

Guaranteed Pure: The Moody Bible Institute, Business, and the Making of Modern Evangelicalism

By Timothy E. W. Gloege

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Timothy E. W. Gloege offers readers both a compelling institutional history of Chicago's Moody Bible Institute (MBI) and a groundbreaking interpretation of American evangelicalism and fundamentalism from 1880 to about 1925. MBI is best known today as one of the pillars of conservative Protestant higher education. Gloege argues that MBI successfully pioneered a new type of Protestant identity based less on church affiliation and more on "consuming" religion. The title, *Guaranteed Pure*, refers to the classic marketing slogan of the Quaker Oats Company, founded by businessman Henry Parson Crowell (who joined MBI's board of trustees in 1904 and stands at the center of Gloege's story). Like Quaker Oats, which generated profits through marketing the trusty-looking "Quaker man," MBI "sold" a new evangelical identity by cultivating the legacy of revivalist Dwight L. Moody, and by pitching itself as a defender of "pure" religion in an age of theological modernism.

Gloege's early chapters sketch Dwight Moody's desire to train a generation of "gap men" who would undertake "Christian work" to convert the working class and solve the social ills of industrialization. Here, as in the rest of the book, Gloege's attention to class is on display. Impatient with theology and bureaucratic

wrangling, Moody preached a new identity of individual salvation that privileged conversion, practical living, and "Christian work"—chiefly evangelizing and missions—as evidence of spiritual transformation. As he traveled the country and gained prominence, Moody aligned himself with various cities' leading citizens—usually businessmen. Even though he worked outside of traditional religious institutions, Moody propagated a conservative gospel that regarded the Bible as a dependable text and God's transforming power as occurring through individual conversions.

With the disparities of industrialization literally exploding in Chicago with the 1886 Haymarket Riot, Moody recognized the increasing distance between his network of socially respectable revivals and the working classes that he sought to convert. MBI was established in 1889 to stem the tide of social unrest through evangelization. However, as Gloege expertly explains, faith healers and early Pentecostals, such as John Alexander Dowie, appropriated Moody's "Christian work" to promote radical religious and utopian communities. Here, Gloege gives a convincing rationale for why Moody and other conservative evangelicals adopted premillennial eschatology, which argued against healings and speaking in tongues. Moody and his

associates asserted that the primary miraculous work of the present age was the spread of the gospel; Christ's second coming would inaugurate a new, and spectacular, dispensation of God's power with New Testament-like miracles.

Guaranteed Pure's second half introduces Crowell and the cutting-edge consumer marketing that he transported from Quaker Oats to MBI. Crowell, Reuben A. Torrey—MBI's first superintendent (1889-1912)—and other leading evangelicals in Chicago advanced the “pure religion” approach, which instilled MBI with middle-class values. By 1905, MBI men were pictured as clean-shaven and dressed in suits. By 1910, MBI dorms were fully segregated, in part to appeal to Southern students. By 1915, women's ministry options were curtailed. Crowell fused his marketing strategies with MBI's institutional identity; he reorganized MBI along business lines, retooled its strategy, and shaped its marketing. MBI's success, Gloege argues in these chapters, was due to the transformation of Moody's “Christian work” model into Crowell's “pure religion” consumer identity. His focus on the shift from religion as something one does to something one consumes is Gloege's innovative contribution to recent studies of the origins of conservative evangelicalism. Future studies will be unable to avoid the rampant use of business and consumer metaphors in evangelical writings of the period.

Gloege makes many other notable interventions that deserve longer discussion. A chapter with new sources on the publication of *The Fundamentals* (1910-1915) reveals tensions between Crowell's Chicago-based network, the rising importance of Lyman Stuart (himself a successful oil magnate), and the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (Biola) in the proto-fundamentalist world. In the final chapter, Gloege traces MBI's navigation through the rise and fall of the World Christian Fundamentals Association and the fundamentalist controversies of the 1920s. He expertly narrates MBI's struggle to remain respectable by distancing itself from fundamentalism's unseemly aspects, while maintaining its “pure religion” guarantee. Overall, Gloege's well-written and convincing work will force historians to rethink the role of consumerism and class in the development of American religion. His book also provides a valuable window into how religion and class were manifested in the largest city of the Midwest, and how MBI became a mainstay in Chicago's urban landscape.

DAN HUMMEL is a Ph.D. candidate and Lecturer at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is currently revising his dissertation, “American Evangelicals, Israel, and the Origins of the Modern Christian Zionist Movement, 1948-1980,” for publication.

