Joel Osteen, the smiling preacher, has quickly emerged as one of the most recognizable Protestant leaders in the country. His megachurch, the Houston based Lakewood Church, hosts an average of over 40,000 worshipers each week. Osteen is the best-selling author of numerous books, and his sermons and inspirational talks appear regularly on mainstream cable and satellite radio.

*Salvation with a Smile*, the first book devoted to Lakewood Church and Joel Osteen, offers a critical history of the congregation by linking its origins to post-World War II neopentecostalism, and connecting it to the exceptionally popular prosperity gospel movement and the enduring attraction of televangelism. In this richly documented book, historian Phillip Luke Sinitiere carefully excavates the life and times of Lakewood’s founder, John Osteen, to explain how his son Joel expanded his legacy and fashioned the congregation into America’s largest megachurch.

As a popular preacher, Joel Osteen’s ministry has been a source of existential strength for many, but also the routine target of religious critics who vociferously contend that his teachings are theologically suspect and spiritually shallow. Sinitiere’s keen analysis shows how Osteen’s rebuttals have expressed a piety of resistance that demonstrates evangelicalism’s fractured, but persistent presence.

*Salvation with a Smile* situates Lakewood Church in the context of American religious history and illuminates how Osteen has parlayed an understanding of American religious and political culture into vast popularity and success.
SUMMARY

The introduction begins with an ethnographic vignette of entering and experiencing Lakewood Church. While it places the author into the story, it prompts the reader to imagine what Lakewood is like in both its institutional and religious forms. It aims to capture both visual and affective elements of what it is like in America’s largest megachurch, after which the introduction pivots to historical consideration of Lakewood’s broader story. The introduction also proposes thinking about Lakewood Church in terms of people, place, personality, prosperity, and Pentecost through historical change over time and contemporary cultural significance. The aim of this summative formulation (call it the 5 P’s if you like) intends to capture the nuance and complexity of Lakewood’s past and present in local and national perspective. In addition, it carefully explains the historical methodology the shapes and informs the book’s major arguments followed by a discussion of the study’s key terms, including evangelicalism and Pentecostalism.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

➤ What impressions do you get of Lakewood Church from the opening vignette? If you have seen Joel Osteen on television or on YouTube, how does the vignette compare with or contrast to what you’ve seen?

➤ What is a megachurch, and what factors about Lakewood’s history document its status as America’s largest congregation?

➤ What is the main argument of Salvation with a Smile?

➤ How does the author couple historical analysis and ethnographic research to create a historical and cultural profile of Lakewood Church?
Chapter 1: John Osteen’s Pentecost
Pages 19–36

SUMMARY
This chapter narrates John Osteen’s early life, affiliation with Christianity, and discusses the churches he pastored before founding Lakewood Church in 1959. It explains his transformation from Southern Baptist preacher to an impassioned nondenominational, neopentecostal. It chronicles the difficulties of his personal life and the sermons and publications associated with his public ministry. The first chapter places Osteen as a key figure in the ascendancy of post-World War II neopentecostalism, most specifically his involvement with the Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International (FGBMFI), and his published and visual presence in Voice, the association’s monthly magazine. Finally, it documents Osteen’s connections to major midcentury neopentecostal revivalists such as T. L. Osborn and Oral Roberts.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

➥ What personal and existential factors led to John Osteen’s religious awakening, and subsequent connection to neopentecostalism?

➥ Discuss John’s “Texas theology.” What mid-twentieth historical changes shaped the broader cultural and political movements associated with Texas theology?

➥ What ministerial experience did John Osteen acquire before starting Lakewood Church? In your opinion, what was the most important and why? (It may be useful to reference the never-before-seen photos of John Osteen’s early years from pp. 23, 24, and 26.)

➥ Explain what John’s saying “Pentecost is not a denomination but an experience from God for everyone,” meant in light of the post-World War II neopentecostal revival.

➥ Discuss the origins of Lakewood Church.

CLASSROOM ENRICHMENT

➥ Instructors who wish to use additional visual accompaniment to lectures and discussions might assign this 25-minute biographical video of John Osteen. While Lakewood Church produced this video toward the end of Osteen’s career—the promotional message is hard to miss—the film nevertheless includes rare footage from Osteen’s life and interviews with individuals who appear in the book (e.g., Sam Martin, Lisa Osteen, Dodie Osteen, Junior Ferguson), especially in the first fifteen minutes of the film.
SUMMARY

Picking up where chapter 1 left off, chapter 2 begins with John’s growing ministry during the 1970s and his adoption of the prosperity gospel, most notably influenced by the teachings of neopentecostal preacher Kenneth Hagin. A close reading of Osteen’s books and teachings deciphers the focus of his prosperity gospel during this period, which included attention to divine healing and psychological well-being in the midst of rapid societal change. This chapter also charts the expansion of Lakewood Church throughout the 1980s, both in terms of congregational size and in terms of its public profile as John’s son Joel Osteen began producing the John Osteen telecast on local and national networks. This chapter ends with John’s final decade in the 1990s, and connects his televangelism and prosperity gospel message of family values, religious leadership, and social conservatism to wider religious trends within the evangelical movement in the United States.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

➥ For many years, Lakewood Church called itself the “Oasis of Love.” Discuss the origins and meaning of this tagline.

➥ Define John Osteen’s prosperity gospel. How did the emphasis of John’s prosperity message compare to and contrast with other leading proponents of the prosperity gospel?

➥ What was John’s “Bible confession” and what did it communicate about Lakewood Church in particular, and neopentecostalism more generally?

➥ Starting in the 1980s, John’s son Joel launched Lakewood’s television ministry. Discuss some of the ways Joel aided his father’s neopentecostal teachings through television broadcasting and production.

CLASSROOM ENRICHMENT

➥ Students interested in Joel Osteen’s early television production during his father’s ministry, as well as John Osteen’s tactics of evangelism might wish to view the 1993 documentary Death & Beyond (approximately 45 minutes).

➥ As chapter 2 indicates, John Osteen’s sermons and publications during the 1980s emphasized topics such as the prosperity gospel and spiritual warfare. This list of televised sermons from the 1980s addresses these topics and illustrates John’s unique preaching style. Comparing clips of any two or three sermons might be a useful classroom exercise to identify commonalities in preaching style and differences in sermon content.
John’s sermons “The Power of Words” and “Changing Your World by Changing Your Words” (both about 25 minutes long) document and present his definition of positive confession. Viewing and discussing these sermons after reading chapters three and four, either in their entirety or selecting a 3-5 minute clip, will illustrate what the author means by Joel’s “embracing the inheritance” of his father’s teaching (cf. chapter four’s Classroom Enrichment question #4 below).

Toward the end of his life, John Osteen spent considerable time offering personal reflections of his own life as well as training ministers and missionaries. Presentations from Lakewood’s “Pastors & Leaders” conference in 1996 conveys these subjects, and presents rich material in relation to the topic of modern religious leadership. (Find the 1997 conference here, and the 1998 meeting here.)
SUMMARY

This chapter begins by recounting Joel Osteen’s transition from television producer to pastor of Lakewood Church. It documents how Joel both recognized his father’s legacy, but also sought to distinguish himself from it by marking his own place in Lakewood’s history, especially in his 1999 “Vision Sunday” sermon and inaugural tagline from the same year, “We Believe in New Beginnings.” In the process, chapter 3 identifies the four parts of his prosperity gospel message: positive thinking, positive confession, a focus on healthy living and psychological wholeness, and a providence of positive outcomes, the conviction that God always orchestrates human lives in an inevitably beneficial way. This chapter also explains the primary influences on Joel’s prosperity gospel: his father, neopentecostal teacher Joyce Meyer, and leadership expert John Maxwell. Analyzing for the first time some of Joel’s early sermons from 1999, chapter 3 concludes by connecting the dots between the content of his rookie sermons and the teachings of his mentors.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

➥ Explain the historical processes by which Joel Osteen became Lakewood’s main pastor. What social or cultural factors stand out as most important and why?

➥ How did Joel’s 1999 message “Vision Sunday” pay tribute to his father’s influence, while marking his own genesis as the minister of a megachurch? (Read the full message of “Vision Sunday” in Appendix B.)

➥ In what ways did John Osteen influence the content of Joel’s message, and his understanding of Christianity?

➥ The history of evangelicalism is full of family transitions in ministry positions and churches, such as Juanita Coe’s work after her husband Jack died; Franklin Graham’s role in his father Billy Graham’s ministry as the elder Graham moved into retirement; and Fred Price, Jr.’s ministry in the shadow of his father Fred Price, Sr. among other examples. How does the John-Joel Osteen generational transition compare to the aforementioned families? What historical, social, theological, or cultural dynamics explain the seemingly smooth, or difficult, transitions of this kind?

➥ How does Joel’s overall prosperity message adapt what he learned from the teachings of Joyce Meyer and John Maxwell?

CLASSROOM ENRICHMENT

➥ The Lakewood Church service that announced John’s death and served as a
tribute to his memory is at once a moving recognition of a pastor’s legacy and an indication, even if in embryonic form, of the congregation’s future. While the video presents tender and moving moments in the life of the Osteen family, it is also important to grasp the “performance” of the service as it relates to leadership transition at Lakewood.

John Osteen’s memorial service (Part 1, Part 2, Part 3, Part 4, Part 5), like the Lakewood tribute, narrates selected aspects of John’s legacy, while it also exemplifies a history of the neopentecostal networks of which he was a part and that helped to make him into a major figure in American evangelicalism (view Part 4 for this content). Moreover, each service (from 13:28-15:00 in the initial service, and in Part 2 from 25:30 to the end of the clip at 31:06), features comments by a young Joel Osteen, who at the time had yet to emerge from his father’s shadow and determine the contours of his own message.
SUMMARY

The fourth chapter details the four dimensions of Joel Osteen’s prosperity gospel identified in chapter 3. From Joel’s published books, audio and video materials, as well as rare transcripts of his inaugural sermons, this chapter explains the smiling preacher’s articulations of positive thinking, positive confession, a providence of positive outcomes, and Osteen’s prosperity gospel of the body. Chapter 4 also contextualizes Joel’s prosperity gospel in light of the prosperity gospel movement’s history, especially its explosive growth following World War II. Finally, it connects the historical and cultural significance of Osteen’s message to his Sunbelt roots in Houston, as well as to the broader story of American Christianity.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

➥ Define the four elements of Joel Osteen’s prosperity gospel: positive thinking, positive confession, a providence of positive outcomes, and his prosperity gospel of the body.

➥ According to the author, how does Osteen’s prosperity gospel compare to the larger history of the prosperity gospel movement?

➥ Discuss how Osteen’s providence of positive outcomes relates to the theological concepts of providence within Calvinist doctrine. (It will be useful to return to this question after reading chapter 8, and note the irony present in New Calvinist critiques of Osteen’s message.)

➥ While the evangelical movement of which Osteen is a part concerns itself with spiritual life, Osteen’s prosperity gospel centers on material, bodily, and corporeal aspects of Christianity. Discuss this relationship, and how it connects to Osteen’s prosperity teachings overall.

➥ While Osteen is a religious celebrity of national and international importance, the author suggests that understanding Houston’s cultural and religious history is equally vital to making sense of Joel’s historical significance. In your estimation, how is Houston integral to understanding the smiling preacher?

CLASSROOM ENRICHMENT

➥ Using data from the Hartford Institute for Religion Research (HIRR), chapter 4 quantitatively compares Lakewood to other megachurches. Encourage students to conduct their own research and analysis from the HIRR’s online database of megachurches. They may wish to compile a list of megachurches in Texas and find the cities in the Lone Star State with the most megachurches, and/or compare megachurch data in Texas to that of other states.
A key example of Joel’s teachings on positive confession come from a 2001 sermon “The Power of Words” (discussed on p. 83). For comparison with John Osteen’s concept of positive confession, see his sermon also titled “The Power of Words” from 1988 (discussed on p. 49). While both sermons are nearly 30 minutes in length, sampling particular sections will be useful in comparing Joel’s teachings on positive confession with that of his father.

In a 2011 appearance on The Dr. Oz Show (view all of the show’s segments here) called “Medical Miracles,” Osteen discussed health, divine healing, and spirituality. It might be useful to propose this query to students: What do Osteen’s comments on Dr. Oz suggest about his prosperity gospel of the body, and how does his perspective commentary fit within concepts of healing and health in the wider prosperity gospel movement?

In 2010, Joel Osteen said an inaugural prayer at the swearing in of Houston Mayor Annise Parker. Mayor Parker, a long-time Houston City Council member, made headlines as the first LGBT mayor of the Bayou City. While Osteen’s cultural politics are decidedly conservative, especially with regard to homosexuality and marriage equality, his message lacks the rhetorical vitriol of the Christian Right that has targeted issues such as abortion and gay marriage. Since this chapter suggests that understanding Houston is necessary to grasp Joel’s historical significance, in what ways does Mayor Parker’s optimism for Houston in her inaugural address reflect Osteen’s spiritual teaching on positive thinking and vice versa? What does Osteen’s decision to say the inaugural prayer for a Democratic mayor (remember, too, that as chapter 2 documented, John Osteen said the inaugural prayer in 1998 for Democratic Houston mayor Lee Brown) reveal about the intersection of religion, culture, and politics in contemporary America?
Chapter 5: Joel Osteen’s Tel-e-vangelism
Pages 107–136

SUMMARY

This chapter offers a history of Joel’s first career as a television producer. Deploying the concept of tel-e-vangelism, it recounts his early days in production and connects his deep knowledge of religious broadcasting to his pioneering efforts with the John Osteen telecast. Chapter 5 also underscores his innovative use of new media (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, etc.) during the early 2000s for Joel Osteen Ministries and the networking behind Osteen’s digital dexterity. This chapter argues that since becoming Lakewood’s minister in 1999, Osteen has remade religious broadcasting—in part through his smile—as an acceptable, if still controversial, enterprise since sour memories of the televangelist scandals of the 1980s and 1990s continue to produce skeptical viewers. Turning to Osteen’s “Night of Hope” meetings, chapter 5 concludes by contemplating the Houston pastor’s nationwide stadium and arena events as the new camp meeting of the 21st century.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Joel Osteen learned the mechanics of religious broadcasting during a critical time in televangelism’s history as scandals befell several high-profile television ministries. How did Joel utilize this knowledge to produce religious programming that was equally entertaining and predictable, thus avoiding the spectacle of televangelism associated with the likes of Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, Jimmy Swaggart, and more recently, Ted Haggard?

- Discuss how the author describes Osteen as a new tel-e-vangelist. To what extent is this a useful concept to understand the smiling preacher’s experience and expertise as a religious broadcaster?

- What entails Osteen’s “Night of Hope” events, and how are these meetings designed to present Osteen and Lakewood to audiences outside of Houston? Is Osteen’s portable Lakewood program unique in the history of televangelism and religious programming? Why or why not?

CLASSROOM ENRICHMENT

- While it possesses a promotional aspect to it, AOL produced a 5-minute story on Osteen’s “Historic Night of Hope” events that presents a unique angle into his televangelism.

- In the wake of televangelist scandals in the 1980s, and in the midst of an important moment for the Christian Right, journalist Ted Koppel hosted a 30-minute forum on the broader topic called “Televangelism: The Million Dollar Pie.” The forum displays the intense skepticism that had developed about televangelism itself, while Koppel’s show also functions as an important historical artifact at
a controversial time in American religious history. Koppel’s segment can provide younger students with a sense of why televangelism remains controversial, why the relationship between religion and politics remains central to American public life, and how significant Osteen’s scripted tel-e-vangelism is.

The journalist John Camp created a half-hour documentary for CNN in the late 1990s (Part 1, Part 2) that presented the fall, and resurrection, of Jimmy Swaggart’s career. While the documentary reflects deep skepticism towards the enterprise of televangelism, it also offers a fascinating history of a leading tel-evangelist’s fall from grace, and the processes by which he mounted a return to public ministry.

Alexandra Pelosi’s documentary “The Trials of Ted Haggard” (Part 1, Part 2, Part 3, totaling approximately 45 minutes) presents the story of a more recent televangelist scandal, along with a contemporary account of the complex entanglement of religion and politics. The documentary’s narrative feeds on the memory of previous televangelist scandals, while it presents the flawed, tragic, yet strangely compelling dynamics of the Haggard family reeling in the wake of controversy. It shows how the cost of religious celebrity today is pricey emotionally, spiritually, and existentially. Like items 2 and 3 above, the Haggard documentary helps students to understand televangelism’s history and cultural and political meaning in U.S. society vis-à-vis Joel Osteen’s tel-e-vangelism.
SUMMARY

This chapter broadens the scope of understanding Lakewood Church as far more than John or Joel Osteen. It advances the idea of Lakewood’s “charismatic core” which unveils not a hidden center of the church—internal access to interior discussions, deliberations, and decisions of the congregation’s leaders is impossible—but distinct manifestations of Lakewood’s congregational history and collective identity. Chapter 6 presents through biographical profile and textual analysis of sermons and publications the teachings of Dodie Osteen, Joel’s mother, and Lisa Osteen Comes, his sister, as well as Victoria, Joel’s wife, Paul Osteen, Joel’s brother, and Lakewood’s first Spanish-speaking pastor Marcos Witt. The chapter focuses on Lakewood’s elites even as it explains reasons for their appeal and why they are controversial.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

➤ How does the notion of Lakewood’s “charismatic core” offer a way to understand the congregation and its history as more than John or Joel Osteen?

➤ Lakewood’s “charismatic core” has largely consisted of members of the Osteen family, which is to say that the church has had mostly Anglo leaders—as compared to its congregational composition which is extremely racially and ethnically diverse. Assess this fact of Lakewood’s history in light of the history of religious leadership in U.S. megachurches. How does the case of Lakewood thus far in its history compare and/or contrast with other megachurches?

➤ And a related question: How do we evaluate the fact that Lakewood, as the largest megachurch in the nation, is one of the nation’s most diverse congregations yet has retained a predominately white leadership structure?

➤ In what ways have the divine healing accounts of Dodie and Lisa fundamentally defined Lakewood’s collective identity? How do these accounts help us to understand Lakewood as a neopentecostal church, both historically and in the present?

➤ Marcos Witt’s presence at Lakewood Church from 2002-2012 was instrumental in the congregation achieving international notoriety. How did Witt’s success as a musician and a minister connect Lakewood to the broader context of global Pentecostalism?

➤ While Lakewood’s missionary efforts date to John Osteen’s tenure, Paul Osteen’s unique skill as a surgeon and pastor continued John’s legacy of global outreach. Discuss how Paul’s efforts have linked Lakewood to wider networks of U.S. capital to the developing world, and the ways that the church’s monetary
and humanitarian aid connects to the longer history of western imperialism.

Victoria Osteen is probably better known for the controversies in which she has been involved than the content and scope of her teaching at Lakewood Church. How do her sermons and books distinguish her amongst Lakewood’s other leaders, and how are her teachings both similar to and different from Joel’s?

CLASSROOM ENRICHMENT

While Marcos Witt’s music has been a defining marker in his career, he is also an accomplished and entertaining minister. Students can access examples of audio versions of his sermons in Spanish at iTunes.

In a rare Paul Osteen sermon posted by Joel Osteen Ministries, which also includes documentary segments of his travels to Africa, his message of global outreach exhibits how he’s kept John Osteen’s missionary legacy alive through a presentation of Lakewood’s charismatic core. To engage the broader themes chapter six addresses, a student discussion in light of this 40-minute video might identify how Paul’s language, and the comments by other ministry participants, reflects the residue of western imperialism or identify how the message reveals the global networks of religious humanitarianism in which Lakewood is involved.

The endnotes for chapter six provide links to articles and videos on Victoria Osteen, including clips about well-publicized stories on her airplane altercation and YouTube controversy that students might profitably use for a discussion on religion and celebrity. However, this brief 8-minute interview clip from her appearance on the Christian Broadcasting Network’s 700 Club, which in essence is a promo for her book Love Your Life expresses her message of positivity for women and the family along with her projects for literacy. At the beginning of the interview, the subject of the lawsuit filed against Victoria is central to the conversation, and her responses illustrate the core components of her message.
SUMMARY

Chapter seven builds on the previous chapter with an analysis of Lakewood’s congregational life by zeroing in on the resources it offers for members and attendees to cultivate a religious identity. Drawing from narrative psychologist Dan McAdams’s concept of the “redemptive self,” this chapter links Lakewood’s teachings on second chances to echoes of that message in religious education classes as well as in the life stories—“testimonies” in neopentecostal parlance—of those affiliated with Lakewood Church. Burrowing down into the lives of some of Lakewood’s members and attendees surfaces not only what drew them to the church’s message, but also how culturally powerful a narrative of second chances is in contemporary times of global terrorism, economic collapse, and social unrest.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What is the “redemptive self” at Lakewood Church, and what kinds of congregational resources exist for members and attendees to make religious meaning of their everyday lives?
- How do the congregational resources for religious identity at Lakewood compare to other megachurches across the U.S.? What are similarities and/or differences?
- Since Joel Osteen is often the public face of Lakewood, what surprised you most about the interior look at the congregation that chapter 7 provides?

CLASSROOM ENRICHMENT

- Salon journalist Alexis Grant wrote illuminatingly about her time at Lakewood Church. While chapter seven begins with a vignette based Grant’s article, encourage students to read “I Fell in Love with a Megachurch” and compare her experience to those Lakewood attendees whose stories appear in the chapter.
- The main site for megachurch research is the Hartford Institute for Religion Research (HIRR). It has produced a large amount of data on not only the leadership of megachurches, but also the experiences of those who attend these massive congregations. Have students read and discuss the HIRR’s research in light of the experiences of Lakewood members and attendees recorded in chapter 7. HIRR findings as well as the stories chapter seven offers document many reasons why people attend and/or leave megachurches. Such comparisons provide the opportunity for much needed nuanced discussion about contemporary megachurch life.
SUMMARY

The eighth and final chapter argues that Osteen's New Calvinist critics and Joel's reply through his piety of resistance—in essence rhetorical and theological battles over interpretations of the Bible that commenced after the smiling preacher's first appearance on *Larry King Live* in 2005—documents evangelicalism's crisis of authority. New Calvinism is an evangelical movement that fixates on propositional, intellectual theology and the absolute fact of divine sovereignty. The movement's commitment to doctrinal precision, articulated through the teachings of individuals like R. Albert Mohler, John MacArthur, and Michael Horton, has led to blistering critiques of evangelicals whose theology the New Calvinists deem as insufficiently robust. This chapter historicizes the New Calvinist's piercing assessments of Joel Osteen, and Osteen's retorts, by connecting the historical dots between a previous generation of ministers such as Norman Vincent Peale and Oral Roberts who weathered similar rhetorical storms as they grappled with critical responses to their messages from fellow religious insiders.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What is New Calvinism and where does it fit within the wider evangelical movement in the United States?
- How do New Calvinist assessments of Joel Osteen and his message demonstrate the movement's emphasis on intellectual, propositional theology?
- Discuss Joel Osteen's piety of resistance and the specific ways he addressed his New Calvinist critics.
- Explain how the rhetorical conflict and theological combat between Osteen and his critics illustrates evangelicalism's crisis of authority.

CLASSROOM ENRICHMENT

- This brief 3-minute clip of Osteen speaking on *Larry King Live* in 2005 (read the show's full transcript here) initially spawned evangelical criticism of him and his ministry. His letter in response to the flap alluded to emerging controversy, but also exhibited rhetorical ways that he addressed detractors by emphasizing positive thinking and second chances.
- For students unfamiliar with New Calvinism, *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly* produced a short report (and transcript) and *Time* writer David Van Biema covered the movement. These accounts help to connect New Calvinism to the broader cultural currents in contemporary American society. While chapter 8 only alludes to intersectional aspects of the movement, students might also profitably
assess New Calvinism through the lens of race, gender, and class vis-à-vis Osteen and Lakewood.

While the Joel Osteen million-dollar gospel tract and Answers in Genesis cartoon present unique critiques of the smiling preacher, so too does the work of Reformed rapper Shai Linne, one of many who targeted Osteen in his 2013 track “False Teacher$” (lyrics here). Emblematic of New Calvinism’s propositional, doctrinal evaluation of non-Reformed evangelicalism coupled with an impressive lyricism, Linne’s song decries the prosperity message in its entirety while singling out Osteen in particular. Students might make a useful contrast between Linne’s song, born from East Coast hip-hop culture, and Houston-based Southern rapper Slim Thug’s 2015 track “Chuuch,” which features snippets of Osteen’s teaching as a “spoken word” component of the song. Slim Thug’s song isn’t a critique of Osteen’s prosperity gospel, but a validation of its emphasis on positive thinking and religious moralism as applied to hip-hop culture. In addition, it provides a way to analyze the intersection of African American Christianity and the prosperity gospel.

HIRR findings as well as the stories chapter seven offers document many reasons why people attend and/or leave megachurches. Such comparisons provide the opportunity for much needed nuanced discussion about contemporary megachurch life.
SUMMARY

The conclusion rehearses the book’s major arguments to suggest that understanding contemporary American Christianity is incomprehensible apart from including the story of Joel Osteen and Lakewood Church. Osteen’s historical connection to neopentecostalism, and the intersection of his knowledge of religious programming with the rise of new media—which occurred as he hit the national stage—propelled him into the spotlight as one of the most important figures in contemporary Christianity. Finally, his ascendancy at the dawn of the twenty-first century in a transitional moment for religion and politics allowed wider purchase for his message because he adopted neither the Christian Right’s combative rhetoric nor religious progressives’ social message of political and economic equality (even though his social politics were functionally conservative).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

➥ Assess the conclusion that Osteen’s popularity ties fundamentally to neopentecostalism, modern televangelism and new media, and contemporary politics in the United States. Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not?

➥ How is Osteen like, or unlike, other contemporary televangelists or religious celebrities? Do his Texas roots offer a way to capture the dynamic of “southernization” in American politics and religious culture (see p. 101)?

➥ In light of the arguments in Salvation with a Smile, are there alternative explanations for Osteen and Lakewood’s significance that account for historical context, American religious culture, or and change over time?
Appendix
Pages 215–234

Appendix A: Joel Osteen, “What the Resurrection Means to Us as Believers” (1999)


SUMMARY

Appendix A and B offer two very unique primary sources, available from the Internet Archive, for studying Joel Osteen and Lakewood Church. Two of his early sermons from 1999, while he was still a rookie preacher, capture the ways that he started to find his footing as a minister and televangelist.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

➤ As you read his sermons from 1999, how does Osteen’s language and messages compare to the more polished, smiling preacher of today? What of his message has changed and/or remained the same?

➤ Where in Osteen’s early orations do you find elements of the prosperity gospel, as well as aspects of evangelical teaching?
EDITOR’S REMARK

By Phillip Luke Sinitiere

In developing this Instructor’s Guide to accompany Salvation with a Smile, I endeavored to create user-friendly questions for classroom use that highlight the book’s major themes and arguments as well as challenge students to connect the book’s content with relevant factors of social, cultural, religious, and historical context. While I designed these questions for use in history and religious studies courses, it is my hope that the questions might also work, or be adapted, for classes in theology, sociology, ethnography, and literature.

The Summary section recaps each chapter’s contents, and the Discussion Questions prompt reflection on how the book’s themes tie into the broader history of American religion. Finally, the Classroom Enrichment sections offer videos, audio clips, or digital materials that bring the chapters to life, or allow instructors and students to engage the book’s contents in more visual and auditory ways.

For helpful feedback during the design phase, I gladly thank Kate Bowler, Charity Carney, Tim Gloege, Lerone Martin, Arlene Sánchez-Walsh, and John Wilsey.

If instructors use the book and guide in their classroom, or adapt questions to their own pedagogical liking, I would love to hear about your experiences and/or ways that I might improve future editions of the Instructor’s Guide. In addition, I am happy to dialogue with professors and their classes via Skype or some other digital means. Feel free to contact me: philliplukesinitiere@gmail.com.