

PROSELYTIZING AND POLITICIZING: EVANGELICALS AND THE SHAPING OF
THE MODERN PRESIDENCY

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by

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ABSTRACT

PROSELYTIZING AND POLITICIZING: EVANGELICALS AND THE SHAPING OF THE MODERN PRESIDENCY

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Conservative evangelical Christians, operating on a belief that the United States was not living up to its covenant with God, entered politics where they sought to use their vast media resources in conjunction with a charismatic leadership to influence presidential politics and establish their conservative policy agenda. Since 1960, the conservative evangelical presence and influence can best be seen through the presidencies of John F. Kennedy, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush. Each of these presidents is responsible for the evolution of the conservative evangelical agenda between 1960 and 2004, as well as their realignment with the Republican Party. A historic, qualitative

analysis of conservative evangelicals reveals that John F. Kennedy's Roman Catholic identity in conjunction with anti-New Deal sentiment, and a growing uneasiness with the secularity of the United States ignited the political mobilization of conservative evangelicals. While the perceived poor leadership and secular policy stances of Jimmy Carter pushed any remaining conservative evangelicals away from the Democratic Party, Ronald Reagan and the rhetoric of "God and Country" cemented the evangelical/Republican realignment. Finally, George W. Bush and the emphasis on "the values voter" became the fulfillment of conservative evangelical hopes. Each of these presidents catered to the evangelical agenda. Presidents Kennedy and Carter provided the negative stimulus to conservative evangelical political mobilization, while Reagan and Bush catered to their rhetoric and promoted their agenda. As a result, evangelicals, drawing upon a long history, have defined religion in their own terms in American politics and discourse.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Responding to President Carter's highly criticized malaise speech and his handling of the Iran Hostage Crisis in 1979, presidential hopeful Ronald Reagan captured the attention of conservative evangelical Christians when he drew upon the nation's Christian heritage by invoking the words of John Winthrop who stated,

“We shall be a city on a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken and so cause Him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword throughout the world. A trouble and afflicted mankind look to us, pleading for us to keep our rendezvous with destiny.” Reagan concluded, “I believe that you and I together can keep this rendezvous with destiny.”¹

The future president's rhetoric proved the perfect formula to win over a group that Gallup Poll indicated in 1977-1978 was comprised of fifty million strong.² Reagan's commission toward a rendezvous with destiny garnered the praise of conservative evangelicals who had by the end of the 1970s become politically mobilized into groups such as the Moral Majority in response to what they saw as the degradation of American society at the hands of a liberal/elite agenda. Abortion, gay rights, and the abolishment of school prayer led conservative evangelicals, chiefly Jerry Falwell, to become resolute in the fact that the United States was “one of the most blatantly sinful nations of all time.”

¹ David Scott Domke, *God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

² Gaston Espinosa, *Religion and the American Presidency* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

Thus, in order to reconcile with God and to achieve this rendezvous with destiny a nation like an individual must be called to repentance and return to morality.³

Seeking to return the nation to God and ensure his blessings, conservative evangelical Christians turned to politics where, from out of the margins of political life, they became a concentrated political force by wielding considerable influence in presidential elections, presidential policies, and by shaping the rhetoric and discourse of American political life. Furthermore, conservative evangelicals are responsible for redefining religion and American politics and for shaping the modern presidency through the dissemination of a particular brand of Christian rhetoric injected into political discourse and broadcast throughout a multimedia empire. Consequently, the elections, policies, and rhetoric of John F. Kennedy, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush all show evidence of the powerful influence of a group with a clear socio-political agenda that has been evolving since the early Puritans. Not only were the aforementioned presidents influenced greatly by conservative evangelicals, they are responsible for cementing the Republican evangelical realignment of the 1980s and for defining the evangelical movement of today. Certainly, Kennedy, Carter, Reagan, and Bush were not the only presidents to engage conservative evangelicals. However, the historical span between 1960 and 2004 proved to be a redefining period in the role of religion and the presidency; more importantly, the role of conservative evangelicals and the presidency.

Motivated by a socially conservative agenda based upon a moral impetus to return the nation to God, conservative evangelicals have been a viable political force in the elections, rhetoric, and policy stances of modern presidents. Attempting to define this group has proven difficult for researchers given the ambiguity of the evangelical label

³ Domke, 52.

and the complexity of the group at large. However, a detailed analysis will reveal that conservative evangelicals, though heterogeneous and divided along racial, cultural, and theological lines share a common core set of beliefs and draw upon a common evangelical language, activism, and history.

According to a criteria of three standards created by Gallup Poll, evangelical Christians share a core set of beliefs. First, there is a core belief that, as an evangelical, one should share their faith. Second, evangelicals hold to the notion that a person must be born again by accepting Christ as their personal Lord and savior. Finally, conservative evangelicals uphold biblical inerrancy, the belief that the Bible is inspired by God and is his literal word.⁴ These shared tenets of evangelical faith are the cornerstone of evangelical life and prove to be a catalyst for their involvement in politics. If the United States is to be, as Reagan noted, “the Shining City”, conservative evangelicals recognized that they must immerse themselves into the culture of American politics while indoctrinating politicians and the public with their religious lexicon.

The long and turbulent history of conservative evangelicals reveals a complex group that has evolved and mobilized at various points in American history around the moral issues of the day. For example, evangelicals experienced the volatile regional divide over slavery, their unified stance on prohibition, communism, and the schism over evolution leading up to the Scopes Trial, which pitted conservative fundamentalists who adhered to the literal interpretation of God’s word against the modernist’s view that was far more tolerant of the theory of evolution.⁵ However, throughout their political history,

⁴ Albert L. Winseman, "Gallup," *Social and Economic Analysis*, May 31, 2005, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/16519/us-evangelicals-how-many-walk-walk.aspx> (accessed September 27, 2010).

⁵ Frank Lambert, *Religion in American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

resulting from factions and regional and sectarian differences, conservative evangelicals found themselves mobilizing with the inability to sustain a unified and active voice along party lines for any long period of time. It is not until the election of 1960 and the Roman Catholic Kennedy that conservative evangelicals found a common political igniter. Rallying conservative evangelicals southern preachers and evangelists exploited religious and regional differences in an effort to thwart Kennedy's strengths.

Leading up to the election of 1960, the early roots of the modern conservative evangelical movement had already begun to diffuse its political voice as the much-lauded evangelist Billy Graham began to communicate the evangelical message to millions via his televised crusades. As early as 1952, Graham began to use his political voice to motivate leaders to action while calling for a return to morality. According to Peter Heltzel, at a crusade in Jackson, Mississippi "Graham warned that the winning party in the 1952 election must "clean up the country" by 1956 or Graham would lead the sixteen million voters he influenced to the other party."⁶ Such political tactics would become commonplace in the years to come, especially when they were aimed at the country's first Catholic president. For example, when approached by a member of Kennedy's 1960 campaign staff to sign an open letter that encouraged Protestant voters to not let the Catholic issue be the deciding factor, but to "employ reasoned balance of judgment", Graham declined. He understood that this would be viewed as a political endorsement and would be contrary to his political affections and loyalties toward Richard M. Nixon.⁷ Not to mention, there was a growing uneasiness among nativist evangelicals who feared a White House that received its orders from the Vatican.

⁶ Peter Goodwin Heltzel, *Jesus and Justice* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁷ Thomas J. Carty, *Catholic in the White House? Religion, Politics, and John F. Kennedy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

The aftermath of the election and the perceived secular advances made by Kennedy and the country during the tumultuous sixties began the conservative evangelical mobilization toward the Republican Party. Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, conservative evangelicals began searching for a voice in American politics.

At first glance a Southern governor with a rich evangelical heritage would appear to be the fulfillment of conservative evangelical hopes. After the moral decay and the culture wars of the 1960s, the catalyst of *Roe v. Wade*, and the indiscretions of Richard M. Nixon, conservative evangelicals were initially intrigued and reassured by Jimmy Carter's familiar message. According to Gary Scott Smith,

“Americans allow, even expect, politicians to talk about morality or spirituality and its importance in government and public life. But Carter went much further. He confessed that he was a born again evangelical Southern Baptist, whose faith influenced every area of his life, including his political positions and style of governing.”⁸

Jimmy Carter can be credited for injecting the language of “born again” Christianity into the American political lexicon.⁹ With statements like, “If I had to sum up in one word what this campaign is all about the word would be faith”, Carter displayed either a keen political strategy, or a prophetic knowing of the convergence of American politics and religion. *Time* magazine dubbed 1976, “The Year of the Evangelical”.¹⁰

Carter's presidency, however, cemented the shift of conservative evangelicals to the Republican Party. His failure to support school prayer, oppose sex education in the classroom, and his support for the Equal Rights Amendment drew the disdain of

⁸ Gary Scott Smith, *Faith and the Presidency: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁹ Frank Lambert, *Religion in American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

¹⁰ Kenneth E. Morris, "Religion and the Presidency of Jimmy Carter," in *Religion and the American Presidency*, 321-352 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

conservative evangelicals who were also appalled at his decision to do an interview with *Playboy* magazine.¹¹

During this time conservative evangelicals from the Christian Right gave birth to Pastor Jerry Falwell's political action group, the Moral Majority. With a platform based on "pro-life, pro-family, pro-defense, and pro-Israel", it helped cement the evangelical Republican realignment. At the same time, other conservative evangelicals were networking their message of traditional values through the mass media empire they had built over the 1970s. Pat Robertson's *700 Club* was one of the early successful evangelical broadcasts that promoted the traditional family paradigm while exposing secularism in all its forms.¹² According to E.J. Dionne, "At least as late as 1976, conservatism was largely defined by the issues of anticommunism and limited government. By the 1980s, conservatism was defined more and more by issues such as abortion, pornography, prayer in schools, and the content of elementary-school teaching."¹³

The 1980 election saw conservative evangelicals rally around what they perceived to be a dire election with dire consequences for traditional American values. Promise came with Ronald Reagan, a conservative Republican, who embraced the language of faith that aroused conservative evangelicals across the nation. Reagan's "City on a Hill" speech and his rhetoric blended elements of God, prayer, and patriotism coated in a layer of pro-free market ideology and an ardent disdain for communism. Addressing Jerry Falwell's church in Lynchburg, Virginia, Reagan stated, "I know you can't endorse me,

¹¹ Gary Wills, *Head and Heart A History of Christianity in America* (New York: Penguin Group, 2007).

¹² Hetzel, 95.

¹³ E.J. Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics* (New York: First Simon & Schuster, 1991).

but want you to know that I endorse you and what you are doing.”¹⁴ Reagan went on to capture sixty-one percent of the white born again evangelical vote. According to Darren Dochuck, the 1980 election “marked the more remarkable culmination of southern evangelicalism’s move from the margins into the cultural and political mainstream.”¹⁵

Though Reagan did not articulate the evangelical faith and his lifestyle did not always reflect the traditional values so important to conservative evangelicals, his presidency brought a substance to policy matters that had been missing. Reagan made abortion, school prayer, support for Israel, and an abhorrence of communism priorities. Reagan’s presidency provided a blueprint for future presidents in working with conservative Christian groups, especially evangelicals. Pat Robertson voiced, “He is probably the most evangelical president we have had since the founding fathers.”¹⁶

Perhaps no other president embraced the language, belief, and policy stances of conservative evangelicals more than George W. Bush. It became apparent in 1999 at the Iowa Republican debate that George W. Bush was the fulfillment of conservative evangelical hopes. During the debate Bush stated, “When you accept Christ as the savior, it changes your heart. It changes your life. And that’s what happened to me.” Immediately after the debate Dee Stewart, the executive director of the Republican Party of Iowa highlighted, “The Republican debate has religion intertwined in its discourse. Our caucus attendee is not going to be offended by a discussion of God or moral values in politics.” Billy Graham boasted Bush’s response to be “a wonderful answer.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Kenneth J. Heineman, *God Is a Conservative* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998).

¹⁵ Mark A. Noll, *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the 1980s* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1990).

¹⁶ Smith, 334.

¹⁷ Domke, 30.

Bush would bring to the presidency for evangelicals what Carter and Reagan could not: a message, lifestyle, and policy direction firmly based on a conservative evangelical philosophy. Furthermore, evangelicals would have an accessibility to the president they had never experienced prior to Bush. Thus, in the 2004 election, evangelicals would come out in large support for George W. Bush. Bush secured 77.5% of the entire evangelical vote aiding him in his when over John Kerry.¹⁸

Bush's evangelical convictions were ever-present following 9/11 and his Manichean rhetoric targeting "evildoers" appealed largely to the conservative evangelical base. The apocalyptic atmosphere prompted Falwell to declare, "God is pro-war." Tim LaHaye called it, "a focal point of end time event."¹⁹

Conservative evangelicals, though a heterogeneous group, share a common core set of beliefs based on sharing one's faith, biblical inerrancy, and being born again. Their history traces back to the First and Second Great Awakenings while their voice in American politics has been present since the early Puritans. Politically mobilized and divided over the issues of slavery, women's suffrage, prohibition, evolution, and communism; the tumultuous 1960s set in motion the political realignment of the Republican Party/and conservative white evangelicals.

Charged by a belief that secular liberalism had polluted the country founded on Christian values and principles, conservative evangelicals feeling isolated and disenfranchised in the 1960s, rallied and concentrated their efforts to create a viable political voice. The conservative evangelical agenda can be best seen forming through the presidencies of John F. Kennedy, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush.

¹⁸ David E. Cambell, *Matter of Faith: Religion in the 2004 Presidential Election* (Washington: Brooking Institution Press, 200).

¹⁹ Wills, 514.

The strength of the evangelical movement can be seen in its evolution throughout American history, but more importantly, through the group's ability to infuse its rhetoric into presidential elections, policy debates, and the mainstream of the American conscientiousness. As Michael Lindsay notes in *Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite*, "Theirs is an ambitious agenda to bring Christian principles to bear on a range of social issues. It is a vision for moral leadership, a form of public influence that is shaped by ethics and faith while also being powerful and respected."²⁰

²⁰ Michael D. Lindsay, *Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

CHAPTER II

AMERICAN EVANGELICALS: WHO ARE THEY?

The evangelical label has proven an arduous task for researchers and pollsters who have sought to define a group responsible for reshaping the religious political landscape with their activism, language, and commitment to traditional values. Every presidential cycle since 1960 has seen and felt the political clout of a group that has received notable attention in the press and academia for its political mobilization. The difficulty in defining the group that fits under the evangelical umbrella stems from the groups' amalgamation of various sects and interests. Evangelicals are a complex group who are divided along racial, theological, cultural, regional, and party lines. Although the term evangelical is most often and most closely associated with white "conservative Protestants", not to be confused with Mainline Protestants, there are a growing group of progressive evangelicals. Despite the diversity of the evangelical label there stands camaraderie among evangelicals around the tenets of their faith and an activist approach to that faith. It is this activist approach that compels evangelicals to enter the realm of politics to bring about changes in moral causes.

Since John F. Kennedy evangelical political behavior has been the subject of several studies seeking to understand just who this group is, and more importantly, what they want. As a voting block evangelicals drew national media attention in the 2004

election, when George W. Bush received 77% of their vote to John Kerry's 23%.²¹ The election of 2004 was the culmination of evangelical political involvement and mobilization. While they were certainly not the only Christian group to aid Bush in his victory, evangelicals were the driving force behind discussions on faith in the American mainstream. Following the election, evangelicals were once again on the grand stage of the American political scene, while pollsters struggled to define this complex group credited with aiding George W. Bush in his win over Kerry.

Gallup polled professed Christians in 2005 to gain a perspective on how much of the population is evangelical. Gallup employed a three question criteria to determine if the subject fit into the evangelical Christian framework. The three questions targeted major tenets of the evangelical belief base: faith sharing, biblical inerrancy, and the born-again experience. Fifty-two percent of those polled said that they had tried to convert someone to believe in Jesus Christ. While thirty-two percent voiced that the "Bible is the actual word of God." The final question hinged upon the idea of conversion and the "born again experience", and showed that forty-eight percent of those polled had undergone such an experience. The overall percentage of those polled that had a yes response to every question was at twenty-two percent, showing that one in five Americans is evangelical.²² According to a religious affiliations survey conducted by the

²¹ Robert Booth Fowler, Allen D. Hertzke, Lara R. Olson and Kevin R. Den Dulk, *Religion and Politics in America: Faith, Culture, and Strategic Choices* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2010).

²² Albert L. Winseman, "Gallup," *Social and Economic Analysis*, May 31, 2005, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/16519/us-evangelicals-how-many-walk-walk.aspx> (accessed September 27, 2010).

Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 26.3 % of those surveyed in 2008 attend evangelical Christian churches.²³

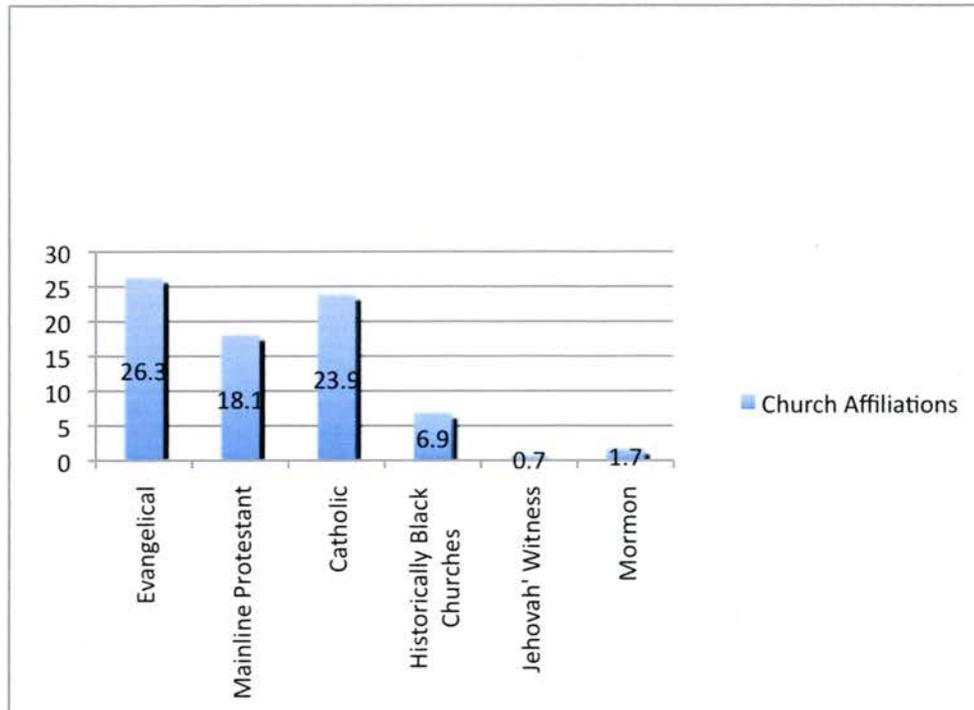


Figure 1: Major U.S. Christian Affiliations

Source: Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Study*, 2008.

The survey of 35, 556 adults was conducted by telephone interview, and revealed that among the Christians interviewed most belong to an evangelical church. Churches identified as being part of the evangelical framework include: Baptist (Evang. Tradition), Methodist (Evang. Tradition), Nondenominational (Evang. Tradition), Lutheran (Evang. Tradition), Presbyterian (Evang. Tradition), Pentecostal (Evang. Tradition), and

²³ Pew, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*, August 13, 2007, <http://religions.pewforum.org/affiliations> (accessed September 27, 2010).

Anglican/Episcopal (Evang. Tradition).²⁴ According to Steven Brint and Jean Reith Schroedel, “The Southern Baptists, claiming more than 16 million members in 42,000 churches, are in many ways the center of evangelical Protestantism in the United States.”²⁵

Although evangelicals have a presence throughout the United States, the strongest concentration of evangelical churches is in the Bible Belt. According to Daniel K. Williams in *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right*, “52% of American evangelicals live in the South.”²⁶ In “American Evangelicals in American Culture: Continuity and Change” Nancy T. Ammerman adds, “Evangelicals are an overwhelming presence in the South and ubiquitous in the Midwest, and have a strong presence in small towns and suburbs in every corner of the country.”²⁷ It is the South, however, that has been the historical political stage for white conservative evangelicals who realigned with the Republican Party in the 1980s after civil rights and the culture wars of the 1960s brought about a unified regional discontent with the direction of the country, and, more specifically, the direction of the Democratic Party. The South has also given rise to most of the key leaders of the Christian Right and Moral Majority, and produced the president who can be credited for bringing “born again” language into the American political vernacular in Jimmy Carter.

²⁴ Pew, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*, August 13, 2007, <http://religions.pewforum.org/affiliations> (accessed September 27, 2010).

²⁵ Steven Brint and Jean Reith Schroedel, *Introduction*, Vol. 1, in *Evangelicals and Democracy in America*, ed. Steven Brint and Jean Reith Schroedel, 1-21 (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009).

²⁶ Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²⁷ Nancy T. Ammerman, *American Evangelicals in the American Culture: Continuity and Change*, Vol. 1, in *Evangelicals and Democracy in America*, ed. Steven Brint and Jean Reith Schroedel, 44-66 (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009). Nancy T. Ammerman, *American Evangelicals in the American Culture: Continuity and Change*, Vol. 1, in *Evangelicals and Democracy in America*, ed. Steven Brint and Jean Reith Schroedel, 44-66 (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009).

Being Born Again

According to Fowler, Hertzke, Olson, and Dulk in *Religion and Politics in America*, “the most telling characteristic that separates evangelical Protestants from other Christians is an affirmative answer to the question, “Do you consider yourself a born-again or evangelical Christian?” The born again conversion experience lies at the core of the evangelical lifestyle. Along with the belief in biblical inerrancy, and the sharing of their faith, the born again experience forms the basis of their religious belief and marks a specific event where they accepted Jesus Christ into their heart as their personal Lord and Savior.²⁸ It is important to note, however, that while the term “born again” encompasses the evangelical umbrella it extends well beyond the evangelical label to other Protestant groups as well as some Catholics. The phrase born again has far reaching appeal and has often been misapplied to only evangelical groups. Gaston Espinosa in *Religion and the American Presidency* adds, “Although most are Evangelical Protestant, there are also born-again mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Orthodox Christians. The fact that a person can be a born-again Christian and a mainline Protestant helps to explain why mainline Protestant politicians such as Reagan (Disciples, Presbyterian), G.H.W. Bush (Episcopalian), and George W. Bush (United Methodist) have also self-identified as born-again Christian.”²⁹

Pluralism Among Evangelicals

While the term born-again, or conversion experience, is one of the tenets of the evangelical faith, it is but one dimension of a pluralistic group. According to Fowler, differences among evangelicals can be divided into three categories: race, theology, and

²⁸ Fowler et al., 32.

²⁹ Espinosa, 19.

culture. When discussing evangelicals as a voting group most researchers make a distinction between white evangelicals and black evangelicals. Whereas, most white evangelicals have shown to be socially and economically conservative and are aligned with the Republican Party, most blacks, 50% of who claim to be evangelical, hold “conservative theological views”, but are socially and economically liberal and largely support the Democratic Party. Brint and Schroedel note the gulf between black and white evangelicals by adding, “Moreover, black evangelicals are nearly as conservative as white on some moral-issues, such as gay marriage. We focus on whites because blacks, despite their social conservatism, have few ties to white evangelicals or other white religious conservatives.” Whereas conservative white evangelicals advocate a strong independence and discipline from government programs, black evangelicals promote a social conscientiousness while their policy goals lean toward “social justice and equality.”³⁰

Black evangelicals also hold to the theological interpretation of the New Testament that emphasizes liberation for the oppressed. Liberation doctrine has been a staple and a motivating factor among black churches in the South throughout their turbulent history. Fowler notes, “In this sense God is an avenging liberator who can lift up the believer and provide both a refuge from the pain of the world and a means for counteracting injustice.” Sharing in this political ideological framework is a small, but growing group of white evangelicals.

Outspoken activists leaders such as Reverend Jim Wallis have been among a growing group of white evangelicals who are theologically conservative but are “socially

³⁰ Brint and Schroedel, *Evangelicals and Democracy in America*, 7-8.

progressive on civil rights, women's ordination, the death penalty, and immigration.” Wallis's book *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* became a popular read among evangelicals who advocate a progressive mindset toward social and political issues. According to Fowler, Hertzke, Olson, and Dulk, “The books denunciation of the Christian Right by a self-identified progressive evangelical, coming right after George W. Bush won a second term with substantial help from conservative religionists, catapulted Wallis into the media stratosphere and made him the de facto leader of religious progressives in America.” Wallis' popularity among evangelicals on the left would eventually garner the attention of the Obama campaign in 2008 where he served as an adviser for “religious outreach.”³¹ Espinosa estimates that this group comprises “20 to 30 percent of the U.S. Evangelical population.”³²

Recent statistics reveal that another group is claiming the evangelical label. According to Espinosa, 37% of Latinos claim to be evangelical. Latino evangelicals tend to be liberal on the death penalty, affirmative action, and women's ordination, but hold conservative views on abortion and gay rights. Traditionally Democrat, Latinos voted for George W. Bush in 2004.³³

While the “evangelical” label, applied broadly, constitutes a diverse mixture of race and ethnicity, politically speaking, the term is most often associated with white conservative Protestants. Most researchers give exclusivity of the evangelical label to white conservatives because of their political activity since 1960. After all it is this group that represents the largest segment of the evangelical voting bloc and has wielded enough political power to spawn organizations and interests groups such as the National

³¹ Fowler, 35.

³² Espinosa, 29.

³³ Espinosa, 29.

Association of Evangelicals, the Christian Coalition, and the Moral Majority in response to liberal policies and Supreme Court decisions like *Roe v. Wade*. Although most conservative evangelicals are not apart of the interest groups stemming from the Christian Right, they share in a common conservative evangelical framework that emphasizes traditional values, evangelical language, and a common disdain for liberal policies.

Figure 2 indicates that 52% of the evangelical population holds a conservative ideology.³⁴

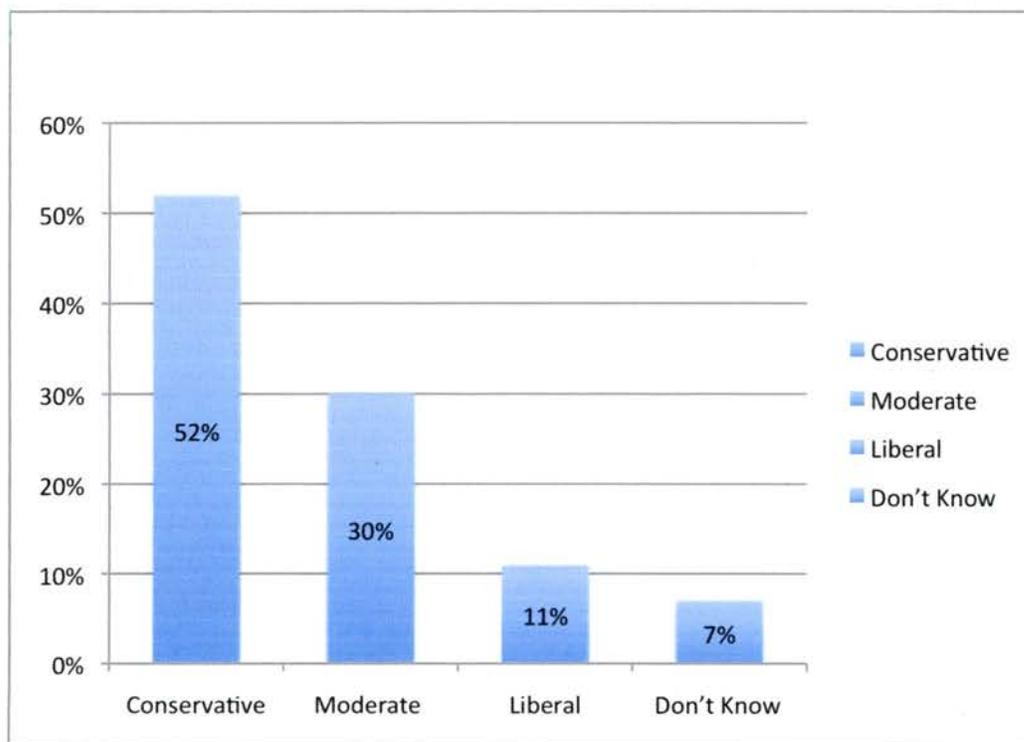


Figure 2: Political Ideology Among Evangelicals

Source: Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Study*, 2008.

³⁴ Pew, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*, August 13, 2007, <http://religions.pewforum.org/affiliations> (accessed September 27, 2010).

Even within the conservative framework, however, there lies a great deal of heterogeneity. For example, theological perspectives on the interpretation of scripture and the role of Christianity in American have added layers of complexity to an already diverse group. This can best be seen among white conservative evangelicals who are divided between fundamentalists and “mainstream” thought. The former take a literalist approach to the interpretation of scripture and have taken an activist approach against what they perceive to be a war against their traditional values.³⁵ Rev. Jerry Falwell, the Southern Baptist Preacher, founder of Liberty University in Virginia, and cofounder of the Moral Majority was the voice of Christian fundamentalism in the 1970s until his death in 2007. A prime example indicative of Falwell’s fundamentalism occurred on May 1, 2005 where he charged members of the Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia to follow his plan of “Massive Spiritual Aggression.” He offered that the Lord spoke to him and revealed this plan, which was to be a “Biblical, non-violent, lawful and offensive strategy.”³⁶ Other notable fundamentalists include former Baptist minister, presidential candidate, and media mogul Pat Robertson, and authors Hal Lindsay and Tim LaHaye.

Most fundamentalists uphold premillennialism, a belief that Jesus Christ will return for his chosen prior to his millennial reign here on earth. This serves as a justification for proselytizing and growing God’s kingdom. If Christ’s return is imminent then it is imperative that evangelicals spread their faith and win lost souls for the kingdom of God. As the famous evangelist Dwight L. Moody proclaimed, “God has given me a lifeboat and said, ‘Moody save all you can.’” Postmillennialists in contrast

³⁵ Fowler et al., 32-33.

³⁶ Lambert, 184.

interpret scripture to mean that Christ will return after a thousand year period of righteousness here on earth. Evangelicals who adopt this framework see social reform as a possibility, and therefore work to better the situation here and now through evangelism, reform, and activism. This was a popular view among evangelicals during the antebellum period.³⁷

Mainstream conservative evangelicals, unlike fundamentalists, take a more moderate approach. Whereas evangelical fundamentalists pursue often aggressive means with highly critical rhetoric rooted in scripture and aimed at those who do not embrace their worldview, mainstream conservative evangelicals like Rev. Billy Graham, have found success with a more tolerant approach to faith. Still theologically and politically conservative, this group of evangelicals comprises the largest segment of the evangelical population. New evangelical leaders like Rev. Rick Warren, author of the *Purpose Driven Life*, and pastor of Saddleback Church in California belong to this evangelical group. Fowler notes, “Saddleback has achieved such prominence that it hosted the only forum on religion and politics in the 2008 presidential campaign that included both parties.”³⁸

Upward Mobility

Once marginalized and perceived as a fringe group who appealed largely to low income, uneducated, rural whites; evangelicals have reached prominence in recent years and are part of today’s “middle-class consumer culture.” Evangelical culture is responsible for generating billions of dollars in merchandise catering to the evangelical belief base. From movies, music, and books evangelical bookstores have propagated their

³⁷ Randall Herbert Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

³⁸ Fowler et al., 30.

evangelical faith, while building a marketing empire. Nancy T. Ammerman states, “Evangelical buying power has forced the American market to recognize them as a consumer demographic worth catering to. Isolated and non mainstream they are not.”

The shift from the margins to the mainstream has taken place over the last thirty years. This is mostly due to the fact that evangelicals, following the 1960s, began infiltrating every facet of American society including: academia, media, business, and politics. Where evangelical Protestants once trailed their mainline Protestant counterparts in influence and status, today they have established themselves and have become a major religious demographic. Another interesting point in reference to the dynamic between evangelical and mainline Protestants is the shift of evangelicals toward the Republican Party and the shift of mainline Protestants away from the Republican Party.³⁹ Evangelical political behavior is, after all, what brought the group into the mainstream. Ammerman offers, “If they had not entered the political arena, the question of their prominence in American life would surely not have gained such urgency.”⁴⁰

Evangelical Lifestyle and Political Engagement

Once criticized by many evangelicals as secular engagement in a sinful world, involvement in politics has become a staple of evangelical behavior. Their political activity reveals a great deal about their identity and culture as a group. Although the white conservative evangelical tree has many branches representing major groups and affiliations, and even smaller sub-groups, the one element that permeates through the evangelical community is their kinetic faith. This approach in many ways separates evangelicals from other Christian groups, and even other Protestants in their behavior.

³⁹ Ammerman, 57-58.

⁴⁰ Ammerman, 60.

The evangelical belief in the deity, life, death, and resurrection of Christ and the atonement of sins through his grace places them on common ground with most Christians.⁴¹ What sets them apart is their “activist approach to faith” and their overt lifestyle commitment to Christ. The evangelical faith informs every aspect of their life, and thus compels them to avoid any hint of a compartmentalization of their beliefs. “For many of them, the evangelical imperative to bring faith into every sphere of one’s life means that they cannot expunge faith from the way they lead, as some would prefer,” claims Michael Lindsay.

Unlike a religion that is passed down through the years from generation to generation, evangelicals relish in the fact that they openly “choose their faith.” This choice leads to a faith of transformation, a faith that spawns a lifestyle commitment with an emphasis on “worship, prayer, and Bible study.” “This lifestyle brings about a need to share ones faith, what evangelicals refer to as “witnessing.” As a result evangelicals share a common vision and a vernacular that permeates every aspect of their lives.⁴² Questions like “Are you saved?” and “When did you commit your life to Christ?” are ubiquitous among evangelicals.⁴³ As Lindsay notes, “Evangelicalism is not just a set of beliefs; it is also a social movement and an all-encompassing identity.”⁴⁴ Brint and Schroedel add, “In a 2005 survey of church members, 94 percent of evangelical Protestants said it was extremely or very important for them to grow in their spiritual life. In the same survey, 85% said that it is very important for Christians to share their faith with people who are not Christians and 95% agreed that Christians in the United States should work harder to

⁴¹ Fowler et al., 32.

⁴² Lindsay, 4.

⁴³ Fowler et al., 32-33.

⁴⁴ Lindsay, 4.

spread their faith throughout the world.”⁴⁵ Thus evangelicals believe that there is “power in the Word” and that power can bring about conviction.⁴⁶

Within this identity evangelicals often frame the world in terms of good and evil, and, thus carry out an individual and collective faith that seeks to right the wrongs that they see in society. Therefore, conservative evangelicals have been the impetus behind public discourse over a wide range of issues such as abortion, prayer in schools, pornography, same-sex marriage, and support for Israel. Thus, it is expected that their politicians embrace the conversation. Robert Wuthnow notes, “only 24 percent of evangelical Protestants said it made them uncomfortable when candidates discuss faith, while “87 percent said it was important that a president have strong religious beliefs.” He continues by adding, “84 percent of evangelical Protestants thought organized religious groups should stand up for their beliefs.”⁴⁷

A perceived secularization of the United States prompted evangelicals, especially fundamentalists, to engage in the political process and wake the rest of the evangelical community, and Christians at large to fight the cultural battle against the liberalism that had taken hold of the Democratic Party. This prompting led to the evangelical Republican realignment of the 1980s that can still be seen today. Figure 3 displays the acceleration of the evangelical/Republican realignment between 1960 and 1980.

⁴⁵ Brint and Schroedel, *Evangelicals and Democracy in America*, 38.

⁴⁶ Robert Wuthnow, “The Cultural Capital of American Evangelicalism,” in *Evangelicals and Democracy in America*, ed. Steven Brint and Jean Reith Schroedel, 27-41 (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009).

⁴⁷ Wuthnow, 39.

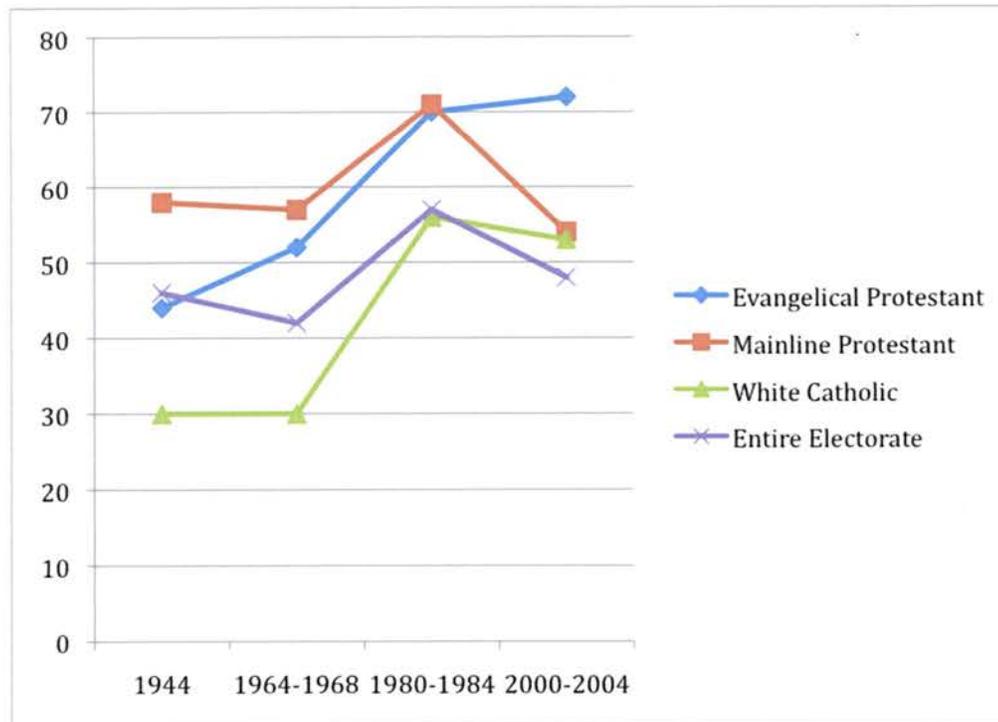


Figure 3: Percentage of Republican Vote for President by Religious Tradition 1944-2004

Source: *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present*

It is important to note that those who researchers have labeled “traditionalists” instigated the move of evangelicals toward the Republican Party between 1960 and 2004.

Traditionalists, according to Kellstedt, Green, Smidt, and Guth, “are regular church attenders who hold literal or inerrant views of the Bible.” The other two categories of “modernists and centrists” account for those attendees who attend with less frequency and place less emphasis on the Bible being the authoritative word of God. When applying the three categories to Evangelical Protestants, Mainline Protestants, and White Catholics it becomes clear that the traditionalists in every group have moved toward the Republican Party. According to Kellstedt, Green, Schmidt, and Guth, “Since the 1960s, those who attend church at least once a week have supported Republican candidates at higher rates

than those attending less frequently. This high attendance certainly facilitates political mobilization: those who attend church most frequently are the easiest to find and activate.” Conservative evangelicals, or “traditionalists”, fit into this church going framework. This culminated in the 2004 election of George W. Bush when evangelicals were part of a greater religious movement that aided Bush in his reelection.⁴⁸

Some researchers have downplayed the impact of evangelicals by claiming that their political power is often over exaggerated and that their voting behavior follows in line with other key factors such as regional voting shifts, and dismiss their strength by suggesting that they are part of a greater movement of religious traditionalists. What cannot be dismissed, however, is the fact that among evangelical traditionalists, 87% voted for George W. Bush in 2004 (10.7 percent of the adult population).⁴⁹ Furthermore, evangelical political behavior continues to set the terms for religious discussion in American politics. When the Republican Party opened its platform to traditional values as defined by an activist Christian voting base, evangelicals seized upon every opportunity to disseminate their message to the public and stake their claim upon the highest office in the land.

The complexity of the evangelical label has presented problems for researchers seeking to define the group. Though divided along racial, theological, cultural and party lines evangelicals agree on three major tenets: biblical inerrancy, faith sharing, and the born again experience. Politically speaking, the term evangelical has been traditionally

⁴⁸ Lyman Kellstedt, John Green, Corwin Schmidt and James Guth, "Faith Transformed: Religion and American Politics from FDR to George W. Bush," in *Religion and American Politics*, ed. Mark A. Noll and Luke E. Harlow, 269-293 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴⁹ Heltzel, 5.

applied by researchers to white conservative Protestants due to the cultural and political differences that exist between white and black evangelicals. However, even among white evangelicals there lies tremendous diversity in interpretation of scripture and approach.

What sets evangelicals apart from other Christian groups is their activist approach to faith and their unyielding belief that faith should inform every aspect of their lives. This is directly correlated to their attitude regarding politics. For most conservative evangelicals it is impossible to set aside their faith in public matters of such dire consequence to their system of beliefs. This prompted evangelical fundamentalist and other conservative evangelicals in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s to mobilize in an attempt to reclaim America. This culminated in the realignment of evangelicals with the Republican Party and eventually the reelection of George W. Bush.

Whereas the election of 2004 has often been dubbed “the arrival of evangelicals” and 1976 was hailed as “the Year of the Evangelical”, these two years are merely highlights or seminal moments of a group with a long and divisive history dating back to the Puritans and the First and Second Great Awakening. The evangelical voice that has become a staple of American presidential politics has a historic thread that endured the early debates over the founding of the nation, the divide over slavery, regional upheaval, and several internal schisms that eventually split evangelicals along very clear lines.

CHAPTER III

EVANGELICAL HISTORY: FROM PURITAN TO PROMINENCE

Recently, much attention has been paid to evangelicals because of their activism and influence in presidential elections. It has become common place for the media to hone in on key leaders of the group to gain their perspective on the spiritual credibility and policy stances of candidates and what issues they hope will be discussed during discourse and debate. As a result, conservative evangelicals have been at the helm of Christian politics since the 1970s. However, it should not go unnoticed that their history has been intertwined with that of the American experience dating back to the early Puritans. One would be hard pressed to separate the evangelical historical framework from the unfolding of the United States as a nation.

The seeds of evangelicalism had already been planted prior to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and, therefore, had already begun to form in the American cultural conscientiousness and political womb. Aided by a fertile spiritual climate evangelicals were charged by the First and Second Great Awakenings, a series of revivals that firmly established the roots of evangelicals in America as proselytizers. Consequently these revivals moved beyond the white evangelical experience and firmly weaved Christianity into the fabric of African slave life.

The conservative evangelical identity has been tempered in disenfranchisement and marginalization; thus, evangelicals saw themselves early on as group being called to

righteousness in a time of darkness. Evangelical churches held to a traditional paradigm, one that was based upon a belief that the Bible is the actual word of God, and as a result evangelicals were leery of the enlightenment thinkers that had such a profound impact on the founding fathers. This philosophical area of contention over God's role in the early Republic remains a volatile issue to this day. Is America, as most conservative evangelicals believe, set apart, as an integral part of God's plan? Or, is God more of an impersonal Creator? Whatever the case might be in an academic sense, as far as the presidency and the public are concerned evangelicals have framed history on their own terms, and right or wrong, they have firmly established their historical viewpoint into the rhetoric and policies of the modern presidency.

Activism in the political arena has been a source of discontentment among evangelicals throughout their history. Motivated by a desire to win lost souls and spread the word of God, evangelical churches spread throughout the early nation. However, the growth of the kingdom would come at the cost of divisions. While regional lines exposed a moral dilemma for the country at large over slavery, evangelicals on both sides upheld a biblical justification for the practice. The divide over slavery would be one of many divisions to haunt the unity of evangelicals. While some evangelicals became politically active over issues such as temperance, women's suffrage, and communism, others chose to isolate themselves from the secular world, which meant removal from politics all together.

Another major event in evangelical history was the Scopes Trial that would mark a dividing line among evangelicals. Leading up to and as a consequence of the trial, evangelicals would be divided between modernists and traditionalists. The schism

exposed competing interpretations of the Bible and raised questions as to its relevance in our society. Politically divided and united around the moral issues of the day, evangelicals have had a turbulent history. It is not until the 1950s and the build up until the election of 1960 election that conservative evangelicals began to show signs of a unified and active conservative political voice.

According to Barry Hankins in *American Evangelicals*, modern evangelicalism has its roots in the 95 theses that Martin Luther posted to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. His protests against practices of Roman Catholicism became the impetus for the Protestant Reformation by first charging that “salvation was by faith alone” or *sola fides*. Salvation can only be found through faith in the grace of Christ. No penance or human action can make a person worthy of salvation. This highlights the previously mentioned evangelical desire to choose their faith. Secondly, Luther criticized the church for making itself an authority on equal grounds with scripture. Scripture for Luther was the highest authority or *sola scriptura*. Therefore, on the basis of what many have called Biblicism, the belief in the authority of scripture, and the aforementioned crucicentrism, salvation through faith in Christ, Protestantism was born. Protestants during this time, though comprised of many diverse groups, were synonymous with the term evangelical⁵⁰ To be evangelical during this time was to be a Protestant who believed in *sola fides* and *sola scriptura*.

Biblicism and crucicentrism were brought to America with the Puritans who had been heavily influenced by John Calvin, a leader in the Protestant Reformation. Receiving their name for their efforts to purify the Church of England, Puritans populated New England and began to build a Christian Society. Schroedel and Brint point out that,

⁵⁰ Barry Hankins, *American Evangelicals* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

“the New England Calvinists tended to view themselves as New Hebrews with a mission to create a new Zion.” This can be seen in the words of John Winthrop who spoke of America as a “City on a Hill.”

With regional differences the early colonies experienced religious boundaries. While the Puritans dominated New England, the Anglican made an imprint in the South, with the Presbyterians taking up the majority in the Mid Atlantic Colonies. Aside from the majority groups were the Baptist, Mennonites, and Quakers.⁵¹

The Great Awakenings

While the Puritans and other Protestant groups laid the foundation for evangelicalism to take up root in the United States, modern evangelicalism would not have its place in the United States if it were not for the First and Second Great Awakenings. “The Great Awakenings transformed the religious landscape, giving rise to new denominations, most notably Methodists, and greatly increasing the influence of Baptists, and lessening that of the Congregationalists, the old establishment denomination in New England,” adds Brint and Schroedel.⁵² According to John M. Murrin, “The First Great Awakening, a series of intense revivals concentrated in the 1730s and 1740s, made New England and Virginia far more pluralistic than they had ever been before.”⁵³

Two evangelical revivalists associated with the First Great Awakening were Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. The former succeeded his father after his death at the Northampton Congregational Church in 1720. Soon after becoming the new pastor Edwards became aware of all manner of sins including fornication, adultery, and

⁵¹ Brint and Schroedel ed., vol. 2, 4.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ John M. Murrin, "Religion and Politics in America From the Settlements to the Civil War," in *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present*, ed. Mark A. Noll and Luke Harlow, 23-41 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

drunkenness. Incensed by what he perceived to be a spiritual warfare with the Devil in Northhampton, he began preaching against the lust of the flesh and charging his parishoners to be saved and lead clean lives. Edwards decried in one of his sermons, "The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some other loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked." He later offered, "And now you have an extraordinary opportunity, a day wherein Christ has flung the door of mercy wide open, and stands in the door calling and crying with a loud voice to poor sinners." Edwards' stern messages stirred the souls of hundreds in Northhampton. Barry Hankins notes, "Within three months 300 people had been converted, bringing the total membership of the Northhampton congregation to over 600, nearly every adult in town." Eventually revivals would spread like fire throughout New England saving thousands.⁵⁴ The real impact of the First Great Awakening, according to Frank Lambert, was by "by elevating personal religious experience above eclessastecal orthodoxy in matters of salvation."⁵⁵ In addition, Brint and Schroedel, highlight, "the establishment churches had become staid and overly formal, leaving the populace largely disconnected from their faith." The revivals provided the perfect ingredients of fear, redemption, and salvation. The seeds of modern day conservative evangelicals were sprouting.

On the heels of Edwards success in the 1730s, George Whitefield became the second most prominent evangelist during this time. Unlike Edwards, Whitefield was mobile preaching from Pennsylvania to Georgia drawing crowds where ever he went. Educated at Oxford, Whitefield took the evangelical message tranatlantic also preaching throughout London. By some estimates Whitefield preached to almost a million people

⁵⁴ Hankins, 5-6.

⁵⁵ Lambert, 19.

in the summer of 1739. Whitefield spoke of a “new birth”, a conversion experience, and asked what would happen if a person experienced a “thorough, real, and inward change of heart.”⁵⁶ This new birth experience was an early maxim for what is referred to now as the born again experience, one of the tenets of evangelical faith. This “new birth” experience had a profound impact on a friend of Whitefields, another key figure during this period and founder of Methodism, John Wesley. The frontier is where Wesley made his impact spreading a message of sanctification and free will. His ideas would be prevalent in the next awakening.

The Second Great Awakening would eventually embrace and accelerate the ideas and core elements of the First Great Awakening, but not before a lull in the burning fire of revival occurred. Historians mark the time period between 1775 to 1800 as a time of religious decline. The American Revolution and the founding gave way to a pause in church growth between the Great Awakenings. While the First Great Awakening increased the diversity of evangelical churches outside of the established Congregationalists and Anglican denominations, an even greater complexity and diversity occurred within each of the newly formed churches, giving way to multiple interpretations of scripture. So-called Edwardsians held strongly to “predestination, the inerrancy of scripture, and the importance of the conversion experience.”⁵⁷ Other groups disagreed with the Calvinistic belief in predestination, and followed the Arminian doctrine which proposed that “salvation is available to all who accept Jesus as their personal savior.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Hankins, 9.

⁵⁷ Murrin, 31.

⁵⁸ Brint and Schroedel, 5.

Meanwhile, philosophies of the enlightenment added to the competing values during the Revolution. According Barry Hankins “Enlightenment deism is a religion of reason that posits a God who created the world, instituted the laws of nature, then stepped back to let things happen according to those laws.” The founding fathers were heavily influenced by the enlightenment, especially Thomas Jefferson, who drew heavily from John Locke’s influence. Lambert adds, “The rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were part of the natural order, not the result of a divine covenant or special dispensation wherein God granted them to chosen people. Jefferson found the origins of popular sovereignty in an imagined state of nature. In contrast to the Garden of Eden, where God determined the rules, in the state of nature men and women took control of their destinies.”⁵⁹ Such beliefs would result in Jefferson being dubbed an “atheist” and an “infidel” by John Adams in the hotly contested election of 1800. According to Gaston Espinosa, the election marked “the first major presidential race that publically injected religion into the campaigning as a an overt strategy.” Although Jefferson survived the attacks and went on to win the race, the fact that religion was introduced as a criteria in the public’s deliberation over the qualifications of a presidential candidate reveals early on the building swell of religious discourse in American politics. It is important to note that by today’s evangelical standards Jefferson would have come under a heavy barrage of questions regarding his faith.⁶⁰

Jefferson was a deist who held reservations about the future success of the evangelical churches. According to Espinosa, Jefferson saw Unitarianism as becoming the primary denomination in the United states. Unitarianism is a liberal Protestant

⁵⁹ Lambert, 23.

⁶⁰ Espinosa, 15.

demonination that denies many of the core elements of the evangelical framework including: Christ's virgin birth, his deity, resurrection, and salvation through the cross. More impressed by the moral teachings and actions of Christ, Jefferson adapted and interpreted the teachings of Christ into what was to become the *Jefferson Bible*. Feeling so strongly in his convictions Jefferson predicted that the Unitarian doctrine would be the future of the United States. His forecast would, no doubt, be proved wrong by the forthcoming awakening. However, Jefferson's legacy and enlightened mind introduces a debate that will revurberate throughout the unfolding of American history.⁶¹

The importance of the enlightenment rests in the fact that it marked the beginning of competing value systems in United States history. The enlightenment led by reason has always been at odds with the conservative evangelical experience. The very idea of an impersonal God removed from his creation goes against the core of what it means to be an evangelical.

As a result many conservative evangelicals today hold to the viewpoint that the nation was founded on Christian principles and dispute the overall impact of the enlightenment. John Murrin contests,

“the revolutionary generation never shared a single set of fundamental values.” He continues, “Jefferson and Madison along with George Washington, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and nearly all of the founding fathers claimed to be Christians; but, by virtually any standard of doctrinal orthodoxy, hardly any of them was. They demanded the right to think for themselves on the most sensitive questions of faith, doctrine, and morals, but they did not try to impose their conclusions on others by force.”

⁶¹ Espinosa, 15.

In addition, the Constitution represented a secular humanist construct and disestablishment was one of its key elements. One that was not only shared by the likes of Jefferson and Madison, but by the Baptists and Presbyterians as well.⁶²

Besides disestablishment, the fact that the Constitution bore no acknowledgement of God provided a tension early on between evangelicals and secular democratic thinkers. Rhetorical evidence from clergy as early as 1789 reveals a disdain from clergy who were outraged by the secular document. They pointed to God's divine dispensation in the nation's Christian heritage. Timothy Dwight, a member of the clergy speaking at a July 4 oration, prompted the audience to "look through the history of your country, [and] you will find scarcely less glorious and wonderful proofs of divine protection and deliverance....than that which was shown to the people of Israel in Egypt, in the wilderness, and in Canaan." He later concluded:

"We formed our Constitution without any acknowledgement of God; without any recognition of his mercies to us, as a people, of his government, or even his existence. The [Constitutional] Convention, by which it was formed, never asked, even once, his direction, or his blessings upon their labours. Thus we commenced our national existence under the present system without God."

Harry S. Stout in "Rhetoric and Reality in the Early Republic" adds, "In Puritan rhetoric, the iron law of God's covenant explained all. This covenant, rather than the science of politics, determined the course of American history and represented the lens through which the nation-state was viewed."⁶³

⁶² Murrin, 32-39.

⁶³ Harry S. Stout, "Rhetoric and Reality In the Early Republic," in *Religion and American Politics From the Colonial Period to the Present*, ed. Mark A. Noll and Luke, E. Harlow, 65-78 (New York : Oxford University Press, 2007).

Just as the nation was being born amid the aftershocks of the First Great Awakening and the impact of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, a second round of revivals began to ignite during the 1790s. Most historians place the start of the Second Great Awakening at Cane Ridge, Kentucky in the summer of 1801. Here, a Great Revival took place and drew a crowd reported to be as large as 25,000 attendees; among them Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians. James McGready was one of the key revivalists of the event that lasted for days. Over the course of the revival there were different stages with pastors preaching the evangelical message. Barry Hankins adds, “emotions ran high, and there were a variety of manifestations of religious experience including crying, shouting, jerking, falling, and, according to some witnesses, even barking.”⁶⁴

Following the event other revivals broke out and by the 1820s they were occurring in urban settings, not just on the frontier. It was here that Charles Gradison Finney a lawyer turned evangelist began to lead crusades in America’s cities. The revivals appealed strongly to the common person and the leadership was certainly not among the elite. The appeal to the common person can best be seen in appeals that were made by the evangelists of the time such as “all are equal at the foot of the cross.” Brint and Schroedel note, “The Second Awakening virtually abandoned the stricter aspects of Calvinism, in particular the doctrines of predestination and innate human depravity, and established belief in the possibility of universal salvation through personal faith and devotional time.”⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Hankins, 11-16.

⁶⁵ Brint and Schroedel, vol.1, 2.

The Second Great Awakening disseminated, what British scholar David Bebbington has referred to as the four essentials of evangelical belief. First, there is Biblicism which places the Bible as an authority. Second, Crucicentrism, the belief that Christ died on the cross. Third is the conversion or born again experience. Finally Bebbington points to activism.⁶⁶

The church growth during the Second Great Awakening clearly established the evangelical voice as the predominant Protestant group. Mark Noll notes, “evangelical Protestant denominations accounted for 85 percent of all U.S. churches in 1860.” Just as the First Great Awakening brought about a complex diversity of numerous interpretations of scripture, the Second Great Awakening created an even more convoluted and fragmented evangelical picture. One of the many lasting consequences of the second round of revivals was that the Methodists and Baptists became the dominant churches under the evangelical umbrella, while several minor groups began to surface.⁶⁷

Slavery

Another major consequence of the early seeds of evangelicalism is the role that it played in the lives of the early African slaves. Milton Sernett notes, “The Evangelical rejection of earthly status and authority, coupled with an emphasis upon an intense personal conversion experience, proved attractive to thousands of black slaves.” Revivals presented early African Americans with “hope and solidarity”. The leaders of the First Great Awakening, Johnathan Edwards, John Wesley, and George Whitefield all preached fervidly to slaves. According to Peter Heltzel, “Evangelical revivals were the first instance of southern slave-holding whites looking at blacks as more than some sort of

⁶⁶ Hankins, 1-2.

⁶⁷ Brint and Schroedel, vol. 2, 5.

economic tool or resource on the level of livestock. “ He continues, “Revivalism created a new religious landscape for black and white Americans to engage one another on more equal footing.”⁶⁸ This equal footing, however, did nothing to ease the tension over the issue of slavery itself. As the moral question over the institution grew in intensity and plagued the American conscientiousness, by the 1830s regional schisms erupted in the major evangelical churches including the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterian.

Slavery like many other pivotal issues in evangelical history set dividing lines that would lead down divergent paths. Southern pro-slavery evangelicals gathered at revival meetings and cited specific examples for the biblical defense of slavery. Northern anti-slavery evangelicals focused on the dignity of all human beings found in the message of God. Preachers on both sides of the debate used public space and rhetoric to diffuse their interpretation of scripture and God’s will on the issue of slavery. Heltzel points out, “The proslavery evangelicals gathered an arsenal of scriptural verses to deploy in defense of slavery (e.g., Gen.9:25-27; Deut. 20:10-11; I Cor. 7:21; Rom. 13:1,7; Col. 3:22, 4:1; I Tim. 6:1,2). He adds, “Christian theology was used to justify a set of systems and mores that primarily benefited white males.”⁶⁹

The issue of slavery marked one of many moral debates that would divide evangelicals along cultural, regional, ethnic, and theological lines. Slavery also provided the first significant political stage for evangelical leaders to use rhetoric steeped in biblical tradition with all of the trappings of the emotional revival experience to engage

⁶⁸ Heltzel, 18-19.

⁶⁹ Heltzel, 21.

the audience and promote an agenda. Slavery began the evolution of evangelical political engagement in United States politics.⁷⁰

Antebellum Politics

The revivals of the Second Great Awakening not only provided a setting for the sinner to reconcile with God, but they provided a forum from which the evangelists could diffuse distrust of public officials and call into accountability their station. According to Richard J. Carwardine in *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America*, “Evangelicals shared the widespread belief that standards of morality in public life had degenerated under the pressures of the new political system.” An Illinois editor wrote, “Maddened, wine-heated politicians” quarreled, swore, spat, threatened and stabbed one another, and “defiance of the laws of God and man, challenged each other to deadly combat.” While evangelicals chastised politicians of poor moral character for being drunkards, womanizers, and gamblers, at the same time they praised other candidates for their moral fortitude, a political behavior that would later become a popular tactic in evangelical politics.⁷¹

The growth of evangelical churches between 1830s and the 1840s proved irresistible to politicians seeking to electioneer on God’s time. Many revivals became party caucuses where would be candidates attempted to win the evangelical vote. Evangelicals struggled with their involvement in politics. Were they to be silent voters, or were they to actively and openly support a candidate? For many evangelicals actively supporting a candidate was in essence idolatry. As Carwardine notes, “Equally ruinous was the “idolatrous homage” and “fanatical praise” political supporters tendered their

⁷⁰ Heltzel, 16.

⁷¹ Richard J. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993).

leaders. Their faith in human instrumentality superseded a proper trust in God. President Harrison's death was widely regarded as a rebuke to the "man worship" of the preceding campaign."⁷² Still other evangelicals saw politics as a viable means of promoting Christian values through the democratic process, while improving their society through reform. According to Frank Lambert in *Religion in American Politics*, evangelicals, not only staged revivals to win souls for God's kingdom, "evangelicals promoted benevolence societies aimed at producing eternal benefits for men, women, and children." Evangelists preached, "Good works should advance the organized promotion of the Evangelical faith."⁷³ It is important to note that most evangelicals during this time, unlike today's evangelicals, held to the postmillennialist belief that Christ will return after a thousand years of peace on earth. Thus, changing the hearts and minds of man and then motivating them toward social reform can improve society. This belief fit together nicely with the evangelical promotion of manifest destiny and the idea of America being the "light of the world."⁷⁴

Carwardine adds,

As part of their preparation of citizens for electoral participation in a mass democracy, evangelicals helped establish a discourse of politics which offered a way of interpreting events and public issues not just at election time but continuously. Their pursuit of individual salvation and reformation raises an expectation of moral integrity amongst public men. Their stress on individual moral discipline and self-control had implications for social regulation and order. Their emphasis on duty and conscience ensured that they treated political issues less according to the measure of social utility than to that of moral propriety and scriptural injunction. They brought their ethical perspectives to bear on banking and other aspects of government economic policy. With even more energy they variously ensured that the questions of education, Indian removal, war, drink and, above all, slavery were placed firmly and the center of the political agenda and

⁷² Cawardine, 25.

⁷³ Lambert, 56-58.

⁷⁴ Brint and Schroedel, vol. 2, 5.

were judged in relation to the Christina's obligation conscientiously to advance the moral republic."⁷⁵

The impact of the Second Great Awakening is best revealed in the strength displayed by the far-reaching political voice of evangelicals during this time. So clear was this voice that politicians began to cater to their rhetoric and mindset.

No lesser a politician than Abraham Lincoln felt the influence of evangelicals during his congressional run for office. Born into a Baptist home and influenced by the evangelical Protestant framework Lincoln was fully immersed in the doctrine and language of predestination and revivalism. "Lincoln developed an antipathy to sectarian divisiveness and religious emotionalism which was to keep him aloof from church membership throughout his life," notes Cawardine. Though well versed in scripture Lincoln's church attendance and unorthodox beliefs cost him the Whig nomination for Congress in 1843. Lincoln stated, "it was every where contended that no Christian ought to go for me, because I belonged to no church, was suspected of being a deist, and had talked about fighting a duel." Lincoln's loss would be a hard lesson learned in the politics of religion.⁷⁶

The 1846 election saw Lincoln once again defending himself against charges of being an "infidel." This time it was at the hands of the Methodist evangelists, Peter Cartwright. According to Carwardine, "Lincoln issued a handbill insisting that he had never denied the truth of the Scriptures." Carwardine adds, "His own electoral experience had taught him: that evangelicalism was a powerful force which might be harnessed for political advantage."⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Cawardine, xvii.

⁷⁶ Carwardine, 46.

⁷⁷ Carwardine, 47.

The evangelical hold on the United States was ubiquitous. Laws regarding behavior and norms all reflected the root of evangelical Christianity. Foreign observers took note on their travels to the United States marveling at the strict adherence to the Sabbath, the impact of the temperance movement, acts of charity, and involvement of evangelicals in the school system. Carwardine concludes, “the impact of evangelical Christianity might be assessed not just statistically – by the numbers of conversions, temperance pledges, and charitable donations- but by its more intangible effects on the mental attitudes, social relationships, and public discourse of the American people.”⁷⁸

Evangelicals in the Gilded Age

Following the Civil War evangelical churches found themselves losing their foothold on America as industrialization led to urbanization and rapid immigration bringing a myriad of values, cultural and religious beliefs, theologies, and intellectual curiosity into the already complex American religious fabric. Evangelicals had been politically active throughout the nineteenth century engaging on both sides of the slavery debate, while voicing their discontent over mail delivery on the Sabbath, and playing a role in the temperance and women’s suffrage movements. However, with the new economic and religious landscape of the late 1800s evangelicals faced an internal struggle, one that would divide them in the early part of the next century.

With rapid industrialization America quickly became one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Frank Lambert notes, “Industrialization changed the way Americans did business in the form of large corporations and trusts that mobilized huge amounts of capital and employed thousands of workers.” With the atmosphere of laissez faire economics in full swing industrial capitalists such as Andrew Carnegie became

⁷⁸ Carwardine, 47.

heroes of what Mark Twain dubbed “the Gilded Age.” As American workers moved from agriculture to the enterprise of industry work in the cities a consumer mindset began to emerge in the United States. Here, “consumption could satisfy one’s needs.” For evangelicals this presented an opportunity to share the gospel.⁷⁹ It is within this culture of heightened capitalism that the next great evangelical preachers emerged.

Dwight Moody and Billy Sunday were evangelists of the old order. In contrast to the postmillennialists “whose good works would reform society during the thousand years before the return of Christ”, they preached the message of repentance and proclaimed the message of Christ as the answer to the social ills of the period like poverty. Adopting and preaching what would become the twentieth century’s predominant theological interpretation of Christ’s imminent return, Moody espoused premillennialism. For Moody and other premillennialists the state of the world was not going to improve until Christ’s return, therefore, reform efforts without repentance were futile. Warning against the greed of the period Moody stated:

With many it is the god of money. We haven’t got through worshiping the golden calf yet. If a man will sell his principles for gold, isn’t he making it a god? If he trusts in his wealth to keep him from want and to supply his needs, are not riches his god? Many a man say, “Give me the money, and I will give you heaven. What care I for all the glories and treasures of heaven? Give me treasures here! I don’t care for heaven! I want to be a successful businessman.”

Moody was the premiere evangelist of this time creating the template of modern day evangelism for future leaders like Billy Graham to follow. According to Lambert, “He employed house to house canvassing of residents before launching a crusade, organization of churches to promote services, and enlistment of financial support from

⁷⁹ Lambert, 75-76.

sympathetic businessmen.” He also founded Bible schools meant to equip believers for spiritual warfare.

The other voice of the age was that of Billy Sunday, a former professional baseball player. Sunday preached a pragmatic message of “good old-time revival.” He believed that the gospel could raise people out of the depravity of sin and onto a new life, leaving behind alcohol, debt, adultery, fornication, and hate. Sunday stated:

“I believe the Bible is the word of God from cover to cover. I believe that the man who magnifies the word of God in his preaching is the man whom God will honor. Why do such names stand out on the pages of history as Wesley, Whitefield, Finney, and Martin Luther? Because of their fearless denunciation of all sin, and because they preach Jesus Christ without fear or favor.”⁸⁰

While the voice of Moody and Sunday carried out the evangelical faith a stirring began to occur within the evangelical world. Another consequence of such rapid industrialization was the introduction of outside influences brought in from large-scale immigration. According to Frank Lambert, “Millions of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe and from East Asia arrived to work in the nation’s factories, mills, refineries, and expanding transportation networks. And with them came religious and cultural baggage that would challenge the dominant Anglo-Saxon, Protestant culture.”⁸¹ Lambert adds, “At century’s end the number of Catholics in the United States outnumbered the combined membership of the top five Protestant denominations.”⁸²

Early 20th Century- The Evangelical Split

Immigration brought with it an influx of questions and curiosity over entrenched doctrinal beliefs regarding original sin and Darwin’s theory. Darwin’s work brought the

⁸⁰ Lambert, 90-92.

⁸¹ Lambert, 74.

⁸² Lambert, 76.

theory of evolution into the mainstream, and in so doing trampled upon many engrained evangelical doctrinal beliefs. As his works *Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* enlightened academia, theologians were soon applying Darwin's theories to Christianity. Barry Hankins adds, "This meant that the form of faith found in scripture was a rudimentary and a basic form of Christianity that evolved over nineteen centuries into a more fully developed religion. This way of thinking was a direct challenge to evangelical Biblicism."⁸³ Conservative evangelicals believed the Bible was authoritative. However, so-called Modernists embraced and began to apply elements of Darwin's theory into the Protestant framework. For example, modernists taught "basically good human beings move naturally to God." Conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists obstinately defended the scripture as Gods' inerrant word. Fundamentalists criticized modernist views on evolution and their emphasis on science as representation of the secularity that stood in direct conflict with America's long-standing belief in the Bible. Modernist, however, found their views to be compatible with the Bible.

The conflict between these two groups eventually came to a head at the 1925 Scopes Trial where the teaching of evolution in the classroom would come under the scrutiny of the courts.⁸⁴ After a long and embittered trial that took on all the trappings of a media circus and resulted in a win by technicality for Scopes, fundamentalists were disappointed.

While evolution presented a monumental schism amongst evangelicals, the interpretation of when Christ would return according to the scriptures provided another

⁸³ Hankins, 24.

⁸⁴ Lambert, 126.

heated controversy throughout the early twentieth century. Pre-millennialism, dispensationalism, and biblical inerrancy were the foundations of conservative evangelical thought. Holding to a belief that the Bible was literally true, that Christ would return after the reign of the Antichrist, and that God had revealed himself to man historically through a series of covenants, prompted conservative evangelicals to be wary of the worsening world crisis and the approaching Antichrist. According to William Martin in *With God On Our Side*, “This doctrine holds that careful attention to biblical prophecies, particularly those contained in the books of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation, can yield clues as to approximately when Christ’s second coming will occur, enabling those who possess this knowledge to be ready. Consequently, premillennialists perceive the worsening world crisis as inevitable, and more importantly, as a backdrop for the approach of the Anti-Christ and the seven- year tribulation period which will lead up to the final battle of Armageddon. Thus, all manner of crisis, atrocity, and disaster mark a sign of the times.”⁸⁵

A key component within the biblical framework of premillennialism is the concept of dispensationalism, the belief that God has dealt with man in a series of covenants throughout history, and that the last covenant or dispensation is what is referred to as the Rapture. William Martin notes, “The triggering action for the beginning of the millennial age, the last dispensation, will be the “Rapture,” at which point faithful Christians will be “caught up together to meet the Lord in the air,” leaving the rest of humanity to face an unprecedented congeries of calamities known as “the tribulation.”⁸⁶

⁸⁵ William Martin, *With God On Our Side* (New York, New York: Broadway Books, 1996).

⁸⁶ Martin, 7.

The other popular view amongst evangelicals was post-millennialism. This view held that Christ would come after a thousand year period of peace on earth. According to Clyde Wilcox in his essay, "The Christian Right in Twentieth Century America: Continuity and Change", "If Christ return is to be preceded by a period of perfect peace, then politics may be a viable means of improving the world. If, on the other hand, Christ's return is triggered by the success of the Antichrist, and this return is imminent, then political solutions to the world's problems are not possible. Turmoil and discord are to be expected, and in fact may signal the end of the world."⁸⁷ These conflicting interpretative viewpoints will permeate through evangelical political thought and action in the twentieth century. Struggles over interpretation will pit conservative against liberal, moderate against fundamentalist within the evangelical movement.

Following the Scopes Trial evangelicals found themselves fractured along biblical and cultural lines. Where they had once been the Christian voice in America, the twentieth century had created a time of turmoil and defeat while placing their voice in the margins of society. The fall out after the Scopes Trial triggered a split among conservative evangelicals into two camps, fundamentalists and neo-evangelicals. Fundamentalists chose a path of withdrawal from a sinful society, seeking to create their own Christian nation. Frank Lambert adds, "After the mainstream culture ridiculed their stance in the Scopes Trial, fundamentalists established their own Bible colleges, publishing houses, mission agencies, and denominations."⁸⁸ Neo-evangelicals on the other hand sought a path of promoting the evangelical message within the culture of

⁸⁷ Clyde Wilcox, "The Christian Right in Twentieth Century America: Continuity and Change," *The Review of Politics*, 1988: 659-681.

⁸⁸ Lambert, 190.

modern society.⁸⁹The fundamentalists would eventually produce Rev. Jerry Falwell, while the neo- evangelicals would offer Rev. Billy Graham.

Conservative evangelicals had seen the first half of the twentieth century divide Protestant America in the wake of the modernity that swept across the country. They were united in their efforts to stamp out the teaching of evolution, alcohol, and communism, while wrestling with America's uncertain moral future. Following the Great Depression and World War II conservative evangelicals, regardless of their divisions on the war and Truman's decision to drop the atomic bombs, felt strongly that the United States was heading in the wrong direction and was in need of salvation. Frank Lambert notes, "While agreeing that Americans needed to experience spiritual conversion, fundamentalists and conservative Protestants thought the answer was revival, not moral outrage over the bomb."⁹⁰ William Martin adds, "In addition to the common struggle to keep food on the table and the fear of the loss of loved ones in the war, conservative Christians faced a danger even more troubling; the possibility that their beloved children would abandon faith in God, live and die outside the church and spend eternity in hell." As a result revival meetings were held on Saturday nights with the intent of drawing young people through an array of attractions geared toward providing entertainment laced with the evangelical message of salvation and the ever-present patriotic zeal.⁹¹

As the 1950s drew near political conservatism began to merge with the theologically conservative evangelical mindset. Signs of another awakening, a Third Great Awakening, began to form as the evangelical voice began to resonate via evangelism while drawing upon a familiar history and rhetoric, one planted by the early

⁸⁹ Brint and Schroedel, 6.

⁹⁰ Lambert, 155.

⁹¹ Martin, 25.

Puritans, and rooted in the First and Second Great Awakening. Throughout their turbulent history evangelicals experienced the early disputes over enlightenment thought, the exponential growth of their churches during the Second Great Awakening, the regional divide over slavery, and the materialism of the Gilded Age. During each historical marker evangelists came to the forefront to denounce the sins of an evil society. After a period of inactivity in the mainstream the 1950s would signal the beginning of the next awakening.

CHAPTER IV
“THE THIRD GREAT AWAKENING”

The 1952 election saw Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower become the thirty-fourth President of the United States receiving 63 percent of the evangelical vote. Voting strongly Democrat in the four previous election cycles something had brought about a change in evangelical voting behavior.⁹² The dramatic leap between 1948 and 1952 reveals the early notions of the culture war that will take place in the 1960s, but also displays the early workings and migratory patterns of southern evangelicals. More importantly the trend marks the entrance of a Republican president fully comfortable with the rhetoric and activist nature of evangelicals in America.

⁹² Kellstedt, 272.

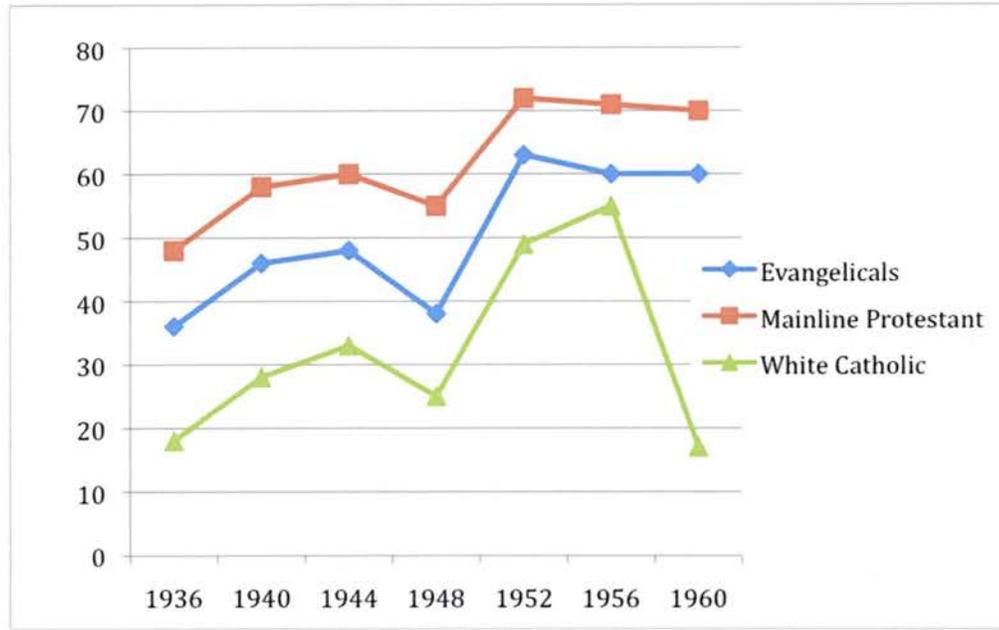


Figure 4: Republican Percentage of Two Party-Party Vote for President 1936-1960

Source: Religion and American Politics From the Colonial Period to the Present

The post war, post New Deal atmosphere found southern white conservatives coming to terms with a system of government that in their eyes represented the epitome of a humanist system. According to Darren Dochuck in “Evangelicalism Becomes Southern, Politics Becomes Evangelical” southern conservative evangelicals were concerned about “a desire to suppress Christian democracy and replace it with a centralized, human system.” They blamed cosmopolitan liberalism and communism and believed that both were at the heart of the New Deal system. With southern preachers advancing the idea that the United States was losing its way in the wake of a liberal governing system, fear began to mount over the loss of traditional values. Dochuck adds, “Symptoms of the last days were everywhere, they pointed out, from the lack of a national commitment to Christian economics to rampant moral degeneracy in the home to

the disappearance of traditional curricula in the classroom.” This culminated in a fear that the New Deal opened the door for communism to be ushered in to the American mainstream. Southern evangelical preachers escalated these ideas from their Sunday morning pulpits.⁹³ This message did not, however, remain in the South.

Dochuck notes, “Between 1910 and 1960, slightly more than 9 million people left the South for the Northeast, Midwest, and Pacific Coast with 5 million of these exiting the region between 1940 and 1960 alone.” Amid the economic climate of the post war southerners spread across the nation, and with them they brought their religion. Thus, the southern conservative evangelical message began to take hold in regions across the United States and evangelical churches (Pentecostal, Baptist, Methodist, Cumberland Presbyterian) began cropping up from the Midwest to California. While some of the more ardent fundamentalists continued down a path of “exile”, mainstream evangelical groups saw themselves “as if they were a godly vanguard sent off into the wilderness to save themselves and their people.” This mission would inevitably take on a political flavor.⁹⁴

As politics merged with evangelical activism, a clear distinction surfaced that separated them from other Protestant Christian groups. Dochuck offers, “Unlike mainline liberal Protestants, they possessed little patience for intellectual nuance or social progressiveness; in comparison to northern evangelicals, who turned “serious, quiet, intense, humorless, sacrificial, and patient” in the peak religious experience, they were

⁹³ Darren Dochuck, "Evangelicalism Becomes Southern, Politics Becomes Evangelical," in *Religion and American Politics*, ed. Mark A. Noll and Luke E. Harlow, 297-318 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁹⁴ Dochuck, 300-302.

always “busy, vocal, and promotional” and task oriented.” Southern evangelicals were becoming an aggressive, enterprising force.”⁹⁵

This evangelical era marked the rise of evangelical leaders such as Billy Graham who garnered so much national support that political leaders began to take notice of the group. Graham “exploited new secular methods of communication to reach tens of millions through his televised crusades.”⁹⁶ According to Peter Heltzel, at a crusade in Jackson, Mississippi “Graham warned that the winning party in the 1952 election must “clean up the country” by 1956 or Graham would lead the sixteen million voters he influenced to the other party.”⁹⁷ This type of ultimatum would become a staple of evangelical politics in the years to come.

Charged by a political mindset that liberalism had tainted the Christian nation formed by God’s providence, conservative Protestants and evangelicals found an ally in Dwight Eisenhower and the Republicans in Congress. Liberalism, evangelicals believed, was responsible for attempting to remove God from American public life. Drawing upon history and patriotism as an impetus many evangelicals shared the idea that the founding fathers were misguided by the Enlightenment, and as a result created a Constitution that bore no acknowledgement of God. Coupled with the dissemination of evolution, the threat of prayer being removed from school, and the intensity surrounding the imminent threat of the godless Soviets, evangelicals and other Protestant groups began to rally for legislation that would define the United States as a Christian nation.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Dochuck, 302.

⁹⁶ Lambert, 155.

⁹⁷ Heltzel, 112.

⁹⁸ Lambert, 156.

As a result Congress added the words “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance and a year later in 1956 Eisenhower directed that all coins and currency be stamped with the phrase “In God We Trust”. President Eisenhower later proclaimed, “In this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America’s heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country’s most powerful resource in peace and war.”⁹⁹ Frank Lambert observes, “Symbolically, the faith of America’s fathers now took on a decidedly Christian character as opposed to that of the Enlightenment.”¹⁰⁰

Evangelicals had scored a major political victory by reminding the country of “traditional values” and its longstanding relationship with God’s providence through Christianity. They had been amongst those who had painted liberals as secular and soft on communism. However, while the 1950s saw the evangelicals begin their conservative political ascent motivated by the Cold War and liberal secularism, the 1960s would begin with the election of the country’s first Catholic president, and mark the beginning of the “culture wars”.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Domke, 15.

¹⁰⁰ Lambert, 156.

¹⁰¹ Lambert, 157.

CHAPTER V
PRESIDENT KENNEDY AND EVANGELICALS

President Kennedy, unlike President Eisenhower, and much to the bewilderment of evangelicals, many of whom suspected that he might placate to the Vatican's wishes, stressed the importance of separation of church and state. Kennedy voiced this point in September 1960 when he stated, "I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute; where no Catholic prelate would tell the President - should he be Catholic - how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote."¹⁰² Kennedy understood the nation's long held resentment toward Catholics. The nativist, anti-Catholic voice that had been raging amongst evangelicals since the immigration waves of the late 19th century was still present and as divisive as ever. According to Thomas J. Carty, "the nativists still perceived Catholics as ignorant immigrants who could never fully assimilate into mainstream Protestant American culture, holding on to a vague belief that Protestantism molded the national traits of independence and individualism."¹⁰³

¹⁰² Domke, 6.

¹⁰³ Thomas J. Carty, *Catholic in the White House? Religion, Politics, and John F. Kennedy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

The Catholic Issue

Fear over perceived Catholic dominance had led to the formation of the National Association of Evangelicals in 1942. Their sole purpose was to “thwart Catholic power in American politics.” Carty adds, “Protestant Evangelicals lobbied the U.S. government to employ diplomatic pressure against several majority Catholic countries, such as Spain and Columbia, that thwarted the efforts of evangelical Protestant missionaries.”¹⁰⁴

While evangelical fundamentalists echoed the nativists fears over a Roman Catholic President, the moderate evangelical Billy Graham pursued a tolerant message, one tainted with the same fear held by other evangelicals, but one that promoted a middle ground that was encouraged by political instinct and tolerance. When approached by a member of Kennedy’s 1960 campaign staff to sign an open letter that encouraged Protestant voters to not let the Catholic issue be the deciding factor, but to “employ reasoned balance of judgment”, Graham declined. His political prowess led him to the conclusion that this could be perceived as an endorsement.¹⁰⁵ A perceived Graham endorsement among evangelicals for Kennedy could have had a negative impact on the campaign of Kennedy’s opponent and Graham’s true endorsement, Richard Nixon.

The Protestant-voting bloc, Graham advised Nixon, outnumbered the Catholic vote 3 to 1. Therefore Graham cautioned Nixon to not pander to the Catholic voice because this could undermine his Protestant strength. Not to mention Catholics would no doubt, Graham believed, vote along religious lines. Graham felt so strongly that Catholics would not vote independent of religious ideals, that he privately, never publicly, endorsed U.S. congressman Walter H. Judd (MN) for the Vice Presidency under Nixon. Judd was a

¹⁰⁴ Carty, 51.

¹⁰⁵ Carty, 52.

Protestant, medical missionary who would, Graham argued, “put much of the South and border states in the Republican column and bring about a dedicated Protestant vote to counteract the Catholic vote.”¹⁰⁶ Although Graham’s approach to the Catholic issue was tempered with a politician’s touch and a message of interfaith relations, and though he avoided at all cost any overt language that may have caused him to be perceived as overtly anti-Catholic as the nativists, Graham feared a Catholic voting bloc and he privately advised Nixon along sectarian lines to exploit the Catholic candidate among Protestant strongholds. According to Carty, Graham also encouraged Eisenhower to “exploit nativist anti-Catholicism in the so-called southern Bible Belt.” Initially hesitant to go public with his endorsement of Nixon, Graham appeared with Nixon at a campaign stop in Pittsburgh.

As the anti-Catholic sentiment and Protestant voting block began to be perceived as “cheap religious bigotry” Graham distanced himself from the movement, and cautioned Nixon to avoid being associated with the nativists. This change came after popular sentiment began to negatively view the anti-Catholic voices. Meanwhile, Kennedy recognized that the religious issue was reaching its boiling point and accepted an invitation to speak on September 12, 1960 at the Greater Houston Ministerial Association.

Understanding the charges and concerns over a Catholic in the White House, Kennedy stated, “it is apparently necessary for me to state once again - not what kind of church I believe in, for that should be important only to me - but what kind of America I believe in.” Kennedy’s message of the separation of church and state was the ingredient used to ease fear over whether a Catholic president would be vulnerable to the wishes of

¹⁰⁶ Carty, 56.

the Vatican. However, it would be this message of separation of church and state applied that would cause evangelicals deep regret as the 1960s unfolded.¹⁰⁷

The 1960 Election

The 1960 controversial election saw Kennedy rally the Democratic base to defeat Nixon. According to Thomas J. Carty, “the Democrats successfully created an electoral coalition of Catholic, Jewish, and African Americans.”¹⁰⁸ Kennedy defeated Nixon in the electoral vote 303 to 219, but the popular vote was won by the slimmest margin of 120,000 votes. The key to Kennedy’s success was the strong Catholic turnout in 14 Northern States that made up 261 of the combined electoral votes. Gary Scott Smith notes, “Kennedy’s religious affiliation decreased his popular tally but helped him win the decisive electoral vote.” Kennedy’s popular tally saw little support in the South and Midwest, where Protestant Democrats chose not to vote. Billy Graham saw in this a potential to improve the divide between Protestants and Catholics in the country, and added that the election “proved that there was not as much religious prejudice in the United States as people feared.”¹⁰⁹

Although Kennedy has been labeled a secular president, he understood the role of religion in America, and the power that ministers such as Billy Graham could wield. Kennedy often referenced God in his speeches and he, like Eisenhower before him, called upon Reverend Graham for biblical quotations to be used in his speeches. Kennedy also attended mass weekly. According to Gary Scott Smith in his book *Faith and the Presidency: From George Washington to George W. Bush*, Kennedy called the Bible “the

¹⁰⁷ Thomas J. Carty, "Religion and the Presidency of John F. Kennedy," in *Religion and the American Presidency*, 283-318 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

¹⁰⁸ Carty, 297.

¹⁰⁹ Gary Scott Smith, *Faith and the Presidency: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

foundation upon which the great democratic traditions and institution of our country stand.” However, rhetoric did little to ease the approaching wave of evangelical discontent over Kennedy’s neutral stance on the issue of school prayer.

Perceived Moral Decay

Igniting the first wave of evangelical outrage was the Supreme Court decision in *Engel v. Vitale*, which declared school-sponsored prayer to be unconstitutional. Prayer, and in some cases bible reading, was a common practice for schools across the nation. Evangelicals and many Catholics saw the ruling as a violation of the nations long held commitment to its Christian heritage. Billy Graham led the criticism by declaring this to be “another step toward secularism”.¹¹⁰ When asked about the decision, Kennedy replied, “I think that it is important... that we support the Supreme Court decisions even when we may not agree with them.” He went on to encourage private prayer at home and in churches where it could be practiced with the utmost “fidelity”. He added, “We have in this case a very easy remedy that is to pray ourselves.”¹¹¹ This held consistent with Kennedy’s previous remarks advocating the separation of church and state and his belief that issues regarding one’s personal faith should remain in the private sphere. According to Thomas J. Carty, “Kennedy’s secularism contributed to the alienation of many conservatives, Catholic and non-Catholic, from the Democratic Party.” Gary Scott Smith notes, “his frequent use of religious language appears primarily to be window dressing rather than the expression of heartfelt convictions or the ideological foundations for his public policies.”¹¹² Nevertheless, the decision regarding school prayer continued to

¹¹⁰ Smith, 275.

¹¹¹ Smith, 292.

¹¹² Smith 292.

resonate among conservative evangelicals throughout the 1960s and would eventually become a historical rallying point for the Christian Right in the 1970s.

Evangelicals Rise

The atmosphere of the 1960s prompted a political awakening among evangelicals. Still reeling from the court decision in *Engel v. Vitale*, evangelicals watched as the counterculture ate away at the nation's Christian heritage. Frank Lambert notes, "The sixties encouraged young people to "do their own thing" and "let it all hang out," which meant ignoring or defying institutional norms that promoted conformity".¹¹³ This went directly against the evangelical notion of Judeo Christian order. Secularism was, as they saw it, preying upon the nation's youth and was undermining the country's most prized institutions. Marriage, for example, came under fire from feminist groups claiming that the tradition was exploitative and promoted female subjugation to a male norm. Lambert continues, "The counterculture of the sixties represented to conservatives the results of a culture that had turned its back on moral values grounded in God's immutable law. In their critique of American mainstream culture, they saw a society that had made gods of science and technology, and they saw a government and economy that reduced people to objects."¹¹⁴

Meanwhile many mainline Protestants and liberal Christians embraced this secular thought. According to Robert Wuthnow in *Religion and American Politics*, "what happened was that, as mainline Protestants blended into a secularized consensus, fundamentalists, conservative Protestants, or explicit "Evangelicals" were forced out."¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Lambert, 189.

¹¹⁴ Lambert, 193.

¹¹⁵ Gary M. Marsden, "Religion, Politics, and the Search for an American Consensus," in *Religion and American Politics*, 466 (New York : Oxford University Press, 2007).

Isolated and politically unrepresented evangelicals began to create networks, open bookstores, and preach involvement. The attitude among many evangelicals between the 1920s and 1960s was one motivated by disseminating God's word, thus not allowing political distractions to interfere with their message of salvation. However, the 1960s created an atmosphere of such instability evangelicals were compelled to mobilize. The instability, evangelicals believed, was spawned by the promotion of secularism over God, and revealed a country that appeared to be headed toward moral collapse.

Evangelical ministers in an effort to return the country to God began to preach involvement in secular politics.¹¹⁶ According to E.J. Dionne in *Why Americans Hate Politics*, the Religious Right arose in reaction to "sixties permissiveness."¹¹⁷ This social upheaval that dominated the 1960s would pave the way for an evangelical and Republican Party realignment that would plant its roots in the late 1960s and peak in 2004.

According to Mark A. Noll, "Evangelicals in the 1960s and 1970s were voting Republican even while maintaining Democratic identity. Only Lyndon Johnson in 1964 did more evangelicals vote for the Democrat than for the Republican." Noll provides several reasons to account for the slow evangelical shift from the Democrat to Republican Party. They include the "the improving socioeconomic status of Evangelicals, the anti-Catholic/anti-Kennedy vote of 1960, early opposition to the civil rights movement throughout the 1960s, and the emergence of the social issue agenda in the 1970s." He also attributes this partisan shift to Democratic candidates like George

¹¹⁶ James Reichley, *Faith in Politics* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2002).

¹¹⁷ E.J. Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics* (New York: First Simon & Schuster, 1991).

McGovern who negatively stimulated evangelical movement away from the party.¹¹⁸

Another component of the partisan shift among evangelicals was the fact that Southern white evangelical Democrats were beginning their move to toward the Republican Party. According to E.J. Dionne, “Most of the evangelical conservatives were white Southerners who began voting against the Democrats because of civil rights.”¹¹⁹

As the 1960s of President Johnson drew to an end evangelicals were scorned by the secular voice of the counterculture, Vietnam protests, Civil Rights marches, and the absence of God in society. Gary Wills states, “A whole series of Supreme Court decisions – on school prayer, on the Pledge of Allegiance, on pornography, on Christmas displays, and above all on abortion- they took as deeply personal assaults. Long-standing laws and customs were being undermined at a dizzying rate.”¹²⁰

The Abortion Issue

The strongest rallying impetus for the group, however, was the abortion issue. Never had there been a singular issue that united evangelicals to mobilize as a unit more than abortion. Between the 1920s and 1960s evangelicals spoke out occasionally on issues such as communism, evolution, and school prayer, but they lacked a focus and sense of cohesion. Abortion in contrast mobilized fundamentalists and moderates together under a conservative Christian Right umbrella. The Religious Right in a broader sense encapsulated, not only evangelical Christians, but anti-abortion Catholics, and Jews as well.

¹¹⁸ Mark A. Noll, *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the 1980s* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1990).

¹¹⁹ Dionne, 234.

¹²⁰ Wills, 481.

The mobilization of evangelicals was due in large part to fundamentalists like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. Both had been reluctant to enter the political scene in their youth, but had been motivated by secular society and the abortion issue. According to Frank Lambert, “a group of fundamentalists met in the early 1970s and organized a movement aimed at restoring America’s Christian Heritage. Falwell along with Tim and Beverly LaHaye, Charles Stanley, and D. James Kennedy, launched the Moral Majority with a mission of “organizing evangelical leaders who will boldly engage the culture.”¹²¹ Flaming the fire of evangelical discontent were authors like Francis Schaeffer, who would later write *The Christian Manifesto*. Schaeffer played an important role in the political ascent of evangelicals. As a Christian philosopher emboldened by the abortion issue he would claim that Christians should not be just compelled to political action, but are obligated to mobilization to stave off the secular offensive.¹²²

According to Christian Smith in *Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want*, “Christian Right Rhetoric contends:

America was founded as a Christian nation and prospered under God’s blessing. Having recently abandoned its commitment to God’s unchanging truth and morality, however, America is now suffering social breakdown. Unless America repents and returns to traditional values and morals, America will suffer God’s judgment. Turning America around from its anti-Christian moral drift will require the active struggle of Christians and supportive allies—the moral majority of Americans—against hostile forces comprised of secular humanists, feminists, the liberal mass media, and so on.”

Data from the 1996 Religious Identity and Influence Survey provides support for the evangelical mindset that began to form in reaction to the 1960s.

¹²¹ Lambert, 190.

¹²² Wills, 482.

Table 1: Conservative Protestant Views on Morality and Public Life, Compared to All Other Americans

	Self- Identified Evangelicals	Self-identified Fundamentalists	All Other Americans
The U.S. was founded as a Christian Nation	87%	82%	66%
We are seeing a serious breakdown of American Society	92%	93%	83%
Moral should be based on an absolute, unchanging standard	68%	63%	31%
Christian morality should be the law of the land even though not all Americans are Christians	55%	50%	25%
The federal government should promote traditional values in society	68%	70%	50%

Source: 1996 Religious Identity and Influence Survey

Table 1 reveals that evangelicals and fundamentalists, along with most Americans believe the United States was founded as a Christian nation with evangelicals leading the way at 87%. Furthermore, evangelicals and fundamentalists, along with all other Americans see a serious breakdown in U.S. society.¹²³ However, when the focus shifts to a standard and absolute morality and a society based on Christian morality, evangelicals represent over double that of other Americans. Therefore, they are twice as likely to believe that there should be an absolute standard of morality and that morality should be based on Christian standards. Also in the category of the federal government promoting traditional values, evangelicals scored 18 points higher than all other Americans. Christian Smith notes, that evangelicals are “also twice as likely as other Americans to view the public schools as hostile to their moral and spiritual values.”¹²⁴ This was the mindset among conservative evangelicals that began to form in the 1960s and by 1976 was honing its voice and looking for a president to cater to their perceived crisis.

¹²³ Christian Smith, *Christian America?: What Evangelicals Really Want* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).

¹²⁴ Smith, 199-203.

CHAPTER VI

JIMMY CARTER: ONE OF THEIR OWN??

The early 1970s brought about a series of disappointments for evangelicals as *Roe v. Wade* and Nixon's Watergate further displayed a moral chasm in American society. Not since Eisenhower had evangelicals had the ear of the president. Kennedy's enlightened ideas, Johnson's "submerged faith", and the disappointment over Nixon's unethical exploits created a desire among evangelicals for a candidate who would embrace their goals, language, and lifestyle.

Jimmy Carter was "born again" in the autumn of 1966 after hearing a message from a preacher who asked rhetorically "whether if Christianity was a crime there be enough evidence to convict the listeners."¹²⁵ Carter had been raised a Southern Baptist and was a faithful member of the Plains Baptist Youth Group, where he would later return and teach Sunday school. Though Carter had a committed life of service in the church he felt his faith was superficial, and required a deeper commitment. After his born again experience he received support and advice from his sister Ruth, who was a devout evangelical and faith healer. Kenneth E. Morris adds, "for Carter becoming born again did not mean, as it usually does, simply converting to Christianity and experiencing salvation. Rather, it also meant practicing as daily habit the commandment that Christ himself said was the greatest, namely, to love God and your neighbor as yourself." Carter exemplified his faith in his 1971 Gubernatorial inaugural address where he stated, "no

¹²⁵ Kenneth E. Morris, "Religion and the Presidency of Jimmy Carter," in *Religion and the American Presidency*, 321-352 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

poor, rural, weak, or black person, should ever again have to bear the additional burden of being deprived of the opportunity for an education, a job, or simple justice.”¹²⁶

Carter was a voracious reader who spent his time gaining a better understanding of his Christian faith, while accelerating his ascent in politics.¹²⁷ Seeking to intertwine his Christian faith with the secularity of politics Carter found inspiration in the writings of theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. He repeatedly referenced Niebuhr’s statement that, “The sad duty of politics is to establish justice in a sinful world.”¹²⁸ It is Carter’s meaning of justice that would eventually open the door for critics, as they would later call into question many of his policy stances in light of his evangelical belief.

Carter’s willingness to overtly express his evangelical faith came as a surprise to many during the 1976 campaign. Gary Scott Smith states, “Americans allow, even expect, politicians to talk about morality or spirituality and its importance in government and public life. But Carter went much further. He confessed that he was a born again evangelical Southern Baptist, whose faith influenced every area of his life, including his political positions and style of governing.”¹²⁹ Jimmy Carter can be credited for injecting the language of “born again” Christianity into the American political lexicon.¹³⁰ With statements like, “If I had to sum up in one word what this campaign is all about the word would be faith”, Carter displayed either a keen political strategy, or a prophetic knowing of the convergence of American politics and religion.¹³¹ The 1976 election saw Carter retrieve the Southern electorate from the grasps of Republicans, who had won the South

¹²⁶ Morris, 328.

¹²⁷ Morris, 325.

¹²⁸ Deal W. Hudson, *Onward, Christian Soldiers* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2008).

¹²⁹ Smith, 293.

¹³⁰ Lambert, 191.

¹³¹ Morris, 323.

with Nixon at the helm in 1968 and 1972. With the help of Southern evangelicals Carter not only reclaimed the South, but he represented the nations most talked about subculture.

Ironically, 1976 saw a role reversal of 1960 between evangelicals and liberal Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and agnostics. During the so-called “Year of the Evangelical” it was the latter groups who feared that an evangelical agenda might find a voice in the White House. Carter’s rhetoric did nothing to ease their fears declaring, “that his effort to pattern his life after Christ’s would help him remain calm in the midst of crises and the challenges of the presidency.” He would later state, “that he would never let his religious beliefs interfere with his presidential duties.”¹³² Although Carter’s words bore all the rhetorical devices held common among evangelicals, his actions and policy stances created a discontentment among conservative evangelicals that would lead to the completion of the evangelical, Republican realignment.

Disappointment

Carter’s words echoed the voice of evangelicals throughout American history when he argued “Our founding fathers made Judeo-Christian ethics and a belief in God...a foundation for the Constitution and the laws of our nation.” According to Frank Lambert in his book *Religion and American Politics*, “Following the Watergate scandal in the Nixon years, Americans seemed to pay more attention to the president’s character, and thought it dangerous to separate morals from politics. Many southern evangelicals had been more upset by Nixon’s crude and sometimes blasphemous language revealed in his secret tapes than by the cover-up of the Watergate break in.”¹³³

¹³² Smith, 294

¹³³ Lambert, 192.

So it was much to their displeasure when Carter decided to give an interview with *Playboy* magazine and his subsequent decision to discuss his most intimate feelings. Carter stated in the interview, which hit newsstands within days of the 1976 election, "I've looked on a lot of women with lust. I've committed adultery in my heart many times."¹³⁴ Conservative evangelicals were appalled to say the least, but it was not until Carter failed to act on the issues most precious to their agenda that he began to feel the backlash.

For conservative evangelicals Carter committed a series of egregious errors that added to the already dim outlook of the late 1970s. Kenneth Morris adds, "The divorce rate kept climbing through Carter's presidency while the birthrate plummeted. Cohabitation was gaining popularity, a gay rights movement was taking shape, and abortions were being legally performed by the thousands." He continues, "Add an escalating crime rate, rampant drug use, declining wages, bankrupt cities, and a culture seemingly given over simultaneously to cynicism and debauchery."¹³⁵ It is within this atmosphere that Carter displayed the distance between his sense of justice and that of the conservative Christian communities that had helped him get elected. His policy directions went entirely against their traditional ideology.

Carter's first misstep came in the area of education where he upset southern conservative evangelicals by supporting the Department of Education as an addition to the cabinet. Since *Brown v. Board*, southerners had been reluctant to increased federal

¹³⁴ Morris, 322.

¹³⁵ Morris, 335.

involvement in state run schools. Now this represented a potential threat to undermine Christian academies.¹³⁶

At the university level Carter's emphasis on equality for all groups opened the door for the IRS to revoke the tax-exempt status of Christian universities who failed to comply with anti-discrimination requirements. These southern schools, namely Bob Jones University, represented the organizational efforts of fundamentalist in the 1960s to counter the secularization of academia.¹³⁷

Evangelicals also argued that Carter was not doing enough to counter the abortion decision; he did not embrace the fight over school prayer, sex education, and his support for the Equal Rights Amendment was also met with disdain. The Equal Rights Amendment had been a target for conservative evangelicals since 1972 and represented a feminist attack on the traditional marriage paradigm. The amendment would have provided women with the same rights guaranteed to men. Given the state of the country evangelicals saw the ERA as another attempt to disrupt the social order with a liberal agenda, and Carter was complicit in this offensive secular move.

This did not, however, hinder evangelicals who led grassroots mobilizations across the country promoting their agenda of traditional values in the face of a secular assault. For example, in 1977 singer Anita Bryant led an effort in Dade County, Florida to defeat an ordinance that would provide equal protection in housing, hiring, and public accommodations for gays. Bryant's protest was labeled "Save Our Children" and sought to strike down the measure of the ordinance that would allow gays to teach in public schools.

¹³⁶ Lambert, 200.

¹³⁷ Hudson, 3.

According to Gary Wills, Carter's worst infraction was the "Conference on Families" that he convened which included gays and lesbians.¹³⁸ It was Carter's loose definition of the word family that drew immediate consternation among evangelicals, while further alienating the group. According to Frank Lambert, "In a 1979 statement kicking off National Family Week, President Carter made clear his inclusive definition of family. "We are a nation of families," he said. "All families are important, but the extended family, the foster family, and the adoptive family play a special role by relieving the isolation of those who lack the comfort of a loving nuclear family."¹³⁹ Conservative evangelicals were appalled by Carter's broad sense of family that included homosexuals. Beverly LaHaye, evangelical wife of Tim LaHaye, stated, "by the 1980s homosexuals were driving in, because they wanted to be part of the whole definition of the family. And we objected to that."¹⁴⁰

President Carter was not the evangelical hope that conservatives were anticipating. Instead he bore a striking resemblance to the mainline Protestants who had merged with the secular voice in years in prior. Concern over Carter's political soul was voiced at the White House by none other than the head of the "Southern Baptists Conference, the largest Protestant body in America". As he left the White House he warned Carter, "We are praying for you, Mr. President, that you will abandon secular humanism as your religion." Following the meeting Carter invited some of the key leaders of the Christian Right to mend his relationship with conservative evangelicals. In attendance were Jerry Falwell, Jim Bakker, Oral Roberts, and Tim LaHaye. After defending some of his positions, namely his decision in support of the Equal Rights

¹³⁸ Wills, 491.

¹³⁹ Lambert, 201.

¹⁴⁰ Lambert, 202.

Amendment the evangelical leadership left the White House on a mission to remove Carter in the 1980 election. According to Tim LaHaye, “We had a man in the White House who professed to be a Christian, but didn’t understand how un-Christian his administration was.”¹⁴¹

Harnessing the political clout of this disenfranchised religious voting block that Gallup showed to be numbering at 70 million became the goal of a certain group of Republican Party strategists. With no evangelical ties, these party loyalists sought to capitalize on conservative evangelical strength by devising a strategy to fuse religious conservatism with the “secular conservatism” of the Republican Party. “Howard Philips of the Conservative Caucus, John Dolan of the National Conservative Political Action Committee, Paul Weyrich of the National Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress, and Richard Viguerie, a fund-raiser for a number of conservative caucuses” were the “architects” of bringing the Christian Right into the Republican Party. Under the direction Paul Weyrich, exploiting moral and value based issues most sensitive to conservative Christians and charging them with mobilization around those issues became the group’s chief political tactic. After taking note of evangelical dissatisfaction with Carter’s positions, Weyrich noted, “Wait a second-these folks are numerous and they’re out there and they’re not organized. Let’s get them in, let’s get them organized, let’s get them voting, and see what happens.” Weyrich understood that evangelicals were the fastest growing Protestant group in the United States.¹⁴² Carter provided the political fuel necessary to seal the Republican/Evangelical realignment.

¹⁴¹ Lambert, 203.

¹⁴² Lambert, 196-203.

Mobilization

Though Carter spoke with an evangelical tongue his actions mirrored and were aligned with what Gary Wills refers to as “Enlightened Religion”. This stood in stark contrast with the “Great Awakening” based evangelical movement¹⁴³. While Carter appealed to many evangelical voters in 1976, he had lost sight of his base. During this time the conservative evangelical mobilization was in full throttle. The Christian Right gave birth to Pastor Jerry Falwell’s political action group, the Moral Majority. With a platform based on “pro-life, pro-family, pro-defense, and pro-Israel” it helped to cement the evangelical Republican realignment. According to David Scott Domke, Falwell used his television program the *Old Time Gospel Hour* to disseminate the message that all evangelicals, both fundamentalists and mainstream, unite under the “born again” banner. In a sermon entitled “America Can Be Saved” Falwell preached:

For too long we have sat back and said politics are for the people in Washington, business is for those on Wall Street, and religion is our business. But the fact is, you cannot separate the sacred and the secular. We need to train men of God in our schools who can go on to Congress, can go on to be directors in the largest corporations, who can become the lawyers and the businessmen and those important people in tomorrow’s United States. If we are going to turn this country around, we have to get God’s people mobilized in the right direction and we must do it quickly. Did you know that the largest single minority block in the United States that has never been capitalized on by anybody is the fundamentalist movement? If all the fundamentalists knew who to vote for and did it together, we could elect anybody. If every one of these people could be intelligently taught and mobilized, brother, we could turn this nation upside down for God!¹⁴⁴

At the same time that Falwell was activating evangelical political mobilization, other conservative evangelicals were networking their message of traditional values through the mass media empire they had built over the turbulent 1970s. Pat Robertson’s *700 Club* was one of the early successful evangelical broadcasts that promoted the traditional

¹⁴³ Wills, 5.

¹⁴⁴ Domke, 18-19.

family paradigm while exposing secularism in all its forms.¹⁴⁵ Dr. James Dobson founder of *Focus on the Family* was also beginning his conservative ascent during this period. According to E.J. Dionne, “At least as late as 1976, conservatism was largely defined by the issues of anticommunism and limited government. By the 1980s, conservatism was defined more and more by issues such as abortion, pornography, prayer in schools, and the content of elementary-school teaching.”¹⁴⁶ The conservative evangelicals who saw the 1960s and 1970s bring about social upheaval, empty promises, stolen rhetoric, and big wins for secularism were about to find success.

¹⁴⁵ Heltzel, 95.

¹⁴⁶ Dionne, 233.

CHAPTER VII

REAGAN: HOPE IN THE WHITE HOUSE

On July 15, 1979 Jimmy Carter addressed the nation on what was supposed to be the energy crisis. However, prompted by an economy in downturn and low approval ratings Carter's agenda turned toward rekindling the nation's spiritual mood. As Carter spoke on the nation's "moral and spiritual crisis" he conceded "all the legislation in the world can't fix what's wrong with America." He then advocated, "faith in each other, faith in our ability to govern ourselves, and faith in the future of this nation." After what Democratic opponent, Ted Kennedy, supposedly dubbed the "malaise speech" Carter witnessed his approval ratings rise for a moment and then plummet to below 29%. This was comparable to Nixon's approval rating during the Watergate scandal.¹⁴⁷

While Carter entertained the strong possibility that he might be a one-term president, evangelicals were hard at work trying to reclaim America for God while ensuring that Carter's fears became a reality. The year 1979 saw the inflamed evangelical leaders of the Christian Right posturing to support the former actor and governor, Ronald Reagan, as he set out on his campaign to claim the White House. Jimmy Carter had been but a momentary pause in the transition of conservative white evangelicals to the Republican Party. Leading the charge among evangelicals were Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority and Pat Robertson's 700 Club. According to Richard G. Kyle in

¹⁴⁷ Morris, 340.

Evangelicalism: an Americanized Christianity, “the electronic church did not create the Christian Right, but without the televangelists it would not have had much success. For seven days a week television sets beamed the image of charismatic preachers denouncing America’s moral decline”.¹⁴⁸

Religion and Reagan

Kenneth E. Morris in his essay “Religion and the Presidency of Jimmy Carter” highlights an irony in evangelical support for Ronald Reagan. He writes, “Although Reagan professed to be and perhaps was, he gave no strong indication of being an earnest born-again evangelical Christian. His wife Nancy Reagan is said to have consulted an astrologer before advising her husband on policy—definitely not a practice that could meet with the approval of evangelical Christian—and the Reagan family was hardly a paragon of “family values.” In reality Jimmy Carter’s family values held closer to evangelical standards than that of Reagan who “was a divorced and remarried Hollywood actor whose own daughter was so estranged from him that she actively campaigned against him.”¹⁴⁹

This paradox can best be explained by revisiting a common theme among conservative evangelicals, dispensationalism. According to adherents to this belief God has dealt with man throughout history using a series of covenants. As a result “America stands in a special covenant relationship with God and is uniquely charged with the mission of doing God’s work on earth.”¹⁵⁰ Dispensationalists also draw upon the belief that when God’s people break the covenant they are in danger of God’s

¹⁴⁸ Richard G. Kyle, *Evangelicalism: an Americanized Christianity* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2006).

¹⁴⁹ Morris, 340.

¹⁵⁰ Morris, 341.

wrath and judgment. Although Reagan did not display the familiar evangelical rhetoric articulated so well by Carter, he sold evangelicals on the mission to return America to its place in the world while flexing her military might. Reagan's language blended elements of God, prayer, and patriotism coated in a layer of pro-free market ideology and an ardent disdain for communism.

The 1980 Election

Charged by the Moral Majority and its leaders the 1980 election was painted as dire for evangelicals. At a 1980 political rally in Dallas Rev. James Robison declared, "The stage is set, where we are either going to have a Hitler-style takeover, a dictatorship, Soviet Communist domination or we're going to get right with God in this country. It is time for Christians to crawl out from under their pews." Understanding the swelling political strength of the Christian Right, Reagan visited Jerry Falwell's church in Lynchburg, Virginia. He also spoke at Robison's Dallas rally where he cleverly stated, "I know you can't endorse me, but want you to know I endorse you and what you are doing."¹⁵¹ Reagan was, no doubt, aware of the Gallup Poll conducted in 1977-1978 that indicated that there were "fifty million Evangelicals" in America. He was also reminded of the group's growing intensity by the offering of new voters from Reverend Jerry Falwell. After discovering that "only about half of religious conservatives were registered voters, Falwell adopted the slogan: "Get them saved, baptized, and registered." He then announced, "If evangelicals are excited about the platform, which they are, and about both candidates, I'd say three or four million votes will be available to Mr. Reagan that

¹⁵¹ Kenneth J. Heineman, *God Is a Conservative* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998).

have never been available to anybody.” He then warned Reagan and Republicans to not deviate from their platform of traditional values.¹⁵² Although the fundamentalist leaders did not speak for all evangelicals a common thread of conservatism united them.

As the election results came in Reagan defeated Carter handedly and the Moral Majority and conservative evangelicals had won a political victory. Although the Moral Majority saw their role in the election as pivotal for Reagan’s victory, E.J. Dionne argues, “that born-again white Protestants” accounted for 17 percent of the electorate. Reagan carried this group over Carter 61 percent to 34 percent. Even if Carter had defeated Reagan by the same 61 to 34 percent among born-again white Protestants, Reagan would still have won”.¹⁵³ Nevertheless, evangelicals celebrated the victory as a victory for morality and looked forward with high hopes to what Reagan would do for their conservative causes. According to Darren Dochuck the Reagan win in 1980 “marked the more remarkable culmination of southern evangelicalism’s move from the margins into the cultural and political mainstream.” Reagan’s win, Dochuck continues, “confirmed what pundits had already recognized in the early 1970s: the demographic, economic, and cultural trends responsible for rebuilding the modern South were sure to bring benefit to a conservative Republican coalition best able to talk the new Sunbelt language of individual entitlement and community values.”¹⁵⁴

Reagan’s Rhetoric

What Reagan may have lacked in the born again language that pleased so many evangelicals in 1976, he made up for by articulating his own tried and true religious experience that played upon the by-gone days of the 1950s while casting a vision for

¹⁵² Domke, 17.

¹⁵³ Dionne, 234.

¹⁵⁴ Dochuck, 317.

America as God's "Shining City on a Hill." Reagan's rhetoric from the onset appealed to evangelicals who considered the United States to be in a special covenant with God and therefore believed that the country was obligated to pursue his direction. As a result the United States like Israel was unique and, therefore, exceptional.

David Scott Domke in *God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon* conducted a study of 20 presidential inaugural addresses ranging from Roosevelt's in 1933 to Bush's in 2005 to highlight instances where the president used words that spoke of the United States as "Set Apart", and instances where the president indicated that the United States is in need of "Renewal". Words that were identified as America being set apart include: "unique, special, chosen, unmatched, best, beacon, and greatest." Secondly, words that were identified as being synonymous with renewal included: "rebirth, reawaken, rededicate, revive, and renew." Domke concluded among other things that, "From the moment Ronald Reagan took the oath of office in 1981, presidents have averaged 36 separate instances in which they characterized the nation as set apart or spoke of national renewal." The typical Inaugural from Roosevelt's first in 1933 through Jimmy Carter in 1977 contained about 17 separate instances in which presidents characterized the nation as set apart or in need of national renewal. Domke adds, "Reagan brought a convergence of God and country that was perfectly worded and timed. In short, Reagan brought the "God Strategy".¹⁵⁵ Figure 5 displays the increase in presidential inaugural rhetoric that refers to the United States as being in need of "renewal" or a set apart and "unique" between 1933 and 2005.

¹⁵⁵ Domke, 51.

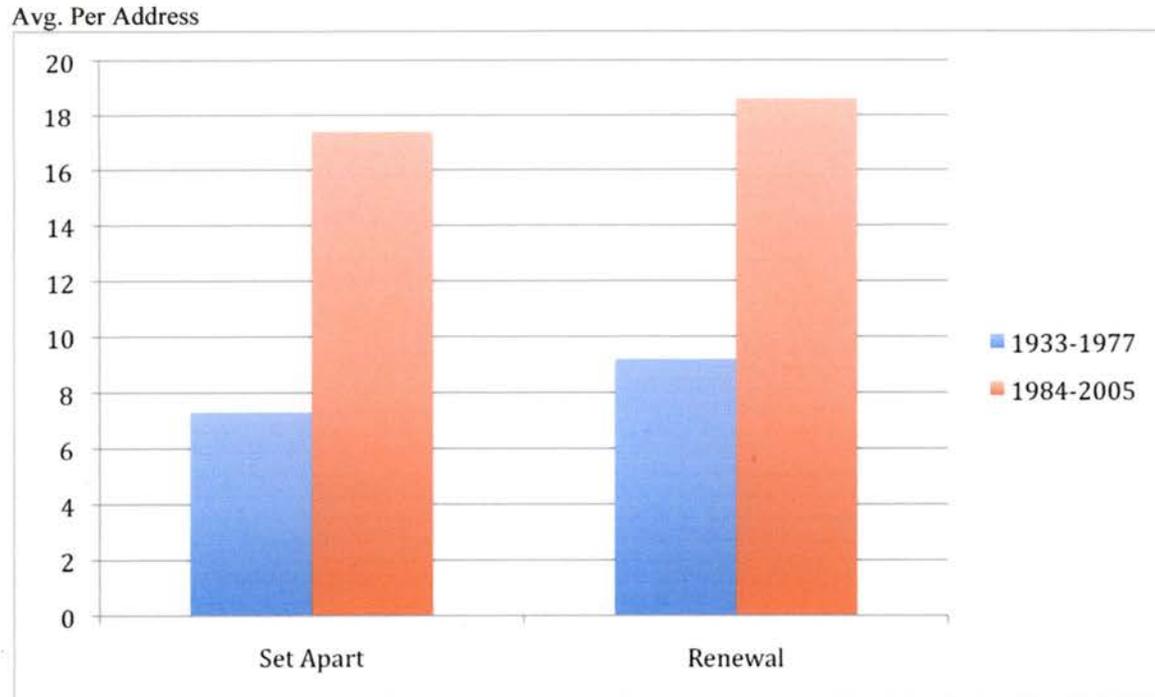


Figure 5: God and Country, Presidential Claims about American Identity in Inaugurals

Whereas Carter’s evangelical resume was clean and easy to trace through his Southern Baptist upbringing and devotion toward his born again ideals, Reagan proved to be more difficult to calculate. What is agreed upon is that he had a “godly mother” who influenced his religious rearing. Nelle was baptized in 1910 after “a deeply moving conversion experience.” She instilled in her son the belief “that God has a plan for everyone.”¹⁵⁶ Consequently Reagan would later note, “I’ve always believed there is a certain divine scheme of things.” Throughout his youth and his early political life Reagan routinely called upon his faith to help with the struggles of life. As governor of California Reagan stated, “I have spent more time in prayer these past months than in any previous period I can recall.” He also invited the consummate mainstream evangelical,

¹⁵⁶ Smith, 326.

Billy Graham, to speak before the state assembly on two different occasions.¹⁵⁷ Reagan's use of storytelling also revealed deep religious sentiment and offered an understanding into his Christian heritage. Reagan once told a reporter, when discussing his use of stories, "Jesus used parables to make his points and help people understand."¹⁵⁸ According to Patrick Buchanan, Reagan was a "self taught Christian" and a "very simple Christian". Reagan's faith would begin like many other presidents, a deeply private matter, but would become more public in his later life.¹⁵⁹

Walking the Walk

For evangelicals Reagan provided a substance and action far exceeding their joy over Carter's evangelical talk. According to Paul Kengor, "He lobbied incessantly for the right of children to pray in public schools." Reagan argued, "Can it really be true that the First Amendment can permit Nazis and Ku Klux Klansmen to march on public property, advocate the extermination of people of the Jewish faith and the subjugation of blacks, while the same amendment forbids our children from saying a prayer in school?" Evangelicals finally had the voice as Reagan pushed for a prayer in public schools amendment in 1982. He articulated his mission when he spoke at the National Association of Evangelicals Conference in March of 1983.

Regarding the issue of abortion Reagan ardently upheld the pro-life platform. Reagan expressed his moral conviction over the issue when he said, "Today there is a wound in our national conscience. America will never be whole as long as the right to

¹⁵⁷ Espinosa, 361.

¹⁵⁸ Espinosa, 361.

¹⁵⁹ Smith, 336.

live granted by our Creator is denied to unborn.”¹⁶⁰ According to E.J. Dionne, “even if Ronald Reagan did not get abortion outlawed or prayer returned to the classroom, he spoke out repeatedly on behalf of these causes, giving them a legitimacy they had never had before.”¹⁶¹

Though Reagan received the gratitude of evangelicals as a whole for his committed efforts toward causes that they believed in, there were some who remarked with disdain over his lack of church attendance, the fact that his wife Nancy consulted with an astrologer, and the fact that he was divorced. To Reagan’s credit the church going issue sprang from a deep regret that when he attended church people often made such a fuss that he felt it to be a huge distraction. According to Paul Kengor while Reagan was still governor, a certain California pastor asked that he stop attending because “people were now coming to worship Ronald Reagan instead of God.”¹⁶² All of Reagan’s personal shortcomings were minor considering that most evangelicals were willing to look the other way as long as Reagan was staying true to course. Thus his 1984 reelection saw white evangelicals support Reagan over Mondale 72 to 27 percent.¹⁶³

Evangelicals also celebrated one of Reagan’s lasting conservative legacies, his federal court appointments. E.J. Dionne notes, “Slowly but steadily, Ronald Reagan was carrying out a judicial revolution, transforming the majority on the Supreme Court and stocking the lower levels of the federal judiciary with conservatives.”¹⁶⁴ Reagan’s appointments would lay the groundwork for causes important to the Christian Right.

¹⁶⁰ Espinosa, 363.

¹⁶¹ Dionne, 237.

¹⁶² Espinosa, 367.

¹⁶³ Dionne, 237.

¹⁶⁴ Dionne, 237.

Reagan's domestic conservative policies reflected an antithesis to the New Deal big government structure. While speaking out against poverty and racism, Reagan charged the church to become more involved and individuals to be less reliant on government. At an African American clergy luncheon in 1982 Reagan voiced, "too many churches are Sunday morning churches and not seven-day-a-week churches." This was the beginning of the faith-based initiative.

Perhaps no other issue or event during Reagan's presidency displays more of his religious inclination and world philosophy than his commitment toward stamping out communism. Reagan abhorred communism and his rhetoric regarding the fear of its diffusion was pleasing to evangelical ears. Speaking to the National Association of Evangelicals in 1983 Reagan warned, "There is sin and evil in the world and we're enjoined by Scripture and the Lord Jesus to oppose it with all our might."¹⁶⁵ Reagan spoke of communism, not as a competing government or economic system, but as a form of "evil" and "insanity". According to Paul Kengor, "what particularly outraged Reagan about Soviet communism was its atheistic nature and worse, its war on religion." Evangelicals, charged by a belief that communism and atheism were synonymous applauded Reagan's words when he declared, "I don't think the Lord that has blessed this country, as no other country has ever been blessed, intends for us to have to negotiate because of our weakness."¹⁶⁶

Reagan's presidency provided a blueprint for future presidents in working with conservative Christian groups, especially evangelicals. Pat Robertson voiced, "He is probably the most evangelical president we have had since the founding fathers."

¹⁶⁵ Espinosa, 374.

¹⁶⁶ Smith, 334

Reagan's idea of America the "Shining City on a Hill", his support for Israel, and his Manichean language regarding the spread of communism aligned with the scope of evangelical intent, while his domestic focus sought to empower the individual and not the government. Although Reagan failed to reinstate school prayer and to ban abortion in the United States, his greatest contributions came in his ability to merge Christian doctrine with American Patriotism. Reagan had provided the fulfillment of the evangelical/Republican realignment. The efforts of groups like the Moral Majority had laid the foundation of Republican ideals merging with Christian evangelical ideals. Reagan had given evangelicals a glimpse of "the Shining City" and it would be over twelve years before they would see another one of their own in the White House.

CHAPTER VIII

GEORGE W. BUSH: THE EVANGELICAL PRESIDENT

Arthur Blessit, the evangelical minister who had carried a twelve-foot cross around the world, was preaching at a revival in Midland's Chaparral Center. The year was 1984 and George W. Bush, owner of Bush Exploration, was curious about Blessit's message of the born again experience. During a private meeting Blessit asked, "What is your relationship with Jesus?" Bush answered, "I'm not sure." Blessit then asked whether Bush would go to heaven if he died today. "No", Bush responded. Next Blessit led Bush in what is known amongst evangelicals as "the sinner's prayer." The prayer centers on the themes of repentance and salvation through Jesus Christ.¹⁶⁷

The encounter with Blessit started Bush down the path of the evangelical faith, but Bush's most impressionable moment in his Christian discovery came in the summer of 1985 during a walk down the beach with the Reverend Billy Graham. The Graham family had been invited to dinner at a Bush family event in Kennebunkport, Maine. As the two men strolled toward Walker's Point, Graham asked Bush, "Do you have the right relationship with God?" Bush recalled this as "the beginning of a change in my life." Though Bush still enjoyed his alcohol, he began to attend a men's Bible study in Midland. It was through this Bible study that Bush began to grow in his spiritual walk, while also establishing evangelical connections that would one day lead to the White

¹⁶⁷ Espinosa, 483.

House. One of these connections was Don Evans, who would become Bush's Secretary of Commerce in the years to come.¹⁶⁸ Not long after the Graham encounter Bush came to the realization that alcohol was having a negative effect on his health. During this time his father asked that he be his senior advisor during the 1988 campaign. It was during this time that evangelicals first begin to take notice of Bush. He had spent the years just prior to 1988 becoming well versed in the evangelical lifestyle, so it made strategic sense for Bush to rally the support of the group for his father. According to David Aikman, "George's success in connecting with prominent leaders in the evangelical community, which grew out of his own experiences within evangelical Christendom, probably was an important factor in the eventual defeat of Robertson's bid for the Republican nomination."¹⁶⁹ Pat Robertson, evangelical leader and host of the *700 Club*, ran for president in 1988 after being disappointed with the lack of policy gains made by evangelicals during the Reagan era.

The Fulfillment

While listening to a sermon at Highland Park Methodist Church in Dallas, Bush came under conviction after hearing the story of God's call on the life of Moses. During the sermon the minister pronounced that Americans "were starved for leaders who have ethical and moral courage." Following the message Bush visited with televangelist James Robison and told him "I've heard the call. I believe God wants me to run for president." According to Daniel K. Williams, Robison was pivotal in the mobilization of evangelicals for Reagan, and after his meeting with Bush he began to introduce the future

¹⁶⁸ Espinosa, 485.

¹⁶⁹ Espinosa, 486.

president to a “network” of evangelical leaders and televangelists.¹⁷⁰

Evangelicals warmed to George W. Bush. He possessed, what his father lacked, an ability to connect with the group actions and language. Frank Lambert notes, “In George W. Bush the Religious Right found a born again Christian who, unlike Jimmy Carter, spoke their language and subscribed to their views. Far more than Reagan or George H. W. Bush, George W. Bush believed that religious groups should participate in public life and should receive their fair share of public funds.”¹⁷¹ George W. Bush knew evangelicals, and according to David Scott Domke, Bush and his advisor, Karl Rove, perfected “the God Strategy.”¹⁷² Bush frequently met with evangelical clergy while in office and even received their advice when making his decision to run for the presidency.

During the 1999 Iowa Republican debate America witnessed Bush change the nature of the discourse by submitting his evangelical perspective.¹⁷³ Bush described his life change by stating, “when you accept Christ as the savior, it changes your heart. It changes your life. And that’s what happened to me.” Domke adds that this statement by Bush established a norm that drew the applause of the audience, changed the debate, and then entered the public lexicon. Following the debate, it was none other than the executive director of the Republican Party of Iowa, Dee Stewart, who highlighted, “The Republican debate has religion intertwined in its discourse. Our caucus attendee is not going to be offended by a discussion of God or moral values in politics.” Billy Graham celebrated Bush’s response as a “wonderful answer.” Evangelicals across the nation

¹⁷⁰ Williams, 247.

¹⁷¹ Lambert, 205.

¹⁷² Domke, 205.

¹⁷³ Smith, 374.

praised Bush's language.¹⁷⁴ Gary Scott Smith points to a Pew Research Poll that indicated "70 percent of respondents in 2000 declared that they wanted presidential candidates to be religious." Bush further impressed evangelicals when he claimed, "the jury is still out on Darwinism." George Will noted, "The new president did not merely pander to the evangelicals; he promoted their causes with the conviction of a true believer."¹⁷⁵

Bush's appeal to evangelicals cemented an eight-year relationship with the group. Following the controversial 2000 election in which Bush received 80% of the white evangelical vote, the president that conservative evangelicals had been praying for had finally taken center stage.¹⁷⁶ Evangelicals had long complained that words and rhetoric were not enough. They were dissatisfied with previous policies that were half-hearted attempts that placated to liberal compromise.

However, unlike his predecessors, Bush delivered for evangelicals. Evangelical language and lifestyle became routine at the White House. Bush began each day with a Bible reading and devotional time with members of his staff. According to Daniel K. Williams, Bush's Cabinet and White House staff selections made his administration the most overtly evangelical in American history.¹⁷⁷ "There were Bible study groups in which "over half of the White House staff" attended. According to Gary Wills, "The Evangelicals knew which positions could affect their agenda, whom to replace there, and whom to appoint." One of the key evangelical players was Kay Cole, Head of the White House Office of Personnel. Coal was the former Dean of Pat Robertson's Regent

¹⁷⁴ Domke, 30.

¹⁷⁵ Williams, 245.

¹⁷⁶ Domke, 32.

¹⁷⁷ Williams, 252.

University, and vice president of Gary Bauer's Family Research Council.¹⁷⁸

Evangelical presence was further established with Bush's appointment of John Ashcroft as attorney general. Ashcroft was well known as a Pentecostal and conservative in evangelical circles. Pat Robertson had at one time encouraged him to run for president.

Bush brought about the activist approach that evangelicals had been hoping for in government. This was reflected in Bush's domestic agenda that included the term "compassionate conservatism." According to David Aikman, "He sought to build on the success of some faith-based organizations in treating social pathologies such as drug addiction and alcoholism by launching, with great fanfare, a program whereby the government would, in certain circumstances, fund programs run by religious groups as long as they did not openly proselytize."¹⁷⁹ This pleased many evangelicals, especially those of a progressive mindset, including many African American churches, but others feared the entanglement of government and religion. Nonetheless, the policy displayed Bush's faith-based philosophy of governance.

Regarding the evangelical theme of family values, conservative evangelicals were enraged by the courts decision in *Lawrence v. Texas*, where the Texas' anti-sodomy law was struck down as unconstitutional. Dr. James Dobson declared, "This was our D-Day." Understanding the political stakes at hand and his commitment to the evangelical base, after some delay, Bush called for an amendment banning same-sex marriage.¹⁸⁰ Bush's appointment of conservatives John Roberts and Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court also satisfied the evangelical base.

Bush's use of evangelical terms and phrases went far beyond the domestic front.

¹⁷⁸ Wills, 499.

¹⁷⁹ Espinosa, 489.

¹⁸⁰ Wills, 511.

Following a meeting with Russian president Vladimir Putin, Bush commented that he had “a sense of his soul.”¹⁸¹ This type of rhetoric was controversial among those who felt that Bush was expressing his faith too openly. Conservative evangelicals, however, welcomed the familiar themes being spoken by a public official.

Bush’s relationship with Israel was also widely accepted among evangelicals who hold a dispensational view of the relationship between the United States and Israel, firmly upholding the belief that Israel is unique and belongs to the Jewish people. David Aikman argues, “Bush appeared to take a hands-off approach to the conflict, essentially giving Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon the green light to pursue his policies toward the Palestinians.” Aikman adds, “Bush supported Sharon throughout his presidency despite Sharon’s heavy-handedness’ toward the Palestinians.”¹⁸²

Sign of the Times

September 11 was the defining moment of George W. Bush’s presidency. Elected without the popular vote, all signs indicated a weak presidency in the making. However following the events of 9/11 George W. Bush began to speak in moral absolutes with zeal and used terms like “evil” and “evil doers.” Bush’s use of moral rhetoric had been a staple of his political career. Christian broadcaster Janet Parshall noted, “I think that God picked the right man at the right time for the right purpose.”¹⁸³

After 9/11 the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were justified according to many evangelicals. Falwell declared, “God is pro-war.” He added, “the abortionists have got to bear some burden for this because God will not be mocked.” Franklin Graham, son of Billy Graham, stated Islam is a “wicked” religion. Tim LaHaye called it, “a focal point of

¹⁸¹ Espinosa, 491.

¹⁸² Espinosa, 492.

¹⁸³ Williams, 255.

end-time events.” This was a war against the enemies of Israel. Gary Wills notes, “The Southern Baptist Convention’s wire services said “American foreign policy and military might have opened an opportunity for the Gospel in the land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”¹⁸⁴ Evangelical support reached its pinnacle in 2004. Even while support for Bush and the war in Iraq waned, the support of most conservative evangelicals withstood the pressure. Daniel K. Williams adds, “Evangelicals view of politics as a spiritual battle between good and evil led them to support not only the military’s actions in Afghanistan, but also President Bush’s war in Iraq.”¹⁸⁵ Gary Wills adds, “in 2006 when two-thirds of the American people told pollsters that the war in Iraq was a mistake, the third of those still standing behind it were mainly evangelicals (who make up about one-third of the population).”¹⁸⁶

George W. Bush provided evangelicals with a voice and action in office that they had never experienced. Thus in 2004, evangelicals and the broader Religious Right, which included many Catholics returned the favor and came out in large support to secure a Bush victory. The broad religious support came about as the result of a strategy conceived in the political mind of Karl Rove.

The Values Voter

Rove, the consummate Republican and Bush strategist, sought to build a broad reaching voting block centered on traditional values, specifically gay marriage. Members of the Christian Right had already brought an ultimatum before Bush and Rove; either endorse the Federal Marriage Act (FMA) or plan on not receiving their vote in 2004. Conservative evangelicals had been outraged over the Lawrence decision, and they were

¹⁸⁴ Wills, 514.

¹⁸⁵ Williams, 255.

¹⁸⁶ Wills, 514.

willing to make gay marriage a key value issue in the 2004 election. Understanding the strength of the conservative evangelical base, Bush obliged evangelicals by supporting the amendment. During his State of the Union speech in 2004 Bush proclaimed, “If judges insist on forcing their arbitrary will upon the people, the only alternative left to the people would be the constitutional process. Our nation must defend the sanctity of marriage.” Bush would later state, “Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman.” Though the FMA would fail to pass the issue became the catalyst for the “values” voter.¹⁸⁷

Referendums took place in thirteen states to have gay marriage made illegal in their state. Ohio, a pivotal swing state in 2004, was one of the states where evangelical pastors like Rod Parsley began mobilizing hundreds of thousands of voters in the name of traditional values to support the referendum. The Bush campaign got on board with banners that read, “George W. Bush shares your values” and “Marriage. Life. Faith.”¹⁸⁸ The appeal of the strategy reached well beyond the conservative evangelical base, and revealed a trend that had been years in the making. Traditional voters in every religious category had been trending toward the Republican Party for decades. Karl Rove, a lifelong agnostic, understood the power of the value voter, especially the conservative evangelical voter.

David E. Campbell in his book *Matter of Faith: Religion in the 2004 Election* concludes, “While Kennedy-hardly a model of Catholic piety-took a stratospheric 82 percent of the Catholic vote, Kerry took less than 50%.” Among churchgoing Catholics, Bush took 74 % of the vote. The God Strategy was broad in its intent in that it held true

¹⁸⁷ Williams, 255-258.

¹⁸⁸ Williams, 258-260.

to the evangelical base, but Bush was able to take it beyond to the broader Religious Right. As for evangelicals, Bush secured 77.5% of the entire evangelical vote to Kerry's 22.5%.¹⁸⁹

Bush's legacy will be forever tied to evangelicals in that he fulfilled a goal set by evangelical political leaders to counter the tide of secularism in Washington, and to fill public offices with their own. More importantly Bush brought conservative evangelical, born again language into the presidency like no president before him.

¹⁸⁹ David E. Cambell, *Matter of Faith: Religion in the 2004 Presidential Election* (Washington: Brooking Institution Press, 200).

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

Unfortunately for conservative evangelicals the Bush legacy had become intertwined with that of their own. Bush had trumpeted many of their policies, views, and words, and as Bush's time came to a political end the electorate had moved to the left. In many ways Bush's poor approval rating and the backlash of the 2008 election was not just a rejection of Bush's policies, but, perhaps, a rejection of conservative evangelicals who were among his most ardent supporters. As the election season of 2008 stirred, a different type of evangelical began to arise, one with the Christian priorities of a William Jennings Bryan or a Jimmy Carter. This time it was not the conservative evangelical bound to the policy goals of the likes of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, but a more progressive, moderate evangelical, an evangelical with conservative views in the area of pro-life, but socially progressive in relation to the war and to the social ills of American society. Evidence of this was displayed when Joel Hunter, a mega-church pastor from Florida, resigned his office of president of the Christian Coalition because the "the Coalition's board objected to his making poverty, the environment, and a living wage important issues." Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church in California, also advocated for the importance of similar issues. Warren received heavy criticism from

evangelical conservatives when he invited, then, Senator Obama to speak at his church.¹⁹⁰

Evangelical history in the United States can be traced back to the early Puritans followed by the spirit of the First and Second Great Awakening. Politically active but marginalized until the 1960s, conservative evangelicals have established themselves as the Christian voice in the arena of politics and religion. While some predict their demise, their language, that of the born again sort, continues to impact American politics. Since John F. Kennedy evangelicals have been responsible for raising the bar on religious language used by politicians and have been the impetus for a strict definition of American morality and the prioritization of that morality. Whereas, Carter proved to be too out of touch with the policy direction of the conservative evangelical base, Reagan answered the call of evangelicals with a rhetoric and action aimed at blending elements of free market capitalism, patriotism, and the ardent belief that the United States is unique and “set apart”, and is in need of “renewal.” George W. Bush became the realization and the fulfillment of what evangelicals had strived for since the 1960s: an activist conservative evangelical in the White House.

Though the strength of conservative evangelicals has been questioned and their role in the 2004 election downplayed, their true success lies in their ability to frame political/religious discourse in their own image. Any discussions regarding values or traditional values, which appear to be clearly ambiguous terms, have been clearly articulated and defined by conservative evangelicals. As a result politicians, pundits, and presidents yield to the cultural definitions of a group that has framed the so-called “culture wars” in their own terms forcing other political entities to debate using their terms. The evangelical/Republican alignment displays the opportunistic political merge

¹⁹⁰ Will, 542.

of two groups seeking to capitalize on the strength of the other, both ardently in support of American exceptionalism coated in a dualistic worldview.

As long as there is a perception that the pendulum could swing toward secularism or that the balance has been inequitably weighted to benefit those who value secular, humanistic philosophies; there will be conservative evangelical mobilization.

Carwardine's assessment of conservative evangelicals during the antebellum reveals a telling nature of a group that has evolved into a politically potent entity willing to play in the often-murky moral waters of politics. He adds,

“These two worlds, of evangelicalism and secular politics, were implicitly in conflict, of course. Evangelicals were concerned with moral absolutes, with straining after standards usually beyond the achievement of fallen humankind. Their fundamental concern was with behavior, with the maintenance of certain moral rules in personal life, both in the public eye and the private sphere. The most effective politician was by temperament a realist, a compromiser who ultimately accepted any working solution even if it fell short of his original ambitions. The temper of the compromise-seeking political trimmer had little in common with that of the conscience-driven, crusading evangelical, who believed partisanship, electioneering, and legislative bargaining undermined Christian virtue and spiritual growth, and encouraged dishonesty and hatred.”¹⁹¹

Carwardine's assessment highlights the evolution that conservative evangelicals have undergone. Once apprehensive to enter into politics, conservative evangelicals have become a viable political force by redefining the place of religion in America's political discourse and, thereby, influencing presidential politics.

¹⁹¹ Carwardine, 48.

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