

## ABSTRACT

The Elephant in the Room: White Evangelicals and the 2016 Presidential Election

Margaret Thonnard

Director: Elizabeth Corey, PhD

In 2016, eighty-one percent of white evangelical voters voted for Donald Trump—the demographics' highest showing of support for any presidential candidate in over two decades. Using both existing and original research, this thesis attempts to create awareness for the historical context behind white evangelical support for Donald Trump. Topics covered include the relationships between high-profile evangelicals and presidents such as Nixon and Reagan, as well as the role of televangelists in the 2016 election. After considering the development of partisanship within the evangelical community, the thesis concludes by assessing the practical options available to evangelical voters in upcoming elections.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS:

---

Dr. Elizabeth Corey, Honors Program

APPROVED BY THE HONORS PROGRAM:

---

Dr. Elizabeth Corey, Director

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

The Elephant in the Room:  
White Evangelicals and the 2016 Presidential Election

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
Baylor University  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Honors Program

By  
Margaret Thonnard

Waco, Texas

May 2020

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Data Review .....	3
The Eighty-One Percent.....	3
Possible Motivations.....	7
Summary of Perceptions.....	17
Conclusion .....	18
Chapter Two: The History Behind the Numbers .....	19
Entering the Political Scene .....	19
One Nation, Under God .....	21
Law and Order .....	24
Rise of the Christian Right.....	28
Reagan’s Investment.....	34
Conclusion .....	36
Chapter Three: The 2016 Presidential Election .....	38
Getting a “Fair Hearing” .....	38
Closing In.....	41
The Board.....	43
Spreading the Word .....	50
Conclusion .....	52
Chapter Four: Concluding Thoughts .....	54
Some Objections (and Responses).....	61
A Critique of #NeverTrump.....	65
Options for 2020 .....	67
Conclusion .....	69
Bibliography .....	71

## PREFACE

I am a conservative-leaning white evangelical who grew up in a family of conservative-leaning white evangelicals. This project began in the Fall 2018 semester when I interned for the Office of U.S. Senator Rand Paul in Washington, D.C. As part of the internship, my working hours primarily consisted of sitting at a small desk that faced a television perpetually tuned in to Fox News while answering the phone and fielding concerns from callers. During that time, I was also trying to make sense of my own orientation towards politics following the 2016 Presidential Election. This research project became my outlet for processing both the internship and the election. By day, I had a front row seat to an unfiltered national outrage concerning Trump, Brett Kavanaugh, ANTIFA, and the midterm elections. By night, I read books that I hoped would help me understand the source of the recurring narratives that arose from my evangelical callers in particular. The result is what is now the second chapter of this thesis.

For liberals as well as conservatives, partisanship and group identity tend to go hand-in-hand. Today's political discourse rewards angry outbursts, condescending tones, and promises of sweeping reforms. I have written this thesis in hopes of helping one group—white evangelicals—escape the snare of political loyalty.

Many politicized groups could be analyzed in the manner that I have taken up in this thesis. I have chosen to focus on evangelicals not only because I belong to the evangelical community and desire its welfare, but also because I believe that evangelical Christians have the potential to become instruments of Christ's peace in a fraught world.

I have elected to limit my research only to the white evangelical community because of its visibility in the press. I also chose this limit in order to avoid the danger of overgeneralized research. With this decision, I in no way intended to communicate that white evangelicals were either the whole of evangelical Christianity or the most significant group. Rather, I chose to write about the group that I knew best in order to be of the most use to evangelical Christianity as a whole.

My method is to tell the story of white evangelical support for Trump within the broader context of the relationship between white evangelicals and the Republican Party. I do not aim to dictate who evangelicals ought to vote for in future elections. Rather, my hope is to enable evangelicals to see and consider their own weaknesses within the realm of politics so as to renew our capacity to be instruments of Christ's peace in the public square. For some evangelicals, such realizations may prompt a change in voting habits. Others may simply become more conscientious about what they say—and do not say—at and between election cycles. Still others may disagree entirely and retain their previous convictions and habits.

I welcome those who are not evangelical Christians to read this thesis, albeit with a word of caution. This thesis intentionally delves into one of the sorest spots within evangelical Christianity. For this reason, the majority of the thesis dwells on some of the unflattering moments in evangelical Christianity. That means that I pay little attention to the countless examples of Christian charity that can be found most readily outside of politics. For this reason, this history ought not to be considered a fair treatment of the evangelical community as a whole. If it were to be read in this way, the reader would be left with a one-dimensional story that mischaracterizes the totality of evangelical

Christianity. As a starting point for a more holistic account of evangelicalism, I would suggest Thomas Kidd's recent book, *Who is an Evangelical?*

To those reading who are evangelical Christians, I offer my thanks for taking the time to consider this narrative even in the midst of an exhausting backdrop of current events. I recognize that some may read this work because they share my concerns regarding the present orientation of evangelicalism to politics. Others may read without sharing these convictions and are yet demonstrating their willingness to be challenged by a different point of view. I am grateful for both readers. Time spent on these discussions is not time wasted. Even our real disagreements, if worked out in love, stand as testimonies to extraordinary love that comes from the Father.

*By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*

*John 13:35*

## INTRODUCTION

*We've done great with the evangelicals. The evangelicals have been amazing [...] We're going to go right through the whole group. And I think we can do really something special. And we're going to protect Christianity, and I can say that. I don't have to be politically correct.*<sup>1</sup>

~Presidential candidate Donald J. Trump, speaking at Liberty University in Lynchburg,  
Virginia on January, 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016

It was not but a few lines further into this speech that then-Presidential candidate Donald Trump infamously quoted “Two Corinthians” to his largely conservative, evangelical student audience. To the evangelical ear, such a faux pas betrays a lack of even basic exposure to church culture. But as the election of 2016 demonstrated, a president need not be evangelical to collect on the evangelical vote.

It seems remarkable that a thrice-married reality TV star who boasted of being able to “stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody” without losing voters could receive 81 percent of the white evangelical vote in 2016.<sup>2</sup> But for many of these voters, support for Donald Trump was the most logical—even Biblical—ballot to be cast.

The average white evangelical voter, like a member of any other political group, votes with the party that has most historically promoted his or her interests. It should be no surprise that, given two choices, the average white evangelical would prefer to support their own party’s candidate to the opposition—even when that candidate is Donald

---

<sup>1</sup> “Donald Trump Speech at Liberty University,” *CNN Transcripts*, January 18, 2016, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/160118/ath.01.html>.

<sup>2</sup> “Trump: ‘I Could Stand In the Middle Of Fifth Avenue And Shoot Somebody And I Wouldn't Lose Any Voters,’” *Real Clear Politics*, January 23, 2016, [https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2016/01/23/trump\\_i\\_could\\_stand\\_in\\_the\\_middle\\_of\\_fifth\\_avenue\\_and\\_shoot\\_somebody\\_and\\_i\\_wouldnt Lose\\_any\\_voters.html](https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2016/01/23/trump_i_could_stand_in_the_middle_of_fifth_avenue_and_shoot_somebody_and_i_wouldnt Lose_any_voters.html).

Trump. This thesis argues that evangelical support for Donald Trump in 2016 was the logical outcome of the decades-long creation and consolidation of the white evangelical voting bloc into the Republican Party.

In making this argument, it is important to clarify that strength of white evangelical voters' relationship with the Republican Party does not necessarily mean that the individual voters are themselves blindly supportive of Republican politicians. However, the very fact that evangelicals often employ phrases such as "the lesser of two evils" when deciding their ballot indicates that, at least within the realm of politics, evangelicals prioritize some moral issues over others. This thesis considers the possibility that these priorities and values have been subtly shaped through close association with the Republican Party, resulting in a sort of brand loyalty upon which a market-savvy politician (i.e., Donald Trump) could capitalize.

Before assessing these possibilities, the first chapter of this thesis will use available data to contest the claim that "real" evangelicals (i.e., evangelicals by belief rather than by cultural identification) did not vote for Trump. The second chapter will provide some historical context for the relationship between white evangelicals and the Republican Party, which will prepare the reader for the third chapter's narration of the developmental arc of evangelical support for Trump in 2016. The fourth chapter will assess the present state of evangelical support for Trump while also weighing the options that evangelical Christians have for their future political involvement. It is my hope that the presentation of these options, coupled with the context provided by the narratives of previous chapters, will ready evangelicals to undertake a godly path along the difficult road that lies ahead.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Data Review<sup>1</sup>

Before discussing the relationship between white evangelicals and Donald Trump, it is necessary to dispense with any illusions regarding the available statistics on voting data. This chapter summarizes the existing quantitative information about white evangelical voters in and since the 2016 Presidential Election. The first part of the chapter examines the criticism of and responses to the criticism of the statistic that eighty-one percent of white evangelicals voters cast ballots for Trump in 2016. The second part of the chapter attempts to understand this statistic in light of other factors, which include policy priorities, partisanship, and impressions of President Trump. These numbers, though incapable of fully expressing the *how* and *why* of white evangelical support for Trump, will ultimately guide my use of the historical, sociological, and editorial accounts of white, evangelical America that have flourished over the past four years.

#### *The Eighty-One Percent*

Exit polls for the 2016 election exit estimated that eighty-one percent of self-identified white, evangelical/born again voters cast their ballots for Donald Trump.<sup>2</sup> Though quickly becoming the moniker for imagining white, evangelical America, evangelicals eager to put distance between themselves and the election have pushed back

---

<sup>1</sup> Special thanks to Dr. Pat Flavin for running the data configurations from what was available in the 2016 American National Election Studies “Time Series Study.” Without his assistance, I would not have been able to include the data featured in Figures 1-5.

<sup>2</sup> Jessica Martínez and Gregory A. Smith. “How the Faithful Voted: A Preliminary 2016 Analysis.” Pew Research Center, November 9 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/>.

against this statistic. For instance, The Gospel Coalition’s Justin Taylor criticizes this statistic’s reliance on self-identification. Taylor argues that this metric inevitably muddies important distinctions between nominal and traditional evangelicals while also excluding those who hold traditional evangelical beliefs and yet do not self-identify as evangelical.<sup>3</sup> According to Taylor’s interpretations of the available data, fewer than half of the eighty-one percent likely held traditional evangelical beliefs, and a full 40% of people with evangelical beliefs did not vote in 2016.<sup>4</sup> With similar (albeit more focused) skepticism, Dr. Thomas Kidd notes that the eighty-one percent statistic fails to distinguish between two groups identified by Pew Research in 2018: the “Sunday Stalwarts” (regular church attendees) and the “God-and-Country Believers” (nominal Christians characterized by anti-immigrant sentiment).<sup>5</sup> Illustrating the confusion surrounding the term, he further notes that “a surprising number of Catholics and even Eastern Orthodox Christians identify as evangelical, even though historically ‘evangelical’ has always referred to a subset of Protestantism.”<sup>6</sup> Lastly, he suggests that the data may have been skewed by the growing contemporary problem of low poll response rates.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately for those attempting to disassociate themselves from President Trump, research trends actually demonstrate a positive correlation between electoral support for Trump and white voters with traditional evangelical beliefs. As early as 2017,

---

<sup>3</sup> Justin Taylor. “Stop Saying 81 Percent of White Evangelicals Vote for Trump (It Was Probably Less Than Half),” The Gospel Coalition, December 14 2018, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/stop-saying-81-white-evangelicals-vote-trump-probably-less-half/>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas S. Kidd, *Who is an Evangelical?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 150.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Kidd, *Who is an Evangelical?*, 150.

Pew Research found that job approval for President Trump ranked higher among those with regular (at least monthly) church attendance relative to those who only attended church a few times per year.<sup>8</sup> Because church involvement forms a central part of traditional evangelicalism, this statistic raises questions about the hypothesis that nominal evangelicals formed the bulk of the eighty-one percent. That hypothesis is further undermined by a 2019 study by Michelle Margolis. In this study, Margolis found that high levels of traditional evangelical beliefs corresponded to substantially higher support for Trump in the general election than those with lower levels of belief.<sup>9</sup> Using data from a 2016 pre-election Survey Sampling International (SSI) poll of 2,000 Americans, Margolis was able to separate respondents who self-identified as white evangelicals from those who held traditionally evangelical beliefs.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, she found that over seventy percent of white, self-identified evangelicals holding all seven traditionally evangelical beliefs planned to vote for Trump. Among white, self-identified evangelicals with three or fewer of the seven beliefs, only slightly greater than forty percent planned to vote for him.<sup>11</sup> It would seem, as Margolis puts it, that “a deeper commitment and more adherence to the beliefs is associated with more support for Trump in the general election.”<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Gregory A. Smith. “Among white evangelicals, regular churchgoers are the most supportive of Trump,” Pew Research Center, April 26 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/26/among-white-evangelicals-regular-churchgoers-are-the-most-supportive-of-trump/>

<sup>9</sup> Michele F. Margolis, “Who Wants to Make America Great Again? Understanding Evangelical Support for Donald Trump,” *Cambridge University Press* (2019): 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048319000208>.

<sup>10</sup> Margolis, “Who Wants to Make America Great Again? Understanding Evangelical Support for Donald Trump,” 10.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

Kidd or Taylor might counter that Margolis' research only considers people with evangelical beliefs who identify themselves as evangelicals or who chose to vote at all. However, these criticisms fall short of undermining Margolis' results. The former critique, valid insofar as it could impact Margolis' results by omitting moderates leery of using a politicized term, relies on inconclusive data. Although LifeWay Research noted in 2017 that "Only two-thirds (69 percent) of evangelicals by belief self-identify as evangelicals," this figure considers all ethnicities.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it cannot answer whether there is a substantial group of white evangelicals by belief who do not identify as evangelical. African-Americans holding evangelical beliefs are unlikely to self-identify as evangelicals, perhaps because the terms has become so politicized.<sup>14</sup> It would seem unlikely, then, that this would be the case in the demographic at hand.

Furthermore, the latter complaint (that the 81 percent does not consider evangelicals who did not vote) seems unlikely to impact the overall conclusion of Margolis' research. Although additional research by LifeWay shows that 19 percent of evangelicals by belief did not vote in the 2016 election, only 24 percent of that 19 percent gave responses indicating that they did not vote for reasons related to convictions or dissatisfaction with the candidates (10 percent and 14 percent, respectively).<sup>15</sup> Likewise, these statistics did not account for ethnicity. Even taking these complaints into account, it is not unreasonable to conclude that practicing, traditional, white evangelicals cast at least as many—if not more—votes for Trump as self-identified white evangelicals.

---

<sup>13</sup> Bob Smietana. "Many Who Call Themselves Evangelical Don't Actually Hold Evangelical Beliefs," LifeWay Research, December 6 2017, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2017/12/06/many-evangelicals-dont-hold-evangelical-beliefs/>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> "Evangelical and Non-evangelical Voting & Views of Politics in America – Part 2," LifeWay Research, accessed October 27 2019. 7-8. <https://lifewayresearch.com/votingandpoliticalviews/>.

### *Possible Motivations*

Votes, of course, do not necessarily entail ardent support. As *Christianity Today*'s Ed Stetzer and Andrew MacDonald have noted, "The statistic [that eighty-one percent of white evangelical voters voted for Trump] has often been used in the media and in academia to represent the idea that all evangelical Trump voters were "all in" for everything that encompasses Trumpism."<sup>16</sup> Stetzer and MacDonald consider this an unfair characterization. In a poll of 3,000 Americans taken just before the 2018 midterm election, LifeWay Research found that one in four white evangelicals by belief reported having voted *against* Clinton (rather than *for* Trump).<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, "a majority of evangelicals by belief (59 percent) agreed that their political support should be tied more to praising or criticizing specific issues rather than individual political leaders."<sup>18</sup> Taken together, these statistics seem to support the "lesser of two evils" argument, which holds that white evangelicals begrudgingly held their noses and voted *for* a platform and/or *against* a candidate. However, this interpretation is not conclusive; LifeWay also reported that as many as half of evangelicals by belief voted for their candidate. Furthermore, the "lesser of two evils" hypothesis neither explains why Trump should be seen as the lesser of two evils nor why some issues would receive higher prioritization than others.

Several hypotheses might be offered to explain this phenomenon. The first possible explanation is that white Christians with traditionally evangelical beliefs simply like Trump. In 2019, Pew Research found that 70 percent of white evangelicals who

---

<sup>16</sup> Ed Stetzer and Andrew MacDonald. "Why Evangelicals Voted Trump: Debunking the 81%," *Christianity Today*, October 18 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/october/why-evangelicals-trump-vote-81-percent-2016-election.html>.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

attend church regularly approve of his job performance—a figure that would not make sense if the vast majority of white evangelicals voted *against* Clinton in a manner that suggested disapproval for Trump.<sup>19</sup> However, data concerning evangelicals’ perceptions of Trump is not wholly positive. According to responses given to the American National Election Studies, the perceptions of Trump from white voters who consider the Bible to be the Word of God are widely distributed.<sup>20</sup> Figures 1-5 provide some insight into how a demographic inclusive of white evangelicals feels about Donald Trump.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Gregory A. Smith. “Among White Evangelicals, Regular Churchgoers are the Most Supportive of Trump,” Pew Research Center, April 26 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/26/among-white-evangelicals-regular-churchgoers-are-the-most-supportive-of-trump/>.

<sup>20</sup> “2016 Time Series Study,” American National Election Studies, accessed October 27 2019, <https://electionstudies.org/data-center/2016-time-series-study/>.

<sup>21</sup> Ideally, this data would represent those who hold evangelical beliefs. However, the ANES data set does not separate respondents in this way. Beliefs about the Bible only represent one facet of traditional evangelicalism, which means that other religious groups that would hold to this same belief may dilute the samples here. These charts are intended merely to provide a rough sketch of evangelicals’ feelings towards Trump in addition to data produced through more particularized reason, and should not be regarded as conclusive within themselves.

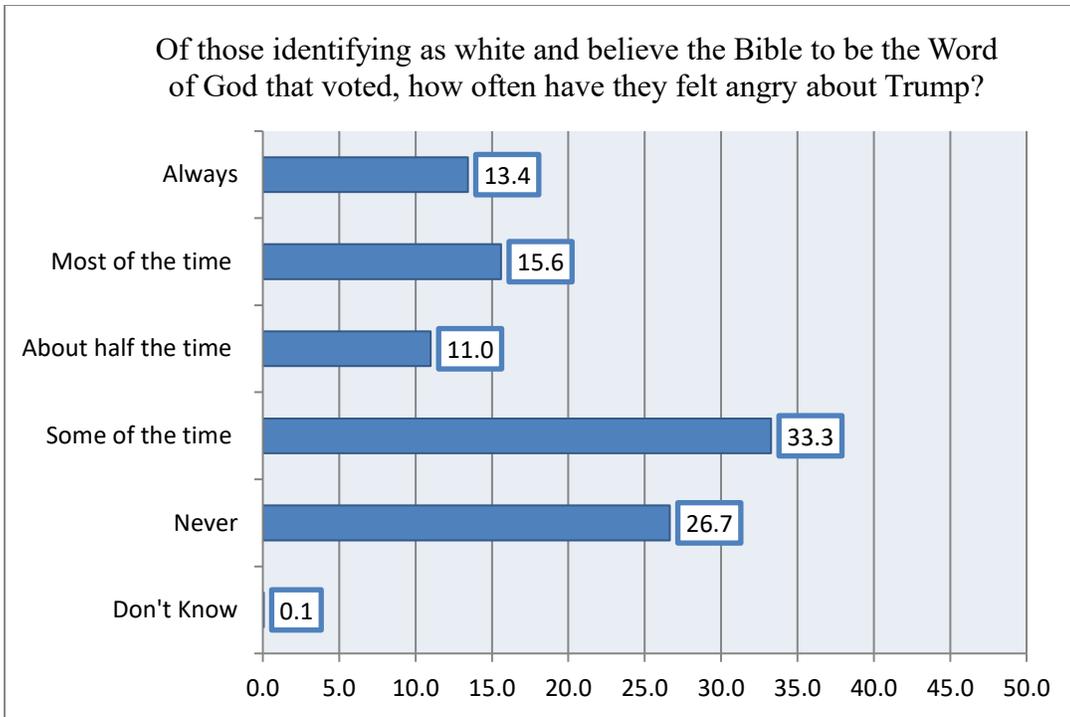


Figure 1: Anger About Trump and Belief in the Bible

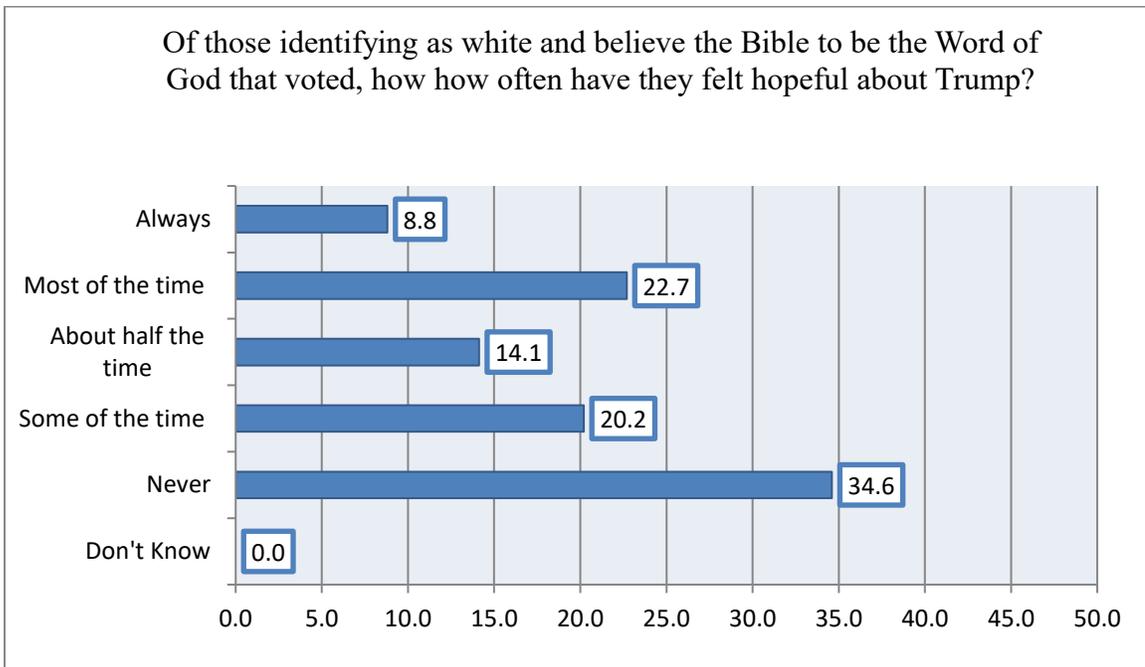


Figure 2: Feelings of Hope About Trump and Belief in the Bible

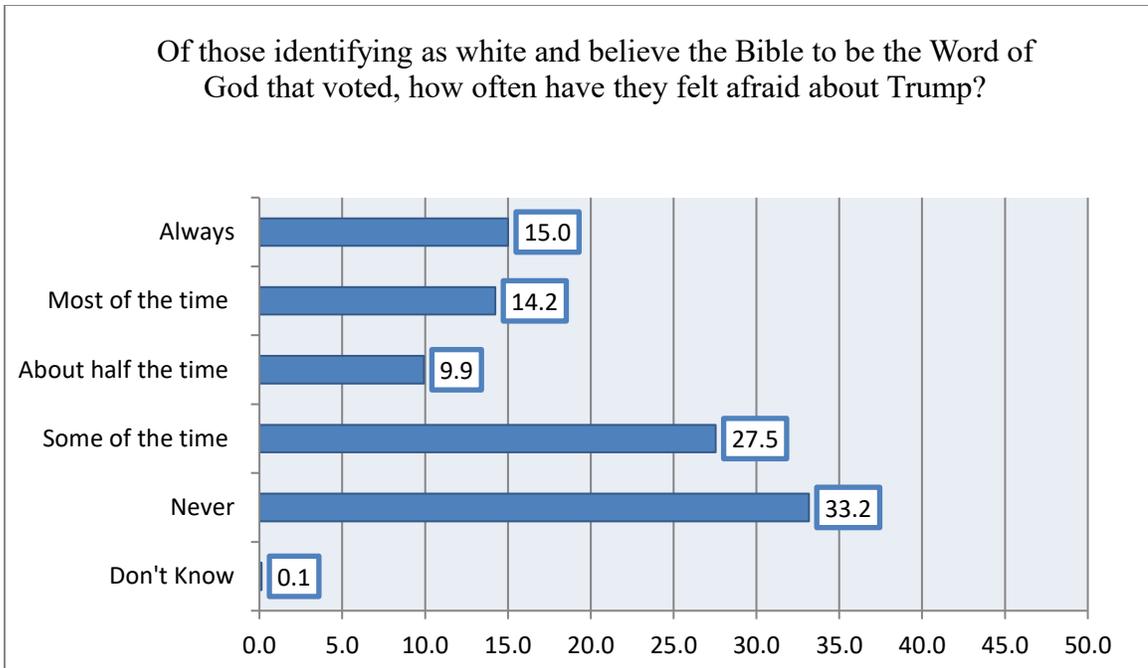


Figure 3: Feelings of Fear About Trump and Belief in the Bible

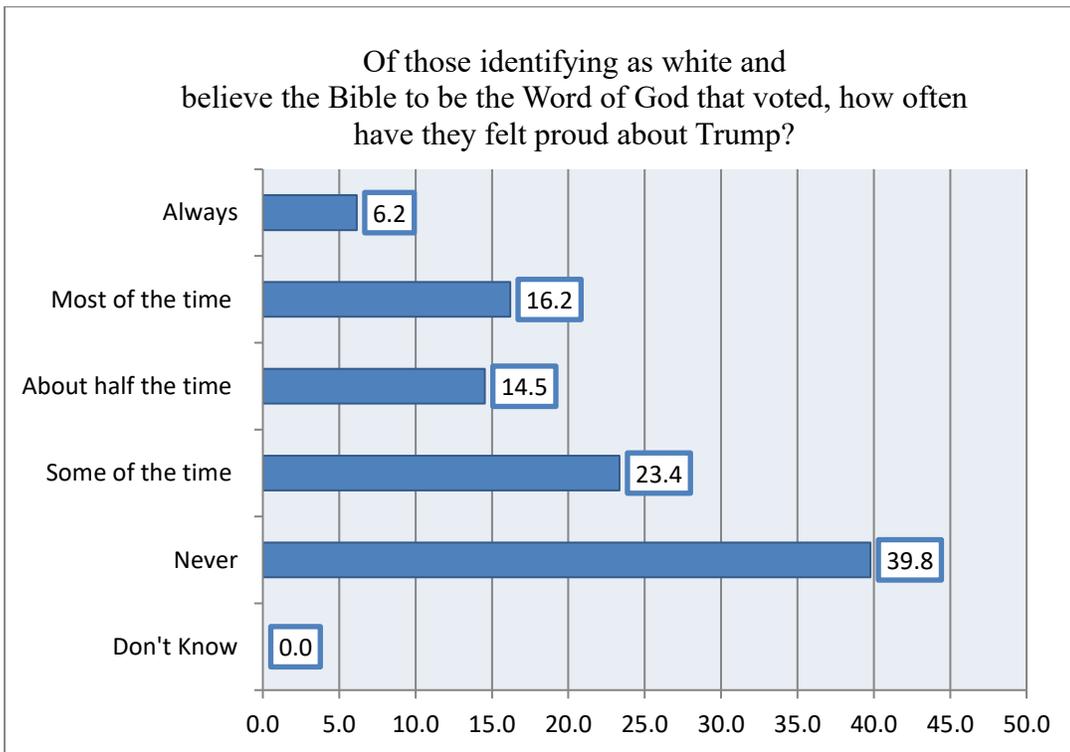


Figure 4: Feelings of Pride about Trump and Belief in the Bible

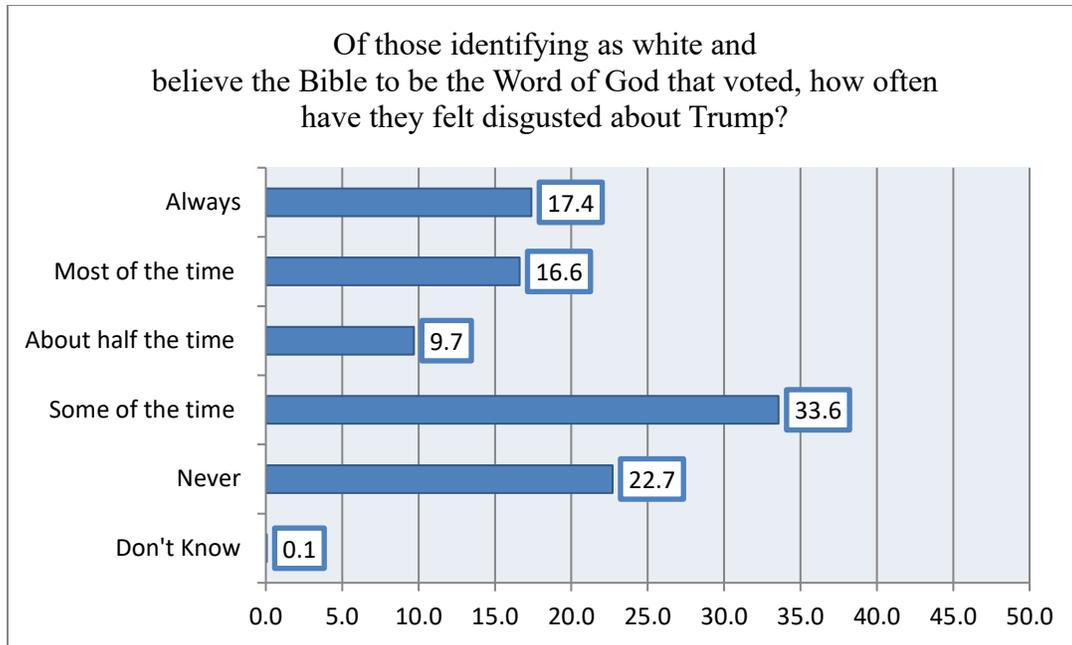


Figure 5: Feelings of Disgust about Trump and Belief in the Bible

Of those analyzed according to the questions laid out in Figures 1-5, roughly 59 percent identified themselves along the Republican spectrum. Figure 1 indicates that 73 percent of these respondents have been angry with Donald Trump at some point. According to Figure 2, 66 percent have expressed hope about Trump in some capacity, with few expressing a constant hope (about 9 percent). In the same way, Figure 3 demonstrates that about 67 percent of respondents have felt afraid about Trump at some point. Figure 4 provides that 40 percent of respondents have never felt proud about Trump, and about 77 percent of respondents have felt disgusted by Trump at some time or another. While this data provides no conclusive understanding of evangelical regard for Trump, it does demonstrate the likelihood of mixed feelings towards him personally regardless of how the respondents eventually voted.

A more nuanced understanding of evangelical regard for Trump could be drawn from Republican primary data. According to Margolis, white evangelical voters with the

highest levels of traditional beliefs did not, on the whole, rank Donald Trump number one. In fact, “only 18 and 14 [percent] of white evangelical Republicans holding six and seven beliefs, respectively, reported wanting Trump to be the nominee.”<sup>22</sup> This figure stands out from the 34 and 38 percent of white evangelical Republicans with three or fewer and four beliefs (respectively) that voted for Trump in the primary. Among those holding the highest degrees of traditional beliefs, Margolis found that evangelicals were more likely to support overtly evangelical nominees in the both the 2012 and 2016 primaries. “This,” as Margolis writes, “is the first piece of evidence in support of the claim that less devout evangelicals were crucial to Trump’s victory.”<sup>23</sup> Regardless, Margolis found that traditional evangelicals invariably support the Republican nominee at higher rates than either nominal or non-evangelical counterparts in the general election.<sup>24</sup> Although Donald Trump may not have been traditional white evangelicals’ first pick, the evidence does not demonstrate that his presidency was unsupported by the evangelicals who voted for him.<sup>25</sup> In measuring evaluations of Trump, there was “a relatively weak correlation between number of beliefs held and evaluations of Donald Trump in 2016.”<sup>26</sup> Those with higher numbers of beliefs reported less favorable feelings than those with low levels of belief, but the difference was statistically insignificant.<sup>27</sup> A similar pattern emerged with respect to traditional evangelicals’ views of Mitt Romney, a candidate that

---

<sup>22</sup> Margolis, “Who Wants to Make America Great Again? Understanding Evangelical Support for Donald Trump,” 16.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid,18.

<sup>25</sup> Note here the distinction drawn between *voting* for a candidate and *evaluations of* a particular candidate.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

some evangelicals considered non-traditional on account of his Mormon faith. Although support for Romney among evangelicals was low in the 2012 Republican Primary, in the 2012 election, increased number of beliefs corresponded to increased likelihood of voting for Romney. In fact, 100 percent of those who held all eight beliefs outlined in the survey said they would vote for Romney.<sup>28</sup> From this, Margolis ultimately concludes that white evangelicals with traditional beliefs are not so much attracted to Trump as they are loyal to the Republican Party.<sup>29</sup>

It is possible that this conclusion overlooks another hypothesis, which is that evangelicals are “issues” voters. Many evangelicals and non-evangelicals, aware of the evangelicals’ historical support for pro-life causes, have postulated that support for Trump was rooted largely in a calculated attempt to position the Supreme Court to someday overturn *Roe v. Wade*. However, research from LifeWay demonstrates a more complicated picture.<sup>30</sup> In LifeWay’s survey, Republicans holding evangelical beliefs were asked to answer the prompt, “In the 2016 presidential election, which if any of the following influenced you to vote for the candidate that you did?” Because LifeWay seeks to represent all evangelicals, much of their data reflects a multi-ethnic sample. This data, while taken from a multi-ethnic sample, still offers valuable insight into the “issues-based” approach to voting. Figure 6 provides a visual representation of these results:

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid,15.

<sup>29</sup> This phenomenon, noticed by many scholars, raises questions regarding the nature and origin of this loyalty. Those particular questions will be explored with more depth in the subsequent chapter.

<sup>30</sup> “Evangelical and Non-evangelical Voting & Views of Politics in America – Part 1,” LifeWay Research, accessed October 27 2019, 47-83. <https://lifewayresearch.com/votingandpoliticalviews/>.

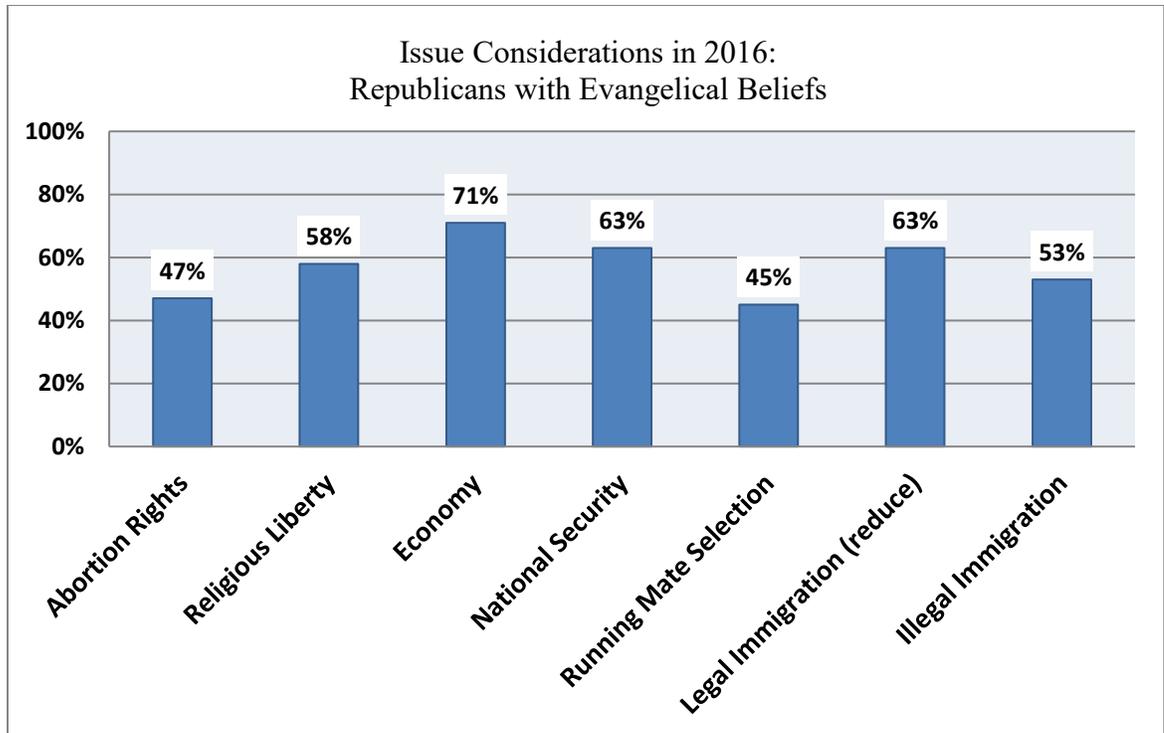


Figure 6: Issues Considerations in 2016 for Republicans with Evangelical Beliefs

Based on the available data, abortion does seem to have played a role in the voting preferences of white/Republican evangelicals in 2016.<sup>31</sup> However, that issue seems to have influenced the choices of far fewer voters than issues such as the economy and immigration. This does not mean that individual evangelicals prioritize economic issues over abortion rights issues. In fact, 73 percent of Protestants with evangelical beliefs agreed to the statement, “I would be willing to vote for a truly prolife presidential candidate in any political party.”<sup>32</sup> Rather, this data indicates that over half of

<sup>31</sup> In the same survey, LifeWay did find that 42 and 43 percent of white evangelicals by belief were influenced to vote the way they did for position on abortion rights and Supreme Court nominations, but did not publish comparable data on other issues that influenced the votes of that particular subset of evangelicalism.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

Republicans with evangelical beliefs take other issues besides abortion rights issues into considering when casting their votes.

It could be, as some have argued, that the abortion issue was the sole influence on some members of the 41 percent. If that were the case, perhaps these voters—and that issue—turned the tide of the 2016 election: a swing voting group within another swing voting group. However, in the absence of research performed on this particular question, the structure of the Electoral College makes this scenario seem implausible.<sup>33</sup>

One final hypothesis for consideration would be the alleged “not-Clinton” effect—i.e., negative partisanship. In 2016, Pew Research asked Trump-leaning respondents to answer, in an open-ended question, the main reasons they supported Trump for president. Among white evangelical Protestants, a plurality of respondents—35 percent—noted that he was “not Clinton.”<sup>34</sup> In an accompanying close-ended survey, Pew found that “76% [of white evangelical Protestant respondents] cited dislike for Clinton as a major reason for their support.”<sup>35</sup> While this was not the most cited reason in the closed-response survey (“views on terrorism” were included by 80 percent of respondents), it does appear in other research as well.<sup>36</sup> In assessing the effects of religious beliefs on negative partisanship, Margolis used a 1-100 point “feeling thermometer” to model support for the candidates in the both the 2012 and 2016 general

---

<sup>33</sup> The Electoral College operates (in most states) under a winner-take-all system. While substantial minority groups within a state *might* impact a election results by impacting which candidate receives the total votes of the state’s electors, the net national voice of these groups is diluted across the results from individual states.

<sup>34</sup> Gregory A. Smith. “Many Evangelicals Favor Trump because He is Not Clinton,” Pew Research Center, September 23 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/23/many-evangelicals-favor-trump-because-he-is-not-clinton/>.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

elections.<sup>37</sup> Noting “a relatively weak correlation between number of beliefs held [by white evangelicals] and evaluations of Donald Trump in 2016,” Margolis found the opposite when measuring feelings towards Democratic candidates.<sup>38</sup> Among those with high levels of belief, positive feelings for Clinton dropped by 28 points—a result very similar to the feelings reported during the 2012 election towards Barack Obama.<sup>39</sup>

In a recent contribution to understanding negative partisanship, Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux and Daniel Cox reported on the Democratic National Committee’s recent release of a report that “called on Democratic politicians to recognize and celebrate the contributions of nonreligious Americans, who make up one-third of Democrats.”<sup>40</sup> In the article, Cox and Thomson-DeVeaux argue that this declaration merely affirmed the long-time conservative conception of the Democratic Party as “godless.”<sup>41</sup> While Cox and Thomson-DeVeaux examine research indicating that the swell of nonreligious voters within the Democratic Party may be due, in part, to perceptions of the religiosity of right-wing voters, the same logic might be turned to explain white, traditional evangelicals’ revulsion towards Democratic candidates. Negative partisanship, it would seem, functions as a positive feedback loop.

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Margolis, “Who Wants to Make America Great Again? Understanding Evangelical Support for Donald Trump,” 20.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>40</sup> Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux and Daniel Cox. “The Christian Right Is Helping Drive Liberals Away From Religion,” *FiveThirtyEight*, September 18 2019, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-christian-right-is-helping-drive-liberals-away-from-religion/>.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

### *Summary of Perceptions*

While research into the “actual” motivations behind evangelical voting patterns can be helpful in answering the question of this thesis, data illustrating both the outside and self-perceptions of evangelicals can contribute to a fuller picture of the present situation. LifeWay’s research found that only 28 percent of people who are evangelical by belief (multi-ethnic, non-partisan sample) see evangelicals as too close to Trump.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, 34 percent of non-believers (and non-self identifiers) hold that evangelicals as too closely aligned with Trump.

Furthermore, LifeWay’s research suggests that evangelicals have adopted (or at least perceive themselves to have adopted) a pragmatic approach to voting. Comparing LifeWay’s survey results to previous research, *Christianity Today* reports that “the number of self-identified white evangelicals who believe ‘an elected official can behave ethically even if they have committed transgressions in their personal life’ more than doubled between 2011 and Trump’s campaign in 2016, from 30 percent to 72 percent.”<sup>43</sup> Unsurprisingly, LifeWay also found that nearly 4 in 10 non-evangelicals characterize evangelicals as “hypocritical.” Regardless of whether this is the case, the available data indicates that there exists a gap between evangelicals’ understanding of their own voting patterns and outside assessment of those trends.

---

<sup>42</sup> Stetzer and MacDonald. “Why Evangelicals Voted Trump: Debunking the 81%.”

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

## *Conclusion*

This chapter's findings indicate that white "traditional" evangelicals are more likely to electorally support Trump than white "nominal" evangelicals. Furthermore, these evangelicals do not seem to feel any better or worse about Trump than other Republican candidates, but were particularly negative in their assessments of Democratic candidates. In this regard, support for Trump amongst traditional evangelicals was not unexpected given historical voting patterns.

Although these voting patterns appear to be back by issues-based priorities, the statistical weight and distribution behind the priorities themselves was not nearly as strong as might be expected. However, the surge in pragmatic voting amongst traditional evangelicals indicates some alteration in the schema of voter calculus. The following chapters will examine this schema in light of the narratives crafted by and for white evangelicals both before and during the 2016 election.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The History Behind the Numbers

Politically speaking, today's highly visible coalition of "white-evangelical-Republicans" is the product of a movement that developed within living memory. This relatively short length of time, however, is bursting with figures, events, and inter-coalition disputes whose significance to politics historians are still unpacking. To provide context for the movement in 2016, this chapter explores some of the key issues and religious leadership that contributed to consolidating white evangelical votes behind the Republican Party from the time of the evangelical lobby's formal entrance into politics to its maturation during the Reagan campaign.

#### *Entering the Political Scene*

The story of the evangelical entry into politics does not begin with a concerted effort to stop abortion, to minimize homosexuality, or even to fight the "liberal media." Rather, evangelical mobilization started as a defense against measures taken by mainline Protestant churches. In *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right*, historian Daniel Williams chronicles how mainline churches sought to squelch evangelical and fundamentalist radio shows through their own political maneuvering.<sup>1</sup> In 1928, the Federal Council of Christian Churches (then the premier association for mainline Protestant denominations) worked to limit secular broadcasters' willingness to sell airtime to religious groups. Their intent was to disrupt the ballooning supply of

---

<sup>1</sup> Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: the Making of the Christian Right*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 16.

fundamentalist and evangelical media. Shows like Charles Fuller’s *Old-Fashioned Revival Hour*, which averaged 20 million listeners a week, began to find themselves in danger of a slow but sure suffocation.

Alarmed at this prospect, fundamentalists decided to tap into the power of federal government for protection. In 1942, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) was born, marking the entrance of the first formal evangelical lobbying association into American politics.<sup>1</sup> With just 750,000 members, the majority of whom were Pentecostals, the NAE began mobilizing for influence in the federal government. After securing the protection of the Federal Communication Commission, they moved on to other issues such as procuring military chaplaincies.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to marking the formal entrance of evangelicals in politics, the creation of the NAE called attention to distinctions within the movement, namely between evangelicalism and fundamentalism. The evangelical and fundamentalist movements share many similarities. Both movements emerged in response to the increasingly liberal interpretations of Scripture embraced by mainline Protestant churches in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both emphasize personal salvation through Christ and the importance of Scripture. Yet evangelicals and fundamentalists tend to diverge significantly in rhetorical tones. Fundamentalists, by definition, interpret the Bible literally, often stressing original intent—an outlook that tends to create very black-and-white type rhetoric. Evangelicals tend to focus on the believer’s “personal relationship” with Jesus, with rhetoric focusing on the spirit and salvation. The two subgroups are not necessarily divergent: some

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 162.

<sup>2</sup> Frances FitzGerald. *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 164.

evangelicals are also fundamentalists just as some fundamentalists are also evangelicals. But as political groups, some rhetorical and strategic differences began to emerge.

Those differences began to erupt into conflict no sooner than the establishment of the NAE. As Frances FitzGerald notes in *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*, fundamentalist minister Carl McIntire refused to join the NAE for its refusal to explicitly target the Federal Council of Churches.<sup>3</sup> Thus began the articulation of the semantic divide in what was then considered the fundamentalist movement: the fundamentalists (those along the rhetorical and theological lines of McIntire) and the evangelicals (conservative Protestants more along the lines of the NAE).

This break between approaches to politics was by no means clear. What became clear, however, was that evangelicals had the potential to shape federal policy. By creating a counterweight to the FCC, evangelicals were able to continue spreading their message of “born-again” salvation to the next generation of Americans.

### *One Nation, Under God*

The next chapter of the story of evangelical political involvement comes in the 1950s, when both presidents Truman and the Eisenhower sought to bolster the American identity through religion.<sup>4</sup> It was during this time that Congress made “In God We Trust” the national motto and added “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance—statements that, under constitutional criticism, have been defended as statements of American political

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 163.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 311.

philosophy rather than religion.<sup>5</sup> According to historian William I. Hitchcock, Eisenhower himself cultivated a special place for faith in the White House by beginning his speeches with prayer, establishing the National Prayer Breakfast, and inviting Billy Graham to the White House as a spiritual advisor.<sup>6</sup> Eisenhower even stepped forward to become the first president to be baptized in the White House (though not, in fact, as an evangelical). Thanks to the U.S. government's interest in fighting communism, the 1950s became the political gold standard for some American evangelicals.

According to historian Thomas Kidd, "The alliance of Graham and Eisenhower signaled a crucial trend among white evangelicals, one that would accelerate during the 1980s."<sup>7</sup> To Graham as well as much of the American public, the Soviet Union was the United States' evil twin—a nation predicated on a godless, inverted worldview. For President Eisenhower, embracing a common Christian faith was strategically key to maintaining the order of the United States. And Billy Graham, with his Crusades attended by the thousands and radio and television broadcasts heard by the millions, was an excellent spokesman for that order. As Hitchcock notes:

[Graham] stressed the message that the Cold War and the H-Bomb, juvenile delinquency, racial strife, and moral weakness were all problems that sprang from a sinful human nature—all of which could be cured instantly by conversion to Christ.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> "The Pledge of Allegiance Cases," The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, accessed December 12, 2018, <https://www.becketlaw.org/case/pledge-allegiance-cases/>.

<sup>6</sup> William I. Hitchcock, "How Dwight Eisenhower Found God in the White House," *History Stories*, History, March 20, 2018, <https://www.history.com/news/eisenhower-billy-graham-religion-in-god-we-trust>.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas S. Kidd, *Who is an Evangelical?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 93.

<sup>8</sup> Hitchcock, "How Dwight Eisenhower Found God in the White House," <https://www.history.com/news/eisenhower-billy-graham-religion-in-god-we-trust>.

In Graham's perspective, faith was the remedy to all worldly strife. In Eisenhower's political world, faith was the bulwark to deliver the United States from communism—a necessity for survival. As Eisenhower himself openly maintained, "Our government makes no sense unless it is founded on a deeply felt religious faith...and I don't care what it is."<sup>9</sup> Although Graham always strove for a non-partisan image in American politics, his staunch opposition to communism often gave a public impression of sympathy with the Republican Party.

Graham's beliefs and the fears of the time prompted a hyper-vigilance against outsiders, including groups now commonly accepted by the Christian Right. At that time, most fundamentalists and evangelicals were uncomfortable allying with "outsider" groups like Catholics and Jews.<sup>10</sup> Graham seems to have shared some of these reservations during the Kennedy campaign, particularly with respect to a Catholic's ability to act independently from the Roman Catholic Church's authority.<sup>11</sup> Graham thus coached Nixon throughout the 1960 presidential campaign with the express purpose of winning over the Protestant vote in the then-Democratic South.<sup>12</sup>

To his credit, Graham did not encourage Nixon to attack Kennedy's Catholic religion. Rather, he urged Nixon to promote his own personal faith while Graham mobilized evangelical and fundamentalist communities to "get out the vote." As part of this effort, Graham facilitated dialogue between the Nixon campaign and the NAE, who

---

<sup>9</sup> Kidd, *Who is an Evangelical?*, 93.

<sup>10</sup> Williams, *God's Own Party: the Making of the Christian Right*, 50.

<sup>11</sup> FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*, 237.

<sup>12</sup> Williams, *God's Own Party: the Making of the Christian Right*, 53.

in turn formed Citizens for Religious Freedom in Washington, D.C.<sup>13</sup> Finally, in the last week of Nixon's campaign, Graham gave an explicit endorsement. Although Nixon would lose that election, he gained a majority of votes from southern Protestants, a group that traditionally voted Democratic.<sup>14</sup> In hindsight, this seeming anomaly marks what would become a significant reversal in the geographic voting patterns of Republicans and Democrats.

### *Law and Order*

After two decades of government-sponsored religiosity, it is no great wonder that the conservative evangelical community felt frightened by the counterculture of the 1970s. On television, evangelicals watched thousands of angry, doped-up youth erupt into protests against war, against gender, against people over the age of thirty, against families, against racists, against draft cards, against materialism, against human rights violations, and against men. Hip intellectuals praised LSD, free love, and eastern religion while simultaneously mocking the mundane lifestyle of what was then the average American family. With the cork popped on pent-up rage, the world as evangelicals knew it seemed to be spinning out of control. Fearing the external threats of communism as much as the internal threat of civil chaos, evangelicals easily took to the "law and order" platform of Richard Nixon in 1968.

Thus Graham and Nixon's influence on the Republican Party would be revisited. After nearly a decade of domestic upheaval from Vietnam protests and the Civil Rights movement, Nixon launched a campaign that centered on reclaiming civil order—a

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 55.

mandate that just so happened to align with Graham's statements on a Christian's duty to obey all laws, including the unjust ones.<sup>15</sup> With this platform (and the support of evangelicals), Nixon won the presidency in 1968. In a statement all-too-chilling in retrospect, Graham all but explicitly endorsed Nixon, saying, "There is no American I admire more than Richard Nixon."<sup>16</sup>

If Billy Graham had not already become a spokesperson for Nixon, he most certainly became one after Nixon won the election. Graham invited Nixon to speak at one of his rallies ("Crusade") in Knoxville, and Nixon invited Graham into dialogues with Kissinger staff on China policy.<sup>17</sup> The interconnection of Nixon's message of law and order became wrapped up in Graham's message of God's order. In the next election, 84 percent of evangelicals voted to re-elect Richard Nixon, an outpouring of support undoubtedly influenced by the endorsements of Graham and the president of the NAE.<sup>18</sup>

Graham probably expected Nixon to accelerate his support for evangelical causes in his second term. Instead, Nixon resigned just before being impeached on charges of obstruction of justice, abuse of power, and contempt of Congress. Released transcripts of White House conversations riddled with the phrase "[EXPLETIVE DELETED]" revealed the President's alter ego to the American public—and, eventually, to Graham.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*, 247.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Williams, *God's Own Party: the Making of the Christian Right*, 102.

<sup>19</sup> Billy Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham*. (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 457.

In his autobiography, Graham maintains that he “had some misgivings about Nixon’s religious understanding,” but that Nixon had sincere appreciation for the Bible and the evangelical cause.<sup>20</sup> In 2009, historian Steven Miller describes Graham’s perspective on Watergate as unfolding in three phases.<sup>21</sup> In the first phase, Graham “simply denied the significance of the crisis,” as evidenced just before the 1972 election when Graham brushed off the alleged crimes as “shenanigans” and affirmed his belief that “President Nixon knew nothing of it.”<sup>22</sup> In the next phase, after top officials associated with Watergate were forced to resign, Graham’s public statements turned towards presenting Watergate as an example of the need for a spiritual awakening—that there was, “a little bit of Watergate in all of us.”<sup>23</sup> At that point, however, Graham had not accepted that Nixon had been involved with immoral activity. In an article for *Christianity Today* at the outset of Watergate, Graham unequivocally condemned the actions surrounding the Watergate affair while maintaining room for Nixon’s innocence.<sup>24</sup> Miller notes that “even as late as June 1973,” Graham held “that it was ‘too early to make a moral judgment’ of the President.”<sup>25</sup> Graham even sent a letter to Nixon that quoted Psalms 35:11-12, a passage in which David cries out to God that his enemies

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 459.

<sup>21</sup> Steven P. Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 184.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 185, 187.

<sup>24</sup> “Billy Graham on Watergate.” *Christianity Today*. January 4, 1974. Republished October 28, 2008. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/octoberweb-only/144-214.0.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Nixon resigned two months later.

have accused him falsely.<sup>26</sup> Only when the profanity-laced traced transcriptions of Watergate were released did Graham enter the third phase, which was to begin questioning Nixon's character.<sup>27</sup> And yet, Graham continued to make excuses for Nixon insofar as the burden of the presidency "is almost too much."<sup>28</sup> Rather than presume that Graham was simply power-hungry or militantly partisan, Miller explains this tendency to make amends for Nixon's guilt as being a natural outworking of his theology:

If one accepts a modified covenantal theology (i.e., that God works actively through nations or people), as Graham also did, then the mechanics of legitimate political power fall into a unique category, difficult to hold accountable to standards of individual morality. Power attains a degree of divine inscrutability, and something as nebulous as job difficulty can become a plausible excuse for excessive use of that power. Graham found transgressions that were clearly individual and conscious in nature, be they swearing or breaking and entering, easier to denounce than the sins of state.

Miller notes that Graham's real-time interpretation of Watergate bore similarity to the reactions of Southerners. Southern journalists remarked that the media had emphasized allegations against Nixon unfairly, much like they had done to the South.<sup>29</sup> Even contemporary songs like "Sweet Home Alabama" captured the sentiment that everyone has his or her own Watergate.<sup>30</sup> Graham was not alone in his interpretation of the events as they unfolded.

Even looking in hindsight at the Watergate affair, Graham is generous in his overall assessment of Nixon as a person:

---

<sup>26</sup> Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*, 187.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

The evidence on the tapes and the testimony of many associates leave no doubt that he was culpable. I did not absolve him—but neither did I judge him. To me, the Watergate affair seemed a brief parenthesis in a good man’s lengthy political career—a parenthesis that I couldn’t understand.<sup>31</sup>

One could, contrary to Miller, explain Graham’s handling of Watergate as one that sought balance between grace and truth. Under this interpretation, Graham wanted to give Nixon a Christ-like benefit of the doubt, ever persisting in the belief that Nixon was not the villain who would live on in the mind of posterity. Likewise, when the evidence of Nixon’s wrongdoing was confirmed, Graham called it what it was while also calling others to repentance. Even under this interpretation, however, it is important to note that Graham ultimately regretted the appearance of closeness that he had shared with President Nixon, as reflected in the close of his autobiography:

If I had to do it over again, I would also avoid any semblance of involvement in partisan politics... An evangelist is called to do one thing, and one thing only: to proclaim the Gospel. Becoming involved in strictly political issues or partisan politics dilutes the evangelist’s impact and compromises his message.<sup>32</sup>

But even if Graham regretted his involvement in politics, his conflation of two messages—worldly and spiritual order—would leave a lasting impact on his white evangelical base.<sup>33</sup>

### *Rise of the Christian Right*

The rise of counterculture in the 1970s not only led to evangelical law and order rhetoric, but also forged an unprecedented alliance among evangelicals, fundamentalists,

---

<sup>31</sup> Billy Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham*. (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 456.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Kidd, *Who is an Evangelical?*, 93.

Catholics, Jews, and other religious conservatives. Fearing the growing acceptance of ideas like postmodernism and secular humanism, these former rivals found like-minded political allies in two converging movements: the New Right and the Christian Right.

The differences between the Christian Right and the New Right are slight but important. The Christian Right—a title that includes a collection of social conservative activists—tended to focus on American social life. Opposition to open homosexuality in the public space, the Equal Rights Amendment, and the removal of classroom prayer dominated the conversations of the Christian Right. The New Right, on the other hand, focused on promoting fiscal conservatism in opposition to progressive economic policy. Given their historic opposition to secularized society and fear of communism, evangelicals easily took to both movements.

It was during this time that the pro-life movement became central to evangelical political discourse. Although revulsion to *Roe v. Wade* tends to color today's evangelical political conversations, that particular issue was not folded into the evangelical platform for some time. When *Roe v. Wade* made abortion legal in 1973, few predominantly white evangelical groups took interest in the issue. In fact, the Southern Baptist Convention had passed a resolution in 1971 that called for relaxing abortion laws, a position that was reaffirmed in 1974.<sup>34</sup> Given that today's non-denominational evangelicals are largely opposed to legal abortion, with 68 percent saying in 2014 that it should be illegal in

---

<sup>34</sup> Williams, *God's Own Party: the Making of the Christian Right*, 115.

all/most cases, one might wonder how the pro-life movement ever gained such importance to evangelicals.<sup>35</sup>

In truth, the initial infrastructure for the pro-life movement came from Catholics, not from evangelicals.<sup>36</sup> At the time, taking up a position against any form of birth control was primarily associated with Catholicism. Some evangelical groups like NAE and *Christianity Today* magazine opposed abortion at the outset of *Roe v. Wade*. But their opposition was largely disorganized. The majority of Protestant denominations did not want the government to interfere in such family decisions.<sup>37</sup> For that reason, the activism that would ultimately lead to the Republican Party's adoption of a pro-life platform in 1976 had more to do with Catholic-led pro-life groups than the efforts of evangelicals.<sup>38</sup>

Evangelicals became invested in the pro-life movement after Francis Schaeffer's 1979 documentary, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* Schaeffer, a fundamentalist pastor who left America to become a missionary in Europe in 1940s, was the pioneer intellectual leader of the evangelical movement in the 1970s.<sup>39</sup> While in Europe, Schaeffer's own perspective on evangelism and Christian living took a radical turn.

---

<sup>35</sup> "Views about abortion among Evangelical Protestants by religious group." *Religion & Public Life*, Pew Research Center. 2014. <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/compare/views-about-abortion/by/religious-family/among/religious-tradition/evangelical-protestant/>.

<sup>36</sup> Williams, *God's Own Party: the Making of the Christian Right*, 116-117.

<sup>37</sup> Ruth Murray Brown, *For a "Christian America."* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2002), 124.

<sup>38</sup> FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*, 298.

Daniel K. Williams, "After Roe," *Defenders of the Unborn: The Pro-Life Movement Before Roe v. Wade*. (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2016), <https://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199391646.001.0001/acprof-9780199391646-chapter-10?rskey=AOz7GS&result=1>, Oxford Scholarship Online.

<sup>39</sup> Barry Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 74.

Confronted with so many young people who had completely abandoned organized religion in search of truth, Schaeffer began educating himself on works of philosophy, art, and even popular culture in order to use them as tools for evangelism.<sup>40</sup> Because of his experiences abroad, Schaeffer, unlike many of his contemporary evangelical leaders, defended Christianity with an eye towards preserving the philosophy that, in his view, built western civilization. Schaeffer taught evangelicals to consider their own “Judeo-Christian” perspective with other “worldviews,” as he termed other philosophical traditions. In keeping with his newfound perspective on evangelism, Schaeffer created documentaries like *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* to bring core Judeo-Christian beliefs like human dignity to the modern audience.<sup>41</sup> In collaboration with pediatric surgeon C. Everett Koop (who, interestingly enough, would become Surgeon General of the United States under Reagan), Schaeffer provided a compelling visual narrative that could seed the pro-life movement.<sup>42</sup> By juxtaposing images of the Holocaust and slavery with tiny newborns and the disabled, Schaeffer attempted to make the case for the intrinsic wrong of euthanasia, infanticide, and abortion.<sup>43</sup>

For evangelicals lacking the Catholic Church’s formal intellectual framework for understanding human dignity, Schaeffer’s work transformed the way evangelicals thought about abortion. Abortion was no longer an issue of order in the family, but of the very value of a human life. It took a few years before the broader evangelical community took notice of *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* But when it did, the piece

---

<sup>40</sup> FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*, 349.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 352.

<sup>42</sup> Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America*, 34, 180-191.

<sup>43</sup> FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*, 355.

became “a nation-wide phenomenon.”<sup>44</sup> For the majority of evangelicals, opposing abortion became as much a moral imperative as standing up to the slave trade.<sup>45</sup>

The issue of abortion was but one of many issues that pushed fundamentalists, evangelicals, and conservative Catholics into the same coalition. Phyllis Schlafly, a Catholic with political roots in the anti-communist movement of the 1950s, mobilized thousands of conservative, politically uninvolved women into the STOP-ERA movement.<sup>46</sup> After leading a successful campaign to block the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, Schlafly continued to publish her pro-family and anti-left positions through her organization, Eagle Forum. Her success in stopping the ERA gained her a broad audience of approving conservatives from many religious traditions.

Schlafly’s audience included fundamentalist Jerry Falwell, a Baptist preacher and political activist known for renouncing politicians and preachers of different doctrine. Falwell, however, began partnering with conservative Catholics to create political action organizations like the Moral Majority.<sup>47</sup> During the 1970s, Falwell used nationwide *I Love America* rallies to preach the threats that abortion, pornography, and sexually-explicit media posed to America’s “national security.”<sup>48</sup> Conversely, his book, *Listen*,

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> While speaking to a group of students at the Museum of the Bible, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos came under fire for expressing just that view:

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/betsy-devos-compares-choice-of-abortion-to-choice-of-slavery/2020/01/23/8f45370a-3e56-11ea-baca-eb7ace0a3455\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/betsy-devos-compares-choice-of-abortion-to-choice-of-slavery/2020/01/23/8f45370a-3e56-11ea-baca-eb7ace0a3455_story.html).

Justin Dyer’s *Slavery, Abortion, and the Politics of Constitutional Meaning* lays out a more thorough consideration of this perspective.

<sup>46</sup> Brown, *For a “Christian America,”* 53.

<sup>47</sup> FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*, 310.

<sup>48</sup> Brown, *For a “Christian America,”* 157.

*America!*, offered a “biblical” rationale for laissez-faire capitalism.<sup>49</sup> With leaders like Schlafly and Falwell, the Christian Right and New Right became increasingly bound by a shared political ideology more so than by shared religious doctrine.

From another perspective, Paul Weyrich, founder of the Heritage Foundation, argued that evangelicals adopted New Right ideology after the 1970 case of *Green v. Connally*. In that case, a D.C. court withheld tax-exempt status from schools that lacked an anti-racial discrimination policy.<sup>50</sup> Weyrich, who opposed the decision of the case on the grounds of “religious liberty,” later remarked:

What galvanized the Christian community was not abortion, school prayer, or the ERA. I am living witness to that because I was trying to get those people interested in those issues and I utterly failed. What changed their mind was Jimmy Carter’s intervention against the Christian schools, trying to deny them tax-exempt status on the basis of so-called de facto segregation.<sup>51</sup>

Given the number of issues and perspectives already mentioned, this statement is by no means final. However, Weyrich’s connection to the New Right makes the observation worth mentioning.

In any case, the formation of the Christian Right cannot be pinned onto one event or political group. The Christian Right, like any political bloc, was a coalition of many interests. And, according to Williams, a mere six percent of whites said that they “felt close” to Christian Right organizations in 1980.<sup>52</sup> The average white, evangelical voter was simply not the Bible-thumping conservative most would imagine. That voter was, however, conservative. As Williams notes, 67 percent of white evangelicals voted for

---

<sup>49</sup> FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*, 305.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 304.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>52</sup> Williams, *God’s Own Party: the Making of the Christian Right*, 193.

Reagan over fellow evangelical Jimmy Carter, and “no Democrat since has won a majority of white evangelical and fundamentalist support in a presidential race.”<sup>53</sup>

### *Reagan’s Investment*

Reagan did not overlook this level of support. The election of 1980 came at a time in which New Deal-era coalitions were breaking down, forcing aspiring politicians to be creative in developing platforms that could actually win an election.<sup>54</sup> The late 1970s saw a surge in the number of people identifying as evangelical or “born-again,” ultimately amounting to an effectively novel cultural demographic.<sup>55</sup> Televangelists like Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell were raising millions of dollars and connecting an unprecedented number of viewers to a religious platform favoring social conservatism.<sup>56</sup> Reagan seized the opportunity afforded by this movement, choosing to let evangelical causes color his platform. In doing so, he not only legitimized evangelicals as a significant interest group within the Republican Party, but also gave white evangelicals an unprecedented sense of political access and importance within America’s historical landscape.

Reagan was, as Steven Miller put it, “more an evangelical’s president than an evangelical president.”<sup>57</sup> Seeing the potential of evangelical voters as loyal Republican

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Bruce Nesmith, *The New Republican Coalition: The Reagan Campaigns and White Evangelicals*. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1994), 2.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 25-27.

<sup>57</sup> Miller, Steven P. “The Evangelical Presidency: Reagan’s Dangerous Love Affair with the Christian Right.” Salon. 18 May 2014. [https://www.salon.com/2014/05/18/the\\_evangelical\\_presidency\\_reagans\\_dangerous\\_love\\_affair\\_with\\_the\\_christian\\_right/](https://www.salon.com/2014/05/18/the_evangelical_presidency_reagans_dangerous_love_affair_with_the_christian_right/).

voters, Reagan unapologetically touted his support for allowing prayer in schools, his opposition to abortion, and his sincere consideration of the possibility of creationism and an impending Armageddon.<sup>58</sup> Unsurprisingly, the combined membership of Christian Right organizations supporting Ronald Reagan’s presidency topped 10 million by 1980.<sup>59</sup>

In *The New Republican Coalition: The Reagan Campaigns and White Evangelicals*, historian Bruce Nesmith quotes a former Reagan adviser who deftly explains the strategic campaign advantage brought about by Reagan’s outspoken support for the Christian Right:

You never think of groups as ‘nice to have.’ You think of what we do to get elected... It was very clear that the fundamentalists were, first off, becoming more active in politics on the abortion issue, the prayer in schools issue, those sorts of things. And it became clear that the liberals were pro-abortion, and for no prayer in schools. So you begin to see a natural constituency, and then identify who they are and where they are.<sup>60</sup>

As another member of the Reagan campaign (also cited by Nesmith) put it,

We did not fear backlash, because the people who strongly oppose fundamentalists usually also strongly oppose Ronald Reagan and what he stands for. You can’t lose support where you never had it in the first place!<sup>61</sup>

In keeping with that perspective, the source of Reagan’s frequent “hat tips” to evangelicals throughout his presidency becomes evident. Reagan’s use of symbolic gestures—i.e., declaring 1983 the year of the Bible, employing phrases like “God bless America” throughout his speeches, preferring to meet with members of the National Religious Broadcasters and National Association of Evangelicals over those representing

---

<sup>58</sup> Nesmith, *The New Republican Coalition: The Reagan Campaigns and White Evangelicals*, 11.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 74.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 76.

mainline denominations—served to build credibility with his base without incurring any political costs.<sup>62</sup>

Although Reagan did welcome evangelical rhetoric and causes into the White House, the Christian Right never made significant legislative progress on protecting school prayer or ending abortion under Reagan’s presidency. Nor did it receive a single pro-life Supreme Court appointee.<sup>63</sup> And yet 75 percent of evangelicals voted for Reagan in 1984.<sup>64</sup> Reagan had rhetorically stood up for the white evangelical community in unprecedented extremes, gaining a level of support as unified and predictable as black Americans voting Democratic.<sup>65</sup> This relationship was a strategic investment, ultimately providing a dependable base for generations of Republican politicians over four subsequent decades.

### *Conclusion*

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, evangelicals developed a regard for presidents who embraced their rhetoric and championed their causes. At first, support for Republican politicians was largely steered by pastoral leadership, as was the case with Billy Graham and President Nixon. But that even Graham was reluctant to reckon with President Nixon’s faults until decades after Watergate attests to the difficulty of perceiving wrongdoing on the part of a sympathetic leader, let alone holding him accountable for it.

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>63</sup> Miller, “The Evangelical Presidency: Reagan’s Dangerous Love Affair with the Christian Right,” [https://www.salon.com/2014/05/18/the\\_evangelical\\_presidency\\_reagans\\_dangerous\\_love\\_affair\\_with\\_the\\_christian\\_right/](https://www.salon.com/2014/05/18/the_evangelical_presidency_reagans_dangerous_love_affair_with_the_christian_right/).

<sup>64</sup> FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*, 365.

<sup>65</sup> Ismail K. White and Chryl N. Laird’s latest book, *Steadfast Democrats: How Social Forces Shape Black Political Behavior*, provides a more thorough exploration of the comparably high (80 to 90 percent) numbers of black Americans who identify as Democrats.

Keeping partisanship out of the evangelical voice became even more difficult as other presidents, such as Ronald Reagan, perceived the development of a distinct evangelical culture and used that social capital to consolidate white evangelical voters into a loyal voting bloc. With this history in mind, the next chapter will tell the story of Donald Trump's success with white evangelicals in 2016.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The 2016 Presidential Election

Donald Trump could not have won the presidency without broad support from traditional and nominal evangelicals alike. To gain that momentum, Trump needed to convince these voters that he was just as committed as past Republican candidates. The assistance of high-profile members of both the pastoral and political arms of evangelicalism made that task possible. This chapter explores the scale and influence of the organizations that helped mobilize evangelical support for Trump in 2016.

#### *Getting a “Fair Hearing”*

In September 2015, the conservative, evangelical *World Magazine* published the results of an informal survey sent to a 103 major evangelical leaders regarding candidate preferences for the 2016 presidential election. Of the 94 responses, the top picks were Marco Rubio (19.1%), Jeb Bush (14.9%), and Ted Cruz (13.9%). Only 3.2% of respondents preferred Trump, and no respondent thought that Trump had done the best job of reaching out to evangelicals.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, 74.7% of respondents said they would “absolutely not vote for” Trump in the primaries. Clearly, Trump did not have a large following among prominent evangelicals.

Something, however, changed over the next six months. Trump became a serious option for evangelicals. Rather than wait until the crunch-time of the general election, the

---

<sup>1</sup> J.C. Derrick. “Whom do evangelical insiders favor in 2016?” *World Magazine*, June 30, 2015, [https://world.wng.org/2015/07/whom\\_do\\_evangelical\\_insiders\\_favor\\_in\\_2016](https://world.wng.org/2015/07/whom_do_evangelical_insiders_favor_in_2016).

campaign began gaining the trust of evangelical leaders even in the midst of the primaries.

A CNN story clip from October 17, 2015 offers a glimpse into the nature of these early efforts.<sup>1</sup> In the clip, evangelical leaders with bowed heads and hands raised are shown praying over Trump. In the accompanying story, a reporter asks Ralph Reed, founder of the Faith and Freedom Coalition, whether evangelicals are skeptical of Trump's purported faith. Reed affirms that "we" (presumably, evangelicals) have had "a good relationship with him." Furthermore, he notes that Trump was "warmly received" in Iowa, having shown up to Faith and Freedom Coalition and other faith-based events and openly saying, "I'm for traditional marriage, I'm pro-life, I support Israel, and I'm for religious liberty." "If you say that," Reed continued, "no matter who you are, you're going to get a fair hearing, he's going to get a fair hearing, we'll see how the vote settles out." The statistics from the Iowa caucus suggest that evangelical voters still preferred Ted Cruz at that time. Regardless, Trump's intentional outreach to evangelicals clearly began even before he became the Republican frontrunner—a strategy that would pay big dividends.

February 2016 marked the first real fruits of the Trump campaign's efforts. At that time, Ted Cruz was the projected winner of the South Carolina primary, where seven in ten voters were likely to be white evangelicals. Instead, he lost to Donald Trump by ten points.<sup>2</sup> At that time, FiveThirtyEight noted that this victory represented a growing trend

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael Smerconish, "Reed: Trump Aligns with Evangelicals on Several Issues," October 2015, CNN video, <https://www.cnn.com/videos/tv/2015/10/17/exp-reed-on-donald-trump.cnn/video/playlists/2016-evangelicals/>.

<sup>2</sup> Giovanni Russonello. "South Carolina Voters Largely Evangelical and Conservative," *New York Times*, accessed December 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/live/south-carolina-nevada-2016-election/south-carolina-voters/>.

in evangelical support for Trump “from 21 percent in Iowa to 28 percent in New Hampshire and now 34 percent in South Carolina.”<sup>3</sup> The article noted that Trump’s primary showing included less conservative evangelicals, suggesting that the support of more conservative evangelicals went to more traditionally Christian candidates like Rubio and Cruz.<sup>4</sup> Tea Party celebrity Glenn Beck, concerned about the lack of consolidated support for one candidate among evangelicals, attempted to organize a fast for securing Ted Cruz’s victory in the Nevada Caucus. Regardless, Trump won 40% of the self-identified born-again/evangelical vote in the Nevada Caucus, leaving Cruz and Rubio behind at 26% and 23%, respectively.<sup>5</sup>

Governor Mike Pence of Indiana (also known for his twelve years of service as a U.S. Congressman) endorsed Ted Cruz on April 21, 2016.<sup>6</sup> Pence, an evangelical who had just one year prior called Trump’s plan to ban Muslim immigrants “offensive and unconstitutional,” said that while he was “not against anybody,” he saw “Ted Cruz as a principled conservative who's dedicated his career to advocating the Reagan agenda.”<sup>7</sup> But this endorsement was not enough to keep Trump from winning the evangelical vote

---

<sup>3</sup> Farai Chideya. “Trump’s South Carolina Win Shows Evangelicals Aren’t Necessarily Voting On Their Faith,” *FiveThirtyEight*, February 22, 2016, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/trumps-south-carolina-win-shows-evangelicals-arent-necessarily-voting-on-their-faith/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> “Nevada Caucus Results,” *NBC News*, February 26, 2016, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/primaries/NV>.

<sup>6</sup> “Indiana governor Pence endorses Cruz for president,” *MSN*, May 2 2016, *Wayback Machine*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160502101304/http://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/indiana-governor-to-endorse-cruz-for-president-media/ar-BBsqqZ9?ocid=ansmsnnews11>.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

in the Indiana primary at 51% to Cruz’s 43% (by that time, Rubio had already withdrawn from the race).<sup>8</sup> Shortly thereafter, Cruz dropped out of the race.

### *Closing In*

With Cruz and Rubio out of the way, Trump needed to redirect evangelical momentum towards his campaign before November. Fortunately for him, his campaign had the foresight to prepare for that task. This preparation became evident when, four months after his success in South Carolina, Trump hosted a closed-door meeting in New York City with over 1,000 evangelical leaders, pastors, politicians, and broadcasters.<sup>9</sup> Opening the conversation was James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, asking a question about religious liberty—apparently, the most popular question submitted. Southern Baptist minister and former governor of Arkansas Mike Huckabee served to monitor the other questions, which had been pre-selected from the pool of 50,000. Responding to these questions, Trump had a platform to talk about his strong bonds with his family, his support for saying “Merry Christmas,” and his loyalty to Israel. Perhaps more importantly, he had the opportunity to emphasize the necessity that evangelicals intentionally unite in support for *one* candidate.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> “Indiana Primary Results,” NBC News, May 5, 2016, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/primaries/IN>.

<sup>9</sup> Emma Green. “Trump’s Play to Win Evangelical Voters,” *Atlantic*, June 21, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/06/trumps-play-to-win-evangelical-voters/488075/>.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

Note: At this point, Trump was already the presumptive Republican nominee. His emphasis on unity had more to do with ensuring that even disappointed evangelicals showed up in November to vote Republican.

That very day, the Trump campaign announced the names of the twenty-five members of his executive board of faith advisors.<sup>11</sup> The announcement clarified that these faith advisors did not necessarily endorse Trump, but rather had agreed to assist him in understanding the best ways to serve evangelicals as president. The public visibility of these members, especially relative to those who sat on the respective boards of Rubio and Cruz, was striking.<sup>12</sup> While the boards of Rubio and Cruz tended to include many university presidents, academics, and policy analysts, the Trump faith advisory board relied on senior pastors of megachurches and major ministry leaders. In fact, on Trump's board, sixty-eight percent (17 out of 25) were pastors, televangelists, or leaders in outreach ministries. In contrast, Rubio had one pastor (Rick Warren, Saddleback Church) (7 percent) and Cruz had four (21 percent). Instead, forty-two percent of the members of Cruz's advisory board were tied to academia (8 of 19), as were sixty percent of Rubio's board (9 of 15).<sup>13</sup> Of Trump's twenty-five advisors, only two worked in higher education: Jerry Falwell, Jr. and Richard Land.

Someone indisposed to Trump might interpret these selections as evidence of anti-intellectualism. But this interpretation ignores the advantages of his selections. From the perspective of someone trying to win a campaign, these advisors had either the most direct experience with election strategy or the most direct ties to everyday evangelicals.

---

<sup>11</sup> "Trump Campaign Announces Evangelical Executive Advisory Board," Trump, June 21, 2016, Wayback Machine, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160623232158/https://www.donaldjtrump.com/press-releases/trump-campaign-announces-evangelical-executive-advisory-board>.

<sup>12</sup> Unsurprisingly, Clinton had no such board.

<sup>13</sup> Kate Shellnutt and Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra. "Who's Who of Trump's 'Tremendous' Faith Advisers," *Christianity Today*, June 22, 2016, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/june-web-only/whos-who-of-trumps-tremendous-faith-advisors.html>.

In short, these were the people who could make the greatest impact on the general election, and their usefulness would be evident throughout the campaign.

### *The Board*

Without delving into a detailed profile of every member of Trump’s faith advisory board, a selected analysis of some of Trump’s choices says something about his pragmatism.

Unsurprisingly, the evangelicals who helped Trump organize the New York City meeting had their place at the table. However, the ties between those organizers and the ones who aided Ronald Reagan are striking. While on the campaign trail, Reagan had appeared before a bipartisan crowd of 15,000 evangelicals and famously quipped, “I know you can’t endorse me. But I endorse you, and what you are doing.”<sup>14</sup> At the time, that line came at the suggestion of none other than Texas evangelist James Robison—the same James Robison who earned a seat on Trump’s executive board. Moreover, during Reagan’s campaign, Mike Huckabee had assisted James Robison with organizing the very event. It would seem that the New York City meeting borrowed a play (and players) from the Reagan campaign.

The political backgrounds of many members of the board made them hospitable to embracing an unorthodox candidate. One such figure was Jerry Falwell, Jr., the president of Liberty University and the son of one of the original masterminds behind

---

<sup>14</sup> W. Scott Lamb. “35th anniversary of Reagan's 'I know you can't endorse me. But I endorse you' - to evangelicals,” *Washington Times*, August 21, 2015, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/aug/21/w-scott-lamb-this-day-in-us-history-reagans-endors/>.

consolidating evangelical voters into the “Moral Majority” in 1979.<sup>15</sup> Falwell, Jr. also understood and practiced coalition building, as evidenced by his early support of the Tea Party movement. The Tea Party, a grassroots movement aimed at demanding fiscal responsibility in Washington, was not a religious movement. However, the movement’s demands for Constitutionalism and limited government appealed to many white evangelicals. In 2010, Falwell seized on this opportunity and appeared alongside Glenn Beck during a spiritually-charged Tea Party rally on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. His early endorsement of Trump in January 2016—and his seat on the faith board—aligned with his anti-establishment and coalition-building tendencies.<sup>16</sup>

Also on the board was Pastor Robert Jeffress of First Baptist Dallas, a 12,000-member megachurch. Like Falwell, Jeffress had his hand in politics long before the 2016 race. In 2011, Jeffress had been an ardent supporter of Rick Perry for 2012. Much to Perry’s embarrassment, Jeffress had then made highly critical comments about Mitt Romney’s Mormonism. These comments brought him enough publicity that he became a regular contributor on Fox News. When Romney earned the Republican nomination however, Jeffress backtracked. His change of outlook in 2012 anticipated his future support for Trump’s candidacy:

If we care about winning elections with candidates who will push back against abortion and immorality, then we have to be willing to compromise on some secondary issues to form a winning coalition with other Republicans... We must differentiate between biblical absolutes and political preferences... Instead of nominating a candidate who is mute or

---

<sup>15</sup> Williams, Daniel K. *God’s Own Party: the Making of the Christian Right*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 160.

<sup>16</sup> FitzGerald, Frances. *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 597.

Kidd, Thomas S. *Who is an Evangelical?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 144.

malleable on social issues but intransigent on political issues, let's try the reverse.<sup>17</sup>

With this newfound pragmatic bent (and publicity), Jeffress would later articulate a case for Trump that resonated with conscientious evangelicals.<sup>18</sup>

The presence of Franklin Graham on the board was also conducive to this case. Graham is highly visible in the evangelical community not only because he is the son of the late Billy Graham, but because he serves as president of Samaritan's Purse, an international Christian relief organization. Samaritan's Purse is well known for its Operation Christmas Child program, which has facilitated the delivery of over 153 million hand-packed shoeboxes around the world since 1993.<sup>19</sup> The organization partners with churches to provide over 4,000 box drop-off centers nationwide. The combined value of all of his foundations has been estimated at \$765 million. Franklin Graham's political involvement was also extensive—and controversial. A regular Fox News contributor, Graham was one of the first evangelicals to (quite controversially) denounce Islam following the 9/11 attacks.<sup>20</sup> During the 2004 presidential election, he leveraged prospective “values voters” through automated calls and direct mail.<sup>21</sup> In a 2011 interview, he suggested that President Obama ought to produce his birth certificate. At

---

<sup>17</sup> FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*, 613.

<sup>18</sup> Kidd, *Who is an Evangelical?*, 141.

<sup>19</sup> “Operation Christmas Child (Fact Sheet),” Samaritan's Purse, accessed December 14, 2019, <https://www.samaritanspurse.org/operation-christmas-child/operation-christmas-child-fact-sheet/>.

<sup>20</sup> FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*, 475, 480.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 504.

that time, he even stated that he thought Donald Trump—then a leading proponent of the birther movement—might make a good president.<sup>22</sup>

Graham never explicitly endorsed Trump for president after joining the faith advisory board. However, he has spent the years following Trump’s election in 2016 on a “Decision America” tour across all 50 states.<sup>23</sup> The conflation of religion and politics on these tours is striking, as noted by journalist Eliza Griswald:

Graham casts the events as “prayer and evangelism,” in the tradition of his father’s crusades... To the initiated, the word “decision” is a double-entendre: it means both to make a decision to follow Christ, or to be born again, and also to make a decision at the ballot box. Graham is careful to stress that he tells people only to “vote Biblically,” but this is a code his followers understand. “He didn’t say who to vote for,” Tom Phillips, a senior member of Graham’s staff, said in Spokane. “He didn’t have to.”

Aside from these tours, Graham has an extensive internet reach that includes 1.75 million Twitter followers and 7 million Facebook followers. He has even gone so far as to “[purchase] words and phrases from Google, such as ‘does God love me,’ to drive seekers to his site.<sup>24</sup> Without a doubt, Graham’s resources and historic political involvement were invaluable assets to the Trump campaign.

But the primary backers of the Trump campaign (and now, presidency) go beyond traditional figures of conservative evangelicals involved in politics. One of the most striking aspects of Trump’s council has been the inclusion of unorthodox televangelists

---

<sup>22</sup> Sarah Pulliam Bailey. “How Donald Trump is bringing Billy Graham’s complicated family back into White House circles,” *Washington Post*, January 12, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/01/12/how-donald-trump-is-bringing-billy-grahams-complicated-family-back-into-white-house-circles/>.

<sup>23</sup> Eliza Griswald, “Franklin Graham’s Uneasy Alliance with Donald Trump,” *New Yorker*, September 11, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/franklin-grahams-uneasy-alliance-with-donald-trump>.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

Note: It is unclear whether Griswald means Franklin Graham’s site, Samaritan Purse, or Billy Graham’s site. A quick Google search suggests the latter.

on his advisory board. This might have something to do with the media connections of another board member—Pastor Mark Burns of The Harvest Praise & Worship Center in Easley, South Carolina.

At the time of the board’s creation, The Harvest Praise & Worship Center’s weekly attendance was estimated at dozen or so worshippers—an attendance rate that would not suggest a large sphere of influence.<sup>25</sup> However, Burns was also the co-founder of The NOW Network, a television network that covers religious programs with titles like, “Kingdom Manifestations,” “The Pathway to Victory,” and the “Christian Wrestling Federation.”<sup>26</sup> Trump met Burns during a "who's who of Christian TV evangelicals" in October 2015, and Burns, one of the few African-Americans that had been willing to meet with the candidate, became a spokesperson for Trump as he campaigned in advance of the South Carolina primary.<sup>27</sup> At that time, Burns tried to turn black evangelicals voters towards Trump.<sup>28</sup> Since, however, only 1% of South Carolina primary voters identified as black, those efforts likely had little impact on the primaries. But something about his support made him impactful enough to earn him a seat on the faith advisory board. Regarding his relationship with Trump, he himself said just before the South Carolina primary:

Really what won me over, is that he said Christianity is under attack. The biggest thing for us, as evangelicals, is we want someone in office who is

---

<sup>25</sup> Shellnutt and Zylstra, “Who’s Who,” <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/june-web-only/whos-who-of-trumps-tremendous-faith-advisors.html>.

<sup>26</sup> The NOW Network, accessed December 14, 2019, <https://www.thenownetwork.org/>.

<sup>27</sup> “Ines Novacic, “Why some African-American evangelicals are playing the Trump card,” CBS News, February 19, 2016, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/why-some-african-american-evangelicals-are-playing-the-trump-card/>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

not part of the current political establishment, who has the ability to do what they are saying... And he [Trump] said - with me, you will have a friend in the White House.<sup>29</sup>

Given Burns' inclusion on the board, it would seem that Trump had reason to fulfill his promise.

The inclusion of televangelist Paula White, founder of a Tampa-based mega church of over 25,000 members, was more obvious from an audience-reach perspective, but certainly not in terms of theology.<sup>30</sup> *Christianity Today* holds that White is a prosperity gospel preacher, meaning one who claims that the Gospel promises “health and wealth.” She has been affiliated with T.D. Jakes, Joel Osteen, as well as Ken and Gloria Copeland (the latter two are also on the faith advisory board). If adherence to this unorthodox theology were not enough, White also denies the doctrines of the Trinity and Christ's status as God's only begotten son. Her gospel proclaims that God wants all to find financial blessing—a journey that begins by donating money to her ministry. “Anyone who tells you to deny yourself is from Satan,” White has said—a proclamation that directly contradicts Jesus' directives in the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>31</sup> Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, has called her, “a charlatan and recognized as a heretic by every orthodox Christian, of whatever tribe.”<sup>32</sup> And yet, in addition to serving on the Trump campaign's advisory

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Shellnutt and Zylstra, “Who's Who,” <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/june-web-only/whos-who-of-trumps-tremendous-faith-advisors.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Matt. 16:24 NIV

<sup>32</sup> Michael Horton. “Evangelicals Should be Deeply Troubled by Trump's Attempt to Mainstream Heresy,” *Washington Post*, January 3, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/01/03/evangelicals-should-be-deeply-troubled-by-donald-trumps-attempt-to-mainstream-heresy/>.

board, White now serves as Trump’s personal pastor and has recently been employed as an official White House aide.<sup>33</sup>

The range of theological convictions amongst members of Trump’s evangelical advisory board is vast and varied. And yet these members share a common denominator: visibility in the media. Whereas Rubio and Cruz tended to rely on university presidents, academics, and policy analysts, Trump surrounded himself with popular evangelical figures. These figures, despite different motivations for aligning with Trump, had direct ties to everyday evangelicals—the people that actually cast votes. As the statistics of the previous chapter have shown, these voters may not necessarily hold (or prioritize) all of the views held by those on Fox News. But Trump’s evangelical council reflects the efficacy of Trump’s evangelical coalition. Representation from prosperity gospel-based programming, which has a large following in the United States, fit nicely with the “Make America Great Again” theme. The presence of conservative leaders who articulate a pragmatic view of values voting offered another type of representation for more traditional evangelicals. In terms of unity, those desiring strong leadership and material “blessing” could get along with staunch support for national security concerns, and those wanting a strong stance on national security issues could put up with some prosperity gospel shenanigans for the sake of commitment to religious freedom and pro-life issues.<sup>34</sup> This was a coalition of influential people that could help tip the scales of an election.

---

<sup>33</sup> Jeremy W. Peters and Elizabeth Dias, “Paula White, Newest White House Aide, Is a Uniquely Trumpian Pastor,” *New York Times*, November 2, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/02/us/politics/paula-white-trump.html>.

<sup>34</sup> To clarify, Russell Moore, one Trump’s most consistent critics within evangelicalism, is not to be included in this assessment.

### *Spreading the Word*

But the political network was more than just a well-connected selection of people. The Trump campaign had relationships with organizations that had highly sophisticated channels for political mobilization. Perhaps the most notable of these is Ralph Reed's Faith and Freedom Coalition, which was mentioned at the outset of this chapter. Ralph Reed is arguably the most successful (and powerful) political organizer in the history of evangelical Republicans. Reed rose to prominence during televangelist Pat Robertson's presidential campaign, which led to the establishment of the Christian Coalition. Robertson anticipated that the Christian Coalition would be "the most powerful political organization in America."<sup>35</sup> The coalition worked to identify and train lay evangelical leaders for "effective political action" as well as to develop innovative techniques for mobilizing voters:

One [such technique] was to cross-reference conservative church membership lists with the list of registered Republicans in a given area. Another was to call voters in selected precincts to ask if they were Republicans, and if they were, to find out what issues they felt most important...The survey information would be coded and stored in a database, and later the identified voters would mysteriously receive computer-generated letters from the Republican candidate with issues tailored to each individual.<sup>36</sup>

The Christian Coalition was so successful that Reed, along with Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council, decided to return to their strategy in 2009 with the founding of the Faith and Freedom Coalition, which allied social conservatives with members of the growing Tea Party movement.<sup>37</sup> The Faith and Freedom Coalition capitalized on the

---

<sup>35</sup> FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: the Struggle to Shape America*, 412.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 414.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 596.

growing Tea Party fervor across the nation. By 2014, Reed had amassed a database of 33.1 million social conservatives and was prepared to use highly targeted online efforts to get out the vote. As Reed himself noted, “There has never been anything like this in the history of the pro-family movement...What we are doing versus the Christian Coalition is the difference of a Ford Model-T and an Indy race car.”<sup>38</sup>

That strategy succeeded, as evidenced in the Republicans regaining control of the Senate and maintaining control of the House during the 2014 midterms. By 2016, the Faith and Freedom Coalition was a highly effective mobilization force. In preparation for the election, the organization made over 10 million calls, distributed 22 million pieces of mail, and contributed 30 million voter guides to 117,000 churches.<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, the Faith and Freedom Coalition directly or indirectly contacted 90.2 million voters, assisting in, as their website boasts, “Donald Trump becoming the 45th President of the United States over Hillary Clinton.”<sup>40</sup>

Another notable organization was the registered non-profit, My Faith Votes. Founded in 2015, the organization receives consulting from millennial Johnnie Moore, a communications expert who worked for Jerry Falwell, Jr. at Liberty University. According to the organization’s website, the mission of My Faith Votes is to mobilize the

---

<sup>38</sup> Anna Palmer, “Evangelicals Road Test 2016 Strategy,” *Politico*, October 20, 2014, <https://www.politico.com/story/2014/10/evangelicals-2016-election-strategy-112050>.

<sup>39</sup> “About the Faith & Freedom Coalition,” accessed December 14, 2014, <https://www.ffcoalition.com/about/>.

<sup>40</sup> “The 2020 Project: Roadmap to Victory,” The Faith and Freedom Coalition, accessed December 14, 2019, <https://www.ffcoalition.com/the2020project/>.

25 million Christians that were registered to vote in 2012, but did not do so. As the purportedly non-partisan website notes,

[W]hile secular progressives have actively sought to implement a counterfeit worldview at every level of government, Christians have remained quietly inside the walls of the church. As a result of apathy at the voting booth and in public life, we've suffered devastating moral decay, declining religious freedom, immoral national debt, and the erosion of traditional family values.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to providing voter guides to churches and college students across the nation, a My Faith Votes press release from October 3, 2016 heralded that My Faith Votes planned to reach 110 million U.S. televisions with a series of 23 public service announcements in the days leading up unto the election.<sup>42</sup> This demonstrates that effective mobilization channels have continued to flourish beyond those of Reed's generation.

### *Conclusion*

The genius of the Trump campaign was chiefly to recognize and mobilize the potential force of the evangelical voting community long before the general election. With great foresight, Trump made early efforts to foster trust between himself and historically important players in the evangelical voting community. Moreover, he had the creativity to make high-profile televangelists and ministers some of his foremost advisors. In this way, Trump not only inherited the support of powerful

---

<sup>41</sup> "About." My Faith Votes, accessed December 14, 2019, <https://www.myfaithvotes.org/about>.

<sup>42</sup> "Press Release: My Faith Votes Launches National TV and Radio Campaign to Mobilize the Christian Votes in the 2016 Election, Saturating Christian [sic] Media," My Faith Votes, October 3, 2016, <https://www.myfaithvotes.org/press-release/press-release-my-faith-votes-launches-national-tv-and-radio-campaign-to-mobilize-the-christian-votes-in-the-2016-election-saturating-christian-media>.

evangelical organizations, but also earned the trust of some evangelicals by inviting their faith leaders into his circle.

Given evangelical voters' limited options in the general election and the lack of an alternative infrastructure for voting outside the Republican Party, it is no great wonder that momentum for opposing Trump among white evangelicals ultimately collapsed. Without time, strategy, and accessible argumentation, there was little chance that a coherent counter-coalition could emerge, let alone impact an election.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Concluding Thoughts

This final chapter considers the question that has weighed heavily upon the minds of some readers from the beginning: *What ought the evangelical to do in 2020?*

Answering this question has never been the primary object of this thesis. Rather, this thesis has aimed to tell the story of what *has* been to enable evangelicals to consider what *should* be. Within the world of evangelicalism (and white evangelicalism in particular), one could easily miss the development of political infrastructure that has grown up alongside the movement itself over decades. In the metaphorical room of evangelicalism, it is an elephant of the grandest proportions—an elephant so large and ancient that one might mistake its leg for some immovable column. To stretch the metaphor (perhaps more than I ought), the 2016 election was, to some, as shocking as if that column had suddenly shifted its weight.

Regardless of my reader's political persuasion, I hope that discussing "the elephant" has mitigated some of the bewilderment concerning the results and subsequent events of the 2016 election. I am wary of prescribing an agenda for evangelicals moving forward lest it distract faithful Christians from the more important task of "know[ing] God and enjoying Him forever."<sup>1</sup> In terms of casting a vote in 2020, each person must judge best as both a democratic citizen and as an ambassador of the kingdom of God.

---

<sup>1</sup> "The Westminster Shorter Catechism," The Westminster Presbyterian, accessed April 6, 2020, <http://www.westminsterconfession.org/confessional-standards/the-westminster-shorter-catechism.php>.

But in making that judgment, Christians are commanded to keep their thinking from being muddied by the authorities of this world:

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.<sup>1</sup>

In keeping with the spirit of this command, this final chapter will briefly review our acquired knowledge of white evangelicalism's past and examine the course of its present direction. In closing, I will reveal my own cautionary thoughts on the potential repercussions of the present relationship between white evangelicals and politics, as well as share a few ideas for navigating the clash of pragmatism and principle. My hope is that these reflections will only serve to contribute to the health and unity of the Body of Christ. For that reason, I devote this final chapter to directly addressing all Christians, from one sister to the rest.

### *Our Present State<sup>2</sup>*

Against the backdrop of impeachment proceedings, the white evangelical community has continued to support the Trump Administration. Although public opinion polls have long attested to Trump's high approval ratings among white evangelicals, the publication of a controversial article in a longstanding Christian magazine revealed just how high tensions have been in the evangelical community. This was the article

---

<sup>1</sup> Col. 2:8-10 NIV

<sup>2</sup> Give or take six months and a global pandemic.

published by Mark Galli, the then-editor in chief of *Christianity Today*.<sup>3</sup> Within the article, Galli offers both legal and moral arguments for President Trump’s removal from office, relying on the precedent of *Christianity Today*’s 1998 call for Bill Clinton’s removal from office. Within hours of publication, the article received over 15,000 online viewers—a load so extensive (and unexpected) that it crashed *Christianity Today*’s website.<sup>4</sup> Apparently, one of those viewers was President Trump, who tweeted about it the next morning:

A far left magazine... which has been doing poorly and hasn’t been involved with the Billy Graham family for many years, *Christianity Today*... would rather have a Radical Left nonbeliever, who wants to take your religion & your guns, than Donald Trump as your President. No President has done more for the Evangelical community, and it’s not even close. You’ll not get anything from those Dems on stage. I won’t be reading ET [sic] again!<sup>5</sup>

This was a startling pronouncement. *Christianity Today*, a magazine that lamented the Supreme Court’s decision on same-sex marriage in 2015 and calls abortion murder, cannot reasonably be characterized as “far left.”<sup>6</sup> And yet, instead of correcting President Trump or even remaining silent, Franklin Graham shortly thereafter took to Facebook to

---

<sup>3</sup> Mark Galli, “Trump Should Be Removed from Office,” *Christianity Today*, December 19, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/december-web-only/trump-should-be-removed-from-office.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, “Christianity Today Editor Laments ‘Ethical Naïveté’ of Trump Backers,” *The New York Times*, January 2, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/02/us/christianity-today-mark-galli-evangelicals.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Twitter Post, December 20, 2019, 6:12 AM. <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1207997319821615105>.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Galli, “Six Things To Do after the Supreme Court Decision on Gay Marriage,” *Christianity Today*, June 26, 2015, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/june-web-only/6-things-to-do-after-supreme-court-gay-marriage-decision.html>.

“Abortion,” *Christianity Today*, accessed April 6, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/topics/a/abortion/>.

finish what the President started.<sup>7</sup> After purporting that his father, Billy Graham, voted for Trump in 2016, Graham lambasted *Christianity Today* for its willingness to publish an article whose conclusions were not supported by Republicans:

...I know a number of Republicans in Congress, and many of them are strong Christians. *If the President were guilty of what the Democrats claimed, these Republicans would have joined with the Democrats to impeach him [...]* Why would *Christianity Today* choose to take the side of the Democrat left whose only goal is to discredit and smear the name of a sitting president? [...] *Christianity Today* said it's time to call a spade a spade. The spade is this—*Christianity Today* has been used by the left for their political agenda. *It's obvious that Christianity Today has moved to the left and is representing the elitist liberal wing of evangelicalism.*<sup>8</sup> [emphasis added]

Public evangelicals like Franklin Graham have not only actively supported President Trump throughout his presidency, but have also acted against evangelicals who break rank and criticize the President. Moreover, these public figures are in close relationship with one another and have high levels of social capital within the white evangelical community. Within four days, nearly 180 evangelicals had signed a letter denouncing Galli's article as partisan, dismissive, and judgmental.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, they took issue with his characterization of Trump-supporting evangelicals as "far-right"—a phrase that did not appear in Galli's article. As the letter said:

We are proud to be numbered among those in history who, like Jesus, have been pretentiously accused of having too much grace for tax

---

<sup>7</sup> Franklin Graham, "My Response to Christianity Today:," Facebook, December 19, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/FranklinGraham/posts/2925457574177071>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> "Evangelical Leaders Call out Christianity Today President over Trump Editorial," *CBN News*, December 12, 2020, <https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2019/december/evangelical-leaders-call-out-christianity-today-president-over-trump-editorial>.

Note: These signatories included Mike Huckabee, Michele Bachmann, Ralph Reed, James Dobson, Robert Jeffress, and Jerry Falwell, Jr.

collectors and sinners, and we take deeply our personal responsibility to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's – our public service. The editorial you published, without any meaningful and immediate regard for dissenting points of view, not only supported the entirely-partisan, legally-dubious, and politically-motivated impeachment but went even further, calling for Donald Trump not to be elected again in 2020 when he certainly survives impeachment. [...] Your editorial offensively questioned the spiritual integrity and Christian witness of tens-of-millions of believers who take seriously their civic and moral obligations. It not only targeted our President; it also targeted those of us who support him, and have supported you.<sup>10</sup>

Regardless of whether one agrees with Galli's concerns, such characterizations are simply out of proportion with Galli's measured tone:

We have reserved judgment on Mr. Trump for years now. Some have criticized us for our reserve. But when it comes to condemning the behavior of another, patient charity must come first. So we have done our best to give evangelical Trump supporters their due, to try to understand their point of view, to see the prudential nature of so many political decisions they have made regarding Mr. Trump. To use an old cliché, it's time to call a spade a spade, to say that no matter how many hands we win in this political poker game, we are playing with a stacked deck of gross immorality and ethical incompetence. And just when we think it's time to push all our chips to the center of the table, that's when the whole game will come crashing down. It will crash down on the reputation of evangelical religion and on the world's understanding of the gospel. And it will come crashing down on a nation of men and women whose welfare is also our concern.<sup>11</sup>

Written three years after Trump initially took office, these are hardly words of someone has no "immediate regard for dissenting points of view." Rather, these words express a different point of view. That evangelical leaders felt offended by the concerns expressed in Galli's article, even labeling the whole thing as "pretentious," was an example of

---

<sup>10</sup> Melissa Barnhart, "Nearly 200 Evangelical Leaders Slam Christianity Today for Questioning their Christian Witness," *The Christian Post*, December 22, 2019, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/nearly-200-evangelical-leaders-slam-christianity-today-for-questioning-their-christian-witness.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Galli, "Trump Should Be Removed from Office," *Christianity Today*, December 19, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/december-web-only/trump-should-be-removed-from-office.html>.

closing the door on any meaningful room for disagreement. It was, in fact, a prime example of “cancel culture,” which is the phrase that has been used to describe political liberals’ tendency to shut down different points of view by condemning the opposition. That Christians who have “been filled in [Christ]” would publicly employ such tactics ought to be shocking.<sup>12</sup>

But perhaps the response to Galli’s article illustrates more than the power struggle within the highest levels of evangelical leadership. Consider that only two months before, Trump was already belittling members of the Never Trump movement:<sup>13</sup>

The Never Trumper Republicans, though on respirators with not many left, are in certain ways worse and more dangerous for our Country than the Do Nothing Democrats. *Watch out for them, they are human scum!*<sup>14</sup> [emphasis added]

That the Commander-in-Chief of the United States should call anyone “human scum” ought to have merited the outcry of the evangelical community, starting with those closest to the President. Instead, evangelical leadership ignored these comments only to later publically berate those evangelicals who, like Galli, would break rank and publicly take issue with the Trump administration. Such behavior hearkens back to Trump’s own campaign boast that he really could, “stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot

---

<sup>12</sup> This tactical manipulation may also be applied to liberal evangelicals who would look down upon conservative evangelicals as “deplorables.” As has been the case throughout this entire thesis, I only focus on white evangelicals who support Trump because; a) an overwhelming majority of white evangelicals supported Trump in 2016; b) even unfairly, they tend to carry the public face of evangelicalism; c) they represent the community which I have been most closely tied to my entire life; d) Christ holds most accountable those who claim to know the truth.

<sup>13</sup> For reference, the relevance of this movement to our discussion is that it includes white evangelicals (such as myself) who are political conservatives who did not vote for Trump in 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Twitter Post, October 23, 2019, 12:48 PM, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1187063301731209220?lang=en>.

somebody and [...] wouldn't lose any voters.”<sup>15</sup> Given the response of evangelicals to Galli's article, President Trump should expect the continued support of white evangelicals come Election Day 2020.

But if this showing of support were not evidence enough for the loyalty of the broader white evangelical community, President Trump's presence and remarks at the 2020 March for Life surely was. Standing before tens of thousands of pro-life marchers in January 2020, Trump became the first sitting president to speak at a March for Life event. Without a doubt, his speech was everything the pro-life movement has been trying to say for years. Throughout his speech, Trump emphasized God as the basis for human dignity.<sup>16</sup> His warm praise of the women, faith leaders, and families who have persevered in their efforts to end abortion had the rhetorical sincerity and conviction of a Martin Luther King, Jr. But most importantly, President Trump was able to name the specific gains that the pro-life movement made under his presidency: confirmation of 187 sympathetic federal judges, religious liberty protections for pro-life college students and charities such as Little Sisters of the Poor, and an end to federally-funded referrals to doctors who provide abortions. As he himself said in his speech, “Unborn children have never had a stronger defender in the White House.”<sup>17</sup>

President Trump offered another compelling selling point: namely, that Democrats have been undeniably hostile to the pro-life movement, as evidenced by

---

<sup>15</sup> “Trump: ‘I Could Stand In the Middle Of Fifth Avenue And Shoot Somebody And I Wouldn't Lose Any Voters,’” *Real Clear Politics*, January 23, 2016, [https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2016/01/23/trump\\_i\\_could\\_stand\\_in\\_the\\_middle\\_of\\_fifth\\_avenue\\_and\\_shoot\\_somebody\\_and\\_i\\_wouldnt\\_lose\\_any\\_voters.html](https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2016/01/23/trump_i_could_stand_in_the_middle_of_fifth_avenue_and_shoot_somebody_and_i_wouldnt_lose_any_voters.html).

<sup>16</sup> “Remarks by President Trump at the 47th Annual March for Life,” The White House, January 24, 2020, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-47th-annual-march-life/>.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

recent events in which “lawmakers in New York cheered with delight upon the passage of legislation that would allow a baby to be ripped from the mother’s womb right up until delivery.”<sup>18</sup> Painting this image, he offered his audience hope:

Sadly, the far-left is actively working to erase our God-given rights, shut down faith-based charities, ban religious believers from the public square, and silence Americans who believe in the sanctity of life. They are coming after me because I am fighting for you and we are fighting for those who have no voice. *And we will win because we know how to win.* We all know how to win [...] You’ve been winning for a long time [...] Together, we are the voice for the voiceless.<sup>19</sup> [emphasis added]

In those words, Trump laid out a seemingly irreproachable case for his re-election by members of the pro-life community, which includes high rates of white evangelicals.<sup>20</sup> Under the current orientation of evangelicals to politics, Trump can expect to continue to have their support come November.

### *Some Objections (and Responses)*

A responsible, run-of-the-mill evangelical might counter that this is all a matter of politics—that, “the other side uses the same tactics;” that “we have no choice but to vote for the lesser of two evils;” and “that we must elect someone who will protect our rights to worship God as well as the innocent lives of unborn children.”

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> If that were not evidence enough, it would seem that white evangelicals surpass other religious demographics in approval of the President’s initial handling of the coronavirus epidemic (77 percent approval):

Gregory A. Smith, “Most white evangelicals satisfied with Trump’s initial response to the COVID-19 outbreak,” Pew Research Center, March 19, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/03/19/most-white-evangelicals-satisfied-with-trumps-initial-response-to-the-covid-19-outbreak/>.

These are all legitimate objections. As far as I know, pure pragmatism may in fact be the best way to determine how to vote. However, taking into consideration the history of white evangelicals and the Republican Party, I would first counter that individual evangelicals (like other people) overestimate their abilities to make a pure, detached pragmatic determination of “the lesser of two evils.” Like any group that has been considerably immersed in politics, our moral priorities have been shaped and formed by our pre-existing loyalties. But even operating under the assumption that our moral priorities are in order, voting for Trump is not necessarily the most pragmatic choice.

For instance, I would argue that outspoken support for and defense of Trump among evangelicals has been counterproductive to the causes of religious freedom as well as the pro-life movement. From an institutional perspective, Trump has set a dangerous precedent for the language with which a commander-in-chief speaks about groups and individuals who oppose him (his comments about adherents to #NeverTrump being “human scum” being the tip of a large iceberg). At some point, evangelicals will face a president who does not look kindly upon evangelicalism. Should that future president let loose upon evangelicals in the way that the current president has belittled others, what grounds would we have for crying foul? Indeed, that future president could rightfully accuse us of having stood aside and even encouraged President Trump as he rolled back the rules of engagement. Surely Franklin Graham never organized 200 evangelical leaders to publicly reprimand the President whenever Trump called someone “ugly” or said that a Democrat had “low I.Q.”<sup>21</sup> When an alternative administration is in place,

---

<sup>21</sup> Philip Bump, “The Expansive, Repetitive Universe of Trump’s Twitter Insults,” *The Washington Post*, August 20, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/08/20/expansive-repetitive-universe-trumps-twitter-insults/>.

there will be no mercy for evangelicals and the projects they have so carefully sought to advance under the Trump Administration.

The same could be said for the political gains that have come about for the pro-life movement. After the Trump presidency, will it be possible to maintain momentum for a pro-life movement that was headed by someone with such a disreputable record on his treatment of people in general (and women in particular)?<sup>22</sup> Prior to the Trump presidency, the millennial generation was increasingly sympathetic towards the pro-life movement.<sup>23</sup> Today, they are increasingly pro-choice.<sup>24</sup> While Trump's presence in the White House does not necessarily explain this trend, it would be difficult to argue that sympathy for the pro-life movement has made meaningful increases under the Trump administration.

Moreover, I am unconvinced that the judicial appointments filled during the small window of the Trump administration can really create long-term gains for the movement. To believe that abortion can be made illegal through judicial appointments assumes that substantive progress can be accomplished through the exploitation of legal technicalities (assuming, too, that those appointees actually followed through on the conservative overtures they made during a confirmation hearing). But even if the Supreme Court were

---

Michael D. Sheer and Eileen Sullivan, "'Horseface,' 'Lowlife,' 'Fat, Ugly': How the President Demeans Women," *The New York Times*, October 16, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/16/us/politics/trump-women-insults.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Charles C. Camosy, "Millennials Will Change Abortion Conversation: Column," March 23, 2015, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2015/03/23/abortion-generation-demographics-choice-life-column/24900705/>.

<sup>24</sup> Karlyn Bowman, "Abortion: Is Public Opinion Changing?," *Forbes*, January 15, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bowmanmarsico/2020/01/15/abortion-is-public-opinion-changing/#3e45cba9294b>.

to revisit precedent and determine that states ought to be able to ban the procedure outright, broad consensus would be needed in each state to actually pass such laws. Democracy will not allow evangelicals to override an unsympathetic majority.

Such are some very cursory objections to the popular framing of Trump as the most pragmatic option for evangelical voters. There exists also a pragmatic case for intentionally putting *distance* between evangelicals and Trump. Perhaps the most important point of this case considers the damage that a close association with any political party can have on the witness of Christians as a whole. As those sympathetic to Trump will quickly point out, Jesus certainly loved tax collectors and prostitutes. But Christ's concern for the souls of the poor, the rich, the outcast, the felon, the adulterer, and even the Pharisee were completely disinterested. In these associations, he did not aim at advancing political objectives. If one is at all conscious of desiring to advance favored policy objectives under a given administration, that person—Republican or Democrat—ought not analogize his or her disreputable associations to that of Christ.

Furthermore, it is a mistake to think that the evangelicals' witness only matters insofar as it plays out in the life of the individual. As a group, evangelicals are highly visible. Even if most evangelicals are not highly partisan, that reality has been obscured by loud, unchecked voices. In *Who Is An Evangelical?*, Thomas Kidd attempts to provide a picture of evangelicalism that is not inevitably bound up in politics—and some of his observations are quite encouraging.<sup>25</sup> But the very fact that a book has to be written to make that clarification attests to weight of our political reputation. Given our history, that reputation will not fade away without real effort and engagement from evangelicals

---

<sup>25</sup> Kidd, Thomas S. *Who is an Evangelical?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

themselves. And there is Scriptural precedence for Christians to be concerned with the collective witness of the Church:

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.”<sup>26</sup>

The Church has a visible presence in our nation beyond that of our own individual lives. Christians ought not to so compartmentalize their faith that they allow the rules of engagement to slip when it comes to those who oppose them. The world is watching.

Finally, taking on the burden of defending the Trump Administration harms individual evangelicals. The demands of political partisanship—the defensiveness, the feelings of indignation, the constant scrutinizing and paranoia surrounding the opposition’s advances—are exhausting at the very least. Repenting of one’s sin and relying on Christ’s grace for salvation is task enough for each day. By feeling the need to justify and defend the President to the world, and ourselves, evangelicals heap greater burdens upon themselves than Christ ever asked us to bear.

### *A Critique of #NeverTrump*

It would be unfair, however, to criticize evangelicals who support Trump without adding a word of warning to those who do not. Since 2016, it has become clear that within the evangelical community, there is a legitimate rift between those in the ivory tower and the average evangelical. There is wisdom in listening carefully to the sentiments of people like Franklin Graham, connected to so many evangelicals, who hold

---

<sup>26</sup> Matt. 5:13 NIV

that there is an “*elitist liberal wing of evangelicalism*.”<sup>27</sup> The danger of adopting a #NeverTrump mindset as a response to the majority of white evangelical voters is that it may breed (or perhaps, have already bred) yet another form of partisanship.

The #NeverTrump movement had its greatest traction in a world far removed from that of the average evangelical. In doing so, it tended to gloss over concerns about voters’ alternatives and ignored the impact of less reputable channels of talk radio, conservative news agencies, and the works of amateur historians that had been shaping the mindsets of the masses of evangelicals for decades. Moreover, it is not unfair to say that it included at least a few individuals whose repulsion for Trump mirrored, in terms of motivation, those who claimed Christ’s example in defending Trump’s conduct. No doubt some evangelicals joined the #NeverTrump faction in order to be counted among the “cool” evangelicals.

Those at all sympathetic to the #NeverTrump movement likely bristle at being characterized as “pretentious” or “elite.” Some—chuckling through gritted teeth—might remark that their faith has certainly scored them no points with their secular colleagues. But before taking offense at these accusations, one might consider whether there might be an element of fairness within them.<sup>28</sup> On this point, I offer the wise words of evangelical Peter Wehner in the conclusion of an essay making a case against Trump:

---

<sup>27</sup> Franklin Graham, “My Response to Christianity Today:,” Facebook, December 19, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/FranklinGraham/posts/2925457574177071>.

<sup>28</sup> I include myself in this group. As a senior in high school, more than one Christian I knew (and these were people who loved me and had my best interest at heart) was concerned that I would be attending Baylor, “a liberal school.” As I have been considering law schools north of the Mason-Dixon line, my mother’s well-meaning agnostic friend just recently remarked that I may struggle to adjust to a secular educational environment after having been homeschooled and then having attended Baylor. For myself, I know that there can be frustration—but perhaps, maybe even a little pride—in feeling misunderstood.

I know enough about human nature and about myself to know that confirmation bias is not confined only to those who see the world differently than I do. It's something that we all struggle with, that I struggle with. I'm struck by how easy it is to see in others, and how difficult it is to see in ourselves. To be sure, confirmation bias is more acute in some than it is in others. Still, we all need help in that effort: to widen the aperture of our understanding, to have our views held up to scrutiny and reason, and to have people with standing in our lives identify our blind spots. Because, to paraphrase the British philosopher and poet Owen Barfield, we should be more interested in truth than victory.<sup>29</sup>

Simply being critical of Trump does not eliminate the dangers of partisanship and confirmation bias in the life of a Christian. Truly, divine intervention is the only thing that can restrain these natural inclinations. In the meantime, evangelicals who are resistant to the Trump administration must make sincere attempts to understand the concerns of the evangelical majority as well as to continue in meaningful engagement in contexts outside of politics.

### *Options for 2020*

In writing this thesis, several people have asked me how they ought to vote in 2020. That, I am afraid, I cannot answer. What I can offer are a few reflections on the options put before Christians in the coming months that, I hope, are not completely detached from either principle or pragmatism.

The first option is to vote for President Trump. But this will pose a difficult task for the voter. Although voting for Trump does not—and should not—commit a voter to openly supporting and defending Trump for the next four years, the forces of partisanship are strong. Even those who withheld public support for Trump in 2016 have become some of his most vocal apologists, going so far to legitimize instances of his coarse and

---

<sup>29</sup> Peter Wehner, "There Is No Christian Case for Trump," *The Atlantic*, January 30, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/01/there-no-christian-case-trump/605785/>.

disparaging rhetoric on more than one occasion.<sup>30</sup> To avoid being sucked into the vortex of competing loyalties, an evangelical who votes for Trump would need to be able to openly criticize Trump and Trump-supporting evangelical leaders when they wrong others (yes, even the people who do not like evangelicals). Of course, it is possible to vote for someone and articulate why while still lamenting the wrong. But it is an emotionally difficult task to truly stand apart from Republicans and Democrats alike and not begin to mistake political disagreement for persecution. The history of white evangelicals and the Republican Party should testify this much.

Moreover, it must also be considered that some of the extreme things that Trump has said are less frightening to conservatives because of his otherwise familiar political positions. In the same way, moderate Democrats are less likely to be addled by extreme statements from the far left. But evangelical Christians—Republicans and Democrats alike—must rise above their sympathies to hold fellow Christians to the highest standards of conduct, come what may. And yet, to hold such an impartial standard to one's own candidates would take Herculean efforts.

This brings us to the second option, which would be to vote for the Democratic candidate. For those convinced that President Trump has done more harm than good, this would be the most pragmatic option. However, choosing this option requires all of the same warnings and admonitions as that of the first. It is difficult to vote along party lines without activating the compulsion to loyalty. Surely a mass influx of white evangelicals moving towards the Democratic Party would result in the same problems posed by our present partisanship. Furthermore, such votes could mean affirming a party platform that

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

has historically expressed little, if not negative, interest on issues of religious liberty and ending abortion.

The final option would be to vote for an independent candidate. In some circles, the mere suggestion of voting for an unaffiliated candidate is met with a chuckle or even contempt. However, I would argue that voting for independents is the best way for evangelicals to re-enter into a healthy relationship with government. No, I do not believe that an independent could ever win the American presidency. The American system inevitably squeezes individual groups into one of two parties before election season. The votes of those who vote independently only count as a protest. But perhaps a protest is exactly what must happen to encourage integrity among the nation's leading candidates.

Consider this: candidates adapt themselves to their supporters. If a sizable number of voters refuse to support candidates who lack integrity (or hold disfavored political views or whatever else), candidates seeking to reclaim these sections of voters will emerge. The most groundbreaking politicians are often entrepreneurial, meaning that they attract new “markets” of voters. Donald Trump's success among blue-collar workers offers this lesson as a case in point. Neither major party will adjust its platform or primary system until it sees potential voters refusing to accept the existing options. In this way, votes for independents should not be discounted as wasted votes. Rather, they are signals that the major parties need reform—and the leverage for getting it.

### *Conclusion*

This thesis paints a very bleak picture of evangelicals and politics. At times during my research, I questioned whether it was even worth pursuing. *Why*, I have

wondered, *do I not concentrate on the good of evangelicalism? Why focus on the controversial parts when there is already so much criticism and disunity in the world?*

For me, the answer lies in my conviction that Christians are uniquely equipped to overcome the animosity corroding American political discourse. Through Christ, we are capable of offering the grace, forgiveness, and selflessness necessary to transcend the infighting, self-justifying and hypocrisy that corrupts (among many things) good government. And Christ has given us exactly what we need:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.<sup>31</sup>

Any politicized group—right or left—could be scrutinized and criticized as I have done to evangelicals in this thesis. But I have “picked on” evangelicals only because I believe that Christians stand on a unique foundation. Today (and this was not my conviction when I began this project), I am less concerned with who evangelicals vote for in 2020 than with whether they become ensnared by competing loyalties. We are “the salt of the earth” and “a city on a hill.”<sup>32</sup> We are “ambassadors for Christ” and “stars in the universe.”<sup>33</sup> As evangelical Christians, we believe that Christ makes us ministers of hope even in a world fraught with rage and misunderstanding. Our orientation towards the chaotic world of American politics, of all things, might just be a place to start.

---

<sup>31</sup> John 14:27 NIV

<sup>32</sup> Matt. 5:13-20 NIV

<sup>33</sup> 2 Cor. 5:20; Phil. 2:15 NIV

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- “2016 Time Series Study.” American National Election Studies. Accessed October 27 2019. <https://electionstudies.org/data-center/2016-time-series-study/>.
- “About.” My Faith Votes. Accessed December 14, 2019. <https://www.myfaithvotes.org/about>.
- “About the Faith & Freedom Coalition.” Accessed December 14, 2014. <https://www.ffcoalition.com/about/>.
- “Abortion,” *Christianity Today*. Accessed April 6 2020. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/topics/a/abortion/>.
- Bailey, Sarah Pulliam. “How Donald Trump is bringing Billy Graham’s complicated family back into White House circles.” *Washington Post*. January 12, 2017. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/01/12/how-donald-trump-is-bringing-billy-grahams-complicated-family-back-into-white-house-circles/>.
- Barnhart, Melissa. “Nearly 200 Evangelical Leaders Slam Christianity Today for Questioning their Christian Witness.” *The Christian Post*. December 22, 2019. <https://www.christianpost.com/news/nearly-200-evangelical-leaders-slam-christianity-today-for-questioning-their-christian-witness.html>.
- Bogel-Burroughs, Nicholas. “Christianity Today Editor Laments ‘Ethical Naïveté’ of Trump Backers.” *The New York Times*. January 2, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/02/us/christianity-today-mark-galli-evangelicals.html>.
- Bowman, Karlyn. “Abortion: Is Public Opinion Changing?” *Forbes*. January 15, 2020. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bowmanmarsico/2020/01/15/abortion-is-public-opinion-changing/#3e45cba9294b>.
- Brown, Ruth Murray. *For a “Christian America.”* Amherst. Prometheus Books. 2002.
- Bump, Philip. “The Expansive, Repetitive Universe of Trump’s Twitter Insults,” *The Washington Post*, August 20, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/08/20/expansive-repetitive-universe-trumps-twitter-insults/>.

- Camosy, Charles C. "Millennials Will Change Abortion Conversation: Column." *USA Today*. March 23, 2015.  
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2015/03/23/abortion-generation-demographics-choice-life-column/24900705/>.
- Chideya, Farai. "Trump's South Carolina Win Shows Evangelicals Aren't Necessarily Voting On Their Faith." *FiveThirtyEight*. February 22, 2016.  
<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/trumps-south-carolina-win-shows-evangelicals-arent-necessarily-voting-on-their-faith/>.
- Derrick, J.C. "Whom do evangelical insiders favor in 2016?" *World Magazine*. June 30, 2015.  
[https://world.wng.org/2015/07/whom\\_do\\_evangelical\\_insiders\\_favor\\_in\\_2016](https://world.wng.org/2015/07/whom_do_evangelical_insiders_favor_in_2016).
- "Donald Trump Speech at Liberty University." *CNN Transcripts*. January 18, 2016.  
<http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/160118/ath.01.html>.
- "Evangelical and Non-evangelical Voting & Views of Politics in America – Part 1." LifeWay Research. Accessed October 27 2019.  
<https://lifewayresearch.com/votingandpoliticalviews/>.
- "Evangelical and Non-evangelical Voting & Views of Politics in America – Part 2." LifeWay Research. Accessed October 27 2019.  
<https://lifewayresearch.com/votingandpoliticalviews/>.
- "Evangelical Leaders Call out Christianity Today President over Trump Editorial." *CBN News*. December 12, 2020.  
<https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2019/december/evangelical-leaders-call-out-christianity-today-president-over-trump-editorial>.
- FitzGerald, Frances. *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*. New York, Simon & Schuster. 2017.
- Galli, Mark. "Six Things To Do after the Supreme Court Decision on Gay Marriage." *Christianity Today*. June 26, 2015.  
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/june-web-only/6-things-to-do-after-supreme-court-gay-marriage-decision.html>.
- Galli, Mark. "Trump Should Be Removed from Office," *Christianity Today*, December 19, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/december-web-only/trump-should-be-removed-from-office.html>.
- Green, Emma. "Trump's Play to Win Evangelical Voters," *Atlantic*, June 21, 2016,  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/06/trumps-play-to-win-evangelical-voters/488075/>.

- Graham, Franklin. "My Response to Christianity Today." Facebook. December 19, 2019. <https://www.facebook.com/FranklinGraham/posts/2925457574177071>.
- Graham, Billy. *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham*. New York, HarperCollins, 1997.
- Griswold, Eliza. "Franklin Graham's Uneasy Alliance with Donald Trump." *New Yorker*. September 11, 2018. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/franklin-grahams-uneasy-alliance-with-donald-trump>.
- Hankins, Barry. *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America*. Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008.
- Hitchcock, William I. "How Dwight Eisenhower Found God in the White House." *History Stories*, History. 20 Mar. 2018. <https://www.history.com/news/eisenhower-billy-graham-religion-in-god-we-trust>.
- Horton, Michael. "Evangelicals Should be Deeply Troubled by Trump's Attempt to Mainstream Heresy." *Washington Post*. January 3, 2017. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/01/03/evangelicals-should-be-deeply-troubled-by-donald-trumps-attempt-to-mainstream-heresy/>.
- "Indiana governor Pence endorses Cruz for president." MSN. May 2, 2016. Wayback Machine. <https://web.archive.org/web/20160502101304/http://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/indiana-governor-to-endorse-cruz-for-president-media/ar-BBsqgZ9?ocid=ansmsnnews11>.
- "Indiana Primary Results." NBC News. May 5, 2016. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/primaries/IN>.
- Kidd, Thomas S. *Who is an Evangelical?* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019.
- Lamb, W. Scott. "35th anniversary of Reagan's 'I know you can't endorse me. But I endorse you' - to evangelicals." *Washington Times*. August 21, 2015. <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/aug/21/w-scott-lamb-this-day-in-us-history-reagans-endors/>.
- Margolis, Michele F. "Who Wants to Make America Great Again? Understanding Evangelical Support for Donald Trump." *Cambridge University Press* (2019): 1-30. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048319000208>.
- Martínez, Jessica and Gregory A. Smith. "How the Faithful Voted: A Preliminary 2016 Analysis." Pew Research Center. November 9 2016. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/>.

- Miller, Steven P. *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.
- Miller, Steven P. “The Evangelical Presidency: Reagan’s Dangerous Love Affair with the Christian Right.” Salon. 18 May 2014. [https://www.salon.com/2014/05/18/the\\_evangelical\\_presidency\\_reagans\\_dangerous\\_love\\_affair\\_with\\_the\\_christian\\_right/](https://www.salon.com/2014/05/18/the_evangelical_presidency_reagans_dangerous_love_affair_with_the_christian_right/).
- “Nevada Caucus Results.” NBC News. February 26, 2016. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/primaries/NV>.
- Nesmith, Bruce. *The New Republican Coalition: The Reagan Campaigns and White Evangelicals*. New York, Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1994.
- Novacic, Ines. “Why some African-American evangelicals are playing the Trump card.” CBS News. February 19 2016. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/why-some-african-american-evangelicals-are-playing-the-trump-card/>.
- “Operation Christmas Child (Fact Sheet),” Samaritan’s Purse, accessed December 14, 2019, <https://www.samaritanspurse.org/operation-christmas-child/operation-christmas-child-fact-sheet/>.
- Palmer, Anna. “Evangelicals road test 2016 strategy.” Politico. October 20, 2014. <https://www.politico.com/story/2014/10/evangelicals-2016-election-strategy-112050>.
- Peters, Jeremy W. and Elizabeth Dias, “Paula White, Newest White House Aide, Is a Uniquely Trumpian Pastor.” *New York Times*. November 2, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/02/us/politics/paula-white-trump.html>.
- “Press Release: My Faith Votes Launches National TV and Radio Campaign to Mobilize the Christian Votes in the 2016 Election, Saturating Christian [sic] Media,” My Faith Votes, October 3, 2016, <https://www.myfaithvotes.org/press-release/press-release-my-faith-votes-launches-national-tv-and-radio-campaign-to-mobilize-the-christian-votes-in-the-2016-election-saturating-christian-media>.
- “Remarks by President Trump at the 47th Annual March for Life.” The White House. January 24, 2020. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-47th-annual-march-life/>.
- Russonello, Giovanni. “South Carolina Voters Largely Evangelical and Conservative.” *New York Times*. Accessed December 14, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/live/south-carolina-nevada-2016-election/south-carolina-voters/>.

- Shellnutt, Kate and Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra. "Who's Who of Trump's 'Tremendous' Faith Advisers." *Christianity Today*. June 22, 2016.  
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/june-web-only/whos-who-of-trumps-tremendous-faith-advisors.html>.
- Sheer, Michael D. and Eileen Sullivan. "'Horseface,' 'Lowlife,' 'Fat, Ugly': How the President Demeans Women." *The New York Times*. October 16, 2018.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/16/us/politics/trump-women-insults.html>.
- Smerconish, Michael. "Reed: Trump Aligns with Evangelicals on Several Issues." October, 2015. CNN. Video File.  
<https://www.cnn.com/videos/tv/2015/10/17/exp-reed-on-donald-trump.cnn/video/playlists/2016-evangelicals/>.
- Smietana, Bob. "Many Who Call Themselves Evangelical Don't Actually Hold Evangelical Beliefs." LifeWay Research. December 6 2017.  
<https://lifewayresearch.com/2017/12/06/many-evangelicals-dont-hold-evangelical-beliefs/>.
- Smith, Gregory A. "Among White Evangelicals, Regular Churchgoers are the Most Supportive of Trump." Pew Research Center. April 26 2017.  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/26/among-white-evangelicals-regular-churchgoers-are-the-most-supportive-of-trump/>.
- Smith, Gregory A. "Many Evangelicals Favor Trump because He is Not Clinton." Pew Research Center. September 23 2016.  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/23/many-evangelicals-favor-trump-because-he-is-not-clinton/>.
- Smith, Gregory A. "Most White Evangelicals Satisfied with Trump's Initial Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak." Pew Research Center. March 19, 2020.  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/03/19/most-white-evangelicals-satisfied-with-trumps-initial-response-to-the-covid-19-outbreak/>.
- Stetzer, Ed and Andrew MacDonald. "Why Evangelicals Voted Trump: Debunking the 81%." *Christianity Today*. October 18 2018.  
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/october/why-evangelicals-trump-vote-81-percent-2016-election.html>.
- Sutton, Matthew Avery. *American Apocalypse*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2014.
- Taylor, Justin. "Stop Saying 81 Percent of White Evangelicals Vote for Trump (It Was Probably Less Than Half)." *The Gospel Coalition*. December 14 2018.  
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/stop-saying-81-white-evangelicals-vote-trump-probably-less-half/>.

- Thomson-DeVeaux, Amelia and Daniel Cox. "The Christian Right Is Helping Drive Liberals Away From Religion." *FiveThirtyEight*. September 18 2019. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-christian-right-is-helping-drive-liberals-away-from-religion/>.
- "The 2020 Project: Roadmap to Victory." The Faith and Freedom Coalition. Accessed December 14, 2019. <https://www.ffcoalition.com/the2020project/>.
- "The Pledge of Allegiance Cases." The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty. The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty. Accessed December 12, 2018. <https://www.becketlaw.org/case/pledge-allegiance-cases/>.
- The NOW Network. Accessed December 14, 2019. <https://www.thenownetwork.org/>.
- "*The Westminster Shorter Catechism*." The Westminster Presbyterian. Accessed April 6, 2020. <http://www.westminsterconfession.org/confessional-standards/the-westminster-shorter-catechism.php>.
- "Trump Campaign Announces Evangelical Executive Advisory Board." Trump. June 21, 2016. Wayback Machine. <https://web.archive.org/web/20160623232158/https://www.donaldjtrump.com/press-releases/trump-campaign-announces-evangelical-executive-advisory-board>.
- Trump, Donald J. (@realDonaldTrump). Twitter Post. December 20, 2019, 6:12 AM. <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1207997319821615105>.
- Trump, Donald J. (@realDonaldTrump). Twitter Post, October 23, 2019, 12:48 PM, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1187063301731209220?lang=en>.
- "Trump: 'I Could Stand In the Middle Of Fifth Avenue And Shoot Somebody And I Wouldn't Lose Any Voters.'" *Real Clear Politics*. January 23, 2016. [https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2016/01/23/trump\\_i\\_could\\_stand\\_in\\_the\\_middle\\_of\\_fifth\\_avenue\\_and\\_shoot\\_somebody\\_and\\_i\\_wouldnt Lose\\_any\\_voters.html](https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2016/01/23/trump_i_could_stand_in_the_middle_of_fifth_avenue_and_shoot_somebody_and_i_wouldnt Lose_any_voters.html).
- "Views About Abortion Among Evangelical Protestants by Religious Group." *Religion & Public Life*, Pew Research Center. 2014. <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/compare/views-about-abortion/by/religious-family/among/religious-tradition/evangelical-protestant/>.
- Wehner, Peter. "There Is No Christian Case for Trump." *The Atlantic*. January 30, 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/01/there-no-christian-case-trump/605785/>.

Williams, Daniel K. *Defenders of the Unborn: The Pro-Life Movement Before Roe v. Wade*. Oxford Scholarship Online, 2016.  
<https://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199391646.001.0001/acprof-9780199391646-chapter-10?rskey=AOz7GS&result=1>.

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