as a creation of evangelical Protestantism in reaction to modernization.

Age-specific ministry to youth. To trace the historical line of relational ministry as the dominant form of youth ministry in America, we must start in the busy streets of London at the height of industrialization. Newspaper man Robert Raikes became disturbed by the situation of children working in industrial factories. Concerned for the overworked and undereducated children as well as the great cities of England soiled by their unsupervised delinquency, Raikes developed what he called the "Sunday school." Sunday school met on the one day of the week when young people were not laboring in factories, and its leaders taught children skills in reading and writing as well as basic manners and morals.

Facing the similar problems of industrialization and the arrival of modernization, America's churches adopted Raikes's program. The Sunday school became the first distinct ministry to youth in America, arriving from England in the middle of the nineteenth century. The uniquely evangelical flavor of American religious life following the two Great Awakenings eventually modified the Sunday school, discarding

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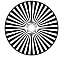
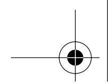
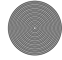
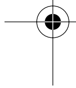
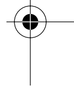
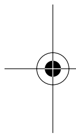
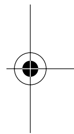
[10]George Marsden, "The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia," in *Reckoning with the Past: Historical Essays on American Evangelicalism from the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals,* ed. D. G. Hart (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), p. 226.



its educational emphasis and replacing it with an objective of converting young people to Christ. The Sunday school became a program for youth evangelism.[11] "No longer a philanthropic expedient for conveying the rudiments of morality and literacy to street waifs, Sunday schools were now portrayed as divinely appointed instruments for the regeneration of the nation."[12]

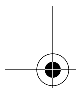
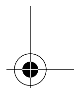
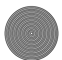
Yet as the population became more urbanized, it became clear that the Sunday school was not enough. In cities throughout the country large populations of young people were freed from the covering of village life and a single family focus. To provide protective outlets of activity for these youth, the Young Men's Christian Association and Young Women's Christian Association were formed. "The purpose of [these] . . . agencies was to help Christian young people retain their Christian commitments after they had moved into the urban jungles."[13] The YMCA recognized the nascent arrival of a distinct youth cohort made possible by the pluralization of modernization as well as the threats that this pluralization inflicted on an individual's Christian commitment to live a holy life. At its beginnings, then, the intent of these early youth ministries was twofold: to reinforce Christian commitments and to protect young people from the perceived threats of menacing city life.

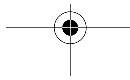
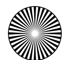



THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

The early decades of the twentieth century saw the dominant agrarian culture in America finally overthrown. Modernization had arrived and with it came sweeping changes within society, culture and education. The arrival of modern society meant the construction of new institutions like the school, the corporation and the nuclear family, which were distinct worlds isolated from each other. With the demise of the apprenticeship and the arrival of a machine-centered economy, human muscle was needed much less and human organization much more. This meant that

[11]Joseph Kett says, "The first of several changes which were to affect Sunday schools came in the 1820s when, under the impulse of evangelical revivals, Sunday school promoters began to emphasize the possibility of converting children *en masse*" (*Rites of Passage,* p. 117).
[12]Ibid.
[13]Mark Senter, *The Coming Revolution in Youth Ministry* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1992), p. 90.

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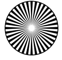
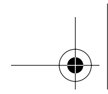
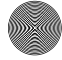
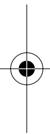
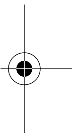


middle-class jobs shifted from blue collar to white. With this shift came a need for new types of training which would give individuals the specialization needed in a modern society. Where just decades earlier reading and arithmetic were nonessential opportunities for personal betterment, in the modernized twentieth century they became essential for participation in society.[14]

The high school became the place where individuals could receive the training and education needed to thrive in a modernized world. William Reese states, "Young people faced a world where machines had transformed the nature of work, where science and technology helped conquer the natural environment. Educators argued that high schools prepared boys especially for the world of business and the professions."[15]

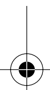
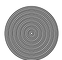
The rise of the high school as the location for young people to receive their needed training meant two things. First, young people remained in their parents' homes much longer than in the past. Second, young people, though remaining in their parents' homes, spent fewer meaningful hours with their parents. Whereas in the decades of agrarianism and apprenticeships, young and old worked side by side and skills were passed on through working together, in the high school young people spent most meaningful hours with their peers, away from the work of parents and other adults. Reed Ueda explains, "The high school institutionalized the peer society. . . . The high school also insulated the peer society, thereby strengthening its ability to discipline its members. Away from parents, away from the church, and away from the workplace, high school students felt pressure to conform to the standards of the group."[16]

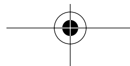
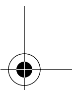
In the cities and suburbs adults may have had fewer hours of contact with their older children, but these hours were more intense. The intensity built as young and old tried to transverse a widening gap in shared experiences and perspectives. The young person may have also felt rising pressure as he or she anticipated operating in a complicated modernized world,

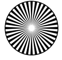
[14]Kett explains further how education served modern industries: "Schools served the needs of business in a variety of ways. As the informal machine shop with a dozen journeymen and apprentices gave way to the modern business corporation, education provided a form of certification for young people. A diploma could act as a kind of letter of introduction" (*Rites of Passage,* p. 153).

[15]Reese, *Origins of the American High School,* p. 96.

[16]Reed Ueda, *Avenues to Adulthood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 120.



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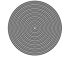
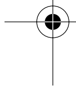
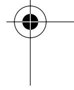
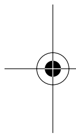
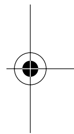




having had little direct contact with it.[17] "To be a high school student at the turn of the century was to be acutely conscious that the era ahead was to be radically different from the one their parents knew."[18] And parents too may have felt frustrated, interpreting their children's ambivalence as an inability to comprehend the difficulty of living in a modernized world. They began to wonder if their children were crazy. At times young people were preoccupied with their own peer world and seemed completely uninterested in the "real world," but then at other times, they seemed overwhelmed by the fear and stress of being held out of and then entering into a complex society.

Reflection on these experiences led psychologist G. Stanley Hall to assert that those in high school were not children and not yet adults, but adolescents.[19] The period of adolescence, in which persons are caught between one time and another, Hall explained, was biologically determined as a period of stress and anxiety (storm).[20] Therefore, Hall affirmed (quite differently from the common thought of the nineteenth century) that adolescents were ontologically distinct and this distinction included a penchant for trepidation revealed in odd behaviors.[21]

While in the first two decades of the twentieth century the high school was gaining importance in American society, it wasn't until the

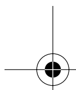
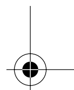
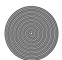
[17]"The high school students of the turn of the century believed they were growing up in a more brutally competitive world. They assumed it was their duty to equip themselves to rise in this setting. The social competition in the peer-group societies of the high school and the interscholastic competition with other high schools stimulated at an early age a keen sense of rivalry and emulation" (ibid., p. 139).

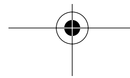
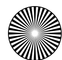
[18]Ibid., p. 143.

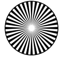
[19]"The belief that a normal adolescence is 'abnormal' can be traced as far back as G. Stanley Hall's *Adolescence* (1904). Yet the most important current expression stems from psychoanalysis, initially in the work of Anna Freud, later taken up and elaborated. This view of adolescence initially focused upon a revitalized conflict between the drives, and the defensive and superego forces" (Joseph Adelson, *Inventing Adolescence: The Political Psychology of Everyday Schooling* [New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1986], p. 127).

[20]Hall traced this biological distinction to the awakening of sexuality in the period of adolescence. Hall claimed "the rise of sexual potency convulsed the whole system and threw the adolescent into storm and stress" (Kett, *Rights of Passage,* p. 206).

[21]Anthropologist Margaret Mead opposed Hall's thesis from the start. In traveling to Samoa she showed that young people in that social context were not in a stage of stress and storm. Her research indicated that such an understanding of adolescence as Hall's must be seen in light of modern society and not as an ontological universal. See Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (New York: William Morrow, 1928).



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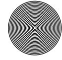
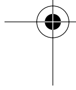
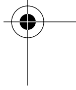
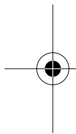
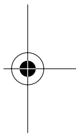




1920s that high school became the norm for all young people (whether middle, upper or lower class).[22] With the popular embrace of Hall's work as well as the arrival of a worldwide economic depression, the high school became both scientifically endorsed and culturally necessary. While young people had found fewer and fewer employment opportunities stretching back to the last decades of the nineteenth century, with the arrival of the Great Depression all remaining work evaporated. With nothing else to do, the majority of young people, now known as adolescents, entered high school. Being an adolescent meant being a high school student, and schooling became the developmental task of the teen years.

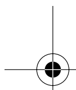
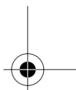
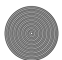
To build loyalty and camaraderie, high schools introduced extracurricular clubs and activities—a trend seized and built on by youth ministry and denominational bodies. As a uniquely modern institution the high school opened itself to pluralism, whether by class, ethnicity or gender. It was naively believed that by placing young girls, middle-class white boys and new immigrants in the same classrooms the high school could serve society by molding individuals from distinct backgrounds into good democratic Americans.

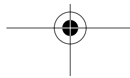
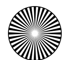



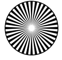
In the 1930s the high school became "the" experience of American adolescents.[23] But the universalization of the high school did not bring uniformity as hoped; rather it brought the pluralizing forces of modernization into the world of the adolescent. As in the offices and factories of their parents, adolescents were confronted with numerous voices and perspectives. Through both education and peer culture, adolescents were becoming aware of the multiple life options available to citizens of a modernized

[22]See Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager* (New York: Avon, 1999), p. 204.

[23]It must be recognized that without the high school, the concept of adolescence as a distinct stage of life would never have come to be. Friedrich Schweitzer helpfully explains, "One of the most important factors responsible for the historically late emergence of adolescence as a distinct stage within the life cycle is the scarcity of educational institutions in earlier history and cultures. Only with the introduction of mandatory schooling beyond the age of ten was there a social and institutional basis for adolescence to become a general experience in today's sense, and this kind of schooling is largely a twentieth-century innovation" (*The Postmodern Lifecycle* [St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004], p. 43). This is not to assume that biology has nothing to do with adolescence. Rather, it must be seen, as Schweitzer argues, that space is given for biological and psychological maturation by social forces.



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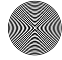
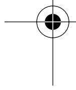
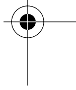
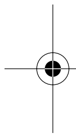
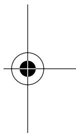




world.[24] The hoped-for monolithic high school experience fragmented into a diversified youth culture in the 1940s and beyond, and the denominational youth societies likewise lost their dominance.

American evangelicalism. Modern society meant the construction of new institutions isolated from each other (such as schools, corporations and the nuclear family). Through these institutions individuals were exposed to a plethora of distinct human experiences and perspectives. As Peter Berger asserts, "Modern society . . . confronts the individual with an ever-changing kaleidoscope of social experiences and meanings. It forces him *[sic]* to make decisions and plans. . . . It forces him into reflection. . . . Not only the world but the self becomes an object of deliberate attention and . . . scrutiny."[25]

This need for deliberate reflection is what social theorists call reflexivity. "The more societies are modernized, the more agents (subjects) acquire the ability to reflect on the social conditions of their existence and to change [them]."[26] Due to the exposure to multiple life worlds and new scientific knowledge made possible by modernization, individuals in the early decades of the twentieth century were forced to rethink and revise their social practices.[27] The need for reflexivity and reenvisioned social practices became so strong that it led individuals and society as a whole to reconsider their understandings of their children (as we just saw) and their religion.

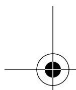
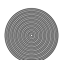
At the end of the nineteenth century, religious reflexivity had cracked the evangelical Protestant shell. In the early decades of the twentieth century the escalation of new scientific theories and progress, coupled with the cultural pluralization of urban centers due to immigration, shattered the

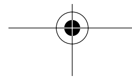
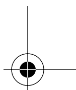
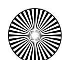
[24]"The peer-group culture of the high school supervened the family to introduce students at an impressionable age to new values and habits that affected their aspirations in adulthood. The conformist pressures of high school youth culture catalyzed the sense of unique generational identity among turn-of-the-century adolescents" (Ueda, *Avenues to Adulthood,* p. 2).

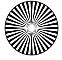
[25]Peter Berger, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 79.

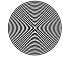
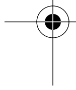
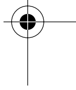
[26]Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 174.

[27]"The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character" (Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990], p. 38).

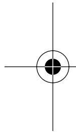
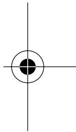






once dominant evangelical Protestant hold on American culture.[28] Two Protestant responses emerged from the rubble of evangelical hegemony. One was to accept the scientific methods and pluralizing forces that threatened certain Protestant commitments. Those who accepted the new scientific methods (soon to be called "the modernists") would reappropriate them for their distinctly religious pursuits. The modernists looked to forms of psychology, evolutionary theory and literary criticism to show the relevance of Protestantism to a pluralistic modern society with the hope that in so doing they could reshape and revive Protestant Christianity in the twentieth century.[29]

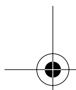
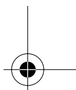
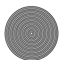
The second group responded much differently. They interpreted the turn toward modern scientific methods and the escalation of pluralism as threatening and potentially deadly to Christianity. From their perspective what was needed was not an appropriation of modern scientific methods but a return to Protestantism's core tradition, biblical authority. This group came to be known as the fundamentalists.[30] The fundamentalists saw themselves cornered by both a culture opposed to their worldview and a modernist (heretical, from their perspective) Protestantism that had traded its birthright for a bowl of stew. Now cornered, the fundamentalists decided to come out swinging. Holding to an inerrant view of the Bible, the

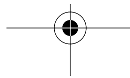
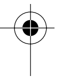
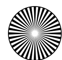



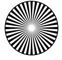
[28]Mark Noll drives this point deeper: "Those who would become fundamentalists feared what the massive immigration of Roman Catholics, Jews, and the unchurched was doing to a United States they considered a Protestant country; they were bewildered by the burgeoning cities that were rapidly displacing small towns and the countryside (where Protestantism had thrived) as the centers of American civilization; and they were appalled by the vogue for naturalist philosophy, and with it the dismissal of the Bible, that extended far beyond the universities" (*The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], p. 114). The authors of *Global Dreams* continue, "The 35 million people who made up the great European migration that occurred between 1800 and 1914 constituted a fourth stream. These immigrants, who willingly braved long, harsh voyages for a chance to make a new life in the New World, eventually succeeded in turning the former English colonies into a multiethnic nation. Poles, Irish, Germans, Jews, and Slavs were joined by Asians, most of whom entered the work force at the very bottom in dangerous, exhausting, and pitifully paid jobs" (Richard Barnet and John Cavanagh, *Global Dreams: Imperial Corporations and the New World Order* [New York: Touchstone, 1994], p. 298).

[29]An example of this way of thinking can be seen in the work of religious educator George Albert Coe.

[30]George Marsden provides a succinct and helpful definition: " 'fundamentalism' refers to a twentieth-century movement closely tied to the revivalist tradition of mainstream evangelical Protestantism that militantly opposed modernist theology and the cultural change associated with it" ("Evangelicals, History, and Modernity," in *Evangelicalism and Modern America,* ed. George Marsden [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984], p. 303).



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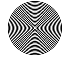
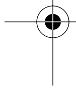
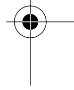
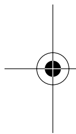
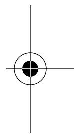




fundamentalists worked to expose and devalue any group or individual that opposed or worked outside this commitment.

The modernist-fundamentalist battle came to a head in 1925, when Tennessee high school teacher John T. Scopes taught evolutionary theory in direct opposition to state law. The fundamentalists won the battle—Scopes was found guilty—but they lost the war. The case had become a national media phenomenon and in the court of popular opinion the fundamentalists had lost badly. In newspapers throughout the country fundamentalists were portrayed as rigid, hateful, backward and ignorant.

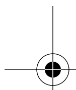
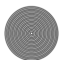
Shocked by this negative reaction and by the loss of the northeastern denominations to the modernists, and now bolstered by the arrival of a new theological perspective, the fundamentalists departed from the public square and took refuge in exclusive communities. Dispensationalist theology, which spoke of an evil world and a holy remnant within it that would soon be plucked from the world before its tribulation, gave the fundamentalists justification to lock themselves away from the world.[31] Individuals were taught to see their time "in the world" as an opportunity to convert others and lead them into the holy remnant through their personal evangelism.

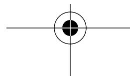
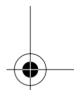
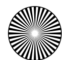



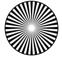
Personal contact was essential because society's institutions could not be trusted, due to the pluralism of modernization. "Having lost two of the most important cultural institutions for a good society, namely, the churches and the schools, many [fundamentalists] looked to create an alternative world that would preserve stability and virtue, if not within the nation, at least among the faithful."[32] Thus fundamentalists between 1920 and 1940 created a number of Bible colleges and seminaries free from the propaganda of modernist science.

In response to the modernizing move toward a pluralistic, open, cosmopolitan society, fundamentalists sought to protect the very sacred tradition which they felt was under attack. Anthony Giddens explains that modern-

[31]"Dispensationalism was a version of premillennialism, the doctrine that Christ will return personally to found a kingdom in Jerusalem where he will reign for one thousand years" (ibid., p. 5). D. G. Hart notes that events of the 1920s through the 1940s, among them the Great Depression and another world war, served Dispensationalists as evidence that their interpretation of history was correct. The rise of radio extended their influence as messages of the end of days and Christ's imminent return went over the airwaves (Hart, *That Old-Time Religion,* p. 39).
[32]Ibid., p. 57.



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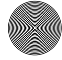
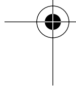
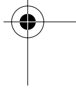
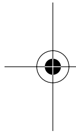
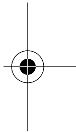




ization places tradition in doubt by challenging it to defend its legitimacy in confrontation with other traditions and perspectives.[33] This very need would motivate evangelicals to focus more attention on the education and protection of their children.

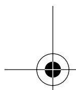
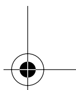
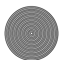
Age-specific ministry to youth. The dominant form of age-specific youth ministry between 1900 and 1940 actually had its start on February 2, 1881, when young pastor Francis Clark from Maine inaugurated the first "Young People's Society for Christian Endeavor." The idea came about after Clark's frustration that in his growing church young people were not going on to become vital members of the congregational life after initial conversion experiences. He and his wife searched for a way to engender commitment and continued involvement among the congregation's young. Building on the conversion emphasis of the Sunday school, Clark drew upon the YMCA's focus on the social gathering of young people and the example of other extracurricular activities that had become popular among middle-class high school students to shape an age-specific ministry to youth in his church. Demanding a depth of accountability and responsibility, Clark received positive responses from his young people. Each member of the society had to pledge to attend each meeting and to share with the group his or her progress in the Christian life. What resulted were meetings numbering close to a hundred participants.

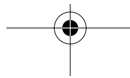
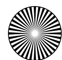



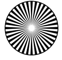
Through the writings of Clark, the idea of a pledging youth society spread like wildfire as local churches across denominations recognized the same issues that Clark had been addressing. By the 1920s most denominations had constructed their own youth societies, complete with curriculum and summer camps. Thus the youth society became a denomination-wide activity, as denominational officials took responsibility for youth ministry.

The Christian youth society served adolescents well in the early twentieth century. Pledging provided a distinct commitment, a choice among a growing buffet of possible lifestyles. In committing to Christian progress through Bible study and witness, adolescents were able to grab hold of a distinct tradition and claim it for themselves. Youth societies, while pro-

[33]Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 48.



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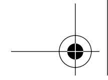
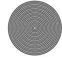
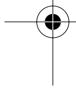
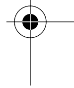
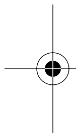
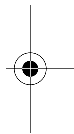





viding an opportunity to claim a tradition, also appeared relevant by grounding themselves in the larger bureaucratic denominations. Adolescents could feel like they were part of something significant and modern, something in step with large, bureaucratic modernized society.

The 1930s, however, foreshadowed the end of youth societies. Reeling from the backlash of the Scopes trial, fundamentalists developed an ambivalent attitude toward both traditional denominations and the public high school. Many denominations were divided between modernists and fundamentalists, often leading to a modernist victory. Fundamentalists criticized public schools (though their children continued to attend) for their adoption of modernist science and willingness to replace the church as the center of local community life.

The denominational youth societies mistakenly anticipated that with the expansion of the high school population in 1930s adolescents would be drawn in larger numbers to denominationally supported societies. But with the growth of school populations and the expansion of a distinct youth culture in the 1940s, adolescents demanded new entertainment sophistication as well as more possibilities for personal intimacy than the denominational societies could provide.

With the continued rise of modernization and the invention of adolescence as a distinct stage of life, the high school became the institutional locus of American youth. Moving through the world apart from their families, adolescents began to increasingly operate outside of the influence of the youth societies. Conservative Protestants by the 1930s felt Christian tradition was coming under deadly attack from science and culture, and recognized that a new strategy beyond the now flagging youth societies was needed to save their children.