

ABSTRACT

The Pentateuch and Brass-Bound Gall: Huey P. Long and Religious Rhetoric

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Huey P. Long, governor of Louisiana from 1928-1932 and U.S. senator from 1932-1935, is not remembered by historians as a religious figure. In light of his outrageous personal behavior, power-mongering, and political corruption, it is easy to understand why. However, a closer inspection of the primary sources details a rich well of religious rhetoric that was employed across Huey P. Long's life and was especially concentrated in the latter half of his career. Not only was religious language used frequently by Long, in fact, forming the backbone of his "Share Our Wealth" platform, but a specifically spiritual image of "messiah" or "savior" was attached to his person. This thesis argues that, far from being an outlier in Long's repertoire of political tactics, religion and its influence was a major thread in his behavior and a favorite tool used throughout his career, regardless of any personal relationship with religion.

The Pentateuch and Brass-Bound Gall: Huey P. Long and Religious Rhetoric

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know that your encouragement was invaluable! Bradley, you are simply the best and I owe you so much for the last two years. Seriously. And last, but certainly not least (except in size), Everett. You are the prize at the end of a very long race and I say with all truth you are the primary reason I finished this work at all. Thanks for your constant companionship over many long days and nights, giving me reason to eat whatever I wanted, and for the promise of new beginnings.

DEDICATION

To Brad and Everett

The world is quiet here.

—Lemony Snicket

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

As the twentieth century dawned upon the state of Louisiana the landscape it illuminated was far from compelling. The landscape displayed a floundering, agriculturally based economy, widespread poverty, engrained socio-economic classes, and a local political system dictated by corruption. It was out of this chaos that the figure of Huey P. Long emerged. His political actions and personal ideology fundamentally divided Louisiana politics into the pre-Long and post-Long era, and created his own personal brand of political idealism called “Longism.” As a Louisiana native Long embodied an almost perfect set of characteristics to achieve success in statewide politics, which would eventually catapult him to the national level. It was these very characteristics that created extremely bifurcated perceptions of Long and mount significant problems for historians.

Huey P. Long’s political career was marked by an intentional appeal to the poverty stricken lower-class and plain-folk demographic, a political platform based almost solely on economic re-distribution, and a passionate hatred for anyone who stood against him. Coupled with his fiery temper, wild gesticulations, and unconventional behavior was a brilliant political mind, a steel-trap memory, a penchant for religious rhetoric, and a thirst for power that drove him to unprecedented success in a period of political upheaval. Arguably the context in which Long operated, his unique personality, and the peers with whom he interacted shaped and molded one of the most fascinating political narratives in Louisiana, and perhaps even American history. His narrative offers

a plethora of studies across disciplines, including political and rhetorical analysis, psychological and sociological assessments, as well historical and religious studies.

A Concise Biography of Huey P. Long

Born on August 30, 1893 in Winn Parish, one of the poorest parishes in Louisiana, Huey Pierce Long was the seventh of nine children born to Hugh and Caledonia Long. Despite the overwhelming poverty present in Winn Parish, Long's family was considerably wealthier than their surrounding neighbors and placed a great emphasis on literacy, especially stressing literature and Biblical studies.¹ As a young man Long was described as "belligerent, ornery...disputatious, officious, bossy, [and] a show off."² Yet he also displayed, at a very young age, remarkable political acumen, an almost photographic memory, and an un-canny ability to persuade people through articulate oratory.³ Throughout a tumultuous high-school and college career Huey P. Long floundered from one set of studies to the next, with the most steady part of his life being a long-standing career as a salesman of a plethora of items and plans, where he continued to perfect his art of persuasion. At the age of seventeen he met his wife, Rose, and commenced a bumpy courtship, which resulted in their wedding in April 1913. Rose later recalled that by the time they were married Long had "confided that he had already mapped out his entire political career."⁴ He intimated that he would first win a minor

¹ Richard D. White, Jr. *Kingfish; The Reign of Huey P. Long*, (New York: Random House: 2006), 4-7.

² T. Harry Williams, *Huey Long*, (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1969), 26.

³ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

⁴ William Ivy Hair, *The Kingfish and His Realm; The Life and Times of Huey P. Long*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 44.

state office, then move to the governorship of Louisiana, progressing then to national politics as a senator from which he would launch, and win, his campaign for president of the United States.⁵ He would achieve all but the last of these steps in his lifetime.

After a short stint at Tulane Law school, from which he did not graduate but did pass the bar exam, Long began a brief, but successful career as a practicing lawyer in Shreveport, Louisiana. However, in 1918, just weeks before his twenty-fifth birthday, Long announced his candidacy for a recently available Railroad Commission seat. Using the base he had built up during his traveling salesman days Long was able to generate enough support and votes to successfully win his first bid at a political office. He won this office on the back of a political message that would become the central theme for the rest of his career. He, and he alone, was the resistance to the centralized wealth of major corporations and the lone voice for the welfare of the common man.⁶

After almost five years as a member of the Railroad Commission, a challenge to the powerful Standard Oil company under his belt, the accumulation of a significant constituent base, as well as a significant amount of political enemies, due in large to his aggressive behavior, Huey P. Long announced his bid for governor of Louisiana on August 30th of 1923. Despite losing this race Long was able to garner name recognition as well as discover a campaign methodology of rousing oration, verbal attacks, and a revolutionary economic agenda that would become his trademark. Far from being discouraged by this defeat Long approached the 1927-1928 gubernatorial campaign, three years later, with gusto. Running on a steady stream of stump speeches, attacks on his

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 88-89.

less-than-compelling opponents and an overwhelming appeal to the poor and plain-folk of Louisiana, Huey P. Long was elected as the governor of Louisiana in 1928.⁷

Over the next five years as governor Long enacted numerous state-wide policies, instituted several large-scale civic projects, specifically new roads and bridges, survived an impeachment attempt in 1929, was re-elected as governor and then U.S. senator by 1932. Over this period Long deeply divided Louisiana between his supporters and his enemies. For every ally he earned by building a road or giving free textbooks to a local school district, he earned an enemy by his sense of political retribution. It was not enough for Long to simply win an argument or debate, or pass a law against opposition. He desired to humiliate his adversaries, often destroying their personal businesses, raising their taxes, or exacting revenge on their families by firing them from government jobs.⁸ Furthermore, Long did not attempt to hide his quest for power, often boasting of what he was able to do in the name of government. This language often led to accusations of fascism or totalitarianism, neither of which Long strove to suppress. According to one source Long once stated that “a perfect democracy can come close to looking like a dictatorship - a democracy in which the people are so satisfied they have no complaint.”⁹ This polarizing behavior created a brand for himself that would eventually move outside the borders of the state and into the realm of national politics.

Against the backdrop of the Great Depression and having been elected to Congress, Huey P. Long attacked his time as a U.S. senator with a vengeance. Long

⁷ White, 44.

⁸ Ibid., xi.

⁹ Ibid., xii.

introduced a controversial economic-redistribution program known as “Share Our Wealth” that proposed liquidating the nation’s wealthiest estates into capital that would be spread to the bottom half of the populace allowing them the ability to own a home, car and radio. By 1934-1935 Long had earned himself a reputation as a troublemaker, willing to resort to outrageous methods to achieve success or acquire attention, and had openly challenged President Franklin Roosevelt on multiple occasions. Simultaneously running the state of Louisiana through a proxy governor, O.K. Allen, and advocating for political reform in Washington D.C., Long expanded his political empire, often garnering himself the titles “fascist” and “dictator.”¹⁰ However, Long’s inevitable bid for the presidency and the ramifications of this move were prevented by an assassin’s bullet. On September 8, 1935 Long was attending a late-night state senate session in Baton Rouge when Dr. Carl Weis fired a bullet into Long’s stomach which resulted in a botched surgery and his death two days after on the 10th of September.¹¹ Though Long’s death cut short any chance of “Share Our Wealth” becoming a reality his assassination produced a legacy that still exists within Louisiana politics to this day. Huey P. Long’s through his personality, his policies, and his state-wide reforms and building projects, left an indelible mark on the state of Louisiana and created a fascinating historical and political study.

¹⁰ Hair, 276 -279.

¹¹ Ibid., 324-325.

Related Historiography

Biographies

The majority of historiography surrounding Huey P. Long falls into the category of biography. For the purposes of this story only a selected few will be discussed for their contribution and importance to the field. The backbone of this genre is T. Harry Williams's work *Huey Long*. Published in 1969 it remains to this day the most extensive and longest biography of Long clocking in at just under 850 pages. Williams, a long time scholar of Long's life, and of southern culture and politics in general, attempted in this biography to make sense of the contradictory behaviors and opinions surrounding Long's life and career. For this reason the work takes on a very apologetic tone, moving between convicting Long and defending him alternately as Williams saw fit. The primary criticism of this work as a biography is that it attempts to explain Long's behavior in ways that are unnecessary as a scholar. However, to date there has not been a work that so accurately explores the breadth and depth of Long's life and career and no work or study of Long's life is complete without using Williams's work as reference.

In this same category, published in 1997, is William Hair's work *The Kingfish and His Realm*. Hair approaches Huey P. Long's life from a political perspective without slipping into political analysis. He supplements his discussion of Long's policies with anecdotes and primary source material that creates a more complete picture of Long than other biographies. Hair's work is perhaps the most scholarly of the biographical texts, attempting to walk the line between historical fact and fiction in a way that allows readers the opportunity to form their own opinion of Long and his career. Hair's work is valuable

to this and other studies of Long for its timely revisiting of many of the sources T. Harry Williams used, and its adherence to scholarly attempts of un-biased writing.

The latest biography written on the life of Huey P. Long is Richard White's *Kingfish: The Reign of Huey P. Long*, published in 2006. This trade press book is perhaps the best concise version of Long's life and political career. It covers the entire span of Long's life and time in office in just over 270 pages, giving readers an overview of the traits that made Long such a fascinating character. White's work is valuable due to its impressive source base, which include the most recent compilation of theses, dissertations, articles, and books about, or relating to Long. However, White's work does fall prey to a common pitfall regarding biographies about Huey P. Long, which is the desire to explain who or what he really was. As this is a trade press book the sensationalism found in it is to be expected yet it prevents White from adding a new perspective to the field. Nonetheless, as the most recent biographical work and considering its very impressive source base, it is a valuable contribution to the study of Huey P. Long.

Other notable, if less constructive, biographies of Long include the earliest manuscript of its type, Webster Smith's *The Kingfish; The Curious Tale of the Life and Adventures of Huey P. Long*, Harnett T. Kane's biting critical work *Louisiana Hayride; The American Rehearsal for Dictatorship*, and Glen Jeansonne's brief overview entitled *Messiah of the Masses; Huey P. Long and the Great Depression*.¹² Each of these works,

¹² Webster Smith, *The Kingfish: A Biography of Huey P. Long*, (G.P. Putnam's Sons: New York, 1960); Harnett T. Kane, *Louisiana Hayride: The American Rehearsal for Dictatorship*, (William Morrow: New York, 1941); and Glen Jeansonne, *Messiah of the Masses: Huey P. Long and the Great Depression*, (Longman: New York, 1993).

while very pertinent for certain perspectives or arguments regarding Long, lacks the overall coherency and applicability that the aforementioned three contain. As such they are useful to the study but in a much more limited capacity.

Political Analysis

Second only to the biographical category are the amount of works studying Huey P. Long's political actions and the consequences of those actions. Two of the most important studies regarding Long's political career on the state level are Perry H. Howard's *Political Tendencies in Louisiana* and Allan P. Sindler's work *Huey Long's Louisiana: State Politics 1920-1952*. Both of these books are valuable for their analysis of the political context, climate, and voting patterns, as well as tracking the behavior of the politicians associated with Long, before, during, and after his time in office. Howard and Sindler are both excellent scholars providing key analysis about statewide political trends keeping in mind the context of southern political behavior. The only issue with these works, taken from a historiographical point of view, is that both are rather dated, with Sindler publishing in 1956 and Howard in 1977. However, given the nature of both of these studies, specifically their qualitative data which is static over time, these two works are still highly relevant and pertinent to this study, though newer and further research would not be unwelcome.

When it comes to examining Huey P. Long's political influence on the national level two works, among others, are particularly important. The first is Arthur M. Schlesinger's *The Politics of Upheaval*, published in 1960, which examines Long's political behavior in against the backdrop of the Great Depression and in relationship to President Franklin Roosevelt's actions in the White House. This comparison is especially

helpful in realizing the extent to which Long's political presence was felt and reacted to which in turn provides scope for his "Share Our Wealth" movement. It also allows scholars to understand Long's success in light of the economic context that he, and other politicians, were operating. In this same vein, published in 1982, is Alan Brinkley's monograph *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* which gives scope for Long's political influence. By providing a comparison between the "Radio Priest," Father Coughlin, and Huey P. Long, Brinkley further articulates the unrest present in this political era and the extent to which dissenters, such as Long and Coughlin, could achieve success. Though parts of Brinkley's work are biographical in nature his primary arguments are political in definition and pertain to the actions of the federal government, voters, and constituents during this period.

Rhetorical Analysis

In light of Huey P. Long's skills at oration it is no surprise that the pertinent historiography contains a section dealing with rhetorical analysis. The two primary works that look specifically at Long's speeches and speech patterns are Paul C. Gaske's work "Huey Pierce Long" in Bernard K. Duffy and Halford R. Ryan's *American Orators of the Twentieth Century*, published in 1987, and Harold Mixon's piece "Huey P. Long's 1927-1928 Gubernatorial Primary Campaign; A Case Study in the Rhetoric of Agitation" found in Carl M. Louge and Howard Dorgan's *The Oratory of Southern Demagogues* which was published in 1981. Both of these works highlight similar techniques and methodologies found in Long's speeches and radio addresses that are immensely helpful to this study, which, as we will see, is focused on Huey P. Long's religious rhetoric. Both studies allow historians to work with terms that they may have been previously

unfamiliar with but are extremely applicable to the primary documents. For example, Mixon's work focuses on Long's earliest successful campaign, 1927-1928, applying the terminology of "polarization" and "solidification" to his stump speeches, which allow historians to then look for these patterns and draw conclusions from them.¹³ In the same way, Gaske classifies Long's later language as "confrontational not conciliatory" and applies the framework of "demagogic discourse structure."¹⁴ Both of these sets of terms and their applied meanings give historians new tools with which to do their research and, as stated previously, apply these methods to the primary source material. Given Long's use of oratory, and his success at it, familiarity with rhetoric analysis is imperative and allows for a much better understanding of the framework into which Long's radio, stump, gubernatorial, and Senate speeches operate.

Fiction

Though pertaining only tangentially to this particular study it is worth mentioning the works of fiction that are based on Huey P. Long's life and career. Larry L. King and Ben Z. Grant's *The Kingfish: A One-Man Play Loosely Depicting the Life & Times of the Late Huey P. Long of Louisiana*, written in 1979, is perhaps the closest representation of the historical Long. The play depicts Long in much the way he would have actually looked, wearing his white suit, smoking a cigar, all the while gesticulating and

¹³Harold Mixon, "Huey P. Long 1927-1926 Gubernatorial Primary Campaign: A Case Study in the Rhetoric of Agitation," in *The Oratory of Southern Demagogues*, eds. Carl M Louge and Howard Dorgan, (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1981), 181; 200.

¹⁴ Paul C. Gaske, "Huey Pierce Long, Jr.; 1893-1935, Governor of Louisiana, U.S. Senator," in *American Orators of the Twentieth Century; Critical Studies and Sources*, eds. Bernard K. Duffy and Halford R. Ryan, (Greenwood Press: New York, 1987), 294.

exaggerating his way through the two acts. *The Kingfish* moves through Long's life with a specific focus on his political behavior in monologue format ending at his death by assassination. Though some artistic liberties have been taken, such as Long's character responding to current political events or explaining his actions in light of the last seventy years etc., the majority of the play holds to the basic facts of Long's life.

Though based even more loosely on Huey P. Long's life than the aforementioned play, Robert Penn Warren's novel *All The King's Men* (1946) and its main character, Willie Stark, is the most famous of all the fictional representations of Long. Though there are very few identifiable facts or historical timelines in Penn's work, the overall attitude of Long, including his ruthlessness and narcissism, are easily identifiable in Penn's southern, corrupt yet somehow identifiable, politician Willie Stark. Other works of fiction which are considered by literary scholars to have their main character based on Long include Hamilton Basso's *Cinnamon Seed* (1943), Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here* (1935), John Dos Passos's *Number One* (1943) and Adria Locke Langley's *A Lion Is in the Streets* (1946). Each of these works includes a character that imbibes the spirit of Long in some form or fashion, from his fascist-like tendencies to his over-confident political swagger, to his oratorical smoothness or his sharp political wit. Though not given a prominent place in this study each of these works provides a glimpse into how Long is remembered and utilized in works of fiction.¹⁵

¹⁵ Keith Perry, *The Kingfish in Fiction; Huey P. Long and the Modern American Novel*. (Louisiana University Press, Baton Rouge, 2004).

The Thesis

This thesis seeks to illuminate a section of Huey P. Long's life and political career that has been previously overlooked, or only given a cursory glance, by scholarship - his religious behavior and rhetoric. It argues that far from being irrelevant or tangential to Long's methodology, religious rhetoric was, in fact, absolutely fundamental in his "Share Our Wealth" movement and played a very influential role throughout Long's life, shaping his political platform and becoming the backbone to many of his oratorical speeches and arguments. Though historically Huey P. Long is not remembered as an overtly religious man, due largely to contradictions between his behavior and his language, this thesis argues that religious ideology, motifs, and rhetoric played just as central a role in Long's life as did other recognized factors, such as his personal ambition or sense of economic disadvantage.

Sources and Methodology

This thesis, while relying on the expansive base of secondary historiography available, primarily seeks to add an important missing piece to the scholarship on Huey P. Long. As such, a large portion of this paper relies on primary sources associated directly with Long in order to validate the central argument; that religious rhetoric played a far more important role in Long's political career than is discussed by scholarship. In light of this, the thesis relies heavily on Long's personally published newspaper *The Louisiana Progress*, and its later renamed version *The American Progress* as primary sources. They are extensions of Long's political platform and his main source of printed support and propaganda spanning from 1930 – 1935. As such they are invaluable tools in understanding Huey P. Long's personal development of his religious persona and the

extent to which he was comfortable being associated with religious ideology. For certain sections relating to Long's 1927-28 campaign the thesis also relies on material found in *The New Orleans Times Picayune* as Long had yet to establish any printed source base of his own. In addition to these primary sources this thesis also uses Long's autobiography *Every Man a King* and his supposal novel *My First Days in the White House* as further examples to explore for religious rhetoric. Given the narrow scope of this thesis, and the amount of material available to researchers, the primary sources mentioned above provide ample evidence with which to work.

Body Chapter One

This first body chapter, entitled "Church, Cottolene, and Campaigns: The Early Intersections of Religion in Huey P. Long's Life" examines the ways the Long's early life and burgeoning political career came into contact with religion and religiosity. It argues that Long not only interacted with religious ideas from a young age but also experimented with religious rhetoric and persuasion from his early days as a salesman well into his career as governor. It also expresses the lack of clarity that much of Long's religious behavior displayed in his early political performance arguing that this dramatically changed when Long takes office as a U.S. senator.

Body Chapter Two

The second chapter, "Choose the Way of God or the Way of Blood: The Religious Rhetoric of Huey P. Long" focuses exclusively on Long's usage of religious oratory as connected to his "Share Our Wealth" program. It breaks Long's language down into three categories, explicit, general, and symbolic, in order to best understand

the ways in which he used the language or was associated with religious symbols or motifs. This chapter argues that Long's reliance and usage of religious terminology was far more widespread and specific than scholarship has previously acknowledged or examined.

Body Chapter Three

The final body chapter, entitled "One With God Is A Majority": The Deification of Huey P. Long," examines the ways in which Long was perceived, and after his assassinations remembered, in religious ways. This chapter utilizes primary sources from a wide selection of Long's supporters, all of whom associate Long with religious figures, ideologies, and causes. It argues that despite discrepancies in Long's behavior, he was widely regarded as a religious and righteous figure by those who supported him and his cause, making the presence of religion and religious rhetoric that more important to his life as a whole.

CHAPTER TWO

Church, Cottolene, and Campaigns: The Early Intersections of Religion in Huey P. Long's Life

Introduction

Huey P. Long, governor of Louisiana from 1928-1932 and U.S. Senator from 1932-1935, was perhaps one of the most complex individuals to step into the realm of local and eventually national politics. Simultaneously saint and sinner Long is remembered in the starkest of terms, which poses significant problems and questions for historians. Harnett T. Kane's *Louisiana Hayride* portrays Long as a despot who "was the first American demagogue to become a national threat; the first to clutch and use with machine-gun ruthlessness the current tools of mass propaganda and the instruments of violence, including state and national militia."¹ Yet, another biographer, Richard White, argues that "Huey Long did more good for the people of Louisiana than any politician before or since."² Whatever one's particular opinion of Long may be, one thing is for certain, he was, at his core, a polarizing figure about whom it was impossible to be ambivalent about. Yet as political analyst Alan Sandler articulates "most judgments of [Long] whether derived from adulation or detestation, are essentially one dimensional."³

¹ Harnett T. Kane, *Louisiana Hayride: The American Rehearsal for Dictatorship, 1928-1940*, (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, 1941), 4.

² Richard D. White, Jr. *Kingfish; The Reign of Huey P. Long*, (New York: Random House, 2006), x.

³ Allan P. Sandler, *Huey Long's Louisiana; State Politics, 1920-1952*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1956), 98.

One of the primary dimensions that has been overlooked by historians has been that of religious behavior. This first chapter explores the early life and political career of Huey P. Long, specifically highlighting the interaction of religion and politics in his life. It argues that Long's interaction with religion, and later, religious rhetoric, has not been comprehensively examined by historians and that, though convoluted, there is a relationship throughout his life and political career that was vital to his success and legacy. It would be erroneous to assume that this chapter will illuminate any startling new aspects of Long's character. However, it does seek to articulate the threads of religion found in the primary and secondary literature, with a specific focus on the interaction of religion and religious rhetoric as related to his political ideology, career, and framework.

Religion and Childhood

Perhaps nothing is more fascinating to historians (and humanity in general) than origin stories. In them we seek to find the buried truths and overlooked keys that allow us to understand the behavior of the subject. Though this practice may be at times speculative in nature, for Huey P. Long it is very productive, and even vital, in understanding his personhood and political career. Born in Winn Parish, Louisiana on August 30, 1893 Huey P. Long was the seventh, of nine, children of Huey P. Sr. (known as Hugh) and Caledonia Long.⁴ According to Long's first and foremost biographer, T. Harry Williams, though Winn Parish was among the most impoverished areas of Louisiana, "very few families in Winn owned more land than the Longs."⁵ Though Huey

⁴ T. Harry Williams, *Huey Long*, (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1969): 26; William Ivy Hair, *The Kingfish and His Realm; The Life and Times of Huey P. Long*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 24.

⁵ Williams, 21.

P. Long would often hearken back to his roots of poverty, the fact remains that Long's family was far from ordinary. According to scholar William Hair, the Long family was perceived as "upper crust."⁶ Among the first to suggest that Huey P. Long's family and thus upbringing was not as simple as he often claimed, Williams also argued that the Long family "were among the literary elite."⁷ As a young child and adolescent Long was exposed to Shakespeare, Poe, and Dickens, as well as other classics. Alongside these works Long also was known to have memorized passages from *The Count of Monte Cristo*, was drawn to the revenge the main character meted out to his enemies, and paid special attention to the works of John Ridpath, specifically his *History of the World*.⁸ Long would later quote and use long passages from Ridpath, according to White, because of Ridpath's stressing of "the crucial role of powerful leaders in world affairs" and the deplorable picture it painted of "the social evil ingrained in concentrated wealth."⁹ Even as a U.S. senator much later in life Long displayed his copy of Ridpath's work prominently on his shelf in Washington D.C.¹⁰ However, the most frequently read text, in large part due to his mother, was the Bible.¹¹ Though almost every biographer of Long records this fact, the majority neglect to account for the impact the Bible might have had on Long. Although his exposure to religion as a child and young man was largely forced upon him by his mother, he clearly retained a significant amount of scripture and later

⁶ Hair, 27.

⁷ Williams, 21.

⁸ White, 7.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 33.

¹¹ Williams, 21; Hair, 31; White, 7.

recognized its power. As this paper explores in the second chapter it was not the classics, nor even Ridpath's words that Long based his national "Share Our Wealth" program on but Biblical principles. Quite clearly, as is demonstrated throughout the course of Long's life, religiosity did not interest Long but clearly something about the use of religious rhetoric did.

The majority of scholarship argues that, due in large part to his mother's influence, Huey P. Long was exposed to religious life for much of his childhood and young adult life. The Long family regularly attended the local First Baptist Church almost every time the doors were open, including revivals, Sunday school, and extemporaneous prayer services.¹² As with almost every other aspect of Long's life, his religious upbringing and participation were fraught with contradictions. Richard White argues that much, if not all, of Long's religious behavior was coerced through his mother and was constantly rebelled against by Long.¹³ William Hair agrees with this sentiment by stating that though Long would choose to be baptized and become a regular member of the First Baptist Church and would later state that "I was, under compulsion, a regular attendant at all religious ceremonies."¹⁴ This type of defiance is consistent with Long's character, both as a child and as adult, being described as "bright, outspoken, aggressively self-confident, and forever seeking the center of attention."¹⁵ T. Harry Williams describes Long as a curiosity in Winnfield, constantly seeking "intellectual

¹² Hair, 33.

¹³ White, 6.

¹⁴ Hair, 33.

¹⁵ White, 7.

stimulation” and “knowledge of the larger society around him.”¹⁶ This peculiarity, in combination with an aggressively narcissistic personality, set Long apart from an early age. A visiting lawyer to Winnfield related that once a traveling circus came to town, holding the town’s attention with its display of wild animals, particularly elephants. A twelve-year old Huey P. Long, apparently angered at the lack of attention, ran out into the street, picked up a stone, and threw at the elephants.¹⁷ In the words of one biographer, “the boy was a perfect portrait of the man to follow.”¹⁸ It is arguable then, that Long’s relationship with religion would be defined by how he could manipulate or exploit it and not by a perceived need or desire to join an organization. This behavior surface later as antagonism towards anything that took attention away from his person.

Whether Huey P. Long was sincere in his religious behavior as a child is questionable. Nonetheless, as a young adult Long declared to his mother his intention to become a minister. Long’s mother had often stated what an effective and powerful preacher she believed her son could be, most likely due to his uncanny ability with rhetoric and oration, and not due to religious zeal.¹⁹ Hair goes so far as to call this belief in her son a “self-deluding tendency of parental love” especially given Long’s pre-disposition and nature.²⁰ However, this is not to say that Long did not take pleasure in and even, as he grew older, willingly participate in some aspects of church-life. He was noted to have enjoyed singing, including group and choir-like events. He spent a good

¹⁶ Williams, 31.

¹⁷ Ibid., 26.

¹⁸ White, 7.

¹⁹ Williams, 41.

²⁰ Hair, 34.

deal of time studying the technicalities of preaching and the methods of discourse used by local preachers.²¹ Yet, scholarship agrees that much, if not all of this behavior, was a formality, without any real heart. Williams writes, “he never had any intention of becoming a man of the cloth. On several occasions, it is true, he spoke about entering the ministry – he must have noticed that preachers could influence people and exert power – but he was doing no more than toying with the idea.”²² In most respects this keen observation is made evident. After leaving home to pursue more education Long abandoned the idea of becoming a minister and rarely attended any church services.

Though the importance and power of rhetoric and communication would stay with Long from his childhood to his death, and in fact be what he predicated much of his political career on, he would look for ways to use these skills outside the realm of the church.²³ With the evidence of Long’s character and his actions it is easy to dismiss his religious behavior and exposure as a child and adolescent as nothing more than rote deed. And yet, arguably the contact with and influence of religion as a young child played an imperative role in Long’s life. As this paper argues, without the knowledge and use of Scripture afforded him by his mother, the latter half of Long’s political career, including his “Share Our Wealth” program, would have little to no basis. His ability to quote numerous passages of scriptures of impressive lengths was as much a tribute to his early religious exposure as to his near-photographic memory. Throughout his political career Long was known to keep a Bible or two near him almost at all time, and Hair describes

²¹ Williams, 41.

²² Ibid.

²³ Hair, 35.

this “method of reading and retaining Scripture...[as] a glimpse of Huey Long’s strange inner conflicts.”²⁴ Just as likely to abuse God’s name in a string of profanity as he was to meticulously copy Scripture verses down or base an immensely successful political program off of Biblical principles, Long was at best difficult to read and at worst an almost irreparably fragmented personality making conclusions hard to come by. Though it may be difficult to determine what Huey P. Long personally believed regarding religion and religious expression, there are clear veins of evidence found in his political career and rhetoric.

Religion and the Campaign of 1927-28

Late in her life, Huey P. Long’s wife, Rose, reminisced over the single-mindedness of her husband when it came to his perceived destiny. She described Long as laying out his political game plan stating, prior to any electoral bid, that he would “win a minor state office, then become governor of Louisiana, then United States Senator, and finally president.”²⁵ After several failed career attempts, including law school, a traveling salesman position, and with a seat on the Railroad Commission (his first political win) under his belt, Long threw himself into the realm of state-wide politics with gusto.²⁶

There is evidence that Long used religious rhetoric prior to his career as a politician, for example, historian Stan Opotowsky states “he [Long] became a traveling salesman, peddling a cooking oil known as Cottolone. He later told reporter Hermann Deutsch, ‘If I couldn’t convinced the woman I also used the Bible on them, showing

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Williams, 12.

²⁶ Hair, 86.

where the Lord had forbidden the Israelites to use anything from the flesh of swine food, and how cottonseed oil, seeing it was a vegetable product, was just bound to be pure.”²⁷ These stories are rare and the primary material recounting them is scarce, however, this particular insight offers a glimpse yet again of Long’s use of, and perhaps reliance, on religious rhetoric. In September 1924, days after his thirtieth birthday, Long put his long-term plans into action and announced his candidacy for governor of Louisiana. Although this election proved a dismal failure for him (he finished in last place) he found the taste of politics exactly what his already whetted appetite craved.²⁸ In fact, he would later state that “once disappointed over a political undertaking I could never cast it from my mind.”²⁹ His half-hearted attempts at other jobs and schools are evidence that his motivation was not success in general, but specifically success that brought power and prestige. Though the election of 1924 left him bereft of office, it did not in any way satiate his desire for political office. Perhaps more motivated than ever, Huey P. Long entered the 1928 gubernatorial election with gusto. The 1927-1928 election provides an interesting, yet convoluted, study regarding the relationship of Long and religious rhetoric.³⁰ Harold Mixon, a rhetorical analyst, argues that this election, perhaps more than

²⁷ Stan Opotowsky, *The Longs of Louisiana*, (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1960), 34.

²⁸ White, 18.

²⁹ Sindler, 99.

³⁰ Though this election offers a limited amount of primary source material it is an effective base to explore Long’s first attempts at employing religious rhetoric in the political arena.

the later two, “earned him [Long] the title of ‘demagogue’ and established his habit of using the rhetoric of agitation.”³¹

Aided by the impotency of his opponents, current governor Oramel H. Simpson and Louisiana Congressman Riley J. Wilson, Huey P. Long was able to create a persona for himself as the candidate of the people. In order to secure his election Long began to identify himself with the marginalized and disenfranchised of Louisiana, which had not been previously done by a state-wide candidate. Another rhetorical analyst, Paul Gaske, argues that Long’s simple and direct speech was specifically tailored to his audiences across the state.³² Estimated at a fourth-grade reading level, his speeches played to the “confrontational, not conciliatory” and were designed to appeal to the crowd as human being and not as intellectuals.³³ Long focused on arousing emotion within his would-be constituents, working especially hard to create a sense of injustice against the treatment of the lower classes of Louisiana. Using his training as a salesman, Long also tailored his speeches to specific audiences, focusing on the local and state issues that would matter the most to whomever he was addressing.³⁴ According to White, Long created a relationship with the common folk of rural Louisiana by sprinkling his stump speeches with phrases like “slick as polecat grease,” “more trouble than a boat can haul,” and “as

³¹ Harold Mixon, “Huey P. Long’s 1927-1926 Gubernatorial Primary Campaign: A Case Study in the Rhetoric of Agitation,” in *The Oratory of Southern Demagogues*, eds. Carl M. Louge and Howard Dorgan, (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1981), 175-176.

³² Paul C. Gaske, “Huey Pierce Long, Jr.; 1893-1935, Governor of Louisiana, U.S. Senator,” in *American Orators of the Twentieth Century; Critical Studies and Sources*, eds. Bernard K. Duffy and Halford R. Ryan, (Greenwood Press: New York, 1987), 293.

³³ *Ibid.*, 294.

³⁴ Mixon, 186-187.

hungry as a seed tick,” using local vernacular with skill.³⁵ These colloquialisms would often be accompanied with religious stories and terms, although as will be subsequently demonstrated through the following chapter, Long did not solidify his religious base until later in his political career. Nonetheless, drawing on his excellent memory and intense exposure to the Bible and religious language, Long began a budding usage of religious rhetoric within the 1927-1928 campaign.

The use of scriptural idioms, stories, and rhetoric first emerged within Huey P. Long’s first gubernatorial campaign, and would become staples of his subsequent campaigns and agendas. However, the complexity, bordering on cumbersomeness, of these incidents leaves much to be desired in the way of conclusions. Long clearly understood that spirituality and emotionality were tangible signs and distinctions between classes. In light of this he clearly sought to emote and gain influence by using religious references, yet examples from this period display Long’s struggle in deciding how best to use this specific rhetoric. One example of his use of religious imagery published in the New Orleans *Times Picayune* was Long’s description of a political enemy as “garbed in the robes of pharaoh’s daughter and [going] into the bulrushes of Simpson.”³⁶ On the surface this descriptor appears ridiculous. Long was speaking against the incumbent Governor Simpson and his advisors to rural Louisiana voters using a story about Egyptian kings and queens. However, because the terminology was in some way familiar, because most Louisianans during this period had undergone some exposure to the Biblical narrative, and had in all likelihood, been practicing identification with Biblical

³⁵ White, 27.

³⁶ New Orleans *Times Picayune*, December 10, 1927.

characters since infancy, they empathized with the metaphor. Clearly Long did not have to be religious or believe in his metaphors to use the language yet he realized that by emphasizing the “domination of heart over mind,” as Gaske articulates, he could win voters who valued the raw emotions of hyper-spiritualized language of the common man over the intellectualism of the elite.³⁷ How better to combat and insult the image of the intellectual, wealthy, urban, elite than with simple, enthusiastic, religious language? Long’s religious language gave him a powerful and piercing weapon that appealed to a power that went beyond slander and personal insult, although he frequently combined the two. In using this type of rhetoric Long rarely stayed within the confines of traditional Scripture use but often used allusions out of context, as with the reference cited above.

In the 1927-1928 campaign Huey P. Long used scripture references that were often archetypal and almost mythical in nature. By hearing, in the previous story, most likely the story of Moses, readers and listeners attached themselves automatically to the story, but the actual message of Long’s Biblical language actually appears unclear. Listeners might have understood the Pharaoh character to be evil due to his slaughter of children but his daughter was supposed to fill the kind and generous role in saving Moses’ life. Long, however, equated the daughter with his opponent Simpson. Arguably, some sort of appeal was there, perhaps an instinctual pull to affirm one’s identity with Long because he was using religious language, but when the reader, or listener, stopped to dissect the use of scripture it appeared jumbled, misused, and cited only to support Long’s agenda. Although this trend of using religious rhetoric to support his own political agenda would continue, Huey P. Long would become much more specific and coherent

³⁷ Gaske, 294.

in his usage. He would retain the practice of utilizing sentiment rather than intellect, having established this practice as a success during his first bid at becoming governor, and he would also refine the art of subjugating religious language to his rhetorical power.

Although the 1927-1928 campaign arguably established Huey P. Long's relationship with religious language and his use of it as a powerful weapon, it also provides historians with further evidence of the complications and inconsistencies of Long's relationship with religion and spirituality as a whole. William Hair describes Long's struggle to balance the Catholic and Protestant interests within Louisiana. "Four years earlier, in his first try for the governorship, Huey had learned that contradicting himself – for example, by taking one position before a Catholic audience and another when speaking Protestants – was apt to be reported in the city press and spread over the state."³⁸ To get around this problem and its potential political backlash, Long would begin to appeal to the crowd on the basis of religious solidarity at the beginning of the rally or speech before the reporters, who could expose him later, were prepared and taking notes.³⁹ Hair argues that the lesson that Long learned from these events was not one of integrity but one of ingenuity. For example, confidential oral reports used in almost every major work regarding Huey P. Long tell a pertinent story regarding this shift. While campaigning in southern Louisiana, he was warned by a political strategist to begin to appeal to voters as Catholics despite his own status as a Baptist. Long proceeded to open his speeches with the following story. "When I was a boy, I would get up at six o'clock in the morning on Sunday, and I would hitch our old horse up to the buggy and I

³⁸ Hair, 153.

³⁹ Ibid.

would take my Catholic grandparents to mass. I would bring them home, and at ten o'clock, I would hitch the old horse up again and I would take my Baptist grandparents to church."⁴⁰ After giving this introduction Long was pulled aside by a local supporter who asked if the story was true, to which Long replied, "Don't be a damn fool, we didn't even have a horse."⁴¹ This story is remarkable for several reasons beyond its sheer audacity. Long understood that he could not openly impugn himself as he had done in the 1924 election. He was previously in the habit of selling himself as a Catholic to Catholics and as a Protestant to Protestants, as stated by Hair earlier, but he had learned by 1927-28 to be conscious about his religious language as he had been exposed for lying in the previous gubernatorial campaign.⁴² Long clearly realized the importance of the childhood story of driving his grandparents to church as a nod to his religious affiliations, but arguably there was more to the story than that, once again describing the complex relationship Long had with religious rhetoric. One possibility of what Long was truly highlighting in this colorful anecdote was his ability to accomplish difficult feats. In the story, though it was false, the boy Long did what he needed to do to keep both sets of grandparents happy. Though this action called for duplicity in his own religious identity it was worth it to maintain peace in his family and get his grandparents to their respective churches. It is possible that the story had other meanings, or was nothing more than an amusing tale, and for the most part the story is emphasized by historians for what it tells of Long as a precocious liar. However, most literature has overlooked what it might say

⁴⁰ Williams, 1.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Hair, 153.

regarding Long's views of religion. Arguably it is further evidence of his willingness to embrace religious language as needed and that he clearly understood the power of religious rhetoric in winning elections, arguing for policy changes and as the basis for political platforms.

Though Huey P. Long used religious rhetoric during portions of the 1928 campaign he also demonstrated that he had no qualms about attacking organized religion if it benefited himself or his agenda. Early in the campaign, a speech printed on August 4th pertaining to education quoted Long as laying part of the blame for the dismal state of public schools at the door of religious thought. He called for "ignorant prejudices based on class hatred and religious intolerance, or other causes, [to] disappear before enlightenment."⁴³ Later Long would make even stronger statements regarding his idea of the boundaries of the church. During the month of January 1928, just weeks before the Democratic primary, Long declared, "I believe that the state ought to support the charitable institutions and not the churches or fraternal organizations."⁴⁴ Long once again credited his childhood reading of John Clark Ridpath as an influence regarding his ideas on the depravity of centralized wealth, even if held by a church, and the power of political leaders to influence change.⁴⁵ Long's statement regarding the role the state should take in caring for the poor did two important things. It allowed Long to argue for more support for the poverty-stricken voters scattered across Louisiana, all the while seeming benevolent and willing to shoulder the burden as the embodiment of the local

⁴³ *Times Picayune*, August 4, 1927.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, January 10, 1928.

⁴⁵ Williams, 7.

government. Richard White argues that this benevolence, though arguably displayed here for political gain, was in actuality very much a part of Long's character. He writes that Long's mother would send Long out as a young boy on charity missions delivering clothes and food to the less-fortunate and that "Huey inherited a belief that the wealth of the land should be shared."⁴⁶ For Long then establishing the government as the source of help and benevolence effectively established himself as the ultimate source of charity. He also, surreptitiously, undermined the authority of the church as the moral base in the state of Louisiana. Arguably he drew a firm line between religious rhetoric and organized religion, thus having no problem in attacking the latter. This demarcation was most likely due to Long's belief that religious rhetoric would garner him personal power, as will be demonstrated in the second chapter, but that loyalty to an organized church body would have only served to weaken his budding image.

Religion and Race

Huey P. Long's behavior during the 1927-1928 campaign is not easy to understand. His use of religious language was complex, filled with anomalies, holes, gaps, and scrambled references. The primary source material is scarce and much of it second-hand, or primarily narrative-driven biography. It is not difficult to understand why historians have avoided this part of his political persona but it remains an extremely important piece of this puzzle and lays very important groundwork for Long's later explicit use of religious rhetoric. However, if there is one area that is perhaps even more confusing it is Long's relationship with racial tension within Louisiana and its intersection with the presence of religion found in Long's life.

⁴⁶ White, 6.

Harold Mixon argues Long truly emerged as a “skillful rhetorician” during the first years as governor and showed remarkable skill in identifying key issues that resonated with his audience.⁴⁷ He also argues that a key component of Long’s identity was that he “invested his development with strong emotional appeals and ethical dimensions, often turning a problem into a moral issue.”⁴⁸ Furthermore, Mixon illuminates several key differences between Long’s rhetoric and the rhetoric of other southern demagogues. First, he states that Long deviated from the norm in not using Southern symbolic myths but rather created his own brand of mythology. Secondly, he argues that Long rarely used racism or racial stereotypes in his stump speeches. Harry T. Williams goes so far as to say that if Long did incorporate racial slurs “he never did it very well.”⁴⁹ Alan Brinkley, in his work *Voices of Protest*, focuses intently on Long’s departure from the traditional Southern demagogue by highlighting his approach to African Americans, going to so far as to call him “enlightened.”⁵⁰ For example, Long was adamant that his economic improvements, especially schools, were for “everybody, white and black.”⁵¹ In the same vein Long often worked to open jobs for local African Americans, often in conjunction with his community development ideas.⁵² Huey P. Long

⁴⁷ Mixon, 201.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Mixon, 202; T. Harry Williams, *Romance and Realism in Southern Politics*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1960) 76.

⁵⁰ Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1982) 32.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid. One example Brinkley gives of this behavior is a story of Huey P. Long forcing a newly opened hospital to hire African American nurses as well as requiring white nurses to treat African American patients. 31-32.

also openly challenged the power of the Ku Klux Klan by not seeking their approval and even stopping their movement within Louisiana.⁵³ However, Brinkley is careful to articulate that “the case for Huey Long as an active friend of black Louisianans is little stronger than the case for him as an active enemy.”⁵⁴

As the evidence above suggests, Long’s help towards African Americans was often tied to his economic developments and was more of an after-thought or by-product than direct assistance. It is also important for this study to note that there is no religious language tied to his view of race relations. In an area where religious rhetoric would have been easy to use and attach to a cause, Long avoided it completely. Arguably, Long used religious rhetoric only when it suited his own political agenda and for Long race relations were not a priority, or perhaps it was simply too much to risk. In fact, Long did little to ensure the political or civil rights of African American Louisianans. “When he won the Louisiana governorship in 1928, a mere 2,054 blacks were registered to vote, one half of one percent of all registrants. In 1936, just after Long’s death, that already negligible number had actually declined by 11, to 2,044...blacks now constituted only .3 percent of the state’s registered voters.”⁵⁵

It can be strongly argued that while Huey P. Long was not an explicit racist he was indeed an implicit one. Nonetheless, Long deviated from the traditional Southern, political script and created his own unique rhetoric that would become very effective as his career progressed. Brinkley argues that by the time Long moved into national political

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 33.

arena he abandoned or avoided the race issue almost completely leading the civil rights publication the *Crisis* to conclude “of the late Senator Huey P. Long...Negro Americans may say he was the only southern politician in recent decades to achieve the national spotlight without the use of racial and color hatred as campaign material.”⁵⁶ However, this image would be created without the use of religious language or rhetoric at all, leaving historians to speculate as to why.

Religion and Populism

Over the next five years, from 1928 to 1932, Huey P. Long adapted well to his role as governor of Louisiana, moving in the realm of statewide politics with ease. As governor Long’s rhetoric became more and more defined. What were only budding ideas in his early years and on the campaign trail became a working system of specific language, biblical references, and a strong economic agenda. This is not to say that the relationship between religion and Long became any easier to understand or categorize but simply that there became a much more noticeable working connection between his economic agenda and his religious rhetoric. The onslaught of the Great Depression and the increased poverty across Louisiana allowed Long to further delineate himself from other politicians. In the study of populism a major vein that emerges is the religious rhetoric often found within its literature. A handful of historians argue that Long fits well under the title of populist, Alan Sandler among them. He argues that “in the midst of the depression, here was a homely philosopher who applied, in the vernacular of the uneducated man, the verities of the Bible and the American constitution to the terrifying

⁵⁶ Ibid., 34.

and bewildering economic problems of the day.”⁵⁷ Furthermore, Sindler articulates that Long’s rhetoric reached those “untouched by the urban progressivism of [Woodrow] Wilson” and that the “lower-class rural whites in Louisiana found themselves voiceless until the entry of Huey Long into state politics.”⁵⁸ Yet other scholars decry Long as a populist, given his penchant for power, identifying him rather as a “Bryanist.” According to James Youngdale’s work on populism, Bryanism is a vein of populism stemming directly from William Jennings Bryan’s personal economic views.⁵⁹ Long borrowed several key elements from Bryan, including his catchphrase of “Every Man a King,” yet he did not embrace other ideas central to populism, such as a rural, agrarian revolution, but instead focused on wealth redistribution and development programs. Youngdale argues that Bryanism originated out of Protestant revivalism and Catholic discrimination however, as Long fit well under neither of those two categories perhaps it is better to understand Long’s Bryanistic tendencies as primarily rhetorical in nature rather than based in ideals. Yet despite this ideological difference, V. O. Key, a political analyst who specialized in Southern politics, argued that “Long scored heavily in the old Populist

⁵⁷ Sindler, 99. Alan Sindler, perhaps more than other scholars, regards Long’s political agenda as populist in nature. He argues that “Longism was no flashing meteor of Populism...it aroused the politically quiescent have-nots and showed them unforgettably the total victory that was theirs for the balloting.” 14.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁵⁹ James Youngdale, *Populism; A Psychohistorical Perspective*, (National University Publications: Port Washington, NY, 1975), 29-31. Youngdale argues that Bryanists are not, in fact, populists by nature but can become them over time. He classifies Long as a Bryanist due to his economic overtones included in his “Every Man A King” speech.

areas.”⁶⁰ Key also stressed the ways that Long continually deviated from Populist methodology, including his ever-increasing use of the radio, his attack on the newspapers, as well as a very effective use of the mail system.⁶¹

Historian Darren Dochuck in his work *From Bible Belt to SunBelt* gives a more nuanced description of the evolution of Long’s political agenda and rhetoric in connection to what he deems “Plain-Folk” religion. He argues that Long, and those who followed him so fervently, “simultaneously protested corporate capitalism and the bureaucratic state.”⁶² Furthermore, he states “their defense of local institutions and determination to ‘pull down the rich’ and ‘raise up the spiritual state of the nation’ were absolute. Simplistic and at times incoherent this agenda...made room for commitments to class and Christian creed”⁶³ Dochuck also contends that Long’s political agenda allowed for notions of “individualism, economic security, racial privilege, and Christian community” to coexist together in one place.⁶⁴ He finds that ultimately this blend of ideas would fail to be successful on any tangible and large-scale level, yet his insightful

⁶⁰ V.O. Key, Jr., “Louisiana: The Seamy Side of Democracy,” in *Huey P. Long; Southern Demagogue or American Democrat*, ed. Henry C. Dethloff, (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1967) 58.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁶² Darren Dochuck, *From Bible Belt to SunBelt; Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011) 80-81.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

description is another solid piece of evidence to Long's erratic yet compelling evolution of political thought and rhetorical flourish developed during his years as governor.⁶⁵

In 1932, shortly after his election to the U.S. Senate, Huey P. Long began, in the words of historian Donald R. McCoy, "to strive in earnest for national political prominence in 1933 motivated by personal ambition."⁶⁶ Having left Louisiana in the hands of a virtual puppet governor, O.K. Allen, "the most inept and overshadowed candidate ever to win a landslide victory in any American gubernatorial election,"⁶⁷ Long was prepared to make a name for himself in the national stage. In a more critical light, Harnett Kane argues that Long was doing little more than presenting a version of dictatorship, even totalitarianism, to the American people in this move to national prominence.⁶⁸ The signs of Long's change in ambition were evident in his behavior. For example, his personally published newspaper, *The Louisiana Progress* was renamed *The American Progress* in 1932, denoting a fundamental shift in Long's goals. It is here that it becomes increasingly more difficult to keep Long in the category of populist, despite his ever-increasing religious rhetoric, due to a shift from local, grassroots economic improvement to a national wealth-redistribution idea. By introducing a national economic recovery program entitled "Share Our Wealth" to ensure sustainable prosperity nationwide, Long set the framework for the most important policy of his career as well as

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Donald R. McCoy, "God's Angry Men," in *Huey P. Long; Southern Demagogue or American Democrat*, ed. Henry C. Dethloff, (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1967) 97.

⁶⁷ Hair, 222.

⁶⁸ Kane, 88.

his most explicit religious rhetoric.⁶⁹ While Long's religious overtones in his early career were murky, often difficult to understand or parse out, the language associated with "Share Our Wealth" is remarkably different. In fact, Donald McCoy termed Long one of "God's Angry Men" due to this shift.⁷⁰ The basic tenets of the "Share Our Wealth" program included the liquidation of all personal fortunes over \$3,000,000 which would allow every American family to receive \$4000 of these funds to purchase a home, an automobile, and a radio. Additionally, pensions and minimum wages would be regulated and doled out, young males who were deemed eligible would receive college tuition, and the government would take control of agricultural surpluses to balance agriculture production.⁷¹ Paul C. Gaske, one of the primary rhetorical critics analyzing Long's work, argues that here Long's rhetorical behavior, especially connected to "Share Our Wealth" began to offer a unique study of oratory. Coupled with Long's specific style of agitation and emotionalism, were "a combination of self-assuredness, intensity, and conviction that made Long's amalgam of populism, technocracy, the Bible and Share Our Wealth, especially appealing."⁷² Furthermore, Gaske articulates that, due in large part to the intensity of the effects of the Great Depression, Long was able to push for a "societal move towards fundamentalism and spiritualism, a de-emphasis on individualism and an increased search for community, and a rejection of science and intellectualism in favor of the spirit and anti-intellectualism."⁷³ Gaske offers important insight as he articulates that

⁶⁹ McCoy, 97.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 97-98.

⁷² Gaske, 293.

⁷³ Ibid., 294.

Long “resisted classifying himself, claiming he was one of a kind” and, according to Gaske, rhetorically this was true until his untimely assassination in 1935.⁷⁴

Conclusion

Huey P. Long’s relationship with religion and religious rhetoric spans across his lifetime and his political career. From an early age he was exposed to organized faith and practice yet abandoned much of these rituals in his young adulthood. However, when one examines Long’s political career a clear interaction, made more evident the later one moves down the timeline, between religion, rhetoric, and political action emerges. This chapter has demonstrated the complexity of this relationship, tracing the threads of religious interactions through Long’s career to its most explicit convergence. The following chapter details, categorizes, and analyzes his religious language as connected to the “Share Our Wealth” program in order to more fully establish the role religious rhetoric played in the career of Huey P. Long.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

Choose the Way of God or the Way of Blood: The Religious Rhetoric of Huey P. Long

Introduction

As Huey P. Long moved into the latter half of his political career his agenda took on a focus it had previously lacked. Honing in on a revolutionary and controversial economic agenda that had national implications Long stated “I’ve done all I can for Louisiana, now I want to help the rest of the country.”¹ This shift in the mindset of Long also ushered in a fundamental change and clarity to his use of religious language as attached to his political policies. This chapter seeks to establish a more multi-dimensional Huey P. Long by focusing on the element of religious rhetoric in his later political career, specifically attached to his “Share Our Wealth” program.² It argues that Long was a deeply complex politician adhering to no specific ideology but rather a patchwork of ideas he himself created, in which religious rhetoric is a major, if not the primary, thread. More specifically, it lays out the numerous ways in which Long used this language and maintains that the majority, if not all, of scholarship has overlooked the specificity and extent to which Huey P. Long used Biblical and religious rhetoric.

¹ William Ivy Hair, *The Kingfish and His Realm; The Life and Times of Huey P. Long*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 253.

² Long’s “Share Our Wealth” program was an economic redistribution policy that would limit income among America’s wealthiest families through strict taxation while establishing a base income of \$5000 a year for every American family. Please refer to chapter one of this thesis for a complete listing of the program’s goals and methods.

It must be noted at the beginning of this chapter that while the greater part of scholarship fails to give adequate attention to the frequency, influence, and role of Huey P. Long's religious language, choosing instead to highlight his political eccentricity, one rhetorical critic, Paul C. Gaske, attempts to shed light on this complex relationship. His brief chapter on Long, included in Duffy and Ryan's *American Orators of the Twentieth Century*, elucidates Long's increasingly religious language during the 1930s. Gaske categorizes Long's language in four distinct ways: confrontational, anti-intellectual, demagogic, and simplistically spiritual (i.e. heart over mind).³ Though Long's religious language is arguably a part of each of these modes of discourse, for the purposes of this paper the last category is most relevant. Gaske contends that Long's basis in economics was "coupled with a pronounced societal move toward fundamentalism and spiritualism, a de-emphasis on individualism and an increased search for community."⁴ This statement, however, does little to explain how Long accomplished this, how it was received, or even the extent to which he did so. Though Gaske does point out that "one finds [an] extensive, even dominant, reliance on Scripture" in Long's rhetoric connected to the "Share Our Wealth" program, he does little to flesh this out.⁵ As previously, stated this chapter is aimed at creating an in-depth look at Huey P. Long's religious language in

³ Paul C. Gaske, "Huey Pierce Long, Jr.; 1893-1935, Governor of Louisiana, U.S. Senator," in *American Orators of the Twentieth Century; Critical Studies and Sources*, eds. Bernard K. Duffy and Halford R. Ryan, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 294-295

⁴ *Ibid.*, 294.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 295. Though Gaske does relatively little work examine the religious language he does specify two of the verses Huey P. Long relied on: Ecclesiastes 5:9, and Leviticus 25-27.

order to better understand how and why it was used. Included in this study are the major outlets for Long's rhetoric, his self-published newspaper *The Louisiana Progress*, later renamed *The American Progress*, his collection of Senate speeches, and his two published books *Every Man A King*, and *My First Days in the White House*.⁶ For the purposes of our study Long's religious language is broken down into three distinct categories: explicit, general and symbolic. The category of explicit language relates to Long's direct quotations of Scripture, focusing on his usage of Biblical books, verses, and characters. The general knowledge section is in the form of ubiquitous mentions of God, references to a higher power or rhetoric with religious overtones or themes. Though Huey P. Long's language was less symbolic than other political figures, especially other Southern politicians, he did use a noteworthy amount and, perhaps more importantly, allowed others to attach specifically religious motifs to his image.⁷ Through these three categories a much clearer and sharper picture can be pieced together regarding Long's religious rhetoric and the reasons he used such language.

Explicit Religious Rhetoric

A newspaper reporter from New Orleans once wrote "Huey is the only man who ever rose to political power in this country solely on the Pentateuch and brass-bound

⁶ Huey P. Long originally named his privately published, propaganda newspaper *The Louisiana Progress* but with the shift in attention to national politics and the movement from governor of Louisiana to senator the name was changed to *The American Progress* beginning in 1932.

⁷ Harold Mixon, "Huey P. Long 1927-1926 Gubernatorial Primary Campaign: A Case Study in the Rhetoric of Agitation," in *The Oratory of Southern Demagogues*, eds. Carl M. Louge and Howard Dorgan, (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1981), 202, and T. Harry Williams, *Romance and Realism in Southern Politics*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1960) 76.

gall.”⁸ This comment was an incredibly insightful exposition of Long’s use of explicit religious language. In the 1930 December issue of *The Louisiana Progress* Huey P. Long began a series of editorial articles with a piece entitled “Will the God of Greed Pull the Temple Down on Himself.” In this article Long laid out what would become his signature argument in relation to his budding “Share Our Wealth” program. He detailed what he believed to be the economic problem, focusing specifically on the fact that wealth “has been concentrated into the hands of a few people.”⁹ These people, Long argued, did not allow for the trickling down of wealth creating a condition in which “people starve for food and shiver for clothes and can not get them because there is too much in the land.”¹⁰ He went on to espouse that these crimes were in direct violation of natural laws, which were synonymous with God’s law. Long stated “if there is [a remedy] it is to be found in the law given by God to man. To quote the Bible would be beyond the sane of our modern politics. It might condemn us in the minds of people who cherish hope of our ultimate salvation along their lines of reasoning. But the Scriptures give us the rules for human conduct as God knew it to be necessary that we should not be a race devouring one another.”¹¹ Furthermore, Long boldly proclaimed that “Christ couldn’t speak plainly the rules of God in most of the churches when he was here last time and He couldn’t do it if he returned here today without qualifying his meanings.”¹² He ended his article with a

⁸ Hair, 34.

⁹ *The Louisiana Progress*, December, 1930.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

call for change at the highest political level, Washington D.C., and the ominous phrase “the Abyss yawns for all.”¹³

Long continues the rhetoric of God’s commands in his article entitled “Could It Ever Have Been or Could It Ever Be?” published in the January issue of 1931. In the opening sentence Long penned “We are told by the Scripture that the Lord has so adjusted and arranged matters that mankind cannot know what has gone before.”¹⁴ He continued in this vein for several paragraphs, describing the obscenity of a culture that produced so much wealth yet sustained a starving and forgotten populace, all the while lamenting the breaking of God’s laws regarding this feat.¹⁵ Long then proceeded to argue that “if concerned take down the word of God, turn to the Book of Leviticus and read chapter 25.”¹⁶ Long went on to include a portion of scriptures taken from Leviticus chapters 25 and 26 as follows:

Let us hear the word of the Lord for just a paragraph. Here it is: And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee and ye shall return every man unto his possessions... The lands shall not be sold forever for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me: if ye walk in my statutes and keep my commandments and do them... I will give peace in the land and ye shall lie down and none shall make you afraid... and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely.¹⁷

Long concluded the article by observing that no one could be sure what America would have looked like if these laws had been observed, or what lies in wait if they continued to

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ *The Louisiana Progress*, January, 1931.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

be dismissed.¹⁸ This passage in Leviticus, though arguably spliced and cut according to Long's wishes, would become one of his primary Biblical texts used in support of his "Share Our Wealth" program. Long referenced Leviticus 24-25 as the code to follow in order to "spread blessing to everyone," and often used it in a jeremiad context.¹⁹ In one editorial challenging President Roosevelt's lack of action Long argued, "I think you will find in the Scriptures a promise of the Lord that He would not only help the country bring about such redistribution, but he would consider the people of such a nation as abiding within the terms of His statutes – so much so that there will be rain in due seasons and a land in which people shall eat their fill and dwell in the land in safety. See Leviticus, Chapters 24 to 27."²⁰ In an almost obsessive way Long appears rhetorically fixated on the Levitical code, quoting it at length.

Though arguably Long's primary Scriptural mooring was the book of Leviticus, he also drew heavily on passages from the New Testament. In an editorial piece published in May 1931, seemingly facing resistance to his frequent use of the Old Testament, Long argued, "a careful comparison of the New Testament with the Old Testament does not to our minds show where Christ was preaching anything different to what was already contained in the scriptures of the Old Testament on the subject we are now considering."²¹ He went on to re-iterate a previous argument that if Christ came to

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *The Louisiana Progress*, August, 1931.

²⁰ *The American Progress*, October, 1933.

²¹ *The Louisiana Progress*, June, 1931.

churches across America in 1931 he would be restrained as to what he could preach.

Long asked his audience:

Could he [Jesus] say this: ‘Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rest of them shall be witnesses against you, and shall be eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped up treasure together for the last days. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth and been wanton: ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just.’²²

Long urged his readers to read James chapter 5 for a fuller look at the previously quoted passage. Once again we see Long using explicit religious language, yet tailoring and tying it to his political agenda. He continued this particular article by expounding on the need to return to the law of God. He penned “the Lord found it necessary to blend into humanity certain qualities of selfishness...but the same Lord that provided that every man should undertake to accumulate also laid down the law as to how fortunes were to be regulated, so that over a given period of time no man nor set of men could have a strangle-hold upon the wealth and property of any race of people.”²³ Furthermore, Long critiqued American selectivity when it came to obeying the laws of God as described in Scripture, once again harkening back to his belief in the Levitical principles of economic justice.²⁴

Huey P. Long’s delight in confrontational and emotionally driven rhetoric was very evident in the passages of scripture that he chose. An article entitled “R-O-W”

²² Ibid. Though this is not a verse-by-verse exegesis these ideas are pulled from James chapter 5.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

published in December of 1933 serves as a prime example.²⁵ In this specific piece Long's rhetoric, now beginning to resonate with his "Share Our Wealth" rhetoric of 1934-35, opened by quoting Matthew 11:34 "I came not to send peace but a sword."²⁶ The article, utilizing the force of the passage of scripture, continued to evocatively challenge the right of the wealthy to live as they do. After a series of bold plans Long concluded with this charge: "We propose...to give something to the man at the bottom so when there is food to eat everyone will be fed, so when there are clothes to be worn all will be clothed, and when there are too many houses everyone will have a home to live in. We propose Every Man A King!"²⁷

By 1934 Long had established a well-founded religious platform. In a speech published in *The American Progress* entitled "Our Vanishing Constitution," Long gave one of his longest and most specific uses of Biblical texts, from both the Old and New Testaments, in order to defend his economic platform on the floor of the Senate. Long began this defense by arguing that the "Bible points the way out," stating that "I am now going to show the Senate that the Lord has commanded that in times of stress it is necessary to forgive interest altogether."²⁸ Long then proceeded verse by verse to prove his point. "I read from the Book of Exodus, the twenty-second chapter and the twenty-fifth verse: 'If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, though shalt not be to him a usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury'...I read from Leviticus, chapter

²⁵ *The American Progress*, December, 1933.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *The American Progress*, May, 1934.

25, verses 35-36: ‘and if the brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee.’”²⁹ Each of these verses, Long argued, prohibited the further taxing and oppression of the farmer and working class. What followed this use of scripture was perhaps even more important. Long was openly challenged by a fellow senator, Marvel Mills Logan, from Kentucky, who stated “it seems to me that the Senator from Louisiana is confusing his quotations from the Bible. The fact is that those commandments were given to the Jews...so I do not think the Senator’s quotation is applicable at all to the peculiar conditions which exist today.”³⁰ Huey P. Long then countered by attacking the senator’s wisdom and retorting “the law is for all nations, says the Scriptures. It is said in the Bible that this law is for all nations and for all people; that those nations who observe it shall live and survive, and that those which despise it shall not survive.”³¹ After being further pressed by Logan as the validity of his statements Long retorted by quoting Luke 17:16-17; John 1:17; and John 7:19 arguing that these verses, found in the New Testament and uttered by Jesus himself regarding economic justice must be taken into account. Long then moved into what could be very easily categorized as a sermon, in which he openly rebuked Congress through the rhetorical trope of Nehemiah chapter 5. He stated “He [Nehemiah] rebuked the rulers and nobles for allowing this condition to go on which I will show you we have right now and the spirit of the Lord ought to rebuke the American

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

Congress for having allowed this condition to come on, and worse still, to remain.”³²

Long continued in this vein, verse by verse, through almost the entire 5th chapter of Nehemiah, arguing for a release of the poor from the unlawful, and essentially un-godly, economical oppression. He concluded his speech under a heading titled “Choose Way of God or Way of Blood” in which he argued that the only way to avoid crushed bones and “human carnage” was to capitulate to the way of the “Supreme Lawmaker.”³³ Quoting the prophet Joel, Long stated that if America would follow the laws given to it, as mandated by both the Old and New Testaments, everyone “shall eat in plenty and be satisfied.”³⁴

What must be noted about the aforementioned speech and subsequent debate is that while Long used, exclusively, the Bible as his source, he inextricably linked these books, people, and verses to his economic program. By knowing, quoting, and maneuvering scripture Long was able to give credibility to his “Share Our Wealth” program. He used the authority of God and God’s laws to undermine and circumvent the authority and opposition of both President Roosevelt and his fellow senators. Though arguably Long’s rhetorical tactic of verbal barrage was important and effective, without the force of religion his argument lacked the moral, and thus imperative, knockout force it so relied on. Arguably, Long used religious rhetoric during this period as a sort of powerful and important bully. He manhandled and manipulated it, wielding it as a warrior would a powerful weapon against an enemy, at times holding it aloft as a threat and at other times using it as a tool of destruction against his opposition. Long created a

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

scenario in which opposing himself would be to oppose God, God's laws and scripture itself, and thus risk God's wrath. Long did not attempt to show himself as necessarily controlling religion or scriptural truth, but as simply one who had a more intimate knowledge of it and could therefore understand it more fully. By appealing to the higher authority with specific religious rhetoric Long became a compelling political force to be reckoned with.

In August of 1935 Long published a speech of importance to this study due to its focus on the person of Jesus. The speech, converted into an article, was entitled "The Last Supper" and argued that America played the role of Judas in betraying Jesus. Long, after quoting Matthew 25, articulated "humanity, therefore, confronts us in the person of our Savior; mankind is in the Lord. In the life of a being placed on this earth in the image of God, there is the son of Man. Deny that person food to eat, and you have starved the Lord, take from that person, however low or ragged he may be, the shelter which protects life and gives comfort and you have turned the Lord into darkness."³⁵ Long's tone in this speech was pleading, his rhetoric tinged with desperation and his person apparently heartbroken for the wrong done to humanity as well as the injuries to Christ as the giver of this law. This is evident as Long exclaimed, "God was betrayed! 'Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did to not to me' ...the accusing eyes of the Savior looked and still look further then as now into the hearts of men, the betrayers of Christ."³⁶ Long did not stop here, however, but reached his peak when he asked,

Can we longer claim our existence as a nation in the name of Christ our Savior?
What mockery are our public prayers! How ignorant our cries at the Judas who

³⁵ *The American Progress*, August, 1935.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

betrayed the Savior 2,000 years ago! That Judas has hanged himself in repentance. But our scions of wealth and power, our overlords who have betrayed the Savior and turned Him away in destitution hand the victim rather than to emulate the one virtue of Judas, to hang themselves in repentance.³⁷

During Huey P. Long's time in the Senate he was known to take up copious amount of floor time with long and arduous speeches. Though these speeches would take on a tone of political aggression they would also continue to incorporate very specific religious themes, references, and ideas. In a speech given on March 17, 1933 entitled "How America Can Be Adjusted," Long mixes political philosophy with his religiously influenced economic ideas. He asked the Senate, "What is the true philosophy of government? It is to do the greatest good to the greatest number."³⁸ Using primary Biblical texts Long argued "the laws of all civilized countries are originally founded upon common law propounded by the Lord. Now by turning to these laws, particularly the book of Leviticus, from the 24th to the 27th Chapters, inclusive, you will find it set forth in certain terms that the nation must keep its people from being burdened with debt."³⁹ Long maintained that the Lord had always intended for there to be freedom from financial and economic burdens unduly placed on the poor and that the only way to achieve this freedom was from a drastic redirection brought about by his warnings. Long's language was filled with cautionary phrases and appeals to the sovereignty and assurance of God's law and eventual wrath or favor depending on the outcome. He articulated that the book of James also warned against the preoccupation of wealth and stated that in America "a

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Earle J. Christenberry, *Speeches by the late Huey P. Long, United States Senator from Louisiana*, (1936), 42.

³⁹ Ibid.

few have desired to accumulate all the wealth, even though they impoverished all the balance of the people.”⁴⁰ This particular speech is very important for what it shows regarding Long’s use of religious language among other sources. After he detailed the Levitical code and coupled this with the passages from James, he delved into Greek philosophy and British and American political theory to further articulate his point. He pulled quotes from Lord Bacon, Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Johnson, Daniel Webster, and ended with William Jennings Bryan.⁴¹ In another speech, “Our Growing Calamity,” Long explicitly stated “there is only one way to save our people; only one way to save America. How? Pull down wealth from the top and spread wealth at the bottom; free people of these debts they owe; God told just exactly how to do it.”⁴² Long continued by comparing America to the Israel of Nehemiah’s day and argued that “if you would just recognize that God is still alive; that His law still lives, America would not grope today...hear me, I read from the Bible, Nehemiah, Chapter 5.”⁴³ After reading several passages aloud he concluded by petition “Hear me, people of America, God’s laws live today. Keep them and none suffer; disregard them and we go the way of the missing. His word said that. Here is what He said: ‘The Profit of the earth is for all.’”⁴⁴ Once again, Long weaved this scriptural narrative with a philosophical and political theory by subsequently quoting Thomas Jefferson, other American founders, and even Horace, the

⁴⁰ Ibid., 43.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 84.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Roman poet. In this particular speech Long also addressed, though minimally, the dichotomy between Catholics and Protestant perspectives on his “Share Our Wealth” program. In arguing that the American people were being oppressed he quoted a letter from Pope Pius given on May 18, 1932. Long stated that though he was a Baptist, he asked for Pius’s statement to be placed on the Congressional Record.⁴⁵ Arguably this action can be qualified as a simple political move, one that would further endear Long to Catholics but it must also be looked at as a religious statement. Long does not discriminate, and in fact cites Catholic doctrine because in his mind his issues, and thus his need and use of religious language, transcend denominations.

Included in Huey P. Long’s published religious materials are specific excerpts from his autobiography *Every Man a King*. Though much of the work will be discussed in the following section due to its general nature, there are select sections in which Long became very detailed. In a chapter entitled “Beginning Agitation in the United States Senate to Shorten Hours and Limit Fortunes” Long took a rare approach by arguing that allowing the wealthy to continue to accumulate wealth further corrupted their souls and served only to hasten their demise, which, though still in line with his doctrine, is one of the only instances when Long references concern for the wealthy demographic.⁴⁶ Long, arguing for wealth redistribution stated, “We can do this. If we do not, we will leave these masters of finance and fame and fortune like the man in the book of old, who said to himself, so the Bible tells us...And I will say to my soul: Soul, thou hast much goods

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Huey P. Long, *Every Man A King; The Autobiography of Huey P. Long*, (New Orleans: Da Capo Press, 1933): 293.

laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry. But God said unto him: Thou fool, this night thy soul shalt be required of thee.”⁴⁷ This reference, though uncharacteristic for Long, still pushed for unequivocal and moral support for the “Share Our Wealth” program and is thus worth mentioning. In this same chapter Long also, much more characteristically, pulled from Leviticus 25-27, Nehemiah 5, Isaiah 42, and James 5.⁴⁸ Once again, Long related these verses to the methods of right living given to mankind by God and his prophets as well as relating them to the commands given to engage in ritualistic wealth redistribution.

Published posthumously Huey P. Long’s supposal novel, *My First Days in the White House*, also finds itself punctuated with specific religious rhetoric. Presented as a “prophecy by its Author” the book centered primarily around a projection of Long’s first one hundred days in the White House after having been elected President of the United States.⁴⁹ Much of the book consisted of jabs at Long’s enemies, cabinet appointments, and quirky illustrations of Long as president. However, after a detailed explanation of what the “Share Our Wealth” would entail (tax code, profit laws, etc.) an unnamed Senator said to Long “It seems that many of us will have to exercise a great deal of faith and hope.”⁵⁰ To which Long replied, “Yes, brother...and in that connection it would not hurt if some of you would read the 13th chapter, I Corinthians.”⁵¹ Long then proceeded to

⁴⁷ Ibid., 294.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 297.

⁴⁹ Long, *My First Days in The White House*, (Harrisburg, PA: Telegraph Press, 1935) i.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 114.

⁵¹ Ibid.

provide the full text chapter of Corinthians 13. This is one of, if not the, only reference to the book of Corinthians and serves primarily to give Long's radical redistribution a softer edge, couched in the terms of love. This unique scripture reference fits well with the closing tone of the book, which displayed a softer, more benevolent Huey P. Long, who simply wanted to serve the American people.⁵²

Implicit Religious Rhetoric

In Huey P. Long's propaganda newspaper *The Louisiana Progress*, alongside the specific religious rhetoric are numerous general yet implicitly religious items. One of the primary ways this type of language manifested itself was through Biblical excerpts which dotted the issues. These selections often centered on themes of God's sovereignty and wisdom, along with warnings to obey the laws and wisdom of God in order to have life.⁵³ Often these columns, entitled "Bible Excerpts," combined verses from multiple chapters in the Biblical book of Proverbs. These articles utilized, almost predominantly, a general working knowledge of Scripture and cultural religious thought that readers might have. For example, one specific article quoted the book of Proverbs, dealing specifically with hard work, abstaining from slothfulness, and gaining wisdom from nature and subsequently natural laws.⁵⁴ Another religious themed section entitled "The Great Commission" dealt less with the last words of Jesus and more thematically with the role of Christianity in the world. The article stated that Christianity had been upheld where "science has failed," and that is still "a small measure of heaven in the immensity of a

⁵² *Ibid.*, 115.

⁵³ *The Louisiana Progress*, April, 1930.

⁵⁴ *The Louisiana Progress*, June, 1930.

world that is only slowly transformed.”⁵⁵ The language used in the article is not specific but rather a general appeal for readers to acknowledge the impact and role of Christianity in the surrounding culture and, in typical fashion, to support Huey P. Long’s agenda. The article concluded by arguing that “the man of wealth and social distinction who hears the call of Christ becomes a humble and earnest servant of his fellow men.”⁵⁶

Also contained in *The Louisiana Progress* were articles, short speeches, and stories all of which reported Long’s use of generic but obviously religiously themed language. In August 1933 Long gave a speech entitled “Before the President” in which he references Jesus, his time on earth, and his words regarding the law of God.⁵⁷ Though this reference is about a specific individual it lacks proper Biblical reference and is said in passing with no real connection to the main body of the speech. In November of the same year Huey P. Long published a running commentary entitled “The Dislocated Pause” in which Long referred to himself as speaking “the truth in the presence of a king.”⁵⁸ Again, this reference is reminiscent the Biblical mandate to proclaim truth no matter who may be listening, perhaps referring to the commands given the early church in the books of Acts, but Long’s use is simply euphemistic and general. In this same vein in February 1934 Long titled his article on wealth and power “The Truth Will Set You Free.”⁵⁹ Not only is the language religious in nature, but Long used it to reinforce the fact

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ *The American Progress*, August, 1933.

⁵⁸ *The American Progress*, November, 1933.

⁵⁹ *The American Progress*, February, 1934.

that his views on the economic and political situation were, in fact, true. In other speeches, both published and given on the Senate floor Long thanked God, made multiple references to God as “creator” and “controller” as well as used sayings such as “laws of the Bible” and the “laws of the Lord.”⁶⁰ All of these references are inherently religious in nature and most likely recognizable as such by less-religious or non-religious persons but lack specificity and references.

In his autobiography, *Every Man A King*, much of Huey P. Long’s religious phrasing and rhetoric took a much more casual tone. *Every Man A King*, due both to the timing of its publication and the intended audience, lacked the specificity of his other religious arguments, yet because the book was an overview of Long’s life the traces of religion as a pattern are easily detected.⁶¹ In a letter composed at the age of 24, Long quoted himself as stating “this is the condition, north, east, south and west; with wealth concentrating, classes becoming defined, there is not the opportunity for Christian uplift and education.”⁶² Long also relayed stories throughout the autobiography of himself reading Scripture and using preachers as the positive characters, or protagonists, in his

⁶⁰ Christenberry, 72, 86, 87,102; *The American Progress*, March, 1934.

⁶¹ *Every Man a King* was published in 1933, just as Long was making true headway into the national realm of politics. Much of Long’s political and religious ideas would become cemented during the period right after the books publication. Because of this, and the intent of the book, which was to provide a personal look at the life of Long, from infancy to the present, *Every Man a King* lacks the tone of religiosity so easily identified in Long’s later works. It is possible that this is an intentional move by Long, one that separates himself from his religious rhetoric, but this would be difficult, at best, to prove empirically.

⁶² Long, *Every Man a King*, 39.

examples.⁶³ In the same vein of common religious language Long appealed to popular American civil religious ideas. In his acceptance speech of an honorary doctoral degree from Loyola University Long emphasized America's focus as not so much on law and in the collective but in faith and in individual responsibility.⁶⁴ Long also emphasized that "God Almighty had warned against this condition" when addressing the economic situation in America.⁶⁵ As *Every Man A King* drew to a close and the "Share Our Wealth" program took shape, Long's language became much more specific as mentioned in the previous section.

Religious Imagery

In addition to his specific and tangential Biblical and religious language, Huey P. Long used, supported, and was associated with religious imagery, allusions, and symbols. Though Long's predominant mode of discourse was direct and, comparatively, cloaked little in the hues of imagery, he did not prevent others associated with him and his movement from using such religious metaphors. Within his personally published newspaper *The Louisiana Progress*, there are several examples of outside parties, vendors, and supporters engaging in symbolic dialogue. Though Long himself may not have been the author of these figurative images or words because he personally oversaw the publication of the newspaper and effectively used it for a tool or propaganda, the symbols are just as valid at explicating his character as if they came from his lips or pen. In an article advertising the completion of the Bonnet Care Spillway, completed in

⁶³ Ibid., 193, 234.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 272.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 290.

response to Long's intense focus on flood-prevention, the headline reads "and the waters shall no more become a flood – and the bow shall be in the clouds."⁶⁶ By linking the completion of this governmental project to the Biblical story of Noah and the flood, Long and his agenda was symbolically linked to it as well. Similarly a 1933 Christmas ad in the now-renamed *The American Progress* symbolically changed the meaning of Christmas to fit the economically themed agenda of Huey P. Long. The ad stated that though it wished it could send a "Merry Christmas" message to its readers, it thought it better to wish a "Hopeful Christmas."⁶⁷ According to this full-page ad "no one will be wholly carefree who remembers that millions upon millions of our brothers and sisters and boy and girls are begging a Christmas crust. No one who shares the compassion of that Savior who was born on a happier Christmas day will wish to be 'merry' while millions of little children cry from cold and hunger."⁶⁸ By running this ad *The American Progress* uses the religious imagery of Christmas good-will and the cheerful, father-like figure of Santa Clause. More importantly, the symbolism of a compassionate baby Christ is used to push the Long agenda of economic re-distribution. In closing, the ad offered these words of hope; "the teachings of Jesus Christ, who said that all men are brothers, are blossoming in the hearts of men. There is hope that mankind now is bold enough to declare the truth of Christ's teachings, and to put them into the laws of our land."⁶⁹

⁶⁶ *The Louisiana Progress*, January, 1931.

⁶⁷ *The American Progress*, December, 1933.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Though this message is couched in the altruistic terms of Christmas cheer it is clearly a political statement.

Additionally both the *Louisiana Progress*, and later the *American Progress*, contain imagery-laden tributes to Huey P. Long. Amid letters of support and poems that express their support of Long is one particularly pertinent example of symbolic language. In May of 1931 it was announced that a song of “appreciation” was being dedicated to Long in the next few pages.⁷⁰ The cover page for this anthem showed a picture of the newly erected Louisiana capitol with lists in the shapes of scrolls on either side of the building, very similar to how the Ten Commandment tablets were often portrayed. Detailed on the lists were the accomplishments of Long within his first term as governor. The song read much like a ballad, mixing mythological feat with historical fact. The opening lyrics stated that “though he has walked right into fame, and while now he wears a smile, he has fought hard all the while.”⁷¹ The third verse went on to recount how Long was very nearly removed from his “throne” as governor but succeeded against the “pirates” of 1929.⁷² These allusions create the sense of martyrdom that became very deeply connected with Long and his time in office. It also suggested that deep down Long was a hard-working and generous man, who, though relatively unknown, had earned his “throne” and therefore deserved to sit there. The imagery of the throne is key as well because not only does it imply a type of all-encompassing power, but it is usually associated with the imagery of divine-right. The chorus of this hymn continued in a vein

⁷⁰ *The Louisiana Progress*, May, 1931.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.* This refers to the attempt to impeach Long after his first year as governor.

of owed allegiance to Long. “And as long as we shall live, One thing we should try and give, In return for ev’ry toil that he has spent, When we sing thru-out the land, Huey has helped the com-mom man, We should give to him our vote for President, He’ll be President of the U.S.A.”⁷³ The language used in the chorus of this song is tinged with religious feeling. It implied the songs of Huey P. Long would be sung throughout the land as would songs of freedom and rejoicing, which often blend religious themes with patriotism or nationalism. It also heavily drew on the sense of debt and lifelong allegiance that was owed Long. The language emphasized that in return for Long’s endless work on the people’s behalf he deserved their lifelong respect and eventually their vote for president. The song then ended on a very prophetic note by assuring singers (and readers) that Long will indeed be president one day.

Perhaps the strongest example of imagery used was published in May of 1934. The piece was a drawn picture entitled ‘Illuminating the Sacred Book,’ in which the arms of a man hold aloft a torch in the left hand and a book in the other. Written in the flames of the torch were the words “Every Man a King” and on the pages of the book “The Word of the Truth” and “Share the Wealth.” Engraved on the left arm were the words “The Huey P. Long Plan.”⁷⁴ The combination of text and imagery in this illustration was explicit and powerful. The book’s right page equates “the Word of Truth,” presumably the Bible or some form of higher truth, with the words on the left page, “Share the Wealth.”⁷⁵ Effectively this portion of the image equates Long’s “Share the Wealth” plan

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ *The American Progress*, May, 1934.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

with scriptural truth. This comparison was the symbolic version of what Huey P. Long did with his use of specific scriptural language in his published articles and speeches. In the other section of the drawing the arm emblazoned with “the Huey P. Long plan” which held the torch high was also fraught with important symbolism. The torch, a common symbol for truth, wisdom, and illumination is supported by Long’s plan. The flames themselves, made up of the words “Every Man a King” once again supported the idea that Long’s plan and goals are the ultimate truth, and perhaps even suggested that without Long’s wealth redistribution there was no evident truth.⁷⁶ This illustration symbolically argued that Huey P. Long’s plan illuminated the religious truths found within scripture in ways that other politicians could and did not.

Conclusion

Huey P. Long is not considered by most historians today as an overtly religious or devout political figure, and perhaps rightly so. However, as this paper has demonstrated, Long clearly used, incorporated and even based his primary platform on specific religious and scriptural rhetoric. Not only did Long utilize explicit religious language but he included general language as well as employing symbolic imagery that relied heavily in religious themes. As Gaske so eloquently states, “the context of the depression and its coincident spiritual, heart-over mind movement among the disenfranchised made the content of Long’s speeches take on a nearly messianic quality.”⁷⁷ Gaske goes on to

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷ Gaske, 296. The concept of a “messianic” quality will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

suggest that it was “rhetorical features, not personality characteristics” that defined Long’s speechmaking. Regardless of the intentionality or sincerity of Long’s personal attachment to his use of religious language it must be acknowledged by the historiography that the language does exist and is a vital piece to not only the “Share Our Wealth” movement but to Huey P. Long’s political career as a whole.

CHAPTER FOUR

One With God Is A Majority: The Deification of Huey P. Long

Introduction

From hero to villain and everywhere in between, Huey P. Long is remembered in a plethora of shades, colors, and hues. During his life and political career he cultivated rapport across the state of Louisiana and eventually on a national level, winning over a surprising number of followers with his vivid stories, wild gesticulations, and revolutionary, economic-driven political agenda. Glen Jeansonne, a Depression-era Louisiana scholar, describes this identification in stark terms when he pens, “Long's uninhibited personality, vulgar language, and crude manners appealed to Louisiana's uneducated, impoverished, embittered voters. He appealed to the prejudice of the poor against the rich and promised a share of the spoils to those who supported him.”¹ More moderately, Richard White argues that “many Louisianans, especially in the rural parts, revere him as a martyred champion of the common people, indeed a modern-day Robin Hood who took from the rich and gave to the poor.”² Long’s identification with and by the economically disadvantaged, and even the socially ostracized or outliers, is a well-accepted and historically proven fact. However, as this thesis as a whole has sought to

¹ Glen Jeansonne, “Huey P. Long, Gerald L. K. Smith and Leander H. Perez as Charismatic Leaders,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Winter, 1994), pp. 5-21, 11.

² Richard D. White, Jr. *Kingfish; The Reign of Huey P. Long*, (New York: Random House, 2006), 272.

demonstrate, little to no work has been done illustrating the extent that Long was identified as a religious figure, or identified with by religious men and women. This chapter argues that Huey P. Long, both in life, and perhaps even more so after his death, was widely regarded as a religious, even messianic, figure and often referred to with religious imagery and language by followers. This key part of his identity and legacy, the “savior-role” identified by his constituents, has largely been ignored and is an important piece in the puzzle of religiosity in Huey P. Long’s political life.

Primarily, this chapter will attempt to argue for this religious identification through an examination of primary texts published in Huey P. Long’s propaganda newspaper, *The Louisiana Progress*. Readers frequently submitted letters to the editor, or letters of support, which were published, and thus accepted by Long and his political leadership. Secondly, this chapter will examine the overtly religious associations made by Long’s “Share Our Wealth” leader and pastor, Gerald L.K. Smith. Smith’s role in the Long empire was a unique one and fraught with religious rhetoric and meaning, and one that continued after Long’s assassination. Finally, this chapter will conclude by briefly examining two historian’s work surrounding Huey P. Long’s legacy, specifically focusing on the ways Long is described that resonate with religious terms yet shy away from explicitly defining the terms as such.

Pre-Assassination Persona

As early as 1930 an image of Huey P. Long as a religious, even righteous man, began to emerge. This perception, for the most part, did not come from his political peers, foes, friends, or even family, but rather from the demographic he sought most to woo: the common folk of Louisiana. One of the first appearances of this type of religious image-

association came in the April 24th edition of *The Louisiana Times*. In the “Letters from Readers” section a very detailed note from a voter was published in which Long was described as a “Moses for the free and independent man.”³ The letter commended Long for his stand against chain stores and big businesses, described as a gang of thieves, and also praised his efforts to protect the small man through a series of taxation laws.⁴ For this supporter Long’s stance against chain stores was equivalent to Moses’ leading the children of Israel out of Egypt into freedom. In another letter to the editor published by the paper a voter from Lafayette, Louisiana lauded Long’s character and his fortitude in the political arena in very religious terms. The writer penned “since time immemorial we know that all great changes came from the brains of one man, and this man is generally found when men have mixed their politics to a point where the whole mass of rules and laws turns into a veritable volcano of eruption...at this time providence sometimes sends a man. He did send one and his name is Huey P. Long.”⁵ The voter went on to express that Long was the only man who could command the voters and that they owed him their deep respect and loyalty.⁶ Not only does this letter use apocalyptic language about the state of local politics, but it assigned Long a messianic role, acting at the behest of Providence, to save the impoverished masses. This savior-role would emerge as one of the predominant themes to Long’s religious persona, as seen in another letter to the paper entitled “He Fights the Poor Man’s Battles”⁷ This particular voter, Samuel Shirey, lauded

³ *The Louisiana Progress*, April 24, 1930.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *The Louisiana Progress*, April, 1931.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *The American Progress*, February, 1934.

Long for his adherence to the Golden Rule and the vast improvements his administration had completed in Louisiana, similar to other contributors. Also similar was Shirey's likening Long to biblical figures. He wrote "when a man advocates, pleads, and stands for what is right and considers the poor he may expect to have many enemies. The prophets, the apostles, John the Baptist and Jesus Christ had enemies all for a righteous cause. This is why our great Senator has enemies."⁸ Though Shirey is not necessarily equating Huey P. Long and Christ, he is certainly affirming his likeness based on Long's own actions and words. Religious identity, specifically messianic religious identity, was an integral part of Long's perceived persona and image.

Alongside this burgeoning image of Huey P. Long as a savior came a sense of injustice being done to him. In another public opinion piece entitled "The Crucifixion of Huey P. Long," which is in and of itself a religious association, a writer simply calling him or herself "Taxpayer" described the extreme resistance to Long's ideas and persona.⁹ "Taxpayer" opened the article by explaining the desperate condition the state of Louisiana inhabited before Long's administration, and focused specifically on Long's raising of literacy rates and his attempts to bring improved civic works to the impoverished rural areas of the state.¹⁰ The author closed the article by exclaiming that despite the local and national attempts to smear Long's reputation and name "the monuments erected by Huey Long will live for future generations to enjoy and he will be

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ *The American Progress*, August 1933.

¹⁰ Ibid.

remembered by the plain people.¹¹ Clearly “Taxpayer,” and arguably others like him or her, viewed Long’s mission as a divine one, one that could get him unjustly “crucified.” This religious phraseology, used by supporters of Long, is very clear evidence of some sort of religious identification and is indicative of a religious persona that was perceivable despite Long’s erratic personal behavior but in conjunction with Long’s religious rhetoric and political platform.

Not only did sections of the commonwealth of Louisiana associate Huey P. Long with religious terminology and ideas, but pastors and preachers did as well, even some from out of state. Reverend Robert Bryce, a minister from Michigan, described how he listened to Long’s senate speeches with “a great deal of interest.”¹² Bryce went on to espouse Long’s attention to the problem of poverty in the United States and to commend him for his courage in challenging “a philosophy of material wealth that has been, for so many years, considered to be an inalienable right, even though it may have become a menace to the welfare of the people.”¹³ Bryce continued by stating that he had been inspired by Long’s speeches to preach on the subject of “Is America a Christian Nation” to his congregation, alongside other issues regarding the conscience of the nation.¹⁴ Similarly, another pastor out of Cleveland, Tennessee, Curd Walker, eagerly added his voice to those supporting Huey P. Long from the pulpit. He wrote that Long was only one of a few whom “no doubt, God in His great wisdom has let feel the grief of all those suffering millions” including in this list the biblical figures of Moses, Joseph and

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *The American Progress*, September, 1933.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Joshua.¹⁵ Walker went on to state that he was appalled at the lack of preachers willing to stand against an “usury system that is so condemned in the Bible” concluding that they must be too cowardly to tell the truth.¹⁶ Not only did Walker himself see and support Long as a religious figure fighting for righteousness but he attempted to bring this theology to his circuit route by requesting “Share Our Wealth” materials that he could distribute and discuss among his churches alongside Long’s speeches.¹⁷ Another letter, written by Reverend E. L. Sanders, a pastor in Arkansas, affirmed, as he termed it, the “Long Plan.”¹⁸ Sanders, a Baptist minister, stated that for a long time he had avoided becoming entangled in the political realm but he found it impossible to remain this way at such a crucial juncture in the nation’s history.¹⁹ He went on to pen that “we are out bother’s keeper” and admonished potential readers to “live right, preach right, pray right, talk right and vote right.”²⁰ Not only did Bryce, Walker and Sanders appreciate Long’s political agenda but they believed it to be in line with Biblical and moral teaching and thus theologically sound. Furthermore, they perceived Long as a righteous and religious figure, with Walker going so far as to compare Long to other famous Biblical figures. All of these men, as ministers, identified with Long and used his ideas to shape their sermons and discourses and even political behavior. Once again, though Long’s religious flair is

¹⁵ *The American Progress*, March, 1934.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *The American Progress*, February, 1934.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

often overlooked by the historiography or discounted as insignificant, clearly Long acquired a religious identity that was significant and beyond the borders of Louisiana.

As Huey P. Long's political career progressed so did the specificity with which his supporters equated him with religious terminology, figures and ideals. In a letter published in 1934 entitled "One With God Is A Majority" a voter directed his comments directly to Long thanking him for his actions.²¹ This voter went on to encourage Long by saying "this is your opportunity, Senator Long; and I am going to live to see these ideas victorious. The redistribution of wealth is as certain as the law of gravitation."²² The letter concluded by stating that failure was not a possibility for the Long agenda, and himself personally, because "one with God is a majority."²³ In this example not only did Long stand on the side of God but he, in fact, was perceived alone with God, needing no other support. Though this letter was clearly written as a note of encouragement it is also strikingly revealing about how supporters perceived Long's standing with their religious concept of God. Huey P. Long, as a political leader, was viewed as being solely on the side of God. In this same vein another supporter submitted a letter entitled "Who is on Lord's Side - Long, or Foes of Poor?"²⁴ In this piece the supporter opened by commenting that from the frenzied actions of Long's enemies it could only be concluded that "he [Long] is a God-send and a political apostle to the people," and that "his [Long's] preaching, his work, his actions and his achievements" must be on point given

²¹ *The American Progress*, August, 1934

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *The American Progress*, February, 1935

the viciousness of his enemies' attacks.²⁵ The letter contended that Long's improvements within the state of Louisiana held distinctly religious merits as now rural families could go to church, even during bad weather, thanks to new roads. In closing the letter this supporter argued that the "Share the Wealth" program was tantamount to the gospel in its power to preserve the lives of Americans everywhere.²⁶ Once again there was a fundamental connection, perceived by supporters, between Long and a religious cause, specifically God's cause for the underrepresented across the United States. Another piece published just weeks after the aforementioned letter, entitled "Why Object to God?" read much along the lines as one of Huey P. Long's own speeches.²⁷ This letter expressed one individual's opinion that, "I haven't seen any feasible workable or righteous plan offered by any one else that will give temporary, much less permanent relief."²⁸ Furthermore, the writer penned that "no plan can or will be righteous unless it is God's plan. And Huey's is the Bible's plan. Who in our country should object to God's telling His people the way out?"²⁹ Once again a very clear connection in the minds of supporters surfaces between Long's behavior and the idea of God's will, righteous doctrine, and Biblical mandates. Specific to this letter is also a clear identification and expressed belief in the religious rhetoric that Long so artfully used when describing his political and economic agenda. In another letter entitled "The Way Is Before Us If We Look To The Bible" a similar connection and use of Long's rhetoric is presented. Writing just to contribute to what she

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ *The American Progress*, March, 1935

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

described as a “very wonderful paper” a woman argued that if an individual would simply adhere to scripture then the pitfalls and devastation of individualization could be avoided.³⁰ Using very similar rhetoric to what has already been explored in the previous chapter, this particular supporter harped on the simplicity of the Biblical plan and the evils of rampant unequal wealth distribution. She closed her article by emphatically stating that “it is perfectly obvious that only ‘common people’ have common sense.”³¹ Clearly the plain-folk religious rhetoric Long used so prolifically in his latter career found its mark. As Huey P. Long escalated his own agenda throughout 1935, and consequently the specificity of his religious rhetoric, there was a noticeable correlation with how religious supporters and voters viewed him. This persona of a righteous, godly, and theologically and scripturally, sound individual would only increase given the events of September 1935.

Assassination and Funeral

Just days after the summer adjournment of the U.S. Congress, Huey P. Long made his way back to Baton Rouge to oversee a selection of state legislation. Despite his official role as a Louisiana senator Long remained de facto governor of Louisiana, controlling much if not all of state political activity through a hand-picked successor as governor and a wide network of political puppets. On September 8, a Sunday, around 8 pm in the evening Long attended a full session of the Louisiana state legislative body regarding the re-districting of St. Landry parish.³² The bill itself was nothing more than

³⁰ *The American Progress*, January, 1935.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² T. Harry Williams, *Huey Long*, (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1969), 861.

Long's attempt to strike back at a political enemy, Judge Benjamin Pavy, by substantially dividing his district and thus preventing his re-election.³³ However, as Long and his entourage of bodyguards made their way into the central hub of the state capital a thin man dressed in a white linen suit stepped out from behind a column and fired a single shot into Long's chest.³⁴ As Long faltered back down the hallway grasping his chest, his bodyguards opened fire on the assassin with wild abandon. Over thirty bullets were fired into the shooter's body with several others lodging themselves into the marble walls of the capital building.³⁵ Long was rushed to Our Lady of the Lake hospital where, after an hour of surgical exploration, it was discovered the bullet had exited his body and his wounds were sutured shut. However, the exploratory efforts were rushed, and conducted by a doctor with a dubious record, and it was overlooked that Long's kidney was badly damaged.³⁶ By Monday morning it was clear that Long's condition was worsening and despite a blood transfusion and other medical procedures by Tuesday morning at forty-two years of age Long's life ended with the words "God, don't let me die. I have so much to do."³⁷

³³ Ibid. The bill was aimed at Judge Benjamin Pavy, a long time enemy of Long, who sat in the thirteenth district composed of St. Landry and Evangeline parishes. Long's goal was to un-seat Pavy by re-districting the area and giving more voting control to the less-anti-Long district of Evangeline by shrinking the district of St. Landry, which was the fourth most populous parish in the state.

³⁴ William Ivy Hair, *The Kingfish and His Realm; The Life and Times of Huey P. Long*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 263.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Williams, 874.

³⁷ Ibid., 875.

Huey P. Long's killer was Dr. Carl Weiss, a very gifted and well-respected ear, nose and throat specialist. Having attended LSU and Tulane Medical School, Weiss also studied at New Orleans' Touro Infirmary in Paris and Bellevue Hospital in New York.³⁸ His connection to Long came in the form of his wife's father, Judge Henry Pavy, whose district Long had been attempting to dissect during the weekend of September 8.³⁹ In combination with this threat, historians have also noted that sources close to Huey P. Long admitted that Long was working to circulate rumors that the Pavy family tree contained African-American bloodlines. This rumor, once spread, would end Judge Pavy's current political career and eradicate any hope for a future bid.⁴⁰ Perhaps it was these factors that drove Dr. Weiss to attempt to take Long's life, despite certainly knowing it would lead to his own death, and despite having a thriving medical practice, a happy marriage and a new baby. As with most political assassinations Dr. Weiss's actions that evening proved almost as controversial and as reactionary as Huey P. Long's political career. William Hair records that "to thousands of people Weiss was not a murderer, but a hero" and that "in James Clarke's words, his funeral attendance was 'the largest of any assassin in American history.'"⁴¹ Several prominent LSU faculty and staff were present at his memorial service, along with the East Baton Rouge Parish district attorney, Congressman J.Y Sanders, Jr., and former governor John. M. Parker.⁴² Yet to the vast majority of Louisiana natives, as well as Long supporters across the nation,

³⁸ Hair, 322.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 320.

⁴¹ Ibid., 324.

⁴² Ibid.

Weiss's actions were unforgivable. The assassination also irrevocably placed Long in the category of martyr and created a funeral scene that was filled with religious rhetoric and further developed a persona that was marked by religious associations.

Huey P. Long's body lay entombed in the state capital for two days with estimates of over eighty thousand people passing to pay their respects. Numbers for Long's actual funeral are estimated even higher, somewhere between 125,000 to 175,000, as men and women from across the state poured in to witness the spectacle of their hero's burial.⁴³ Bouquets of arranged flowers alongside hand-picked daisies brought in by farmers and planters surrounded the area while the LSU band played Long's song "Every Man a King." Long's friend, fellow orator, and leader of the "Share Our Wealth" movement, Reverend Gerald L. K. Smith, spoke at the graveside.⁴⁴ Smith spoke, "the blood which dropped upon our soil shall seal our hearts. This place marks not the resting place of Huey Long. It marks only the burial place for his body."⁴⁵ Smith furthermore articulated that "his spirit shall never rest as long as hungry bodies cry for food, as long as human frames stand naked, as long as homeless wretches haunt this land of plenty."⁴⁶ Smith's speech over Long's casket was by no means his first, nor the last, relating to Long, both as an individual and as a politician. In fact, Smith's presence in Long's political regime

⁴³ Harnett T. Kane, *Louisiana Hayride: The American Rehearsal for Dictatorship, 1928-1940*, (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, 1941), 136. See also Hair, 325.

⁴⁴ Hair, 325.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ White, 268.

and relationship with Long himself, before and after Long's assassination, are both important factors in the study of Long's religious persona.

Gerald L. K. Smith

Reverend Gerald Smith once spoke of Louisiana as a “backwards, oppressive oligarchy, dominated by planters who, allied with the New Orleans city machine, ran the state like feudal lords,” that is, until Huey P. Long arrived on the political scene.⁴⁷ Smith, a long time fundamentalist minister and “political sensationalist” was attracted to Long's platform and, after resigning as pastor of Kings Highway Christian Church in Shreveport, sought employment under Long in 1933.⁴⁸ Glen Jeansonne, the primary scholar of Smith's career, argues that the political appeal between these two men was reciprocal, and that “Long saw Smith as a brilliant speaker whose status as a clergyman could also provide some religious credibility to his movement.”⁴⁹ As evidenced through his choosing of a minister to lead his most powerful political group, and the trends of the previous two chapters, Long clearly recognized the power of religious rhetoric and sought to use it as frequently as he used other tactics, such as verbal barrage and plain-folk emotionalism, in his career.

What is unique, and also important to this study, is Smith's perception of Huey P. Long. It is perhaps the most blatant and articulate example of the view of Long as a religious figure available to historians. Jeansonne states that Smith viewed Long as a

⁴⁷ Glen Jeansonne, *Gerald L.K. Smith; Minister of Hate*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 33.

⁴⁸ Arthur M Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 64.

⁴⁹ Jeansonne, 34.

“demigod” and as “the smartest, most noble, most humane man in America, who was no demagogue because he kept his promises to the common people while conquering the feudal lords of Louisiana.”⁵⁰ Smith was also quoted as saying that “Huey Long is a superman. I actually believe he can do as much as any ten men.”⁵¹ Though Smith’s language is possibly sycophantic, especially given his role as leader of the “Share Our Wealth” movement, it is also remarkably personal and religious in nature, making it hard to dismiss. According to Jeansonne, “Smith was uncharacteristically deferential to Long, bragged about wearing his clothes, and pretended to be closer to the man than he actually was. He boasted on one occasion, I’ve slept with him, eaten with him, talked with him, prayed with him and I know he is a man of God.”⁵² Fully believing in Long’s economic redistribution plan Smith used as much if not more religious rhetoric in his speeches and meetings than Long himself, seeking to imitate him, even “proselytizing for him.”⁵³ Yet Smith’s most profound statement, particularly for this study, came when he was describing how to achieve political success. He spoke, “no great movement has ever succeeded unless it has deified some one man. The Share the Wealth movement consciously deified Huey Long.”⁵⁴ Arguably Smith’s words echo the sentiments found in so many supporters and voters letters, in his own relationship to Long, and even, perhaps, in Long’s own personal ambition.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 35.

⁵³ Ibid., 38.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Believing himself to be a part of the great future Huey P. Long was destined for, Smith was obviously devastated at his death. Jeansonne records Smith, at Long's funeral, as saying that "he (Long) has been the wounded victim of the green goddess; to use the figure, he was the Stradivarius whose notes rose in competition with jealous drums, envious tomtoms. He was the unfinished symphony."⁵⁵ Smith attempted to invoke the power of Long in multiple publications after his death, one of which was entitled "The Spirit and Purpose of Huey Long Shall Never Die."⁵⁶ He penned the letter to his "Comrades" urging them to make their anger and sadness at Long's death known through the upcoming election by casting ballots for his approved ticket. Smith's language describing Long's death was indicative of much of the rhetoric surrounding this event. It memorialized Long yet also invoked his memory in a call to action with a religious flourish. He wrote, "Our leader has fallen in the lines of duty at the hands of an assassin. The flesh of Huey Long is dead but his spirit lives. He died for us."⁵⁷ Smith ended the memo by giving a first-hand account, which may or may not have been embellished, of his time at Long's bedside before he died. He re-stated Long's last words "Oh Lord, don't let me die. I have a few more things to do" and proclaimed that "the work which he left undone, we must complete."⁵⁸ Though Smith would attempt to pick up the political reigns after Long's death he found that oratory alone, even oratory built on Long's memory, could not grant him success in the ruthless and cutthroat world of Louisiana politics. He had some influence on the national level later in his career with his

⁵⁵ Ibid., 41.

⁵⁶ "Share Our Wealth" memo, undated.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

publication of a zealous magazine called “The Cross and The Flag” and in connection to Jonathan Perkins’ “Ham and Eggs” movement, which was described as a movement embracing “the principles of Jefferson and Jesus and the legacy of William Jennings Bryan and Huey Long.”⁵⁹ Perkins himself had been an avid Long supporter, going so far as to throw his body across Long’s casket at his funeral garnering significant media attention.⁶⁰ Yet Smith sank into a pattern of racist preaching earning himself the titles “vitriolic” and “minister of hate” and died in relative obscurity.⁶¹ Nonetheless, Smith’s relationship with Long, his deep and spiritual devotion to his cause, and his efforts to immortalize Long as a martyr, had a profound effect across the state of Louisiana and provide excellent evidence to the central role Huey P. Long’s religious persona played in his career.⁶² Smith offers us a unique example of one man’s religious perception of and devotion to Long, especially after his death, and this emotion was well felt by supporters and mimicked across the state as evidenced in letters published by *The American Progress*.

⁵⁹ Darren Dochuck, *From Bible Belt to SunBelt; Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), 88. Jeansonne, “Huey P. Long, Gerald L. K. Smith and Leander H. Perez as Charismatic Leaders,” pg.8. Jeansonne states that Smith derived the title “The Cross and the Flag, from a saying of his father’s that the only two things a man needed to cling to were the cross and the flag, fusing church and state together.

⁶⁰ Dochuck, 88.

⁶¹ Ibid., Jeansonne, *Gerald L. K. Smith; Minister of Hate*, iii.

⁶² Jeansonne, “Huey P. Long, Gerald L. K. Smith and Leander H. Perez as Charismatic Leaders,” 5.

Post-Assassination Persona

In the September issue of *The American Progress*, just days after Long's death and funeral, an entire page was devoted to the outpouring of emotion connected to Huey P. Long's death. Several of these article displayed a memory of Long, or argument regarding his life, that had religious overtones or that was explicitly religious in nature. On such article was entitled "Long's Only Sin – Kept Promises" in which the author argued that "Huey Long was a human dynamo" and his actions on behalf of the poor of Louisiana could not be overlooked.⁶³ This supporter stated that Long's only mistake was that he was open about his political power but that this only made him more honest. After listing numerous other ways in which Long had helped the state the article closed with the phrase "no man can serve two masters – profit and the people" indicating that Long has chosen to side with the people over money.⁶⁴ This phrase itself is rooted in scripture and the writer used it to further illustrate an opinion of Long that suggests integrity and righteousness.⁶⁵ Similar to this, another article entitled "Cowardly Press Could Not Kill His Principles" stated that "the name of Huey P. Long will go down in history as one of the few really great men who ever lived."⁶⁶ The letter also argued that the principles, or integrity, of Long that were so attacked by the press and political enemies would not be abolished by his death. The rhetoric in both of these articles indicates a faith in Long that is based on his actions but also on the principles behind them and lends itself to veneration that is laced with religious idealism. Another example of this entitled "Long

⁶³ *The American Progress*, September, 1935.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Reference: Matthew 6:24.

⁶⁶ *The American Progress*, September, 1935.

Lives Wherever Men Love Honesty and Justice” articulated that, in reference to Long, “your body has passed to its eternal sleep but your spirit will ever live and breathe and brood whenever and wherever the sons of men may congregate in defense of common honesty and simple justice.”⁶⁷ The language of the article, its eloquence and use of terms such as “Great Friend of Man” when referring to Long, are all further evidence of an association of Long, his ideas, and his persona, with something much longer enduring than simple political endeavors.

A more religiously explicit display of anger over Long’s death came in the form of a letter entitled “Nailed To Cross of Ignorance and Hate.” In this piece the author proclaimed that “nailed with a hundred nails to a cross of misunderstanding created by misrepresentation of everything he did or tried to do, mortally wounded by a greed-maddened, insane and deluded assassin, that unconquerable soul, Huey P. Long, has gone back to his Creator.”⁶⁸ The imagery used in this article is clearly religious in nature and indicative of an understanding of Long that is rooted in a religious context. The author stated that the spirit of Long would not disappear from the earth because his “millions of disciples will send men there with orders to carry on the fight for Share Our Wealth.”⁶⁹ Again, the reference to Long’s supporters as “disciples” signifies a relationship that is beyond politician and constituent and something much more akin to the relationship between a prophet and his followers. Similarly another piece by a supporter and mourner entitled “Long Will Shine as Ray of Hope for Countless Millions to Come” stated that

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

“Huey P. Long was a profound believer in the eternal laws of God,” and that Long worked to bring about justice for all men. Much in the same vein as the aforementioned letters and opinion pieces, this one articulated the same expressions that Huey P. Long’s spirit would endure beyond his death and his legacy would bring about true change. All of these post- mortem examples illustrated a very important piece in Long’s relationship with religion; that of a religious persona and legacy.

“Messianic” Literature

Though the vast majority of scholarship regarding Huey P. Long’s legacy does not acknowledge the role and distinct presence of religion, religious rhetoric, and religious imagery, two scholars draw closer than others. Arthur Schlesinger, in his work *The Politics of Upheaval*, entitled his opening chapter on Long “Messiah of the Rednecks.” This chapter was also featured in the “Problems in American Civilization Series; Huey P. Long; Southern Demagogue or American Democrat?”⁷⁰ By using the term “Messiah” Schlesinger applies inherently religious terminology to Long’s identity. He acknowledges through the chapter, and article, that Long “was their [crowds and supporters] idol – themselves as they would like to be, free and articulate and apparently without fear.”⁷¹ He also chronicles, though minimally, Long’s interaction with Biblical principles in connection to the “Share Our Wealth” program and Gerald L. K. Smith’s deification of Long. However, despite Schlesinger’s use of the term “messiah” and his brief looks at the role religion played in Long’s career, his analysis fails to merge the two

⁷⁰ Arthur Schlesinger, “Messiah of the Rednecks” in *Huey P. Long: Southern Demagogue or American Democrat*, ed. Henry C. Dethloff, (University of Southwestern Louisiana Publishing: Lafayette, LA, 1976), 51.

⁷¹ Ibid.

identities of priest and politician as the evidence suggests they were. Instead, Schlesinger argues that Long “had no ideological preoccupations” and pens that Long’s “political fantasies had no tensions, no conflicts, except of the most banal kind, no heroism or sacrifice, no compelling myths of class or race or nation.”⁷² If this is the case, and the primary source material suggests it is not, then Schlesinger’s terminology of “messiah” is misleading and misses the mark of his argument. Regardless of the coherency of Long’s religious identity it was certainly perceived, lauded, and even practiced by his followers and supporters thus creating a plethora of ideals and “compelling myths,” as Schlesinger terms them. Despite backing out of his own argument, Schlesinger’s term is incredibly appropriate and much closer to the mark of Long’s political career than perhaps he is comfortable with. Schlesinger would not be the only scholar to use the term “messiah” as Glen Jeansonne, formally mentioned in connection to scholarship regarding Gerald L. K. Smith, did so as well in his short book *Messiah of the Masses: Huey P. Long and the Great Depression*. Jeansonne, much like Schlesinger, uses the term “messiah” without delving in to it or giving much evidence as to the purpose of the term. He does acknowledge that Long claimed to find the inspiration for his “Share Our Wealth” program in God’s law but does little to expand on this.⁷³ Jeansonne’s primary purpose in using this term is to correct what he perceives to be an imbalance in Long’s legacy. Jeansonne believes Long to be a “misunderstood figure” and that he has been studied primarily out of context by those who do not understand Louisiana’s “political

⁷² Ibid., 67.

⁷³ Jeansonne, *Messiah of the Masses; Huey P. Long and the Great Depression*, (New York: Harper Collins College Publishers, 1993), 118.

complexities.”⁷⁴ Arguably Jeansonne’s use of the term “messiah” and his focus on Long’s achievement and national political plans suggest that he uses the term in a redemptive sense to argue that Long, though far from perfect, was somewhat sincere in his desire to help the impoverished and thus was reciprocated in a way that resembled something spiritual. As with Schlesinger before, Jeansonne’s use of the term hits much closer to home than other scholarship and hints at the relationship that Huey P. Long had with religion and religious rhetoric, yet misses the mark by not focusing on the quality and strength of the religious legacy that Long imbibed.

Conclusion

As with almost every aspect of Huey P. Long’s life controversy and ambiguity surround how he was perceived and to what lengths his legacy and persona were religious. Historian T. Harry Williams once stated that “when people in Louisiana try to describe the impact of Long and his movement, they have trouble in putting their thoughts into words. They are obviously deeply moved, but they are embarrassed that they may sound emotional or exaggerated.”⁷⁵ As evidenced by the letters and speeches the connection between Huey P. Long and his supporters reached a level that was clearly religious in its overtones and religious in sentiment. Though the argument regarding Long’s own sincerity in creating this image maybe an area for debate and further analysis, there is substantial evidence that men and women, farmers and preachers, politicians and statesmen, recognized and articulated a religious depth to the relationship

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁷⁵ T. Harry Williams, *Romance and Realism in Southern Politics*, (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1961), 77.

that was sustained, even after Long's demise. As Richard White articulates, "to the poor country folk he [Long] was omnipotent and invincible and indeed, immortal" a "specter [that] still plays the leading role in the melodramatic history of Louisiana politics" and that the people of Louisiana "did not merely vote for him, they worshipped the ground he walked on....he was part of their religion."⁷⁶ Arguably Huey P. Long, despite his despotic nature and fascist tendencies, held, and still holds to this day, a deeply emotional and religiously informed and described place in the historical hearts and minds of Louisianans and common folk nationwide.

⁷⁶ White, 276; 273, x.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Huey P. Long's life, persona, and career are, to the researcher, tantalizing specters. For the historian, Long provides the study of an obscure figure from a backwoods parish of Louisiana who raised himself up to the height of national politics aided in large part by events and context of his day. As a product of the Great Depression era, Long imbibed the sentiments of thousands of voices who primarily viewed the world through the lens of the "haves" and the "have-nots." For political scientists and analysts Long's career offers the study of a figure who defied previous electoral patterns by mobilizing the lower socio-economic demographic with great success. Politically, Long re-defined the power structure within the state of Louisiana by catering not to mob bosses or oil refineries centralized in New Orleans, but by using public works and construction projects to woo the middle and lower classes, found in middle and upper Louisiana, into his political camp. For scholars who specialize in rhetoric and oratory Huey P. Long's style is a compelling study. From explaining his political platform through the use of vernacular to his insatiable and deeply personal criticisms of his opponents and foes, to the emotionalism and, oftentimes, exaggerations found in his language, Long's style is unique and yet would become representative of a major style of demagogic oratory. Finally, as this thesis has argued, there is also room for those who study religion and religious rhetoric to examine Huey P. Long life, persona, and career.

Religion and religious rhetoric played a significant role in the life of Huey P. Long. From an early age Long was exposed to Biblical teaching, attended church services

regularly as a young man, and at one point expressed interest, though fleeting, in becoming a minister. This early exposure and deep familiarity with religious terminology would play a major role in Long's life, as would the power he saw connected to such language. As this thesis has expressed Huey P. Long began experimenting with religious rhetoric early, originating with his sales positions and eventually branching out into politics. His 1927-28 campaign for governor of Louisiana saw him attempt to incorporate religious motifs and stories into his stump speeches yet also displayed his resistance to organized religion as a power structure he might have to contend with. As Long progressed throughout his career he made conscious and strategic decisions in how he used religious rhetoric, and to what agendas he attached the language to. This behavior provides a fascinating study for religious historians and offers possible insight into Long's personal perception of religion and his hesitation to embrace certain aspects of it.

Regardless of Huey P. Long's personal feelings or early attempts at using religious rhetoric by the time he was elected a U.S. senator he had found his niche. Using Old Testament prophecies and judgment stories combined with Jesus' parables, Long fashioned a virtually impenetrable shield of religious ideas that supported his specific brand of economic re-distribution as the only way to eradicate poverty and restore a much needed balance to the American nation. Despite his outrageous behavior, including an almost compulsive use of profanity and a steady ingestion of alcohol, Long was able to successfully promote his "Share Our Wealth" as a distinctively religious as well as simplistic, practical, and achievable program.

Not only did Huey P. Long use religious language profusely through his later political career but he was also not opposed to allowing others to attach religious images,

motifs, and tropes to himself. As discussed in the latter portion of this thesis, peers such as Gerald L. K. Smith, as well as the general public who supported him, connected a very specific “messiah” image to Long’s work that was cemented in his early death, often portrayed as a martyrdom, by assassination. These religious associations came by way of likening Long to religious figures, such as Joshua, Moses, and even Jesus, and by associating him with the righteous cause of God. In the face of immense political opposition, due in large part to Long’s own political bullying, he was defended by his followers as being unjustly persecuted, with many using the term “crucified.” Long’s assassination brought forth an outpouring of support that was religious in nature with many harkening back to the image of a religious teacher who afforded no harm to anyone but was still murdered by evils rivals who were jealous of Long’s success. In light of these three angles, previously unexplored to this depth, scholars of religious history and of religious rhetoric can possibly begin, alongside historians and political and rhetorical analysts, to explore the complicated, yet compelling, conundrum that is the politician Huey P. Long.

Epilogue

If one were to visit Baton Rouge, Louisiana today one would find it almost impossible to escape the presence of Huey P. Long. The massive state capital, built at his behest, dominates the downtown skyline, standing as a reminder of the bold, and at times, excessive behavior of Long. His burial site and statue face this capital building as though admiring his own work, again, true to Long’s nature. Louisiana State University, though founded previous to Long’s reign as governor, exists in the state it does today almost solely because of his intervention. From buildings to funding to staff hiring Long

dramatically changed the face of LSU, transforming it into a university of repute. Outside the boundaries of Baton Rouge Long's public works campaign, specifically bridges and roads, connect the state in ways that it had not been connected before. Perhaps most importantly Long changed the way the politics were done in the state of Louisiana. For many this change was for the worse. They perceived Long as a fascist, dictator who bullied a state, and attempted to bully the U.S. Senate, into giving him unfettered power that he used according to his whims. However, just as many viewed Long as a hero for the people, who did not shy away from his roots but embraced them, garnering him a massive constituent base which he would ride to the highest points of political power available to him. Not only did he change politics demographically or electorally but he became a forerunner in the art of using religious rhetoric to achieve political success. Although arguably this tactic existed previous to Huey P. Long, he utilized it to its fullest extent, molding it to his particular platform, style, and historical context, in ways that have not been given enough credence by the historiography.

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