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The Rise Of Christian Nationalism: Government and Religion In The Reagan Era and Beyond

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THE RISE OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM: GOVERNMENT AND RELIGION IN
THE REAGAN ERA AND BEYOND

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
History

by
Daniela Lizbeth Bedolla
May 2024

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines why the relationship between government and religion should remain separated. By focusing on The Cold War and Ronald Reagan's presidency (1981-1989), this thesis demonstrates Reagan's administration marked a modern pointing that led to the rise of Christian Nationalism in American politics. The Cold War initially started modeling the puzzle pieces of what Christian Nationalism became, however it was during Regan's presidency that the American public began to see white Evangelical religious leaders take prominent federal positions, the frequent use of different religious opportunistic tactics in presidential and governmental campaigns and witness religious rhetoric influence domestic as well as foreign policies.

The thesis incorporates evidence that includes personal correspondence, introductory forms to religious amendments and sections of Reagan's personal diary. In addition, the use of newspaper clippings, speeches, and works of previous historians as further evidence to demonstrate why the separation of government and religion is crucial. This thesis argues that Evangelical Christians use their beliefs to influence a Christian worldview on American society in ways that directly violate the First amendment of the American constitution. With that, Reagan's administration—along with prominent evangelical religious leaders'—often ignored the nation's religious diversity. As Reagan's administration skyrocketed Christian Nationalism to new heights never seen before, the genesis

that sparked Christian Nationalism blurred the lines between church and state and conservative American politics.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

On August 23, 1984, then-President Ronald Reagan (1911-2004) remarked at the Ecumenical Prayer Breakfast in Dallas, Texas, “if we ever forget that we’re one nation under God, then we will be a nation gone under.”¹ Well before Reagan, the relationship between government and religion has been hazy. Several people believe that the United States was founded on Christian beliefs, while others do not believe that the United States had a religious founding. I first became aware of the influence religion has over the government during middle school. At the time, I did not fully comprehend why it was a big issue. From a young age, we are taught how the Pilgrims fled England due to religious persecution and came to America seeking “religious freedom.” However, during my middle school history class our teacher began to lecture us about the California Mission Systems. I remember him describing the missions in their full glory. My history teacher showed us images of different missions throughout the Southland of California. He mentioned how these missions helped pave the way for modern-day civilization and the assimilation of Native

¹ Remarks at an Ecumenical Prayer Breakfast in Dallas, Texas, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, accessed March 31, 2023. <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/remarks-ecumenical-prayer-breakfast-dallas-texas>

Americans into society. At the time, I was young, childish, and naive. I did not understand what the issue was or if there were any issues for that matter.

As time went on, I got older, my education progressed, and my interest began to unfold. It was not until I began to take history classes in college that I learned about the realities in which religion influenced the extermination of many Indigenous groups, languages, and cultures. It was during this time that I began to question why this was the case and I began having a difficult time trying to understand why this happened. I could not comprehend how religion motivated countries to invade lands, commit mass murders, and force the assimilation of countless Indigenous peoples. It was from that moment forward I became much more vigilant and noticed how religion and government are still interconnected in the twenty-first century.

When questioning how religion influences governments, I want to pursue and challenge those who believe that the United States had a religious foundation. In doing so, I want to establish why the relationship between government and religion should remain separated. As I establish the reasoning why the separation between government and religion is crucial, I investigate Ronald Reagan's presidency (1981-1989) as a modern turning point that led to the rise of Christian Nationalism which put into practice the religious ideology within government policies. Christian Nationalism is not a religious creed, but a

political ideology.² Journalist Katherine Stewart states how Christian Nationalism promotes the myth that the American republic was founded as a Christian nation, asserts that legitimate government adherence to the doctrines of a specific religious, ethnic, and culture heritage, and demands that our laws be based not on reasoned deliberation but idiosyncratic interpretations of the Bible.³

The use of Christian Nationalism within Reagan’s presidency paved the way to foreign and domestic laws that interpreted Christian ideology in ways that shaped American policies—a major event that continues in the present day. As Reagan’s presidency pushed forth Christianity—more specifically white Evangelicalism—I will commence with the Cold War. However, before leading into the Cold War, I distinctively mention white Evangelicalism mainly because of their apocalyptic narrative. The Evangelical apocalyptic narrative is in part of the pioneering brand in which white Evangelical Christians used a “utopian vision” which interpreted the Scriptures as their core theology.⁴ The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) describes the core theological values of Evangelicals in four categories. First, conversionism (the born-again experience), second, Biblicism (obedience to the Bible), third, activism (demonstration of the gospel in missionary and social efforts) and lastly, crucicentrism (the sacrifice of Jesus

² Katherine Stewart, *The Powers Worshippers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019). 4.

³ Stewart, *The Powers Worshippers*. 4.

⁴ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2015.) 243.

Christ in the crossing making possible the redemption of humanity).⁵ Part of Evangelical obedience to the Bible has resulted in the campaigning against LGBTQ+ communities, abortions, and more recently IVF.

Nonetheless, The Cold War initially started molding the puzzle pieces that gave rise to Christian Nationalism during Ronald Reagan's presidency. During his administrations, many Christian Evangelicals took prominent positions and merged religious ideology with foreign and domestic affairs. In doing so, Americans saw the persecution of countless homosexuals, challenges to women's reproductive rights, and the use of religion at the forefront of presidential and governmental campaigns as opportunistic tactics. The context of the Cold War was responsible for the start of Christian Nationalism, but it was Reagan's presidency that skyrocketed it.

In addition, my research will contribute to the ongoing academic literature that examines the separation of government and religion. As my research examines the separation of government and religion, and argues against a Christian founding, it will highlight direct events and laws in Reagan's presidency that illustrate how religion played a pivotal role during his administrations. Reagan cemented Christian Nationalism into the heart of US policies and identity. In addition, in the culmination of the US in the final years of the Cold

⁵ "What is an Evangelical?," National Association of Evangelicals, accessed March 27, 2024, <https://www.nae.org/what-is-an-evangelical/>.

War, majority of Christian Evangelicals push forth policies based on their religious theology, which continues to play a major role in the American governmental system.

This thesis examines the societal and cultural history surrounding the rise of Christian Nationalism during the Cold War, with a particular focus on Ronald Reagan and his administrations. The issue of government and religion have become more polarized in contemporary society. In recent years, white Evangelical radicals have perpetuated mass hysteria surrounding bodily autonomy within women's reproductive rights, threaten the rights of the LGBTQ communities and promote Christian ideology to divert inclusivity within American society.

In Chapter 1, gives introductory background on scholarly works that provide an on-going contribution to the continuous issues interwoven with the separation of government and religion. In doing so, I illustrate how several authors' works, all of whom have similar conclusions, demonstrate, and highlight how having a wall to keep government and religion separated is the best possible solution for America. In addition, I use the works of Christian historian, Mark David Hall as a form to illustrate how having a different conclusion than others cannot only set you apart, but also argue against the claim that America has a Christian founding. Chapter 2 considers how the Cold War shaped the rise of Christian Nationalism. The rise of Christian Nationalism within the Cold War, it has become evident that Reagan's different methods to fight against communism

stemmed from his belief that communism was a threat to religion and people's freedoms worldwide. In addition, Reagan's constant efforts to abolish communism from the world, the threat of atheism started to become Reagan's new issue regarding communism. Chapter 3, dives into the lives of the most notable Evangelical Christians. These religious puppeteers consisted of Ronald Reagan, Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson, who all strengthened the position of Christian Nationalism in ways never seen before.

Chapter 4 examines different opportunistic tactics Reagan used to strengthen his governmental and presidential campaigns. These opportunistic tactics were shaped directly by the religious rhetoric based on Evangelicalism that continues to play an important role in modern day. Chapter 5 mentions how Reagan was keen to establish an amendment that voluntary have students pray during school hours. However, within this chapter, it mentions how this amendment is a direct violation of the First amendment while also developed on Christian tendencies. Chapter 6 gives in detail how Evangelical rhetoric sparked the persecution of homosexuals within the United States. Starting with a brief history on homosexuality, then moving into Evangelical conversion therapy called Exodus to remove "gayness" from individuals, and lastly gives readers an insight into The Lavender Scare that sought the persecution of homosexuals working within the White House. Finally, Chapter 7 looks in modernity. Religion continues to remain a thriving enterprise in which its influence has become a vital part of

American politics. However, the constant use of religious theology remains an ongoing dilemma in which issues in present day persist.

Throughout centuries, religion has been at the forefront of many governments worldwide. According to the Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, around the world, religious actors and institutions have gained political influence, marshaling religious arguments to justify their activities.⁶ Additionally, religion has inspired a multitude of world events, ranging from horrific terrorist acts to altruistic responses to the refugee crises.⁷ Peter Mandeville, author of *The Geopolitics of Religious Soft Power: How States Use Religion in Foreign Policy*, describes how religion features prominently in the international relations of many stages around the world today.⁸ Mandeville indicates that mobilizing religious affinities as a form of public diplomacy, positioning religion as a force to counteract perceived ideological foes or creating transnational networks of religious populism to support incumbent regimes—governments clearly perceive geopolitical utility in the power of religion.⁹ The issue of government and religion being used within domestic and foreign policies is dreary. Although my research will solely focus primarily on the domestic side of

⁶“Religion and World Politics”, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, accessed January 1, 2024, <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/topics/religion-and-world-politics>.

⁷ “Religion and World Politics.”

⁸ Peter Mandeville, *The Geopolitics of Religious Soft Power: How States Use Religion in Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).

⁹ Mandeville, *The Geopolitics of Religious Soft Power*, 4.

these issues, I will insert some foreign policies that I deem apical to my main argument. As the conversation between the separation of government and religion continues to unfold, The Cold War, religious leaders, opportunistic tactics, and domestic policies leading up to and within Reagan's presidency will demonstrate how crucial it is to have a wall separating government and religion.

Assessment of Literature of the Field

This thesis uses research from several disciplines to illustrate the turning point leading to the height of religion used within the government. Many authors have different points of view whether religion should be used within the government. The primary areas of scholarship provide insight into the topic and periods where the use of religion in government was at its highest turning point. This kind of societal and cultural analysis provides an in-depth investigation how The Cold War led to the rise of Christian Nationalism, which becomes a prominent entity during Ronald Reagan's presidential terms and continues in present day. Naturally, the issues of government and religion demonstrates the desperate need for white Evangelicals mode for power. This concept of "mode for power" is illustrated through present day radical laws in which push forth the Christian theology.

Political historians, Erwin Chemerinsky and Howard Gillman have an extensive number of years within the field. Erwin Chemerinsky is a dean and professor at the University of California Berkeley, where he teaches constitutional

law, criminal procedure, and federal jurisdictions. Howard Gillman is a chancellor and professor at the University of California, Irvine. Gillman teaches Political Science with a focus on the American Constitution and the Supreme Court. Both authors have established prominent careers within their fields, where they have collaborated multiple times to write about government and religion. Their most recent book, *The Religion Clause: The Case for Separating Church and State*, examines the highly controversial issue of the relationship between religion and government. In doing so, both authors firmly state their opinions regarding the separation of religion and government. Both authors contend that religion “should not provide a basis for exemptions from general laws, such as those prohibiting discrimination or requiring services.”¹⁰ Chemerinsky and Gillman seek to be “descriptive and normative” as they describe the law of the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause. The authors examine the Constitution as it “was meant to and should be interpreted as creating a secular republic.”¹¹ Chemerinsky and Gillman are firm in their argument and mention how the government has “no role in advancing religion and practices should be a private matter...and [should] not inflict injury on others in the name of religion.”¹²

In their analysis, Chemerinsky and Gillman argue in detail about how religion has affected minority groups in the development of the United States. In

¹⁰ Erwin Chemerinsky and Howard Gillman, *The Religion Clause: The Case for Separating Church and State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 16.

¹¹ Erwin Chemerinsky and Howard Gillman, *The Religion Clause*, 18.

¹² Chemerinsky and Gillman, *The Religion Clause*, 19.

addition, both authors describe how the American Constitution was drafted for the welfare of the people, “not by religious establishment and forced conformity...but by the secularization of government authority and the toleration of diverse religious practitioners.”¹³ While Chemerinsky and Gillman have a strong argument within their book, other authors would argue against it.

Though Chemerinsky and Gillman examined the nation’s founding and Constitutional questions regarding religion, Jeremy R. Hatfield specifically examined the Reagan Administration in his 2013 dissertation for Ohio University. In doing so, Hatfield establishes how religion shaped the administration’s foreign affairs. Within the dissertation, Hatfield explores the relationship between the Religious Act—the Religious Act mentions being “neutral” towards religion may burden religious exercise as surely as laws intended to interfere with religious exercise—the Reagan Administration, and the Cold War, describing it as a “political marriage.”¹⁴ Hatfield’s dissertation is part of the growing contribution of literature where that examines the Religious Right’s involvement in foreign policy. Not only does Hatfield dive into the relationship between the Religious Act, the Reagan Administration, and the Cold War, but he also argues how foreign affairs played a significant role in the activism of the Religious Right, which historians have generally recognized. Hatfield mentions several authors who describe and

¹³ Chemerinsky and Gillman, 22.

¹⁴ Jeremy Hatfield, *For God and Country: The Religious Right, The Reagan Administration, and The Cold War* (PhD Dissertation: Ohio University, 2013).

support his argument. However, he uses a well-established author who has a similar idea as Chemerinsky and Gillman. Within his dissertation, Hatfield uses historian Andrew Preston, in which he addresses how the use of religion in American Foreign Relations historiography has altered its outcome.¹⁵ Preston points out how integrating religion in the history of American foreign relations has affected the methodology that often governs the study of foreign affairs. However, it may seem religion provides challenges when trying to explain the actions of the government's foreign affairs outcome.

Another author of this scholarly work is Andrew P. Hogue, who is an Associate Dean of Engaged Learning in the College of Arts and Sciences at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. Hogue teaches philanthropy, civil society, social innovation, and politics. However, Hogue is best known for his book *Stumping God: Reagan, Carter and the Invention of a Political Faith*. Hogue begins with the 1980 presidential election, which helped usher in a new era of religious politics in America with Reagan's victory. Hogue acknowledges how Reagan's 1980 presidential election was the reason why the United States factored religion into politics—especially during presidential and state government campaigns. In addition, Hogue mentions how Reagan did not attend church often during his years as governor of California, but to gain public approval and to set a good example, Reagan frequently attended church during his presidency and

¹⁵ Hatfield, *For God and Country*, 21.

campaign.¹⁶ What's more, Hogue argues how many modern presidents “sought divine guidance in making decisions and leading the nation.”¹⁷ He describes how seeking “God’s counsel to carry out their momentous responsibilities...help [them] gain perspective, establish priorities, be confident about their decisions, endure trials and accept defeat.”¹⁸

Nonetheless, what I think is the most important within Hogue’s book is the mention of the influence each president has within their own religion. Hogue mentions the influence presidents have by stating, because of their duties and influences...[presidents] has played an important role in the debate over the intent of the First Amendment...through their personal religious practices, rhetoric, and policies, they have a significant impact on American attitudes about church-state relations.¹⁹ Having mentioned the influence presidents have over religion, Hogue later uses, for example, Ronald Reagan’s presidency to acknowledge the height of Evangelicalism. Hogue identifies this historical shift and expression of religious ideas that built up Reagan’s presidential campaign and presidency in different modes of how those particular elections helped shape the future of religious discourse. In addition, Hogue also uses Kennedy’s presidential campaign, where America saw the height of Catholicism during the 1960s. But what is most notable is that although Kennedy was a Catholic

¹⁶ Andrew P. Hogue, *Stumping God: Reagan, Carter, and the Invention of a Political Faith* (Waco: Baylor University, 2012).

¹⁷ Hogue, *Stumping God*. 417.

¹⁸ Hogue, 417.

¹⁹ Hogue, 420.

president, he supported the separation of government and religion.²⁰

Acknowledging this information provides insight into which presidents supported the separation between religion and government. Hogue, like the prior authors, supports the separation of government and religion.

To continue, author Frank Lambert is another historian who has a similar argument as the previous authors mentioned. Lambert is a history professor at Purdue University. With the help from the university, Frank Lambert was able to publish his book *The Founding Fathers and The Place of Religion in America*. The book dives into the events that changed religious identity into a significant role in the establishment of the “New World.” Here, Lambert argues that the place of religion in the “New World” proposed a free marketplace of religion, then designing a church-state republic.²¹ Within his book, Lambert is quick to establish his argument, basing it on the “meaning of freedom in the concept of freedom of religion.” Lambert does this by singling out the question of how the Puritan Fathers erected their ‘City upon a Hill,’ which later transformed it into the Founding Fathers, distinction between the line of church and state.

According to Lambert, the Founding Fathers developed an entirely different understanding of what religious freedom actually means. To them, the Founding Fathers believed in religious toleration, as Lambert notes that the Founders

²⁰ Hogue, 422.

²¹ Frank Lambert, *The Founding Fathers and The Place of Religion in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

also prayed for religious toleration: that persons of faith should be no more suspended, silenced, disgraced, [and] imprisoned for men's traditions. Men and women ought to be allowed to worship as their consciences dictated as long as their practices were prejudicial to none but to those that seek their own quiet, credit, and profit in the world.²²

Lambert indeed believed that America did not have a Christian founding, nor did the Founding Fathers establish the "New World" with Christian ideologies.

Instead, Lambert states throughout this book how the Enlightenment period (was an intellectual and cultural movement that emphasized reason over superstition and science over faith) was responsible for their way of thought. During the Enlightenment, many people were exposed to different ideologies and mythologies. This allowed people to explore and embrace new religions, new traditions, and new ideas without punishment. According to Lambert, "the Enlightenment, they had great confidence in the individual's ability to understand the world and its most fundamental laws through the exercise of his or her reason."²³ To Lambert, the concept of true religion was not something that was handed down by the church or within the bible, but it was rather found through free inquiry, underscoring his argument for the separation of government and religion.

Equally important is Anne C. Loveland's *American Evangelicals and the U.S. Military, 1942-1993*, which is based on a religious studies perspective.

²² Lambert, *The Founding Father and The Place of Religion in America*, 42.

²³ Lambert, 3.

Loveland's book studies the 50 year-history of conservative Evangelicals within the U.S. military.²⁴ Loveland argues that Evangelicals began to exert enormous conservative military influence during the 1940s. Evangelicals fought a significant battle to become major "players" in the military. They succeeded because they provided several programs that introduced their religious beliefs—most notably, the introduction of chaplains into military forts. According to Loveland, during the 1950s, the use of chaplains was meant for "publicizing its new religion" by "[the] worship of God is a requirement of moral living and Religion in Our Way of Life...that service to the nation."²⁵ The recruitment of chaplains meant the conversion of military people to improve the moral behavior of American troops. However, Loveland not only focuses on the Evangelical chaplains, but she also addresses the 1993 debate between Evangelicals and military leaders regarding homosexuals in the military and inputting a ban on homosexuals being recruited. According to Loveland, many Evangelical leaders felt having homosexuals within the military was a "dare disrespect to a nation founded on god."²⁶

However, for military Evangelicals, the issue of homosexuals within the military provoked a greater conflict between sectarian and plural ideals during the 1970s and 1980s. Loveland mentions how the Evangelicals relied on the "Old and New Testaments in, which condemned homosexuality as a sin,"²⁷ thus,

²⁴ Anne C. Loveland, *American Evangelicals, and the U.S. Military, 1942-1993* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1996).

²⁵ Loveland, 11, 12.

²⁶ Loveland, 324.

²⁷ Loveland, 324.

reinforcing their argument. With the use of several authors who all have similar arguments, Loveland is another author who has similar ideals, but this time, she focuses on military personnel to further her argument. In addition, the issue of homosexuality has become an ongoing debate. Nonetheless, Loveland uses General Colin L. Powell to illustrate how being homosexual is not “anti-American.” Powell uses words of “recognition and acceptance” to validate his point. According to Loveland, Powell noted, “We’re all Americans. We are many kinds of Americans of all walks of life, and there are some Americans who are homosexual...homosexuals [who] are every bit as good as any other American, even if they have what is called an alternate lifestyle.”²⁸ With the use of Powell, Loveland is able to demonstrate how other high military personnel had different ideals than that of society. Powell was ahead of his time, thinking differently and not letting religious ideologies influence his decisions, stating:

We are all Americans, we are free to make our own moral choices about that. We, as professional members of the military, must conform to that policy...[However] a public policy should not be influenced by religious principles...if after those decisions are made you still find it [homosexuality] completely unacceptable and it strikes to the heart of your moral beliefs, then I think you have to resign.²⁹

Having used this quote within her book, Loveland is able to strengthen her argument. Loveland can demonstrate how different people did not become influenced by social-religious tantrums. Loveland can show how no matter what

²⁸ Loveland, 325.

²⁹ Loveland, 325.

position one holds; one's mindset can be completely different from others. As stated, with the use of Powell and his high position in the military, Loveland strengthens her argument. In addition, the use of high-position individuals is something that should be integrated into all books.

Another author who uses a similar method to Loveland and has similar conclusions as the previous authors, is Mark Douglas McGarvie, professor of history at the University of Richmond. McGarvie's *One Nation Under Law: America's Early National Struggles to Separate Church and State* documents America's transition from Christian communitarianism to liberal republicanism with its insistence that church and government do not interfere with one another. By diving into the contract clause that "spawned" from the First Amendment, which mentions "protecting all matters of private interest expressed in contract from interference by government."³⁰ The First Amendment safeguards religious freedom, defending the right to religious belief as a matter of personal integrity. McGarvie's argument is about the role of law in church-state politics, where it established that "churches played important roles in influencing American culture."³¹ McGarvie describes how the early republic was consistent with ideologies transforming the contentious debate over American values, which minimized the "primary laws" of nation and state that change churches from their

³⁰ Mark Douglas McGarvie, *One Nation Under Law: America's Early National Struggles to Separate Church and State* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 2004), 3.

³¹ McGarvie, *One Nation Under Law*, 4.

traditional role. However, McGarvie is quick to acknowledge that although the First Amendment safeguards religious freedom, it “did not mean acceptance so much as separation: each religious enclave exercised its own rules regarding conformity with a sectarian defensiveness that stemmed from the precarious state.”³² McGarvie also acknowledges that “the Constitution did not separate church and state, but it does endorse a conception of society that made separation inevitable.”³³ On the other the separation of church and state is not a federal matter, but like McGarvie mentions, “essentially [it] became a state matter.”³⁴ In addition, McGarvie’s argument gives historical context, which focuses on the interrelationships between church and state. However, and most interesting is the concept in which McGarvie brings up during the “conflict” between religion and nationalism. McGarvie is the first author to mention nationalism becoming an issue or having a conflict with religion. McGarvie describes nationalism as a moving force that “overlapped but asserted” the religious movement. Notably, the concept of nationalism came to bear on future historiography on the subject.

Another author who argues for the separation of government and religion is Lisa McGirr. Lisa McGirr is a professor of history at Harvard University. McGirr specializes in the twentieth-century history of the United States, where she studies politics, religion, and social history. McGirr’s 2002 *Suburban Warriors*:

³² McGarvie, 30.

³³ McGarvie, 13.

³⁴ McGarvie, 13.

The Origins of the New American Right dives into the case study of the New Right while focusing on Orange County in Southern California. McGirr begins her case study by understanding the “tenacious roots of popular conservatism in twentieth-century America.”³⁵ In doing so, McGirr demonstrates conservative ideology that occupied a “central” but “not dominant” place in American history, culture, and life. McGirr emphasizes how Orange County became Reagan County and the central area where conservatism flourished between the 1960s and 1980s. It is here where McGirr identifies Orange County as a revitalization and militant Right but also as a place where high-tech defense industries resulted in an emphasis on “strong private development” with little regard to public and community spaces.

However, McGirr’s main argument is to provide insight into the rise of conservatism. Orange County became a conservative hub, but as McGirr states, “it was also the birthing ground of powerful grassroots political movements.”³⁶ It is here where McGirr acknowledged the rise of political leaders like Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan. Nonetheless, McGirr’s book does not directly call for the separation of church and state, but it identifies how suburban people created new political and social philosophies anchored on Christian fundamentalism, nationalism, and libertarianism.³⁷ McGirr addresses the

³⁵ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015)

³⁶ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 21.

³⁷ McGirr, 8.

separation of government and religion in a different way. According to McGirr, the 1950s and early 1960s saw the rise of “anti-communism” that provided “an egalitarian society based on the authority of God.”³⁸ It is here where McGirr begins to base her argument. McGirr calls for the separation of government and religion but uses a different method that investigates the rise of conservatism in modern-day America.

Another author with similar ideas is Robert Wuthnow. Wuthnow’s book *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* looks at how the symbolic boundaries of religion have changed during World War II. The book provides a historical discussion of the changes in the contours of American religion beginning in the 1940s, while attempting to discuss what has changed and what has not changed about the place of religion within American society. Wuthnow describes how “American religion has undergone a major restructuring...[where] American religion has been altered sufficiently that we find ourselves faced with new realities that are sometimes much more difficult to understand or appreciate.”³⁹

By examining the restructuring of religion during World War II, Wuthnow describes how World War II did not only bring change in religion but saw new developments in technology and international relations—just as Jeremy Hartfield mentions—populations, and many more. Wuthnow describes these changes as

³⁸ McGirr, 164.

³⁹ Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 6.

“greatest interest [with] the utterance of public discourse on matters of collective value, politics and economics.”⁴⁰ However, and most importantly, Wuthnow mentions the use of religion as a presidential endorsement. Wuthnow is another author who believes that the use of religion in a presidential campaign heightens religion in American society. For instance, Wuthnow analyzes the Evangelical resurgence of the 1970s and 1980s. Wuthnow explains how there was an increase of “37% of evangelicals”⁴¹ when Ronald Reagan ran for governor and president. Wuthnow, like Lisa McGirr, is another author who addresses the separation of government and religion in a different way. Wuthnow uses World War II as the fundamental way to address the wall to separate government and religion, here the height of new developments in technology, international relations, and many more as forms of “legitimizing myths in religious forms.”⁴²

As the works discussed thus far demonstrate, most scholars within this field argue that America did not have a religious founding and argue to keep religion and government separate. However, author Mark David Hall had a different approach. Hall, a professor at George Fox University (GFU), is a Distinguished Scholar of Christianity and Public Life. At GFU, Hall teaches several courses, such as American Political Theory, Religion and Politics, and Constitutional Law. From his time at GFU, Hall has written three books—including *Did America Have a Christian Founding?*—which share the same argument that

⁴⁰ Wuthnow, 10.

⁴¹ Wuthnow, 187.

⁴² Wuthnow, 283.

America did in fact have a Christian founding. In addition, all three books have been published by his university. It is essential to highlight that the university is responsible for the publication of all three of his books. In doing so, *Did America Have a Christian Founding?* lacks scholarly objectivity. This raises several questions: is he politically motivated in some way? Is it to please the publishing company, to please his place of work, or to please himself? Hall is part of the continuous growth of literature that revolves around religion and government. As I conducted my research, he was the only author who argued America did have a Christian founding.

Nonetheless, author Mark David Hall's *Did America Have a Christian Founding?: Separating Modern Myth from Historical Truth* dives into the American Founding Fathers' motivations for embracing a sturdy understanding of religious liberty. In doing so, Hall presents a large amount of evidence that America did, in fact, have a Christian founding. Hall challenges historians who argue that America's Founding Fathers were not deists by stating, "most authors who claim the founders were deists ignore these and other clear statements by them that God intervened in the affairs of men and nations."⁴³ However, as Hall's book continues to support his claim, it is missing crucial events that happened during and prior to America's independence. In addition, he does not adequately engage with works that have explored the prevalence of Deism among the

⁴³ Mark David Hall, *Did America Have a Christian Founding? Separating Modern Myth from Historical Truth* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2019), 33.

Founders. At the same time, Hall does not mention the persecution of countless individuals whose beliefs differ from the “founders” and the millions of Indigenous peoples who were killed due to their religious beliefs. In fact, within the one paragraph where they are briefly mentioned, Hall states, “All humans are created in the image of God,”⁴⁴ but later changes his wording by imposing how slave owners fought to keep slavery not because of their Christian convictions but because “religion and morality” should be the law of the land.

Furthermore, it is essential to mention how Hall discusses the First Amendment. Toward the end of the book, Hall mentions, “all citizens are protected by the First Amendment,” which is why:

Jehovah’s Witnesses have been protected from being compelled to salute and pledge allegiance to the American flag, Muslim prisoners have been permitted to grow beards despite regulations requiring inmates to be clean-shaven, members of a New Mexico branch of a Brazilian church have been allowed to use hallucinogenic tea in religious ceremonies, and Amish families have been exempted from compulsory school attendance.⁴⁵

It is interesting to note how Hall acknowledges religious liberty with the First Amendment. He describes it as a way the Founding Fathers made serious efforts to accommodate all religious commitments. However, Hall mentions how all citizens are free to practice any religion as they please but cannot as “Americans deny the presence of God within their consciences and government.”⁴⁶ Although Hall, does demonstrate an intellectual form of published works, Hall’s *Did*

⁴⁴ Hall, *Did America Have a Christian Founding?*, 48.

⁴⁵ Hall, 145.

⁴⁶ Hall, 146.

America Have a Christian Founding?: Separating Modern Myth from Historical Truth is not published through a scholarly outlet but one that takes the Christian Bible as its only standard. Thus, this thesis challenges Hall's work and argues for the separation of government and religion and argues against the narrative of America having a Christian founding.

Statement of Research and Analytical Methodology

Using the research of scholars in political science, history, and civil history, I will demonstrate why having a wall to separate government and religion is in the best interest of American politics and why Ronald Reagan's presidency is a modern turning point leading to the height of religion used within the government. Throughout the history of America, religion has been used in policies to implement the justification of mass killings, conquering foreign lands, and subjection of others by pushing "God's" plan for morality. Within my thesis, I will use several primary and secondary sources to strengthen and expand my argument. I will use speech transcripts from the Ronald Reagan Library, which demonstrate the modern turning point that heightened the use of religion within the American government. Apart from using speech transcripts, I will be using archival material from the Reagan Library to explore the internal correspondence between the president, people from Congress, and American citizens regarding events that transpired because of religion.

In addition, I will use Erwin Chemerinsky and Howard Gillman's work to further examine the concept of a "wall" to separate government and religion. Chemerinsky and Gillman's work has provided ample evidence that illustrates how this "wall" can benefit politics in America. Finally, in seeking additional authors to provide ample evidence to support my argument, I will demonstrate how Christian Nationalist have used their Christian ideology to suppress other religious groups, Indigenous cultures, and minority groups within America.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BEGINNING

On May 13, 1981, the world held their breath as news broke that Pope John Paul II was shot and seriously wounded in St. Peter's Square by the Turkish assailant Mehmet Ali Agca.¹ For millions of the Catholic faithful, this day would be one to remember. The head bishop of the Catholic faith was attacked, and potentially dying. The shooting of the Pope was seen by the world as an attack towards the Catholic faith. But according to Mehmet Ali Agca, it was meant to be seen “as a symbol to restore Pan-Turkish unity and to get rid of Armenians, and Christians.”² For others, many conspiracy theories began to arise due to the attempted assassination which symbolically represented worldviews in the Cold War Era. After the attack on the Pope, word spread around the world that within Turkey, there was a likelihood of a communist revolution. This revolution would be sparked by an organization known as the Grey Wolves. The Grey Wolves were a Turkish ultranationalist organization, which led to target Kurds both within the country Turkey and abroad to advance Turkish nationalism, albeit at the sometime promoting state political and military goals.³ The organization was

¹ *Spy Ops*, Season 1, Episode 4, “The Plot to Kill the Pope.” September 8, 2023. Netflix

² *Spy Ops*, Season 1, Episode 4, “The Plot to Kill the Pope.” September 8, 2023. Netflix

³ Diliman Abdulkader, “The Ultra-Nationalist Grey Wolves: A Turkish Government Tool to Persecute Kurdish People,” *Georgetown Journal of*

convinced that killing the Pope would eliminate Christians from this earth, as he was the leader of the faith. However, the United States and NATO did not believe that the Turkish organization Grey Wolves were responsible for the attempt. On the other hand, both believed that the attempt was prompted by the Bulgarian Secret Service, which was sponsored by the Soviet Union or also known as the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics).⁴ NATO and the United States believed the attempt was a strategic maneuver by the USSR. Vatican Expert Fabio Marchese Ragona states, “the secret service of the Soviet Union, the KGB (Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti) must surely have been involved in the attempt to assassinate the pope...[because] John Paul II was the first foreign Pope, hailing from Eastern Europe (Poland) and represented an anti-communist ideology.”⁵

During the height of the Cold War, the assassination attempt of Pope John Paul II was massive. There was a strong reason to believe that the Pope might contribute to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. John Paul II, born May 18, 1920, in Wadowice, Poland lived under a communist regime. The Soviet Union fought desperately to keep Poland under its control. However, Lech Walesa (president of Poland 1990-1995) led a solidarity movement and a successful pro-democratic

International Affairs 23, no.1 (2022):92-98, <https://doi.org/10.1353/gia.2022.0015>, (accessed January 8, 2024).

⁴ *Spy Ops*, Season 1, Episode 4, “The Plot to Kill the Pope.” September 8, 2023. Netflix.

⁵ *Spy Ops*, Season 1, Episode 4, “The Plot to Kill the Pope.” September 8, 2023. Netflix.

effort, leading to the end of communist rule in Poland during 1989. As war was unfolding on the other side of the world, in Washington D.C. the newly elected president experienced a similar fate to Pope John Paul II. Just elected, President Ronald Reagan was shot six times by the assailant named John Hinckley Jr.⁶ Thankfully, the President was not directly hit as the Pope. However, due to the similar circumstances, Reagan and Pope John Paul II became infatuated with one other. Both were shot and came close to knocking on heaven's door. It was for that reason and their respective religious faiths that it would ultimately become the sole reason to become a united front, all while giving them an extraordinary amount of common ground.⁷ Because of their mutual briefs and near experiences with death, both appeared to believe equally in God's will and the defect of communism in the Soviet Union. In the 1999 *Times Magazine*, both Reagan and the Pope gave interviews stating how they believed God saved them for a chosen mission, in which, both "shared the same view that each other had been given a spiritual mission...both discussing the unity of their spiritual views and the terrible oppression of atheistic communism."⁸ As both the Pope and Reagan had come to believe in an atheistic communism, much of the world began to believe the same.

⁶ Assassination Attempt on Reagan, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/reagans/reagan-administration/assassination-attempt-reagan> (accessed November 25, 2023).

⁷ Paul Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan: A Spiritual Life* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011), 209.

⁸ Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan: A Spiritual Life*, 211.

In the United States, we have often been conditioned to believe Communism is a horrendous-godless-devilish ideology. As for me, learning about Communism in graduate school seemed a bit taboo. However, questions began to arise as to why? For example, as Americans, why do we always associate communism with dictatorship, famine, and the complete annihilation of human rights? Why are so inclined to believe that communism is connected to a godless government? According to Richard Nixon, he once stated on August 21, 1960, that a

significant number of Americans contend that communism is no particular concern of theirs. Few can still believe that communism is simply a curious and twisted philosophy which happens to appeal to a certain number of zealots, but which constitutes no serious threat to the interests or ideals of free society. The days of indifference are gone... The danger today in our attitude toward communism is of a very different kind. It lies in the fact that we have come to abhor communism so much that we no longer recognize the necessity of understanding it.⁹

Nixon's makes an important observation in noting that "we no longer recognize the necessity of understanding it." Communism has not only affected American society and politics, but it has affected the world. The 1917 Russian October Revolution launched the eventful formation of the Soviet Union that initially

⁹ The Meaning of Communism to Americans: Study Paper by Richard M. Nixon, Vice President, United States of America, The American Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/the-meaning-communism-americans-study-paper-richard-m-nixon-vice-president-united-states> (accessed November 25, 2023).

formed a communist government.¹⁰ Four years later July 1, 1921, Communism took root in China. Inspired by the events that happened in Russia, Chinese citizens took matters into their own hands, and with that, the Communist Party was formed.¹¹ During the 1930s and 40s, communism spread throughout the world. Found in countries such as Nicaragua, Cuba, North Korea, and Poland; there was no end game from communism beginning to spread to the corners of the world. As communism took hold in said countries, in the United States, opposition to communism was promoted by conservatives, monarchists, fascists, liberals, and social democrats.¹² As the fascist governments rose to prominence as major opponents of communism in the 1930s, it was until May 9, 1945 when the USSR declared victory over Nazi Germany in WWII, that eventually launched the start of the Cold War. As the ideology of communism began to expand, these events played a pivotal role in shaping the Cold War, as we will see in Chapter 1.

In Chapter 2, I will discuss how the Cold War initially started molding the puzzle pieces that gave rise to Christian Nationalism. It was during the Cold War in which many Evangelical leaders took prominent roles within the government, established laws and promoted events—like The Lavender Scare—which were

¹⁰ “Days That Shook the World: Russia’s Two Revolutions of 1917,” YouTube, March 8, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-tlCpleWLI> (accessed January 14, 2024).

¹¹ Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao: The Memoirs of Mao’s Personal Physician* (New York: Random House, 1994).

¹² Norman Markowitz, “The Communist Party in the ‘30: The Depression and the Great Upsurge,” *People’s World*, May 14, 2019, <https://www.peoplesworld.org/article/the-communist-party-in-the-30s-the-depression-and-the-great-upsurge/> (accessed January 14, 2024).

unmistakably developed with religious ideology. As the Cold War ensued, Christian Nationalism rose to limits with which no other religious denominations were able to grapple. With that, the Cold War and President Ronald Reagan's political career coincided almost exactly with the rise and fall of communism in Russia.¹³ As events began to unfold, and as communism began to become a threat worldwide, it eventually became the force that would motivate Ronald Reagan to begin to illustrate mythologies that eventually led to what I would call Reagan's anti-communist crusade.

After the assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II, Reagan launched an investigation to pinpoint who was responsible for the assassination attempt on the Pope. In doing so, Communism began to—according to Reagan—manifest ungodly connotations.¹⁴ After launching the investigation, Reagan spoke to the American people where he proudly stated “I would rather see my little girls die now, still believing in God, than have them grow up under communism and one day die no longer believing in God.”¹⁵ For as long as I can remember, Americans have been conditioned to believe Communism is a horrendous-godless-devilish ideology. With the rise of Christian Nationalism during the Cold Era, the United States had no room for godless ideology. Because according to evangelical leaders, America was a country founded by God.¹⁶ They reasoned that as a

¹³ Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan*.

¹⁴ Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan*, 216.

¹⁵ *Spy Ops*, Season 1, Episode 4, “The Plot to Kill the Pope.” September 8, 2023. Netflix.

¹⁶ Loveland, *American Evangelicals and the U.S. Military*.

citizen of this supposed god-fearing country, communism has no room here, nor any room for atheists for that matter. However, Reagan and others—including Christian Nationalists—began to embrace the notion that everyone who lives or supports communism were atheists and a threat to the country. Thus, establishing another label that would connect communism and godlessness together—atheism. As communism continued to threaten Western culture and the rest of the world alike, it eventually became an issue. As previously mentioned, Evangelical leaders, and some historians, hypothesized America was a country founded on religious principles, so protecting this radical belief was fundamental. However, I would argue differently. Communism posed a threat to Christianity, and in the end, became a threat to religion worldwide. As Communism began to threaten all aspects of the world, atheism became the forefront of communism, and Reagan’s presidency would profit by mentioning how he would obliterate communism from the face of the earth.

The Cold War

“Either Communism must die, or Christianity must die...because [Communism] is an actual battle between Christ and antichrist.”

-Billy Graham, 1953

Finding a definitive answer as to why the Soviet Union and the United States “hate” each other is determined by several different reasons. According to the Library of Congress, the “United States government was initially hostile to the Soviet leaders for taking Russia out of World War One and was opposed to a

state ideologically based on Communism.”¹⁷ According to History.com, it states, “it was the Soviet expansionism into Eastern Europe that fueled many Americans to fear a Russian plan to control the world,” and “the fear of the Soviet Union to use the space race as a way to launch nuclear weapons from space.”¹⁸ However, according to political historian William Inboden, the Soviet Union was “the apex of military might, with a nuclear arsenal that outmatches that of the United States.”¹⁹ In other words, the Soviet Union had a large and powerful military presence that threatened the United States. However, the Cold War issue was not only about military power, but about religious ideology. It was a “titanic struggle,” states Ronald Reagan biographer David T. Byrne. Byrne calls the Cold War a “holy war between good and evil, with the fate of humanity hanging in the balance.”²⁰ In it, the Cold War view of a world was divided into a Judeo-Christian West fighting atheistic communism, promoting immorality as part of the

¹⁷ “Revelations from the Russian Archives: The Soviet Union and the United States,” Library of Congress, [text=The%20United%20States%20government%20was,state%20ideologically%20based%20on%20communism.https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/archives/sovi.html#:~:text=The%20United%20States%20government%20was,state%20ideologically%20based%20on%20communism.](https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/archives/sovi.html#:~:text=The%20United%20States%20government%20was,state%20ideologically%20based%20on%20communism.https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/archives/sovi.html#:~:text=The%20United%20States%20government%20was,state%20ideologically%20based%20on%20communism.) (accessed January 14, 2024).

¹⁸ “Cold War History,” History, October 27, 2009, <https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/cold-war-history#>, accessed January 14, 2024).

¹⁹ William Inboden, *The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan, The Cold War, and the World on the Brink* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2020).

²⁰ David T. Byrne, *Ronald Reagan: An Intellectual Biography* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 28.

communist plot to hasten the moral degeneracy of America.²¹ Communism during the Cold War in the United States was a political form of propaganda based on a godless ideology. It was during the Cold War that sparked an event that would lead to the persecution of homosexuals working with governmental facilities, and laws were established based on religious ideologies, including efforts to formally legalize school of prayer.

In the late 1940s, the Cold War was solidified. It was during this period in which the United States was able to introduce Western influence in countries formerly occupied by the Soviet Union. By the 1950s, the US was at war with Korea, Germany was divided, McCarthyism skyrocketed, and the launch of the Lavender Scare had begun. By 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik I, becoming the first nation on earth to put a manmade object in space. In the early 1960s, America was playing technological catch-up with its archenemy, the Soviet Union.²² Intelligence gathering was becoming the epicenter of the Cold War. In the 1970s, tensions were beginning to ease between the US and the Soviet Union because of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks—also known as SALT–1 (1972) and 2 (1979).²³ As religion played a role very early on during the Cold War, it was by the 1980s in which the Reagan presidency increased the

²¹ David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 37

²² "Area 51: The CIA's Secret," directed by Paul Nelson (National Geographic, 2014), Disney +, 2014.

²³ "Area 51: The CIA's Secret."

appeal of religion during the Cold War. After the assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II and Reagan, religion took center stage during the Cold War. During one of Reagan's visits to Ireland during 1984, Reagan promoted the idea of the "Western value" to the exclusive preserve of white Protestant European civilization, and the relativists of the Left, who saw the United States and Soviet Union as moral equivalents.

Nevertheless, the Cold War eventually became a major issue that could make or break Ronald Reagan. During Reagan's presidency an American economic recovery began, helping spark a global boom. Additionally, he rebuilt the American military and used it to help repair America's alliances and check the Soviet Union. According to Inboden, Reagan revived his nation's beliefs, its values, and its roles in the world, and recaptured the strength, dynamism, and grandeur of the office of the president.²⁴ In all parts of the globe, Reagan's presidency would recognize modernity as a symbolic wave that allowed Reagan to help position America. When it came to the Cold War, Reagan perceived the Soviet Union's frailty and illegitimacy, and developed a strategy to exploit its weakness while also partnering with it to reduce the risk of nuclear apocalypse.²⁵ But questions arise as to if Reagan's strategies would help end the Cold War? Or would it strengthen it? According to Melvyn P. Leffler author of *Ronald Reagan*

²⁴ Inboden, *The Peacemaker*.

²⁵ Inboden, *The Peacemaker*, 4.

and The Cold War: What Mattered Most, discusses an on-going debate about Reagan's aim to win the Cold War stating that he:

wanted to abolish nuclear weapons...but his significance stemmed less from the arms buildup and ideological offensive that he launched at the onset of his presidency in 1981, than his desires to abolish nuclear weapons, tamp down the strategic arms race and avoid Armageddon. These priorities inspired Reagan to make overtures to Soviet leaders and gain a better understanding of their fears.²⁶

As the arms race launched at the onset of Reagan's presidency in 1981, according to Christian Nationalists, Reagan managed to maintain an optimistic belief in which the machinery against religious freedom honored the greatest irony of communism as the force to contain a nation under God.²⁷ By being able to contain such an optimistic belief, Reagan's administration was able to put forth the Cold War as a type of war that used international politics and domestic politics to influence ideological struggle in which religious attributes were applied in certain situations. As the Cold War continued as a replay of the past world wars, Reagan recognized that the natural expansionist intentions of the "evil" Soviet Union, like Nazism were fundamentally opposed to individual rights and freedom.²⁸ It was this recognition that Reagan would ultimately become an anti-communist crusader.

²⁶ Melvyn P. Leffler, "Ronald Reagan and The Cold War: What Mattered Most," *Texas National Security Review Volume 1, Issue 3* (May 2018), 14.

²⁷ Byrne, *Ronald Reagan*.

²⁸ Byrne, *Ronald Reagan*, 257.

Reagan the Anti-Communist Crusader

As we have been discussing, Reagan's overall objective was to rid the world of the unholy idea of communism. For Reagan, this plan of action was part of what he claimed to be God's will for him.²⁹ By being able to isolate the mythology of his methods to abolish communism from the world, Reagan felt compelled to pray for guidance because it became a crucial issue where it required careful and precise attention, as it spoke directly to Reagan's motivation and conviction in confronting the USSR. According to Reagan, to defeat godless communism, he would need to develop eight strategic pillars that would help him end communism. These pillars were:

First, restoring the American economy as a foundation of national strength and morale. Second, delegitimizing Soviet communism as a system of government. Third, building up and modernizing America's military. Fourth, supporting anticommunist insurgencies around the world. Fifth, making 'mutual assured destruction'(MAD) obsolete through the Strategic Defense Initiative. Sixth, promoting human rights and freedom around the world, especially in the Soviet Bloc. Seven, pressuring the Soviet system into producing a reformist leader with whom Reagan could negotiate. Eight, reducing the number of nuclear weapons in the world—with the ultimate hope of abolishing nuclear weapons entirely.³⁰

As Reagan developed these eight pillars, he would eventually use the strengths and liabilities of the Soviet Union as a fundamental form to end them. By developing comprehensive strategies, Reagan ultimately strengthened the

²⁹ Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan*.

³⁰ Inboden, *The Peacemaker*, 8.

United States' global position, all while shattering the position of the Soviet Union.

Yet, as the position of the Soviet Union began to disintegrate globally, Reagan believed that the citizens living under communist regimes would eventually one day have peace.³¹ In addition, it had become evident that the Cold War was not only Reagan's central concern. Reagan's first day in office during 1981, issues within foreign policy began to consume his time. However, that would not remove the issues of godless communism from his duties. It would initially cause Reagan to pursue a comprehensive belief which would end communism throughout the world and prompt self-government versus dictatorship, religious faith amongst atheists, and prosperity versus penury and freedom over tyranny.³² Nonetheless, prior to winning the presidency, Ronald Reagan had been attacking the Soviets since the 1950s. During the 1950s, Ronald Reagan was acting in Hollywood and taking it by storm. It was during this time in which he used his platform to vocally attack communism, but it would not be until the early 1980s in which Reagan's passionate defiance only increased once he took office as president.

As we break down the historical events which occurred during the Cold War we will see how Vietnam, Watergate, the détente with the Soviet Union and Jimmy Carter's presidency (1977-1981) began to configure how Reagan viewed

³¹ Inboden, *The Peacemaker*, 5.

³² Inboden, 175.

communism. It was during Reagan's Presidential news conference on January 29, 1981, that he answered the question that Sam Donaldson from ABC asked him: "What do you see as the long-range intentions of the Soviet Union? Do you think the Kremlin (Russian government) is bent on world domination that might lead to a continuation of the Cold War or do you think under other circumstances they thought it possible?" Reagan responded: "Their determination that their goal must be the promotion of world revolution and a one-world socialist or communist state...[they] openly and publicly declared that the only morality they recognized is what will further their cause, meaning they reserve unto themselves the right to commit a crime, to lie, to cheat...the Soviets considered such behavior moral, not immoral."³³ For Reagan, the Cold War was the most dangerous war in which any president of the United States had fought. Losing the Cold War meant losing our freedom that the Founding Fathers sought to gain.³⁴ But as Reagan put it, making a deal with the Soviets would be akin to "giving up your dreams of freedom to save our own skins, is as if we're willing to make a deal with your slave master."³⁵

The Cold War became a fundamental event that catapulted religion at the forefront of the battle. As religion became the centerpiece of the Cold War very

³³ Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, "President Reagan's First Press Conference on January 29, 1981," YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-Qv5GmGonk> (accessed February 12, 2024).

³⁴ Byrne, *Ronald Reagan*.

³⁵ Byrne, *Ronald Reagan*, 100.

early on, it was not until Reagan came into office that he used religion as a foundation to end communism. Reagan often used the Bible as a foundation to obliterate communism. He used the story of Moses as a form of justification to ensure future generations to live a Christian lifestyle than to suffer and die as Christ did on the cross then living under communism.³⁶ However, as events continued to unfold, we will see how atheism became interwoven with communism. Atheism would ultimately become the reason why religion became the center focal point to end communism for leaders like Reagan.

Atheism in Communism

By the 1980s, it became abundantly clear the importance of understanding Reagan's obsessive focus with the USSR's anti-religious ideology in the realm of American political discourse. With it, Reagan's Christian worldviews became centralized and shaped whether the Soviet Union and the United States could even come together.³⁷ However, as there was no set form of unity for the Soviet Union, Reagan began his religious worldviews to articulate Christian moral values in opposition to the USSR³⁸--since according to American society, communism was considered atheistic.

Throughout Reagan's first term as president, whenever given an opportunity to openly criticize Soviet atheism, he would take it, jokingly stating,

³⁶ Byrne, 101.

³⁷ Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan*.

³⁸ Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan*, 219.

“Communism works only in Heaven, where they don’t need it, and in Hell, where they already have it.”³⁹ During the twentieth century, various countries within the Soviet Union undertook secularized efforts within their societies as an attempt to regulate religion. Instead, religion was substituted with what became known as “scientific atheism” as a defining feature in communist ideology.⁴⁰ Peter Atkin, author of *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science: Atheism and Science*, explains that a scientific atheist holds the domain of science is the physical world, but considers there is no other variety of world, and that the “spiritual” is an illusion generated by a physical brain.⁴¹ In other words, “scientific atheists” believe in their technological and scientific methods that ultimately disprove religion as a whole. This concept of “scientific atheism” sent much of American society and then President Ronald Reagan into a frenzy. Most Americans grew up with religious fundamental views. With it, believing in God and eternal salvation became the overall objective of any religious sector. So, when

³⁹ Kengor, 220.

⁴⁰ Steven Rathgeb Smith, “Religion under Communism: State Regulation, Atheist Competition, and the Dynamics of Supply and Demand,” in Rachel M. McCleary (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Economics of Religion*, Oxford Handbooks (2011; online edn, Oxford Academic, 18 Sept. 2012), accessed 16 Jan. 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195390049.013.0012>, (accessed January 16, 2024).

⁴¹ Peter Atkins, “Atheism and Science,” in Philip Clayton, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science* (2008; online edn, Oxford Academic, 2 Sept. 2009), accessed 16 Jan. 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199543656.003.0009> (accessed January 16 2024).

communism promoted atheism within the Soviet Bloc, change needed to happen in the minds of Americans.

Reagan once said: “Atheism is as much a part of communism as the Gulag. Every kind of roadblock is thrown in the way of religion up to including imprisonment. Children in Soviet schools are indoctrinated from grade 1 with the falsehood that there is no God.⁴² After coming across this quote, I became intrigued by it. This quote talks more about the mental capacity in which Reagan became infatuated with using religion as an overall objective to influence the war against the Soviet Union. For Reagan, communism was developed as a form to eradicate all religions because believing in a supreme being gave people faith and influenced their actions which can become reciprocated towards oneself or government.⁴³ However, answering the overall question as to why continues to linger. For example, why does religion continue to influence societies into fighting wars—religious wars—that essentially give way to matters in which government and religion should remain separate? Or why does American politics continue to get involved in foreign affairs that ultimately have nothing to do with the United States? Carlo Ginzburg, author of *The Cheese and the Worms*, tells the story of a sixteenth century Italian miller named Menocchio who is accused of heresy during the Inquisition (the 12th century Inquisition was a powerful office set up by

⁴² Byrne, *Ronald Reagan*.

⁴³ “Communism and Religion,” (Jan 17, 2024)
<https://victimsofcommunism.org/curriculum-chapter-3/> (accessed January 17, 2024)

the Catholic Church to root out and punish heresy throughout Europe and the Americas)⁴⁴ and sentenced to death, all because Menocchio began to question religious and social conflicts within the society in which he lived. During the sixteenth century, Menocchio questioned church authorities and their place in society. He questioned how religious text became the foundation of governmental rules and regulations. But most importantly, Menocchio saw how church influence within government contrasted that model of perfection to become a struggle of social order and mortality.⁴⁵

I use the example of Menocchio to illustrate how similar and different the use of religion played within the government in different parts of the world and in different times. Hundreds of years have passed between Menocchio and the Cold War. Atheism in communism became Reagan's obsessive focus with the USSR's anti-religious ideology. Reagan sought to free the Soviet Union from its atheistic policies, but as we continue to discuss the discourse of atheism in communism, questions arise as to whether the threat of communism threatens religion worldwide?

Communism and the Threat to Religion Worldwide

⁴⁴ "Inquisition," History, November 17, 2017, <https://www.history.com/topics/religion/inquisition#> (accessed January 17, 2024).

⁴⁵ Carlos Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013).

On May 23, 2023, *The Washington Post* published an article “Communism Poses Top Threat to Christian Lives Worldwide, Religious Freedom Expert Says.” This article discusses how Communism remained the greatest threat to Christian lives.⁴⁶ Writer Mark A. Kellner establishes how many years after the Cold War, communism continues to pose a threat to religion. Kellner states that “Americans” do not expect the number one persecutor of Christians around the world is not the Islamist terrorist. It is Communism. Communist countries are still the main persecutors of Christians.”⁴⁷ After reading this quote, I believe Kellner talks about a critical point. Not only are Americans conditioned to believe communism is an ungodly ideology, but after 9/11 the rise of Islamophobia rose to new heights not seen before. Communism no longer plagues the minds of Americans; this time Islam became the number one contender against the “persecution of Christians.” As the article continues to unfold, Kellner interviewed Rev. Johnnie Moore, former member of U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in which he calls for “educating” the American society about the roots and extent of religious persecution.⁴⁸ Moore later

⁴⁶ Mark A. Kellner, “Communism Poses Top Threat to Christian Lives Worldwide, Religious Freedom Experts Say,” *The Washington Post*, May 10, 2023, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/may/10/communism-poses-top-threat-christian-lives-worldwi/> (accessed January 18, 2024).

⁴⁷ Kellner, “Communism Poses Top Threat to Christian Lives Worldwide, Religious Freedom Experts Say,” <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/may/10/communism-poses-top-threat-christian-lives-worldwi/>

⁴⁸ “Communism Poses Top Threat to Christian Lives Worldwide, Religious Freedom Experts Say.”

emphasized the ignorance within American society regarding religious persecution against Christian lives. Moore states, “Christians in America have come to think that somehow their faith should be accepted and not controversial and being a Christian means that everybody will like you.”⁴⁹ Similar to Kellner, Rev. Johnnie Moore mentioned another crucial point. If history has taught us anything, it is that the United States has done no wrong. However, that would be far from the truth. Although the United States has no set religion—thanks to our Founding Fathers—the concept of religion in the United States has been responsible for the suppression of other religious groups, the forced assimilation of countless Indigenous groups with the use of the religious mission systems, and the suppression of minority groups (for example homosexuals, and people of color) within the United States.

As communism continued to be viewed as an ongoing threat to religion worldwide, it became evident that communism became the central focal point in American politics. Reagan began to perceive communist ideology as a danger to religious practices not only by the Soviet Union, but around the world.⁵⁰ According to Reagan, he indicated how communism influenced regions like El Salvador, where the guerrillas launched a revolution, where people lived “under a darkness of godless communist rule,” and in North Korea, communism was the

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/may/10/communism-poses-top-threat-christian-lives-worldwi/>

⁴⁹ “Communism Poses Top Threat to Christian Lives Worldwide, Religious Freedom Experts Say.”

⁵⁰ Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan*, 221.

foundation of “hatred, oppression and brutally attacking human liberty.”⁵¹

However, Cold War historian and author of *Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective*, Philip E. Muehlenbeck describes how many scholars now recognize that religion was a factor throughout the Cold War, but became the very nature in which the Cold War allowed religion to play a greater role in international history than ever before.⁵² According to Muehlenbeck, the arms race was no longer the reason behind the Cold War, but religion overtook its place.

Interestingly, as Reagan continued to fight against the godless ideology of communism, Reagan never neglected to forget that nuclear weapons and nuclear war could have become the destruction of Western civilization.⁵³ In addition, just as nuclear weapons and war could have become the destruction of Western civilization, it became evident that religion became the weapon to wage the Cold War.⁵⁴ It became perceivable that communism took hold of regions, which threatened democracy and religion. For example, in Western Europe, bastions of secularism, Christian Democracy combined with conservative politics and conservative faith to provide the most robust challenge to both communism and fascism.⁵⁵ In the United Kingdom, Britons conflated Christianity with civilization, and saw both as under threat from atheistic communism.⁵⁶ However,

⁵¹ Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan*, 223.

⁵² Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2012).

⁵³ Byrne, *Ronald Reagan*.

⁵⁴ Muehlenbeck, *Religion and the Cold War*.

⁵⁵ Muehlenbeck, *Religion and the Cold War*, xiii.

⁵⁶ Muehlenbeck, xiii.

it may seem communism became a threat to religion worldwide, because it began to challenge Western ideals which called for modernization and centralization, which bear on individuals, nations, and societies. Overall, the threat communism posed to religion was an issue that Reagan could not forget. Reagan's overall objective during the Cold War was to protect individuals' right to practice their religion without having a godless ideology ruin their overall salvation. Because of Reagan's Christian views, throughout his administration religion would become the focal point. Religion, for Reagan, meant more to him than the ordinary person. We will see how religion increasingly took hold on Reagan and his administration. We will see how the inclusion of religious Evangelical leaders took high governmental positions and tried to push forward laws that were based on their religious ideology. These Evangelical leaders would become prominent figures in both religious sects and politics.

CHAPTER THREE

RELIGIOUS PUPPTEERS

“The idea that religion and politics don’t mix was invented by the Devil to keep Christians from running their country.”¹ - Jerry Falwell (1974)

The interaction between religion and political life in America is interconnected in countless ways, from obvious institutional ties to practices that express religious sensibilities, though far removed from conventional religious settings.² Religion has no longer become a private matter. In the last 90 years, Americans have seen how religious spectacles continue in other forms. On April 29, 1980, for example, more than a quarter of million evangelical Christians packed the Mall in the nation’s capital to proclaim, “Washington for Jesus.”³ As the title states “Religious Puppeteers,” will dive into the lives of four individuals who all played a major role within the rise of Christian Nationalism, starting with then-president Ronald Reagan. Reagan, occasionally known as the “Great Communicator,” argued that the United States faced a dire crisis, where the best way to handle its situation was to address it with conservative reforms. He instituted TV evangelicals like Pat Robertson and Billy Graham as political advisors during both presidential terms. Both Pat Robertson and Billy Graham's

¹ William R. Goodman Jr, James J.H. Price, *Jerry Falwell: An Unauthorized Profile* (Virginia, Paris & Associates, 1981).

² Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 18.

³ Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 4.

ties to the political atmosphere strengthened the position of Christian Nationalism in major ways that had never been seen before. However, as Robertson and Graham strengthened Christian Nationalism on the political front, there was another individual that used religious and conservative fundamental ideology to enforce this Christian ideology as the proper way of “American life.”⁴

Televangelist Jerry Falwell was credited with playing an important role within the presidential campaign of Ronald Reagan. Falwell, along with Robertson and Graham, became an essential part of the growth of Christian Nationalism, the influence of religion used on the political front of foreign and domestic policies, all while Reagan became the key figure in their ploy.

Chapter 3 dives into the lives of these four key figures. First, we will discuss Ronald Reagan, and how he became the key figure in the religious ploy strengthened by Robertson, Falwell, and Graham in American politics. Second, I explore the life of Billy Graham. I discuss Graham’s methods and tactics, which shot Christianity to the forefront of American politics. Next, I will dive into the life of Jerry Falwell. Falwell was a major reason why many Americans accepted controversial ideologies against homosexuals, the Aids crisis and more.⁵ Along with Jerry Falwell, I believe both Falwell and Robertson are the most controversial Evangelicals that took center stage in the influence of religion in America. Finally, I examine the life of Pat Robertson. I discuss how he was able

⁴ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

⁵ Loveland, *American Evangelicals and the U.S. Military*.

to use religion to strengthen his position within American society, and how he had to “help” Reagan during his presidencies. With the use of religion becoming the epicenter of American politics, and within presidential and governmental campaigns, Reagan, Graham, Falwell, and Robertson heightened Christian Nationalism like it had never been seen before prior to the Cold War.

Ronald Reagan

Ronald Wilson Reagan was born February 6, 1911 in Tampico, Illinois, and was the youngest son to a devoted Christian mother named Nelle and an Irish Catholic father named Jack Reagan.⁶ Reagan grew up in a “Protestant form of Christianity” at home, where he claims that his mother Nelle Reagan played a large role in his Christian faith.⁷ In 1924, a young Ronald Reagan sat alongside his mother Nelle at the First Christian Church in Dixon, Illinois, where the start of his “spiritual pilgrimage” began. However, at the same time, across the globe the Soviet Union was in distress, because founder of the Soviet Union Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) was nearing his death. Lenin’s death became a worldwide event. However, his death would become something to the Soviet Union. Because of Lenin’s death, it would lead to events in which the fall of the Soviet Union would become evident. Lenin’s last years had seen the final elimination of all noncommunist political organizations and publications and the suppression of the

⁶ Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan*.

⁷ Byrne, *Ronald Reagan*.

democratic deviations in the Communist Party itself.⁸ Little did Reagan know that communism would take center stage in his life.

From a young age, Reagan's life was overtaken by church and religious sermons, thanks to his mother Nelle. Nelle indoctrinated Reagan with her religious beliefs and schooled him in Christian doctrine all while living a Christ-centered lifestyle.⁹ Due to the influence his mother had on him from a young age, this religious lifestyle affected him during his adult years. In 1922 when a young Reagan was introduced to a little book known as *That Printer of Udell* by Harold Bell Wright. Reagan became infatuated with the book, stating how that book made an “everlasting impression on me,” describing it as a “wonder book about devout itinerant Christians.”¹⁰ Moreover, Reagan was often caught quoting sections of the book during some presidential speeches. For Reagan, religion was everything. Religion became the reason as to why he would introduce laws with religious tendencies during both of his presidential terms. In addition, according to Lou Cannon, Reagan’s leading biographer, Cannon would identify how religion became a true passion for Reagan and how individual freedom became the catalyst for his religious ideology, mentioning: “personal freedoms

⁸ “The U.S.S.R from the death of Lenin to the death of Stalin,” Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Soviet-Union/The-U-S-S-R-from-the-death-of-Lenin-to-the-death-of-Stalin> (accessed January 22, 2024).

⁹ Byrne, *Ronald Reagan*.

¹⁰ Byrne, *Ronald Reagan*, 18.

ultimately would prove irresistible to all people everywhere. He believed in spreading the gospel of freedom.”¹¹

As religion continued to play an important role in the life of Reagan in and out politics, Reagan ultimately became a part of a grander role in which other Evangelical figures like Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson came into play. For these Evangelical figures, religious influence all Westerners because we have been shaped by our pasts, at both cultural and intellectual levels.¹² Reagan’s religious convictions had a crucial impact on his policies during his time in the White House. The religious convictions that he instituted during his presidency are a prime example of how his childhood influenced him. As previously stated, Reagan grew up in a “Protestant form of Christianity.” From bible school classes to writing columns for the church newspaper, Reagan was baptized on June 21, 1922. Reagan’s baptism became the symbol of his commitment to Christ. A few years after graduating from high school and going to college, Reagan later moved to California where he launched his career in the entertainment industry. Now, a huge Hollywood star, Reagan admitted that his religious convictions did not have a sense of direction.¹³ However, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, Reagan became acquainted with influential Evangelicals. In 1953, Reagan first met Billy Graham. Graham would help Reagan reconnect

¹¹ Byrne, 67.

¹² Gary S. Smith, *Faith and the Presidency: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹³ Smith, *Faith and the Presidency*, 327.

with his religious convictions once more. After meeting Graham, Reagan eventually reconnected with his religious past and once again embraced it. During the 1960s, Reagan became acquainted with another Evangelical leader at a local church where he attended in California. Donn Moomaw, an Evangelical minister, became a close friend of Reagan, however, his influence would not exceed the limits in which Graham had on Reagan.

Graham's influence was demonstrated when he gave a speech after Reagan was elected governor of California in 1967. During Graham's speech, he spoke to the state assembly about the importance of the Bible and prayers having a "special" place within government offices.¹⁴ It was then when Reagan declared his intention to follow the teachings of Jesus in his work as governor and rely on God's help in discharging his duties.¹⁵ As I will discuss later in chapter 5, involving religion in state matters is against the U.S. First Amendment. Under the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause, it strictly prohibits the use of any religion in the context of any form of politics, thus calling for the separation between religion and government—in which our Founding Fathers fought for. During his time as governor, Reagan's personality began to show. In front of the world, Reagan was convivial, upbeat, courteous, respectful, self-confident, and humble.¹⁶ But for his wife, Nancy Reagan (1921-

¹⁴ Smith, 327.

¹⁵ Smith, 327.

¹⁶ Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan*.

2016) she described him as a “loner, opaque, remote, distant and inscrutable.”¹⁷ However, as Reagan continued and finished his term as governor of California, it was not until winning his presidential election twice where we would see how he used religion to fight against communism during the height of the Cold War.

For Reagan the Cold War and communism meant the freedom for Westerns was being threatened. As freedom was threatened for Westerns, it meant that their religious freedoms were threatened as well. During the Cold War, Reagan and Evangelical sects believed that America was a country made for and by God.¹⁸ This claim would not be formidable until Reagan was elected as president. Many Christian followers, including Reagan, believed America was the defender of good, calling it “the shining city on the hill” that must lead the fight for freedom against atheist darkness.¹⁹ Reagan insisted: “America as a place in the divine scheme of things that was set aside as the promised land...I believe that God in shedding his grace on this country has always in the divine scheme of things kept an eye on our land and guided it as a promised land.”²⁰ As freedom maybe the claim in which called for the obliteration of communism, the main goal of the US foreign policy during the presidency of Ronald Reagan was ending the Cold War—which was achieved in the Revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe

¹⁷ Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan*, 389.

¹⁸ Smith, *Faith and the Presidency*.

¹⁹ Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan*.

²⁰ Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), 25.

during 1989, in the German reunification in 1990, and in the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.²¹

For Reagan, religion was everything to him. Religion became the reason as to why he would introduce laws with religious tendencies during both of his presidential terms. In this way, the struggle against communism became personal for Reagan. As Western freedoms were threatened along with religion, Reagan's decision to obliterate communism was in large part based on religion. With the use of spreading freedom as the overall concept into regions of the world, Reagan's foreign policy would use the Bible as an explicit reasoning, in which the war against communism was detrimental for the idealized American style of freedom.²² However, as the story continues to unfold, we will see how intricate religion played a major role in Reagan's life choices and political decisions.

Billy Graham

William (Billy) Franklin Graham Jr. born on November 7, 1918, was a world-renowned Evangelical preacher who captivated the minds of many world leaders including that of the late Queen Elizabeth II (1922- 2022). Growing up on a dairy farm in Charlotte, North Carolina, Graham preached the Christian Gospel to more people in a live audience—as an adult—than anyone in history has done

²¹ Byrne, *Ronald Reagan*.

²² Byrne, *Ronald Reagan*, 125.

before him. However, his journey to becoming a preacher is not at all difficult to understand. In 1934, at the tender age of 15, Graham made a personal commitment to God through the ministry of another Evangelical named Mordecai Ham (1877- 1960). Mordecai Ham was an outspoken Evangelical whose anti-semitic and anti-Catholic claims foreshadowed his preaching's. Despite accepting the controversial preaching of Ham, his teaching would still change the life of a young Billy Graham forever.²³

Years later in 1949, Billy Graham became a worldwide sensation due to his first ever crusade launched in Los Angeles, California. The Los Angeles Crusade of 1949 was the first Evangelistic campaign held by Billy Graham.²⁴ Originally meant to last for two weeks only, there would be an extension of the crusade for another eight weeks. This crusade eventually introduced Evangelicalism as an influential force in American culture.²⁵ The concept of Evangelicalism was brought into the spotlight by Billy Graham. Graham, originally a traditionally defined Protestant, broke from the fundamentalist society of

²³ Dan Graves, "Mordecai Ham, Outspoken Evangelist," Christianity, April 28, 2010, [outspoken-evangelist-11630588.html](https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1801-1900/mordecai-ham-outspoken-evangelist-11630588.html).<https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1801-1900/mordecai-ham-outspoken-evangelist-11630588.html> (accessed January 24, 2024).

²⁴ "7 Lives Changed at Billy Graham's Los Angeles Crusade," Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, September 24, 2019, accessed January 24, 2024, <https://billygraham.org/story/lives-changed-at-billy-grahams-los-angeles-crusade/>.

²⁵ Kristy Etheridge, "Billy Graham's 1949 Los Angeles Crusade Left Lasting Impression on 2-year-old Attendee," Billy Graham Evangelist Association, September 25, 2018, accessed January 24, 2024, [1949-billy-graham-los-angeles-crusade-left-lasting-impression-on-2-year-old-attendee](https://billygraham.org/story/1949-billy-graham-los-angeles-crusade-left-lasting-impression-on-2-year-old-attendee).

Protestantism and began to call himself an “Evangelical.” Albeit, as the “new” religion known as Evangelicals took the center stage, it was during the Los Angeles Crusade where 3,000 Angelinos chose to convert to Christianity. The conversion of these 3,000 Angelinos was impactful. It would be for that very reason why Graham would eventually receive a celebrity status, become a household name in Washington, but most importantly would become a confidant for future presidents.²⁶

By the 1950’s Graham struck a chord that resonated throughout the country. As his views began to unfold, it would eventually become what seemed to stand for the idea of American righteousness.²⁷ With his newfound fame, Graham became the symbol of what “this country needs [for] revival” according to House speaker Sam Rayburn (1882-1961). To his followers, Graham became the representation of heaven on earth, because Graham represents “reconciliation and fellowship with God and Christ.”²⁸ This representation of the ideology of Graham would allow him to rub shoulders with powerful men, and throughout his career many politicians would court him because of the considerable size of constituency he represented.²⁹ In addition, Graham’s trail-blazing persona would continue to work for him, especially during the Civil Rights Movements. Originally at the start of Graham’s religious career, his crusades

²⁶ Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks. 2017).

²⁷ FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals*. 170

²⁸ FitzGerald, 177.

²⁹ FitzGerald, 178.

were held as segregated crusades. However, on August 23, 1954, when Graham addressed his audience at a sermon in Vanderbilt University in Nashville Tennessee, where he warned his white audience that:

Three-fifths of the world is not white. They are rising all over the world. We have been proud and thought we were better than any other race, any other people. Ladies and gentlemen, I want to tell you we are going to stumble into hell because of our pride.³⁰

This quote gives a firsthand insight into the mind of Graham. Interestingly, if Graham was able to overcome the racial prejudice happening during this time, one would think that his influence would change the mind of his followers. However, that would not be the case, but in solidarity with the minority, Graham would march alongside Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) in the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott.³¹ For Graham, in standing in solidarity with Martin Luther King Jr., he believed that his faith and preaching would prompt the world to change their views on race. However, it would be some years later where American society would no longer be segregated, the issue of race continued to play an enormous role in American politics. Despite that, Graham's preaching took a different turn as he became involved with politicians to end communism entering the Western world. With Graham having used his sermons as methods

³⁰ United Press, "Text of Second Graham Sermon, Delivered To Capacity Crowd in VU Gym," *Nashville Banner*, August 25, 1954, p. 6. Accessed January 10, 2024, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/nashville-banner-text-of-second-graham-s/138495295/>.

³¹ Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks. 2017).

to speak out against communism, the Cold War would drastically alter the climate of American politics, religion, and society.

As the Cold War began to take center stage in world politics, Graham would set off events that promoted American presidents to take drastic measures to ensure religion, and western culture were not threatened. By late 1950s and 25 crusades under his belt, Graham helped merge patriotism and Christianity in the public sphere by addressing politicians and the presidents on the subject of Christ and communism.³² In addition, according to historian Frank Lambert, Graham “framed the Cold War as a moral conflict” becoming a war against “good vs. evil” in a god-fearing country.³³ By using the ideology of good vs. evil, Graham raised the fear within America as he began to preach how communists and left-wingers were infiltrating America’s schools, colleges, churches and national security agencies.³⁴ Alongside Graham, Republican senator Joseph McCarthy (1908-1957) became responsible for persecution of homosexuals within the United States during the Cold War. Graham and McCarthy both viewed homosexuality as a form of communism which brought disgrace to the dignity of American statesmanship.³⁵ As the Cold War ensued, and fears of communism

³² FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals*, 257.

³³ Patrice Taddonio, “How Billy Graham Helped Merge Patriotism and Christianity,” PBS, February 21, 2018, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/how-billy-graham-helped-merge-patriotism-and-christianity/> (accessed January 26, 2024).

³⁴ Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2017).

³⁵ FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals*. 180.

continued to take American society by storm, Graham used his “political power” and divine sermons to bring up the threat of communism. However, decades later during the 1980s, Graham and then newly elected president Ronald Reagan strengthened this idea of a battle between Christ and communism.

Billy Graham’s large-scale preaching and friendship with numerous presidents—including that of Ronald Regan and later Barack Obama—brought Graham to international prominence. However, the issue of the Cold War and communism continued to plague the world. Originally, Graham and Reagan first met in 1953, when Reagan was still a Hollywood movie star. But after Reagan’s triumphant win for California’s governorship in 1967 and later in 1981 when Reagan won over the presidency, Graham accompanied Reagan during many of his public spectacles. In doing so, as American historian Robert Wuthnow notes, both Reagan and Graham were symbolically making the connection between personal faith and the nation.³⁶ An Evangelical himself, Reagan represented the catalyst of Evangelicalism, but with Graham by his side, American society “depended upon religion,” providing the capstone of responsibility in which “democratic values and mortality were accountable.” With it, religion provided an absolute standard, against which measured social politics, and created the discourse of religious values in a whole society. Overall, Graham would not only become a prominent religious figure at a national level, but Graham represented

³⁶ Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.)

the concept of religion and patriotism in which Reagan's presidency would later embrace as Christian ideology. What's more, Graham would become a part of a movement to strengthen this ideology of government and religion being interlinked.

Jerry Falwell

Another Evangelical figure, and who I believe to be the most controversial one of all, is Jerry Falwell. Falwell was born August 11, 1933, was a televangelist, conservative activist, and founder of Liberty University. Falwell catapulted to fame due to his Christian ideals which played a major role in American politics. Coming from Lynchburg, Virginia, Falwell's religious rhetoric influenced the masses in his conservative ideals as a way of an American lifestyle.³⁷ Interestingly, his upbringing would not revolve around any type of traditional religion like other Evangelical leaders. For Falwell, in his early years they were ones of hardships. According to journalist Peter Applebome, Falwell grew up in a household as a battleground between the forces of God and the powers of Satan.³⁸ After understanding his family's religious predicaments, on January 20, 1952, Falwell mentioned how blinding lights and heavenly voices

³⁷ Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks. 2017).

³⁸ Peter Applebome, "Jerry Falwell, Leading Religious Conservative, Dies," *New York Times*, May 15, 2007, accessed January 30, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170630165807/http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/15/obituaries/15cnd-falwell.html?hp>.

came to him at his mother's kitchen. After declaring to receive a religious epiphany, Falwell declared his love for God and accepted Christ at Park Avenue Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia.³⁹ Soon after, Falwell would buy a Bible and the start of his ministry began.

During his youth and most of his early adult years, Falwell would preach about the gospel at the church he established, the Thomas Road Church.⁴⁰ Initially? the church only had 35 people attend the sermons, however, by the 1950s, Falwell had already become a household name. It was not until 1956, where Falwell began to use the church and his preaching for political movements. However, in 1957, Falwell reached new limits when he began to broadcast his sermons through the television and radio. Impressed by the effectiveness of television and radio broadcasting, Falwell noticed an increase in new members, mentioning how television made him an "instant celebrity...people were fascinated...they could see me and hear me preach."⁴¹ The use of these technological devices brought many Evangelical figures into the national and international spotlight. They used these forms of communication to share their religious rhetoric, and often share their views on political issues, foreign or domestic. For a domestic viewpoint, during the 1960s the Civil Rights Movement was at its height, and in the 1970s abortion became the pinnacle of instituting

³⁹ Applebome. "Jerry Falwell, Leading Religious Conservative, Dies."

⁴⁰ Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2017).

⁴¹ Macel Falwell, *Jerry Falwell: His Life and Legacy* (Tennessee: Howard Books. 2008).

religious ideology in a political hemisphere. From a foreign viewpoint, the Cold War was strengthening. The Communist theology was taking shape in foreign countries where it threatened Western culture and religions.

By the end of 1979, Falwell was much more involved within politics—especially after the launch of his religious organization known as the Moral Majority. The Moral Majority was an organization designed to register conservative Christians and mobilize them into political force against what Falwell called “secular humanism” and the moral decay of the country.⁴² At the start of the 1980s, the Cold War entered new levels never seen before. According to Falwell, communism was spreading like wildfire and “we are fighting a holy war.”⁴³ However, in America, during the 1980s, presidential elections were commencing. It was finally time to determine who was going to become the next president of the United States. Racing against the 39th president of the United States Jimmy Carter (1924) was Evangelical Ronald Reagan. Jerry Falwell, the Moral Majority, and other Evangelical leaders like Pat Robertson (1930-2023) would become responsible for the votes that Reagan got to win the election. With the use of direct-mail campaigns, nationwide newspaper ads, and publications like the newspaper the *Christian Voice*, Reagan was portrayed as the best candidate for Christian voters.⁴⁴ Indeed, Reagan represented the ideal president

⁴² Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2017).

⁴³ FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals*, 295.

⁴⁴ Gary S. Smith, *Faith and the Presidency: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

for the United States. The social climate within America was based on Christian ideology. It represented the internal salvation of an individual and having a Christian president represented what America initially stood for, which was America was made by God.⁴⁵ Reagan won the election with 51 percent of the popular vote and 489 electoral votes to Carter's 49.⁴⁶ After the election, Falwell made the cover of *Times Magazine*, but most interesting was a poll conducted by the *U.S. News & World Report* where Americans ranked Falwell as the 14th most influential person in the country, just after Vice President Bush. However, if we look at the presidential election, we will see how religion played a major role in the success in which Reagan and his team achieved. Since the social climate was based on religion, rolling with it emphasized Reagan's position within the election.

What's more, as Falwell played an important role within the presidential campaign against Jimmy Carter, Farwell continued to use his religious doctrines to institute and try to implement laws that would try to alter the lives of American citizens. Falwell and his Moral Majority believed and promoted "pro-life, pro-traditional family, pro-moral and pro-American."⁴⁷ The concept of pro-life was—and continues to be—a political issue as well as a religious one in which life is thought to begin at conception. After abortion became legal throughout the

⁴⁵ Smith, *Faith and the Presidency*. 318.

⁴⁶ Smith, 319.

⁴⁷ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2015.)

United States, Falwell preached against abortion, calling it a “terrible decision”, and comparing it to “Hitler’s final solution for the Jews.”⁴⁸ Pro-traditional families became an issue for many Evangelicals because homosexual families did not represent the standard of Americanism.⁴⁹ Falwell preached televised sermons on homosexuality, declaring the wrath of God on the “sexual mutiny” throughout the country. In addition, although Falwell brought enough attention to the pro-family concept, Falwell was unable to persuade then President Ronald Reagan to support it. Having no support from Reagan was a surprise since without Falwell and the Moral Majority, Reagan would not have gotten the votes needed to win the election.

Falwell also launched the “Clean Up America” campaign in San Francisco, California where he began sending out letters with ballot questions stating, “do you approve of known practicing homosexuals teaching in the public schools?”⁵⁰ His efforts reflected the social climate of religious theology in which many Evangelical leaders tried to influence political leaders to implement laws based on religion—for example the School of Prayer amendment. As for pro-America, the idea can be interpreted differently between everyone. However, to Falwell and the Moral Majority, it was clear to them that pro-American meant

⁴⁸ Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks. 2017).

⁴⁹ FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals*. 298.

⁵⁰ FitzGerald, 301.

following the ways of Christ.⁵¹ Overall, looking back at the Moral Majority, 1980 presidential election, and more, Falwell gave rise to the disparity between his claims, which compromised Christian ideology. Falwell's conservative ideas began to ostracize political leaders in which caused turmoil between both parties. Falwell ultimately introduced the fundamentalist sense of an everlasting crisis between good and evil within national policies. As years have passed between then and now, the rhetoric of good vs evil continues to play out.

Pat Robertson

Marion Gordon "Pat" Robertson born March 22, 1930, was an American media mogul, religious broadcaster, and at one point of his life was even a presidential candidate for the Republican Party. In addition, Robertson was responsible for the development of the Christian Coalition. The Coalition, established in 1987, was a political organization made up of pro-family Americans who care deeply about ensuring that the government serves to strengthen and preserve families and values.⁵² The Christian Coalition would eventually replace the Moral Majority and strengthen Christian values on the political front. As for Robertson, he would reach fame and glory like that of Graham and Falwell. Robertson became well-known to millions, the reason why

⁵¹ Dr. Roger Schultz, "Christianity and the American University," Liberty Journal, February 26, 2019, accessed January 31, 2024, <https://www.liberty.edu/journal/article/christianity-and-the-american-university/>.

⁵² "We Are the Christian Coalition of America," Christian Coalition, accessed January 31, 2024, <https://cc.org/about-us/>.

is because he too, like Graham and Falwell, began to broadcast sermons, thus allowing millions of people to tune in. Alongside Falwell, I believe Robertson is one of the most controversial Evangelicals that took center stage in influencing religion in America. Rob Boston, the director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, calls Robertson “the most dangerous man in America.”⁵³ As we will discuss, Robertson’s earlier years and adult years became an integral piece to what would eventually be called the decade of the Christian Right.⁵⁴

Pat Robertson grew up in a prominent family. Considered a Virginian social light, Robertson’s father Absalon Willis Robertson (1887-1971) was a lawyer and a conservative Democrat, who had served in the U.S. Congress from 1932 through 1946 and in the Senate for the next 20 years.⁵⁵ Absalon political influence and prominent position within the Congress and Senate would eventually lead Pat to adapt certain skills that he learned from his father. Growing up in Lexington, Virginia, Robertson went to private schools during his primary years and then graduated from Washington and Lee universities in 1950.⁵⁶ Soon after graduating, Robertson joined the Marines where he served as an assistant adjutant during the Korean War (1950-1953). After serving two years, he returned and continued his education at Yale University majoring in law; here

⁵³ Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2017).

⁵⁴ David T. Byrne, *Ronald Reagan: An Intellectual Biography* (Nebraska: Potomac Books, 2018).

⁵⁵ FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals*. 369.

⁵⁶ “Marion Gordon ‘Pat’ Robertson,” Christian Broadcasting Network, accessed January 31, 2024, <https://www.cbn.com/patrobertson/bio.aspx>.

Robertson met his wife Dede Elmer (1927-2022). However, his time at Yale would turn out to be difficult. At Yale, Robertson for the first time encountered students better than he was, his grades were mediocre, and upon graduating he failed the New York State bar exam.⁵⁷ Falling into depression, Robertson's luck would change in 1959 where he uprooted his family to Portsmouth, Virginia.⁵⁸ Soon after relocating to Portsmouth, Robertson decided to become a minister and eventually started broadcasting his religious sermons through the television. It was during this time that Robertson bought a location in which he would use the facility to hold these televised broadcasts. Unfortunately, low on money, Robertson took a job at a Southern Baptist Church. Here he worked alongside the pastor who further strengthened his religious ideology and motivated him to continue broadcasting his sermons. During his broadcasting, Robertson vocalized his views against homosexuals and feminism.⁵⁹ As years went on, Robertson also spoke out against abortions and 9/11 terrorist attacks, which was a coordinated attack against America, killing around 3,000 people were four al-Qaeda individuals flew passenger planes into the World Trade Center in New York.⁶⁰ After years of religious broadcasting and establishing the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), Robertson continued to struggle to generate

⁵⁷ Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks. 2017).

⁵⁸ FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals*. 371.

⁵⁹ FitzGerald, 375.

⁶⁰ "9/11 FAQs," National September 11 Memorial and Museum 9/11 Memorial, accessed January 31, 2024, <https://www.911memorial.org/911-faqs>.

revenue.⁶¹ Upon this, in 1963, Robertson held a telethon pleading for 700 viewers to contribute just \$10 a month to keep broadcasting his sermons. The results of this telethon were dismal.

However, during the telethon, Robertson's mother Dede would call to tell him about an epiphany she had during his telethon. Dede mentioned having seen him kneeling in prayer with his arms outstretched to heaven and a packet of banknotes of large denominations floating down from heaven into his hands.⁶² Unfortunately for Robertson, this epiphany would not come true until years later. Fast forward to 1969 where Robertson's luck would start to change. It was in 1969, when Robertson hired rural Evangelicals from Michigan Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker to do a kids show on CBN. This event prompted so much success that his finances increased by major numbers.⁶³ As Pat Robertson's finances changed, it also meant that his position within the religious realm changed. It would allow him to secure a position in American politics that would involve his leadership and religious doctrines. Robertson would work alongside other prominent Evangelical leaders like Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority, which supported Ronald Reagan as a presidential candidate during the 1980s. Reagan's presidential candidacy would represent the Christian ideology in which

⁶¹ Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks. 2017).

⁶² "Marion Gordon 'Pat' Robertson," Christian Broadcasting Network, accessed January 31, 2024, <https://www.cbn.com/patrobertson/bio.aspx>.

⁶³ Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks. 2017).

Reagan became a symbol of combining religion with government. After working alongside Reagan to achieve his victory, Robertson sought to maintain a close relationship with the president and several Christian leaders.⁶⁴

While working for Reagan, Robertson served with the Victims of Crime Task Force. Although that would eventually become his official position, Robertson would stand by Reagan when trying to implement new laws that included any form of religious ideals. Robertson and Reagan worked very closely in order to maintain the nation's religious heritage, and the importance of public and private morality, all while trying to issue the necessity of a national dependence on God.⁶⁵ Oftentimes, Robertson would get caught saying "Reagan is probably the most Evangelical president we ever had since the Founding Fathers."⁶⁶ It is important to note that although Reagan used his presidency to relay the issue of religious topics to American citizens, predecessors would also discuss different religious rhetoric appropriate to their time. As I said, for the most part, our Founding Fathers believed in religious diversity, which prompted them to believe in establishing a wall that separates government and religion from one another. However, no matter who or what, any individuals that have a prominent

⁶⁴ Gary S. Smith, *Faith and the Presidency: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁶⁵ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 36.

⁶⁶ Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2017), 56.

position within American society will often try to persuade their religious rhetoric to ensure America's moral values do not disintegrate according to their views.

Religious historian and author of *The Christian Coalition: Dreams of Restoration, Demands of Recognition*, Justin Watson comments on “reflecting a widespread tendency in Evangelicalism to accommodate the cognitive style of modernity.”⁶⁷ It is interesting to note how accommodating a religious sect based on modernity can often change the outcome in said religion. For example, Robertson, alongside with Graham and Falwell, all three Evangelical leaders used television and radio broadcasting to spread their religious doctrines, thus, promoting the growth of Evangelicalism throughout the nation. As we continue further along to discuss Robertson, it is important to mention his 1988 presidential bid. In September of 1986 Robertson announced his intention in seeking the Republican nomination for the President of the United States.⁶⁸ Once his intentions were set and clear, he would be going head on with George H. W. Bush (1924-2018). In announcing his nomination for President of the United States it seemed probable that Robertson would eventually win the nomination, as Robertson would embrace the same policies as Ronald Reagan. The policies consisted of lowering taxes, adding additional funds to strengthen military

⁶⁷Justin Watson, *The Christian Coalition: Dreams of Restoration, Demands of Recognition* (New York: St. Martin's Press. 1977).

⁶⁸ “Marion Gordon ‘Pat’ Robertson,” Christian Broadcasting Network, accessed February 1, 2024, <https://www.cbn.com/patrobertson/bio.aspx>.

defense, and establishing a balanced budget within American economics.⁶⁹ As events began to unfold, Robertson would eventually lose the nomination to George H. W. Bush. All in all, Robertson continued to preach his religious sermons through television and radio. Robertson also continued to indoctrinate others in government offices with his religious ideology.⁷⁰ If Robertson has taught us anything, it is that using your religion as a form to manipulate laws and regulations to sustain your position within a government is a cause of concern. Robertson used his Christian ideals to essentially oppress a large minority of American citizens. Threatened by Democrats, homosexuals, feminists, and others, Robertson sought the need to protect religion and faith from being ostracized within American culture.⁷¹ In short, Robertson used Christianity and religious peoples as a weapon to fight off what he viewed as Antichrist forces that ultimately threatened the pro-family structure and moral values within American society.

As the name of this chapter entails, these religious puppeteers—Graham, Falwell, and Robertson—were part of a grandeur sect that used religion to influence their power. In addition, their political power strengthened more when

⁶⁹ Gary S. Smith, *Faith and the Presidency: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁷⁰ Zachary B. Wolf, “How Pat Robertson Helped Create the Modern GOP,” Cable News Network (CNN), June 8, 2023, accessed January 31, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/06/08/politics/republicans-pat-robertson-what-matters/index.html>.

⁷¹ Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2017).

Reagan became elected as the new President of the United States. Reagan along with Graham, Falwell, and Robertson would strengthen Christian Nationalism as it became more available to the public due to use of radio and television broadcasting. But most importantly, because of Reagan's Evangelical religious views becoming the subject matter within both of his presidential terms, Graham, Falwell, and Robertson became much more prominent. However, as Reagan began to use religion to influence his decisions, in the following chapter, we will see how Reagan began to strategically use religion in ways to please different political parties to support him. This opportunistic tactic would eventually make or break Reagan.

CHAPTER FOUR

OPPORTUNISTIC REAGAN

According to the National Library of Medicine opportunistic behavior is defined as a selfish behavior that only pays attention to its own interest.¹ The idea of using opportunism regarding Ronald Reagan came about when I began to look at other historical figures that use opportunistic behavior for their benefit. For instance, many historical religious leaders from antiquity to the present-day use religion as an opportunistic approach to win over their country's citizens. Like some of these religious historical figures, Ronald Reagan used religion as an opportunistic move for his governmental and presidential campaigns. As the topic of religion connected to governmental and presidential campaigns have raised concerns, looking to Reagan's conservative ideology means processing Christian values that have nourished Western and American cultural history, especially to the concept of the Kingdom of God.² As I continue to restate, thanks to the Founding Fathers, the United States has no set religion. However, as Christian Nationalism was rising, Christian voters became motivated by a belief that moral

¹Leinan Zhang et al. "Can Psychological Contracts Decrease Opportunistic Behavior?," National Library of Medicine, June 3, 2022, accessed March 19, 2024, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9205657/#B79>.

² David T. Byrne, *Ronald Reagan: An Intellectual Biography* (Nebraska: Potomac Books, 2018).

and spiritual decline endangered the nation.³ Indeed, as Katherine Stewart argues in *The Power Worshipers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism*, many Americans continue to view Christian Nationalism as a “cultural movement,” which centers social issues as abortion and same-sex marriages as conflicts over monuments and prayer.⁴ Reagan, alongside the Christian Nationalist movement, used these social issues to influence conservative political movements and Reagan used them as an opportunistic tactic in which highly conservative Christians have become politically involved, allowing him to become the newly elected president of the United States of America.

Chapter 4 dives into the different areas in which Reagan used religion to win the governmental campaign for California and the presidential campaign of 1980. Afterwards, while discussing Reagan’s presidency, I emphasize how the use of religion as an opportunistic tactic became the way in which Reagan was able to win over American Christians. It was during Reagan's presidency in which we saw how he would jump in different directions to make sure he was pleasing everyone. For example, Reagan publicly announced going against California’s Proposition 6 or also known as The Briggs Initiative. The Briggs Initiative would become one the first attempts to restrict the rights of lesbian and gay Americans

³ Stephen D. Johnson and Joseph B. Tamney, “The Christian Right and the 1980 Presidential Election,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 21, no. 2 (June 1982): 123-131.

⁴ Katherine Stewart, *The Powers Worshipers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019).

by popular referendum. November 7, 1978, nearly 2.8 millions of Californians voted to ban gay teachers from teaching in public schools.⁵ If it were to have passed, it meant teachers who were found to have taken part in “public homosexual activity” or “public homosexual conduct” would be fired. The act defined public homosexual conduct as including “the advocating, soliciting, imposing, encouraging or promoting of private or public homosexual activity directed at, or likely to come to the attention of schoolchildren and/or other employees.”⁶ Reagan’s stance against the Briggs Initiative was surprising. I found that to be interesting, since Reagan was a highly conservative Evangelical and vocal against homosexuality.

It was also during this time when the concept of abortion came into play. It was on January 22, 1973, that the Supreme Court came to the decision of 7-2 that found that women in the United States had the fundamental right to choose whether to have abortions. Reagan was extremely vocal about his position when it came to abortion. He, including with many other religious leaders, believed abortions were an attack against God. However, after the January 3, 1985, bombing at abortion clinics, he called for “vigorous investigation” of the bombing

⁵ Nicholas Goldberg, “Column: How 2.8 Million California Voters Nearly Banned Gay Teachers From Public Schools,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 4, 2021, accessed March 19, 2024, <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2021-08-04/gearhart-briggs-initiative-ban-gay-teachers-proposition-6>.

⁶Liz Tracey, “Proposition 6 (The Briggs Initiative),” Jstor, October 28, 2022, accessed March 19, 2024, <https://daily.jstor.org/proposition-6-the-briggs-initiative-annotated/>.

in which he “condemned in the strongest terms.”⁷ As we continue to explore the religious shift that came and went, these notable changes came in various ways throughout different presidential eras. Most prominently, these religious shifts were sought within Jimmy Carter’s presidential era and most notable during Ronald Reagan’s governmental and presidential campaigns. Through these examples, Chapter 4 explores Reagan's opportunistic tactics while using religion within his governmental and presidential campaigns.

Governmental Campaign and Governor for California

Ronald Reagan mentioned during his First Inaugural Address as governor of California “Freedom is a fragile thing and is never more than one generation away from extinction. It is not our inheritance, it must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation, for it comes only once to a people. Those who have known freedom and then lost it never know it again.”⁸ It had become abundantly clear that Reagan’s overall concern was the freedom of the people in which he had believed were being threatened by the Democratic party. In the not-too-distant past, Reagan had been a proud member of the Democratic party, but changed to the Republican party because Reagan noticed how a series of

⁷Statement on Bombings at Abortion Clinics, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/statement-bombings-abortion-clinics>

⁸“Ronald Reagan: 33rd Governor, Republican,” The Governor’s Gallery, California State Library, accessed February 1, 2024, <https://governors.library.ca.gov/addresses/33-Reagan01.html>.

domestic and statewide issues appealed to his evolving sense of roles government should and should not play in people's lives.⁹ However, Reagan never forgot to involve his religious ideology and mention God within all his achievements and speeches. Reagan's public statements and positions were always commended to a higher divine entity. Minutes within his First Inaugural Address as governor of California, Reagan mentioned, "anyone could appeal this delegated authority without asking God's help." In addition to appealing to a higher authority, Reagan accepted the challenge of becoming governor of California all while praying to God for guidance. He stated, "I pray that we who legislate and administer will be granted wisdom and strength beyond our own limited power; that with Divine guidance we can avoid easy expedients as we work to build a state where liberty under law and justice can triumph."¹⁰

Ronald Reagan announced his Republican candidacy for governor in 1966 and ran against Democrat Edmund G. (Pat) Brown (1905-1996). After winning most of the California votes, Reagan promised to intertwine "Christian teachings" as it was set to "revolutionize the world."¹¹ Once it was determined that Reagan would win the governorship of California in 1967, Reagan set forward the religious movement that his governorship would strengthen. As

⁹ Paul Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan: A Spiritual Life* (New York: Reagan Books, 2004).

¹⁰ "Ronald Reagan: 33rd Governor, Republican," The Governor's Gallery, California State Library, accessed February 1, 2024, <https://governors.library.ca.gov/addresses/33-Reagan01.html>.

¹¹ Paul Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan: A Spiritual Life* (New York: Reagan Books, 2004).

Reagan's Christian ideology followed him into his newfound position, Reagan's predecessor Edmund Brown's administration left Reagan with several obstacles. These obstacles ranged from issues over race, fair housing, welfare, and public spending, but the main obstacle Reagan faced was the controversies over the split between liberal and conservative members.¹² As the split between liberal and conservative wings evolved, their main issue was immigration. When Reagan was campaigning throughout California, he looked to Orange County to strengthen his campaign because Orange County became known as "God's County...it was the dream of being able to get somewhere."¹³ Orange County became a center of Christian Nationalism. During the 1960s, Orange County had become an important center for military defense industries, and rapidly strengthened its economy and social structures.¹⁴ As Orange County was becoming economically diverse, it was its moralism during the 1920s that sought Orange County as a "Christian ranked city...that boasted important figures to develop Christian fundamental views as the beginnings of the fundamental movement."¹⁵ It was this that made Reagan look too Orange County for their support as a Christian representative with a political stance.

¹² Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan*. 197.

¹³ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2015.)

¹⁴ McGirr, 29.

¹⁵ McGirr, 31.

However, prior to winning the office as governor, Reagan was an A-list actor, who had spent 30 years acting for numerous roles.¹⁶ During his acting career, Reagan developed a friendship with then Senator Barry Goldwater (1909-1998) and other prominent figures within the California conservative circles. In 1964, Goldwater won the nomination for the presidency from the Republican Party. Reagan believed that Goldwater would have become a great president if chosen. Goldwater's presidential candidacy represented a meditation between moderate and liberal Republicans who both shared similar views when it came to ending communism.¹⁷ Goldwater's advocacy would enlist the prevention of spreading communism, adding additional funds for the military, and establishing America as a supreme country which echoes to the present day.¹⁸ Although Goldwater would have "great" ideas for America, many conservatives believed Reagan had a greater chance of winning than Goldwater would—if he chose to run for president.

What is more, during the early years of the 1960s, finding anything that illustrates the religious lifestyle or spiritual life of Ronald Reagan is relatively undocumented. This has baffled historians who try to figure out more about Reagan's spiritual life during this time. However, one thing is certain, in October

¹⁶ "Ronald Reagan's Filmography," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, accessed February 1, 2024. <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/reagans/ronald-reagan/ronald-reagans-filmography>

¹⁷ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2015.)

¹⁸ McGirr, *Suburban Warrior*. 193.

1964, Reagan gave a speech known as a “Time for Choosing,” in which he steered himself directly to Christian conservatives.¹⁹ The “Time for Choosing” speech became a part of a larger event that initially changed the lives of both Reagan and Nancy—this speech would eventually steer Reagan away from the entertainment industry in Hollywood, and put Reagan into a position which led to becoming president of the United States for two terms. In addition, the speech ushered in a conservative moment in American history, states historian and author Lisa McGirr.²⁰ McGirr's book *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of The New American Right*, mentions how the speech “Time for Choosing” was a form to call for “strong leadership” following the assassination of president John F. Kennedy, a growing welfare state, and the Cold War.²¹ As much work as Reagan had put into Goldwater’s presidential election, he would eventually lose to Lyndon Johnson (1908-1973). McGirr, identifies how Johnson won the election and not Goldwater. Johnson would champion his passage of the Civil Rights Act and advocated a series of anti-poverty programs collectively known as the Great Society, as for Goldwater espoused a low-tax, small-government philosophy, and reconnecting Christian ideology in a government setting.²²

After losing the presidential election to Lyndon Johnson, Goldwater continued to be a part of political agendas—for example, using propaganda films

¹⁹ McGirr, 197.

²⁰ McGirr, 122.

²¹ McGirr, 126.

²² McGirr, 192.

for the Cold War and nuclear weapons.²³ Soon after Reagan announced his Republican candidacy for governor in 1966 and won, Reagan began to set things into motion. Nearly one year later, Reagan launched a billion-dollar tax increase, which many perceive as a positive for the state. Senate *Bill 556* raised sales taxes from three to five cents on the dollar; the maximum income tax from seven to ten percent; bank, corporation, and inheritance taxes from 5.5 percent to six percent; distilled liquor taxes from \$1.50 to \$2.00 per gallon; and cigarette taxes from three cents to ten cents per pack.²⁴ The bill was designed to only increase revenues, but also began a substantial tax increase within the state. As a result, Reagan's conservative supporters did not agree with the bill. Other than the economic success that Reagan brought to the state of California, Reagan fought against a bill which targeted individuals that identify as homosexuals. In particular, the law would have banned lesbian and gay people and supporters of lesbian and gay rights from teaching public schools.²⁵ This bill would become known as The Briggs Initiative. Sponsored by State Senator John Briggs, The Briggs Initiative or Proposition 6 was put on California's voting ballot on November 7, 1978. Thankfully Californian's voted down the proposition. According to Reagan biographer Lou Cannon, Reagan was repelled by the

²³ Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks. 2017).

²⁴ Jackson K. Putnam, *Governor Reagan: A Reappraisal* (Los Angeles: University of California Press. 2006). www.jstor.org/stable/25161839

²⁵ Sue Englander, Paula Lichtenberg, and Glenn McElhinney, The Briggs Initiative: A Scary Proposition, GLBT Historical Society Museum and Archives, accessed February 4, 2024. <https://www.glbthistory.org/briggs>.

aggressive public crusades against homosexuals' lifestyle which became a staple of right-wing politics in the late 1970s.²⁶

Abortion became another issue for Reagan. Although Reagan's Evangelical views condemned the use of abortions, Reagan signed the Therapeutic Abortion Act of 1967, which authorized physicians to perform abortions in a hospital up to the 21st week of pregnancy in cases in which the pregnancy resulted from rape or incest or endangered the physical or mental health of the mother.²⁷ Years later in 1973, *Roe v. Wade* became a federal precedent that allowed physicians to perform abortions throughout the country. This ruling sent many American Christians into a frenzy.²⁸ However, Reagan's years as governor in California have little to no documentation illustrating Reagan's religious lifestyle or spirituality, but that changed once Reagan took office as the President of the United States of America.

Presidential Campaign and Presidency

²⁶ Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000).

²⁷ "Dear Attorney, General Lockyer," Legislative Analyst's Office, accessed February 4, 2024.

https://lao.ca.gov/ballot/1999/990671_INT.html#:~:text=In%201967%2C%20the%20California%20Legislature,mental%20health%20of%20the%20mother.

²⁸ Jackson K. Putnam, *Governor Reagan: A Reappraisal* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006). www.jstor.org/stable/25161839.

Reagan holds the distinction of being the only California governor to become President of the United States.²⁹ After two terms as governor of California, Reagan won the Republican nomination in 1980 and chose former United Nations Ambassador George H. W. Bush as his vice-president. Reagan's presidential terms—unlike his years as governor—are rife with religious ideology that influenced many foreign and domestic policies. Reagan, an Evangelical himself, had people within his staff that shared the same religion. In addition, during his presidential campaign, Evangelical leaders like Bill Graham, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and others all helped Reagan win the election. All of this begs the question, how did the conservative political movement in America become a religious movement prior to the 1980 presidential election? Author Andrew P. Hogue gives us the answer to this question:

the result of conservatives establishing hegemony in the Republican Party, thereby establishing a permanent role in presidential elections, or whether overtly religious politics was something new even for self-described political conservatives, a tactic employed first in 1980 that proved effective enough as a political tool to be utilized in perpetuity.³⁰

Reagan's administration underlines the theology and political beliefs that characterized the conservative political movement, as will be demonstrated by examining foreign and domestic policies. Jeremy R. Hatfield, as part of his Ph.D. dissertation, describes the relationship between Reagan's administration and the

²⁹ "Ronald Reagan, "California State Library," accessed February 4, 2024. <https://governors.library.ca.gov/33-reagan.html>.

³⁰ Andrew P. Hogue, *Stumping God: Reagan, Carter, and the Invention of a Political Faith*. (Waco: Baylor University, 2012).

conservative political movement as a “political marriage.”³¹ Hatfield centralizes this theory by focusing on the American foreign policy from the late 1970s through the end of the Cold War. When Reagan took the office of presidency, the Cold War eventually became his central focus. Reagan’s administration used the Cold War to shape international politics and domestic politics that pushed fourth religious attributes. However, Hatfield mentions, Evangelical figures at large were becoming more ambivalent and then adamant about national defense issues. They viewed the Cold War as the conflict that would end Christian life as they knew it.³² It had become evident that religion played a role very early, however, the Reagan presidency increased the appeal of religion during the Cold War.

It has become easy to identify the interconnection between religion and government that became apparent during Reagan’s administration. As the Cold War pushed foreign policies forward based on religion, there were a few domestic policies that Reagan advocated for that were based on his Evangelical religious ideologies. Reagan firmly believed and often declared that God intended America to be a beacon of hope, faith, freedom, and democracy — “a city on the hill.”³³ This idea penetrated Reagan’s mind and he ran with it. Although historians debate the nature of Reagan’s personal faith, they concur that he used religious rhetoric, discussed religious themes, and spoke to religious

³¹ Jeremy Hatfield, *For God and Country: The Religious Right, The Reagan Administration, and The Cold War*. (Ohio University, 2013).

³² Hatfield, *For God and Country*. 158.

³³ Gary S. Smith, *Faith, and the Presidency: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

groups more than any other twentieth century president.³⁴ These appeals to religion were noted by voters at the time. On multiple occasions, voters reached out to Reagan noting concern over his endorsement of the “Christian Nationalism Movement.” As one representative example, Mrs. Eleanor Karp from Manchester, Connecticut wrote to President Reagan, informing him about her disapproval of an endorsement of the “Christian Nationalism Movement.” Mrs. Karp stated:

I am concerned that you not use the office of the Presidency as ‘Evangelist-in Chief’ or to further the notion that any particular group of Americans is to be accorded special standing because they practice any religion. To me, it is no coincidence that the First Amendment to the Constitution contains both the guarantee of free speech and the guarantee of separation of church and state...While I know that you cannot control the statements of all your supporters, millions of Americans would be greatly relieved if you would clarify that you do not officially embrace the ‘Christian National Movement’; that you do not intend to use the office of the Presidency to favor a particular religious dogma; and that you intend instead to preserve the Presidency as an office for all the people, believers and non-believers alike. As Rev. Billy Graham remarked in 1981 ‘it was a mistake to identify that kingdom of God with the American way of belief, I’ve come to understand there are no simplistic answers to the exceedingly complicated problems we face as a country—and as a planet.’ Without separation of church and state free spirited public debate is impossible. The mutual respect that is essential to democratic debate is lost when a President’s opinions on public policy are used as some sort of perverse test of a citizen’s standing with the Almighty.³⁵

Although I did not find any response from Reagan to Mrs. Eleanor Karp, it was interesting to read her letter as one of the Americans who called into

³⁴ Smith, *Faith, and the Presidency*, 417.

³⁵ Reagan Library, Collection: Norman Lear “Church and State”: File OA 12249.

question the standing of Reagan's administration. The Founding Fathers established the First Amendment to keep the separation of religion and government. Some view the Reagan administration's use of religious rhetoric as a potential violation of the First Amendment under the Establishment Clause.³⁶ In addition, the 1980 presidential election cast a long-standing shadow that lasted for the last three decades. Because of it, religion has remained a pronounced and prominent aspect of presidential politics.³⁷ Reagan believed strongly in affirming the idea that religious values and beliefs should inform and influence politics in profound ways.

Religion provided the source of individual conscience and morality, however with Reagan as president, the concept of individual conscience and morality became a fundamental source that reflected the ambitions and whims of these Evangelical leaders to pursue political offices. Andrew Hogue, historian, and author of *Stumping God: Reagan, Carter, and the Invention of a Political Faith*, describes how the practice of American politics regarding.³⁸ This "new era" would come into play during Reagan's administration. During Reagan's presidency, he called for passing the School of Prayer Amendment. This amendment would allow all children of different religious backgrounds to

³⁶ "Fairness Doctrine," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, accessed February 8, 2024, [fairness-doctrine](#).

³⁷ Andrew P. Hogue, *Stumping God: Reagan, Carter, and the Invention of a Political Faith*. (Waco: Baylor University, 2012).

³⁸ Hogue, *Stumping God*, 237.

participate in morning and evening.³⁹ Although it failed, party members continued to push for this amendment. The School of Prayer Amendment became an opportunistic tactic for Reagan. As he did so, and continued to fail, his popularity among the Christians sky-rocketed because of his constant appeal to the Supreme Court or Congress to establish the amendment.

Abortion was another opportunistic issue that followed Reagan over to his presidency from his time as governor. As governor, Reagan signed a bill making abortion legal for victims of rape and incest.⁴⁰ He was acutely aware that women who were victims of rape or incest and became pregnant would be re-victimized by being forced to have their attacker's baby. But his religious faith left him questioning when life begins.⁴¹ The issues that abortion brought to Reagan, privately and publicly, pulled him in two different directions. Aiming to please his party and American citizens, he condemned the use of abortions, but said it should be allowed only for rape, incest or the risk of a woman dying.⁴²

Overall, Ronald Reagan used his Christian values to subsequently adhere to pleasing his party, religion, and citizens. Reagan often used his religious ideology to please the American people but would rephrase his Christian ideals

³⁹ Reagan Library, Collection: Holladay, Jo, "School of Prayer," Files: OA 12240.

⁴⁰ Patti Davis, "How My Father, Ronald Reagan, Grapple with Abortion," New York Times, May 22, 2022, accessed February 8, 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/22/opinion/ronald-reagan-patti-davis-abortion.html>.

⁴¹ Davis, "How My Father, Ronald Reagan, Grapple with Abortion."

⁴² "How My Father, Ronald Reagan, Grapple with Abortion."

to please those whose large economical contribution increased his chances for re-election. Nonetheless, Reagan's presidency allowed historians—like me—to view his jump from side to side as a critical part of American history. However, to make sure he was pleasing everyone who needed to be pleased, that also meant displeasing others. The qualities Reagan displayed illustrated him as an opportunistic politician who used religion for political gain. Although others would disagree, historians like Andrew P. Hogue mentioned how at times, Reagan's sincerity on religion was true at the political forefront. If you ever decide to visit the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, that religious sincerity is demonstrated as the library is perched on top of a hill that illustrates John Winthrop's "city on a hill" phrase. As the discourse of opportunism continues with Ronald Reagan, we continue to see how within the last thirty years other politicians have also used Christian ideology to further strengthen their cause in the political forefront—arguably making them also opportunistic individuals like Ronald Reagan.

CHAPTER FIVE

SCHOOL OF PRAYER

On March 8, 1983, the Supreme Court shut down an amendment that would have allowed students to partake in morning and evening prayer during school hours. It became known as the “School of Prayer” or “President’s Amendment.” The amendment was backed by Christians within the United States government—including the president of the United States and its ordinary citizens. However, then-president Ronald Reagan became the one who fought for the establishment of the School of Prayer Amendment. According to Reagan, this “President Amendment would allow all children of different religious backgrounds to participate in morning and evening prayer.”¹ Yet, this was not have been the first time that the School of Prayer Amendment was shut down. Prior to this, the School of Prayer had been proposed to the Supreme Court many other times. Democratic Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia (1917-2010) proposed the amendment in 1962, 1973, 1979, 1983, 1993, 1995, and 1997.² Senator Robert Byrd was a strong believer in keeping God’s influence in America. Byrd believed that prayer should be held in schools and even on governmental floors—like Byrd, hundreds of years earlier, Benjamin Franklin had

¹Reagan Library, Collection: Holladay, Jo, “School of Prayer,” Files: OA 12240.

²Court Case, February 8, 1983, folder “Court Case re: First Amendment Establishment Clause (135838052),” Box 4, William Barr Files, Ronald Reagan Library. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/135838052>

proposed something similar holding prayer within government floors.³ However it is important to note, Franklin's proposal occurred before to the ratification of the Frist Amendment.

Prior to the closure of the School Prayer Amendment, Byrd addressed Congress further to establish a strong argument in support of the amendment. Byrd believed that to, "remove God from this country will destroy it."⁴ In support of Senator Byrd, Reagan once gave a speech at the National Religious Broadcaster on January 30, 1984, mentioning, "we need a new amendment to restore the rights that were taken from us. Senator Baker has assured us we will get a vote on our amendment (School of Prayer)."⁵

The downfall of this amendment resulted from the fact that it violated the First Amendment of the Constitution. According to the First Amendment, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the

³ "Benjamin Franklin: Constitutional Convention Address on Prayer," American Rhetoric, January 7, 2024, (accessed February 8, 2024).

⁴ Bill Federer, "American Minute with Bill Federer," accessed February 8, 2024, <https://myemail.constantcontact.com/-To-remove-God-from-this-country-will-destroy-it---Senate-Majority-Leader-Robert-Byrd.html?soid=1108762609255&aid=yBRUgy3nLj8>.

⁵ Reagan Library "Holladay, J. Douglas"; Series II: Education Subj. OA 12249

Government for a redress of grievance.”⁶ Within this chapter, I will discuss how the School of Prayer Amendment directly violated the First Amendment. In addition to the School of Prayer, I argue that this amendment has Christian tendencies without the acknowledgment of other religions. Lastly, I contend that this amendment was part of the influence in which religion has played a direct role in making and establishing domestic policies. Religion has been used in American history to establish laws that directly affect minor groups—the School of Prayer does just that. The 1962 case of *Engle vs. Vitale* is a perfect example of the direct violation of the First Amendment. The case shows how different religions, like Judaism, were not thought of when the state Board Regents of New York adopted the nondenominational prayer. In addition, this case illustrates a perfect example of how religion plays a direct role in making and establishing domestic policies in the United States.

Engle vs. Vitale

In 1962, the U.S. Supreme Court came to a ruling of 6-1 and voted against the School of Prayer Amendment. This amendment theoretically would have allowed students to “opt-in to participate in the school-sponsored morning

⁶“The Bill of Rights: A Transcription,” National Archives, April 21, 2023, accessed March 5, 2024.
<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rightstranscript#:~:text=Bill%20of%20Rights.%22,Amendment%20I,for%20a%20redress%20of%20grievances.>

prayers.”⁷ This ruling was part of the Supreme Court case—number 370—that challenged the state Board Regents of New York, which adopted on November 30, 1951, “a nondenominational prayer.”⁸ This “nondenominational prayer” allowed students the choice to be excused for morning prayer if they chose to with the written consent of their parents. This case became known as *Engel v. Vitale*.

The Union Free School District in New Hyde Park, New York, endorsed and launched the practice where teachers led students in prayer every morning.⁹ A nondenominational prayer was recited by school children every morning after the Pledge of Allegiance.¹⁰ This practice was voluntary, where students could be excused from class without any form of punishment. Petitioner Steven I. Engel was one of many parents who believed that the “state should not impose a one-size-fits-all prayer upon children of many different faiths or no faiths.”¹¹ The prayer went like this, “Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee, and we beg Thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers and our Country.”¹² The issue of this “nondenominational prayer” was not just the prayer,

⁷Engel v. Vitale, 370 U.S. 421 (1962).

⁸ Engel v. Vitale, 370 U.S. 421 (1962).

⁹ David L. Hudson, “Engel v. Vitale (1962),” January 1, 2009, <https://firstamendment.mtsu.edu/article/engel-v-vitale-1962/>

¹⁰ Heimler’s History, “Engel v. Vitale, Explained [AP Gov Required Cases],” YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MT-gmX7_k4.

¹¹ David L. Hudson, “Engle v. Vitale (1962).”

¹² Erwin Chemerinsky and Howard Gillman, *The Religion Clause: The Case for Separating Church and State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

but was the first two words that the prayer started with. The words “Almighty God” were a direct violation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. However, respondent and president of the school board, William J. Vitale, and the entire State Board Regents argued: “This daily procedure was...created by the State Constitution to which the New York Legislature has granted broad supervisory, executive and legislative powers over the State’s public school system.”¹³ In other words, Vitale stated they were in their right to establish this amendment due to the states’ power over public schools.

So why does this Supreme court case matter? If we investigate the case file *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 412 (1962) it breaks down the arguments both sides tried to defend. The overall objective of the case was described as “the state board of regents in New York wrote a voluntary prayer to Almighty God that was intended to open each school day. A group of organizations join forces in challenging the prayer, including families and institutions dedicated to the Jewish faith. They claimed that this violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, but the New York Court of Appeals rejected their arguments.”¹⁴ Although the prayer is clearly vague with no mention of a specific god or gods, it was still in direct violation to the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. According to the primary holding within the case file, it mentions how the state cannot hold prayers in public schools, even if it is not required and not tied to a

¹³ *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962).

¹⁴ *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962).

particular religion. Authors Erwin Chemerinsky and Howard Gillman note that “prayers at government activities, religious symbols on government property, [and] prayer in public schools violates the Constitution.”¹⁵ In addition, Chemerinsky and Gillman describe when Roger Williams, co-founder of Rhode Island, mentioned how “he wanted to separate church and state not to safeguard the state from religion, but to protect religion from the state.”¹⁶ Williams was firm when it came to having a wall in which separated church and state, his political legacy would be in part what influenced the making of the Establishment Clause. In other words, Williams wanted to allow citizens to exercise their right to “freedom of religion” and not be ostracized because of their different religious practices.

Nonetheless, as the situation became dire, the central argument held by the New York regents was students had the right to opt-in taking part in the school prayer. While students theoretically could have opted out of participating in the prayers, the majority and proponents of its decision recognized that children are unlikely to choose not to engage in a teacher-lead activity—in other words, the school prayer activities would have essentially been an event forceable by teachers for students to attend. Consequently, the Supreme Court decision on the *Engle vs. Vitale* case was a demonstration of how the court ruled

¹⁵ Erwin Chemerinsky and Howard Gillman, *The Religion Clause: The Case for Separating Church and State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020). 66.

¹⁶ Erwin Chemerinsky and Howard Gillman, *The Religion Clause*. 65.

in favor of individual rights. The justices came to this conclusion by asking, does the reading of a state sponsored prayer at the beginning of the school violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment? According to the majority, it does. Justice Hugo L. Black gave the majority ruling over the case. In doing so, Black primarily focused on historical events tied to religious discrimination and intolerance in England and the early colonial days of the United States. This history, according to Black, showed that by the time of adoption of the U.S. Constitution Americans had a “widespread awareness...of the dangers of a union of Church and State.”¹⁷ I believe Justice Black influenced his fellow justices during the trial. Black cited several different sources that commented on why the First Amendment was added to the Constitution. In it, Black states “the First Amendment was added to the Constitution to stand as a guarantee that neither the power nor the prestige of the Federal Government would be used to control, support or influence the kinds of prayer the American people can say.”¹⁸

The school of prayer does directly violate an individual's First Amendment right, but scholars continue to debate the topic. Author Mark Hall contradicts Chemerinsky and Gillman's claims by stating how the Establishment Clause provides no bar to exempting religious minorities from general laws within the

¹⁷ David L. Hudson, “Engel v. Vitale (1962),” January 1, 2009, <https://firstamendment.mtsu.edu/article/engel-v-vitale-1962/>

¹⁸ Hudson, “Engel v. Vitale (1962),” January 1, 2009, <https://firstamendment.mtsu.edu/article/engel-v-vitale-1962/>

practicing state.¹⁹ So, how does author Mark Hall's claim determine how much power is limited to the state or the government? For what it may seem, according to Hall's claims, the state would have a grander status over the federal government. If that were the case, how does it affect the overall objective of the state and government? Would the First Amendment be radicalized within the state? Would the state and church ideology have a holding over the state legislature? As we further explore the whole concept of the School of Prayer Amendment, let us hold on to these questions and find definitive answers as to how it might change the discourse of church and state.

Founding Fathers and The First Amendment

On January 1, 1802, then-president Thomas Jefferson drafted a letter to the Danbury Baptist Association where he discussed the separation between church and state, by mentioning, "I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, thus building a wall of eternal separation between church and

¹⁹ Mark David Hall, *Did America Have a Christian Founding?: Separating Modern Myth from Historical Truth* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2019), 152.

state.”²⁰ Years earlier, the Bill of Rights was ratified on December 15, 1791 where the First Amendment formally created a separation of church and state.²¹

As these quotes demonstrate, the Founding Fathers had a strong belief in the separation of church and state. The First Amendment was proposed during the process of ratification to address concern over the failure of the Constitution to protect the essential rights of individual citizens from the power of the government.²² As historians who continue to conduct research on religious ideology during the founding days, and who argue the US did not have a Christian foundation, describe how the Holy Scriptures were the most important source of authority for America’s founders, but they are not a handbook for politics.²³ For some Founding Fathers, the Holy Scriptures were considered just that, an important source of authority. Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) once proposed a new version of the Bible because of generational change, mentioning:

It is now more than 170 years since the translation of our common English Bible. The language in that time has changed much, and the style being obsolete, and thence less agreeable, is perhaps one reason why the reading of that excellent book is of late much neglected. I have therefore thought it would be best to procure a new version, in which, preserving the sense, the turn of phrase and manner of expression should be modern. I do not pretend to have

²⁰ James H. Huston, *The Founders on Religion: A Book of Quotations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

²¹ David Emory Shi, *America: A Narrative History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2019), 125.

²² McGarvie, *One Nation Under Law: America’s Early National Struggles to Separate Church and State*.54.

²³ Mark David Hall, *Did America Have a Christian Founding?: Separating Modern Myth from Historical Truth* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2019). 30.

the necessary abilities for such a work myself; I throw out the hint for the consideration of the learned: and only venture to send you a few verses of the first chapter of Job, which may serve as a sample of the kind of version I would recommend.²⁴

In recent years, in a study led by the University of Chicago, they asked 1,140 Americans if they could name any of the specific rights protected by the First Amendment.²⁵ The results are depressing. For some Americans, not understanding what the First Amendment really entails is cause of concern. About 76 percent of Americans think the First Amendment is only connected to the right of freedom of speech and has nothing to do with religion.²⁶ About 24 percent were able to identify freedom of religion as part of the First Amendment. America's knowledge of basic facts of their constitutional rights--including the First Amendment--is dismal. If discourse surrounding the reasons behind the First Amendment were discussed, this would educate Americans on the origins of the First Amendment and understand the significance. Other questions could arise, such as what is the purpose of it? Why were the Founding Fathers so

²⁴ "Franklin: Proposed New Version of The Bible, 1782 or After," National Archives, accessed January 27, 2024.

<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-38-02-0388>

²⁵ "American's Civics Knowledge Drops on First Amendment and Branches of Government," Annenberg Public Policy, University of Pennsylvania, accessed January 27, 2024.

<https://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/americans-civics-knowledge-drops-on-first-amendment-and-branches-of-government/>

²⁶ "American's Civics Knowledge Drops on First Amendment and Branches of Government," Annenberg Public Policy, University of Pennsylvania, accessed January 27, 2024.

<https://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/americans-civics-knowledge-drops-on-first-amendment-and-branches-of-government/>

invested in enforcing the First Amendment? As the discussion continues surrounding the First Amendment, the central question remains: what is the purpose of the amendment? The First Amendment was established by the Founding Fathers as a form to ensure every American has the right to practice their religion without any sort of harsh repercussions. Indeed, one of the foundational narratives in American history surrounds those who sought religious freedom. It was on September 16, 1620, the Mayflower set sail from Plymouth to America. In it, some voyagers were in the search of a new life full of economic abundance, and for others, religious freedom was the main reason for their relocation.²⁷

For James Madison (1751-1836) the entire concept behind the First Amendment was mentioned as “the civil rights of none shall be abridged on account of religious belief or worship, nor shall any national religion be established, nor shall the full and equal rights of conscience be in any manner, or on any pretext infringed.”²⁸ In recent scholarly articles, theories have risen as to how the First Amendment should be interpreted in light of the Founders’ views. As history has shown us, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison desired a strict separation of church and state. But author Mark Hall challenges that desire of a separation. According to Hall, Jefferson and Madison wanted to separate church

²⁷ Christopher Klein, “Why Did the Pilgrims Come to America?,” History, November 13, 2020, <https://www.history.com/news/why-pilgrims-came-to-america-mayflower> (accessed February 28, 2024).

²⁸ James H. Hutson, *The Founders on Religion: A Book of Quotations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

and state more thoroughly than most Founders, even though they did not embrace the sort of strict separation desired as to groups like American Civil Liberties and Union and Americans United for Separation of Church and State in the present day.²⁹ However, historians like Chemerinsky and Gillman discuss how the foundation of the First Amendment was meant to create a wall that separates the church and state, but under that review create a secular place for religion in the private realms of people's homes, place of worship, and daily lives and not within a government setting.³⁰

However, historian Mark Douglas McGarvie describes how by the end of the eighteenth century the worldview of America was no longer a Christian connotation of the colonial era, but rather in the libertarianism of the Enlightenment.³¹ It was during the Enlightenment period where American society began to shift. Laws began to change. Laws no longer had religious ideology behind them, on the other hand, they had changed to reflect these ideological transformations. Despite it all, established churches continued to play important influential roles within American society as a form to uphold Christian values.³² Yet, the Founding Fathers remained fixated to enforce the separation of church

²⁹ Mark David Hall, *Did America Have a Christian Founding?: Separating Modern Myth from Historical Truth* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2019). 61.

³⁰ Erwin Chemerinsky and Howard Gillman, *The Religion Clause: The Case for Separating Church and State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020). 12.

³¹ Mark Douglas McGarvie, *One Nation Under Law: America's Early National Struggles to Separate Church and State* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 2004). 3.

³² McGarvie, *One Nation Under Law*. 15.

and state. According to McGarive, Jefferson and Madison worried that political leaders with Christian beliefs might seek to evangelize or proselytize from public office could destroy republican government.³³

The Founding Fathers were adamant to keep the separation of church and state. According to historian Frank Lambert, in deciding the place of religion in the new republic, the Founding Fathers, rather than designing a church-state framework of their own, endorsed the emerging free marketplace of religion.³⁴ Lambert was able to identify how the influence of the Enlightenment had a great confidence in the individual's ability to understand the world and its most fundamental laws through the exercise of his or her reason.³⁵

As the Founders envisioned a clear separation between church and state, during Reagan's presidency, he sought to blur the lines to advance his policies and personal convictions. With it, Americans saw how the First Amendment was challenged. This led to famous individuals like Norman Lear to call into question his position as president. American screenwriter and film producer Norman Lear is a significant figure within the story of American religion. Within his entertainment and political careers, Lear has been vocal in defending the most dearly held values of American religious liberalism—which includes the separation

³³ McGarive, 41.

³⁴ Frank Lambert, *The Founding Fathers and the Place Of Religion in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 8.

³⁵ Lambert, *The Founding Fathers*, 3.

of church and state.³⁶ Lear vocalized his disagreement with the New and Religious New Right on numerous matters of morality and politics and was at times labeled a poor Christian—or unpatriotic—or anti-family.³⁷ According to Lear, the Christian Right represented an autocratic movement designed to suppress intellectual and religious freedoms protected by the Constitution.³⁸ In a letter, Lear penned to then President Ronald Reagan, Lear mentioned his concern as to Reagan’s recent endorsement of the “Christian Nation Movement.” Soon after receiving the letter from Norman Lear, Ronald Reagan responded addressing Lear’s concern. In his letter, Lear wrote:

I am deeply troubled by what seems to be an endorsement of the so-called ‘Christian Nation Movement’ in many of your recent speeches. [As] I fully respect (and would fight to protect) your right to whatever spiritual and religious beliefs you prefer, I am concerned that you not use the offices of the Presidency as ‘Evangelist-in-Chief’ or to further the notion that any particular group of Americans is to be accorded special standing because they practice any religion.

Reagan responded with:

First let me say that until I read your letter, I was unaware of any ‘Christian Nation Movement,’ and I certainly do not support the notion that any group of citizens is to be accorded special standing ‘because they practice any religion...It is true I’ve addressed a number of religious groups—always by their invitation. Some have been Protestant, some Catholic, some Jewish and some have been conferences or conventions of representatives of all religions.

³⁶Benjamin, L Rolsky, “Norman Lear, the Christian Right, and the Spiritual Politics of the Religious Left,” In *the Rise and Fall of the Religious Left: Politics, Television, and Popular Culture in the 1970s and Beyond*, 21–41, Columbia University Press, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/rols19362.5>.

³⁷ Rolsky, 33.

³⁸ Rolsky, 35.

In addition, Lear talks about the First Amendment as it guarantees freedom of speech and religion:

To me, it is no coincidence that the First Amendment to the Constitution contains both the guarantee of free speech and the guarantee of separation of church and state. History shows that they are inextricably linked. Without separation of church and state, free, spirited public debate is impossible.

Reagan's response:

I do believe the first amendment is being somewhat distorted or misinterpreted by some who would, by government decree, make freedom of religion into freedom from religion. The first amendment plainly is to ensure that in this nation there shall be no official state church. The amendment says the government shall not establish religion, but it also just as plainly says the government shall not interfere in the practice of religion...Norman, maybe we're coming to the same concern from opposite viewpoints, namely the threat to individual freedom.

Lear ended his letter by rising concern of what "damage" an open-ended statement can cause:

The mutual respect that is essential to democratic debate is lost when a President's opinions on public policy are used as some sort of perverse test of a citizen's standing with the Almighty. While I know that you cannot control the statement of all your supporters, millions of Americans would be greatly relieved if you would clarify that you do not officially embrace the 'Christian Nation Movement'; that you do not intend to use the office of the Presidency to favor a particular religious dogma; and that you intend instead to preserve the Presidency as an office for all the people, believers and non-believers alike.³⁹

³⁹ Letter, Norman Lear to Ronald Reagan, October 1984, Box OA12249, Ronald Reagan Library.

As Lear brought this to Reagan's attention, Reagan ultimately made Lear aware of his overall end-goal as President:

The goal of our nation must always be the ultimate in individual freedom consistent with an orderly society... I approve of the references to God in the Declaration of Independence, the inscription "In God We Trust" on our coins and engraved on the wall in the Capitol Building. I believe history shows that every great civilization that has ended up in history's dustbin did so after forsaking their God or Gods. At the same time, I believe in every American's right to worship whatever God or Gods he or she chooses or no God at all...let me just close by saying that I believe I have a responsibility to speak out for decency and the basic moralities without which there can be no civilization or personal freedom.

Reading the correspondence between Lear and Reagan is quite remarkable. We have a concerned citizen writing to the President of the United States, stating his concern over his policies especially when involving religious ideologies. What is more, the fact that then President Reagan responded gives an insight into his mindset. It had become evident that Reagan had religious tendencies in which he wanted to implement into a religiously diverse society. From trying to pass the School of Prayer Amendment, to allowing Evangelical leaders to have high political positions, Reagan's presidency marked a modern turning point that eventually led to the height of religion used within the government.

Christian Tendencies within Domestic Affairs

On May 17, 1982, President Reagan sent to Congress a proposed amendment to the Constitution which would allow citizens to pray in public

schools. Reagan's goal was to restore Americans' rights to participate in voluntary school prayer. According to Reagan, he believed that individuals should be allowed to decide for themselves whether to join in such prayers.⁴⁰ Before trying to reinstate the amendment, the school of prayer was proposed several times and denied seven. However, when reading the proposal, I noticed something that stood out to me. I noticed the school of prayer was based on Christian beliefs. With the ruling against the School of Prayer, the Supreme Court did not see it in the way Reagan did, and because of that Reagan once said, "The First Amendment was written not to protect the people and their laws from religious values but to protect those values from government tyranny."⁴¹

Within the President's proposed constitutional amendment, Reagan stated how nothing in the Constitution shall be construed to prohibit individual or group prayer in public schools or other public institutions. Otherwise stating no person shall be required by the United States or by any States to participate in prayer. On March 8, 1983, Reagan began to transmit through a televised broadcast in which he began to explain proposal on the School of Prayer:

"To the Congress of the United States:

On May 17, 1982, I transmitted for your consideration a proposed constitutional amendment to restore the simple freedom of our citizens to offer prayer in our public schools and institutions... The public expression through prayer of our faith in God is a fundamental part of our American heritage and a privilege which should not be excluded by law from any American school, public or private... Today, I join with the people of this Nation in acknowledging this

⁴⁰ Speech, March 8, 1983, Box OA12249, Ronald Reagan Library.

⁴¹ Speech, March 8, 1983, Box OA12249, Ronald Reagan Library.

basic truth, that our liberty springs from and depends upon an abiding faith in God...

Nearly every President since Washington has proclaimed a day of public prayer and thanksgiving to acknowledge the many favors of Almighty God. We have acknowledged God's guidance on our coinage, in our national anthem, and in the Pledge of Allegiance. As the Supreme Court stated in 1952, ``We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being." The founders of our Nation and the framers of the First Amendment did not intend to forbid public prayer. On the contrary, prayer has been part of our public assemblies since Benjamin Franklin's eloquent request that prayer be observed by the Constitutional Convention...

I therefore beg leave to move -- that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business... Just as Benjamin Franklin believed it was beneficial for the Constitutional Convention to begin each day's work with a prayer, I believe that it would be beneficial for our children to have an opportunity to begin each school day in the same manner... The amendment I proposed will remove the bar to school prayer established by the Supreme Court and allow prayer back in our schools. However, the amendment also expressly affirms the right of anyone to refrain from prayer. The amendment will allow communities to determine for themselves whether prayer should be permitted in their public schools and to allow individuals to decide for themselves whether they wish to participate in prayer. I urge that this amendment be quickly adopted, for the vast majority of our people believe there is a need for prayer in our public schools and institutions."⁴²

The School Prayer Amendment promoted prayer in schools, however, it failed to mention that prayer would be instituted in all religions. That would not only include Christianity (since it was the largest religious tradition in the country),

⁴² "Message to the Congress Transmitting the Proposed Constitutional Amendment on Prayer in Schools," Ronald Reagan Library and Museum, [message-congress-transmitting-proposed-constitutional-amendment-prayer-schools](#) (accessed January 27, 2024).

but it would include other religions like Islam, Catholicism, Judaism, and others. If we look back at the 1962 case of *Engle vs. Vitale*, the reason for its dismantling was because it failed to integrate children of other religious beliefs. Advocates of the school prayer seem to say that all prayer is good, regardless of its content. However, the idea that any formulation devised by any teacher or student has an equal claim to be recognized as suitable prayer was not. Prayer has a different form depending on its religious attribute. In these ways, Reagan's proposal for the reinstatement of the School of Prayer Amendment was solely based on Christian tendencies.

Although the school of prayer was meant to be integrated as a constitutional amendment that proposed religious freedom, unfortunately, it did not. Establishing this as a constitutional amendment would directly violate the Constitution but also violate the standards of the founding of the United States of America. To reiterate, the Founding Fathers established the First Amendment to protect religious freedom. They wanted separation between government and religion. And this amendment contradicted just that. On September 18, 1982, then-President Ronald Reagan addressed the nation by radio after the Supreme Court shut down for the fourth time the School of Prayer Amendment. According to Reagan:

Prayer can move mountains. Well, it's suddenly moved the hearts and minds of Americans, and the times of trials and helped them to achieve a society for all its imperfections is still the envy of the world...the Founding fathers felt this so strongly that they enshrined the principle of freedom of religion, and the First Amendment was to protect religion from the interference of

government, and the guarantee of its own words, the free exercise of religion.⁴³

As Reagan mentioned, “the purpose of this amendment was to protect religion from the interference of government, and the guarantee of its own words, ‘the free exercise of religion.’”⁴⁴ There seems to be a contradiction here, note the phrase the “interference of government.” The definition of interference of government can have several different meanings. However, when it comes to religion being bestowed on the American people, the concept of interference of government seems to elude politicians, especially if we know this because of the Establishment Clause. Now, if we look at the end of this speech, “the free exercise of religion,” those words seem to grasp the concept of the First Amendment. Free exercise of religion, those words promote what the Founding Fathers wanted for the United States. Freedom to express their religious identities without any form of harsh persecution that they endured or that their parents endured during their time in Europe.

Despite that, Ronald Reagan continued to use the Founding Fathers as metaphors to continue the campaign for his “School of Prayer” proposal, stating:

Just as Franklin believed it was beneficial for the Constitutional Convention to begin each day’s work with a prayer, I believe that it would be beneficial for our children to have an opportunity to begin

⁴³ “Radio Address to the Nation on Prayer in Schools,” Ronald Reagan Library and Museum.

⁴⁴ “Radio Address to the Nation on Prayer in Schools,” Ronald Reagan Library and Museum, accessed January 27, 2024. <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/radio-address-nation-prayer-schools>

each school day in the same manner. Since the law has been construed to prohibit this...It is time for the people...to act.⁴⁵

Ronald Reagan acknowledged during his speech to Congress, in support of the School of Prayer, that the US Constitution states that the construction of religious forms of laws should not be integrated or put forth to the American people. However, although he acknowledges this, he continued to call for a change in the constitution to put forth this amendment that he so desperately endorsed. If the change were to happen, it would go against the Founding Fathers' beliefs of remaining a free religious country.

The School of Prayer Amendment has become a crucial event within Ronald Reagan's presidency. At this point, Reagan began to use religious ideology to implement domestic affairs. Having so ignored the Founding Fathers calls for the separation of government and religion, Reagan—along with Evangelical leaders—used religion to try to enforce domestic ruling on the American people. As many sought to fight against these religious affairs, others fought against them being implemented. The Ronald Reagan presidency would become the catalyst of which religion became central to conservative American politics. In doing so, the concept of mortality and salvation was used as a form of propaganda to ensure Evangelical figures remained in power within the government. Overall, Ronald Reagan won his election because of his partnership

⁴⁵ "Radio Address to the Nation on Prayer in Schools," accessed January 27, 2024, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/radio-address-nation-prayer->.

with prominent Evangelical figures. These figures helped Reagan express his religious ideology, which would eventually become the catalyst that launched his presidency. However, as we will see in the next chapter, Reagan and his religious views within his administration would not only be challenged but used to blame homosexuality on the Aids Crisis and for the decline of morality within American society. With the so-called decline of morality, the support of Christian rehabilitation programs—like Exodus—were supported by prominent Evangelical figures and Reagan himself.

CHAPTER SIX

HOMOSEXUALITY

"Someone must not be afraid to say, 'moral perversion is wrong.' If we do not act now, homosexuals will 'own' America! If you and I do not speak up now, this homosexual steamroller will literally crush all decent men, women, and children who get in its way ... and our nation will pay a terrible price!" -Jerry Falwell

From a young age, many people are taught “We are children of God” and that “God loves us, because we are his children.” But according to many religious groups, homosexuals are not deserving of God’s love. For centuries, being homosexual was believed to be against the laws of nature and those of God according to dominant western culture. For Christians and other religious groups, the Bible is God’s very written word.¹ In it, the Bible is meant to tell the story of God’s creation, sin, redemption and finding salvation through his teachings. It is these very ideas that help fuel how the interpretation of God’s laws plays in societal, cultural, and governmental spheres. According to the Human Rights Campaign, “most Christians make these difficult determinations by studying what the *whole* of Scripture says regarding a specific topic, exploring the linguistic, historical and cultural context within which the words were written, and then putting these discoveries in conversation with what we know to be true of the

¹ Myles Markham, “What Does the Bible Say About Homosexuality?,” Human Rights Campaign, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/what-does-the-bible-say-about-homosexuality> (accessed December 13, 2023).

character of God more broadly.”² However, questions arise as to the extent the Bible comments on homosexuality. If so, which passages are they? And how do these laws determine how someone who identifies as a homosexual receives salvation? If we are all “children of god,” what makes homosexuals not deserving of God’s love? It is these kinds of questions that are constantly being asked.

Within this chapter, I will cover central aspects of the history of homosexuality to give context to how Reagan addressed LGBTQ rights and the AIDS crisis. I will split it into four subcategories where I believe religion played a major role in the persecution of thousands of homosexuals within the United States. Within these sections, I will briefly discuss the history of homosexuality in the west. In addition, I will mention the Lavender Scare, and dive into how the Lavender Scare was used to justify the unjust acts committed by the United States government towards individuals who identify as homosexuals working with the federal government. Next, I will also talk about the Exodus Annual Conference that happens in Anaheim, CA where it claims to pray away any homosexual feeling within a person. In addition, I will examine the AIDS Crisis, and argue against how this pandemic did not only affect individuals who identified as homosexuals but also affected heterosexual men and women while discussing how religion played a pivotal role in acts against homosexuals. In continuation, I will give a few examples of historical figures who identified as

²“What Does the Bible Say About Homosexuality?,” <https://www.hrc.org/resources/what-does-the-bible-say-about-homosexuality>.

homosexuals who either played a major role within the LGBTQ community, established prominent roles within governmental spheres and identify how their prominent roles helped influence a larger path where more doors opened for individuals like them.

A Brief History of Homosexuality in the West

For some scholars, the term “homosexuality” is problematic, especially applied to ancient cultures.³ However, the condemnation of homosexuality supersedes Christian belief, for most Christian theologians and denominations have considered homosexuality immoral or sinful.⁴ Homosexuality was illegal in the United States and most countries throughout the world. Within recent years, within the United States there have been laws put in place to protect the rights and lives of people who identify as a homosexual. As for European countries, the European Union established the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, in which it established Articles of non-discrimination for the European Union to follow. However, these non-discriminatory laws arrived centuries or years too late for many. The term “homosexuality” is defined by the American Psychological Association as a “sexual orientation refers to an enduring pattern

³ Thomas K. Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Document* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 549.

⁴ Philippe Huguelet and Harold G. Koenig, *Religion and Spirituality in Psychiatry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 386.

of emotional, romantic and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes.”⁵ Reading about how the term homosexuality is defined by the American Psychological Association gives a clear understanding, but most importantly, it does not have a scientific or religious ideology behind it. This definition is neutral. Unfortunately, there are other institutions that use religion to define the term of homosexuality as something entirely different. Because of traditional religious beliefs are often considered directly in conflict with homosexual behavior and, in some cases, even with mere attraction to the same sex, the roots of the conflict are plain.⁶ Nonetheless, identifying or labeling someone should not be aligned with a degrading terminology. On the other hand, labeling should be aligned with something that goes hand in hand with culture, beliefs, or identity. Unfortunately, throughout history, derogatory labels have been used frequently within the parameters of government, religion, and society.

For hundreds of years, identifying as a homosexual and acting upon homosexual acts was punishable by death. That is in part the reason why even in the present day, many live in hiding, fearing persecution from their society or families. Unfortunately, the prejudice and discrimination that people who identify as homosexual regularly experience have been shown to have negative

⁵“Understanding sexual orientation and homosexuality,” American Psychological Association, 2008, accessed December 28, 2023. <https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq/orientation>.

⁶Oliver B. Papa, “Homosexuality and Religion: The Conflict,” *Intuition: The BYU Undergraduate Journal of Psychology* 11, no. 2 (2015): Article 8, accessed December 28, 2023, (accessed December 28, 2023).

psychological effects. Despite all that, there have been several individuals who have played a major role within the government offices, military tactics, authors, actors etc., all of whom identify as homosexual. In antiquity, for instance, it is mentioned that King James I of England (1566-1625), son of Mary Queen of Scots, was “the most prominent homosexual figure in the early modern period.”⁷ King James I of England was responsible for the Church of England's permanent role as the official religion of England. King James I also had the bible translated to English, in which would later be known as King James Bible.⁸ In addition, centuries later another was a man named Alan Turing (1912-1954), who is often hailed for his influence in modern computing.⁹ It was his ability to decode the encryption of German Enigma machines during World War II that made him a household name. Unfortunately, in 1952, Alan was prosecuted for homosexual acts, which led him to accept hormone treatment that is commonly referred to as a chemical castration.¹⁰ Unfortunately, in June 1954, Turing died by suicide by

⁷ Dan Avery, “13 LGBTQ royals you didn't learn about in history class,” National Broadcasting Company (NBC), October 18, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/nbc-out-proud/13-lgbtq-royals-didnt-learn-history-class-rcna3097#> (accessed December 28, 2023).

⁸ David Mathew, “James I: King of England and Scotland,” Britannica, updated March 23, 2024, accessed December 28, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/James-I-king-of-England-and-Scotland>.

⁹ “Britain: Apology to Gay Mathematician,” *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/11/world/europe/11briefs-turingbrf.html#:~:text=Prime%20Minister%20Gordon%20Brown%20apologized,Mr.> (accessed December 28, 2024).

¹⁰ “Alan Turing,” Biography, July 22, 2020, accessed December 29, 2023, <https://www.biography.com/scientists/alan-turing>.

ingesting cyanide. Suicide has become the mass murder that would kill two times more than those who identify as heterosexuals.¹¹

King James I of England and Alan Turing are both historical figures from England, however this next individual was a prominent figure within United States history. Walt Whitman (1819- 1892) was an influential American poet. The Long Island native was regarded as one of America's most significant nineteenth century poets. Whitman's most notable works known as *Live Oak with Moss* and *Calamus*, however it was his twelfth unpublished works that catapulted him to become a household name. As *Walt Whitman's Songs of Male Intimacy and Love: Live Oak, with Moss and Calamus*," author Betsy Erkkila describes how, "Whitman's unpublished sheaf of twelve poems on manly passion and love written in 1859...where man who love men can live and love openly in accord with their desires."¹² In the late nineteenth century, homosexuality was still illegal, so someone of Whitman's magnitude writing about love stories between the same sex was considered to be taboo. Although the United States continues to be locked in a struggle over homosexuality civil rights, Whitman's poetry saw the world for what it could be—that of acceptance of "manly love." Unfortunately, Whitman would never come to see that society he dreamed of, because even in

¹¹ Oliver B. Papa, "Homosexuality and Religion: The Conflict," *Intuition: The BYU Undergraduate Journal of Psychology* 11, no. 2 (2015): Article 8, accessed December 29, 2023. [Viewcontent.cgi](#).

¹² Betsy Erkkila, *Walt Whitman's Songs of Male Intimacy and Love: Live Oak, with Moss and Calamus* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011), 163.

the present day, although identifying as a homosexual has become normal within American society, they are continuing to fight for their rights to this day.

Recently writers Jacob Poushter and Nicholas Kent published an article where they identified an increase of acceptance in many countries around the world in the past two decades. Their article, “The Global Divide on Homosexuality Persists,” describes how despite major changes in laws and norms surrounding the issue of same-sex marriages and the rights of LGBT people around the world, public opinion on the acceptance of homosexuality in society remains sharply divided by country, region and economic development.¹³ In addition, although the countries that were surveyed were based on country, region and economic development, societal norms based on religion also played a pivotal role on views of homosexuality. Overall, Poushter and Kent’s findings established varied levels of acceptance for homosexuality across the globe in which a religious affiliation became the key role in the country's acceptance of homosexuality.¹⁴ Poushter and Kent’s article gives insight into a global perspective as it involves the acceptance of homosexuality.

The Lavender Scare

¹³ Jacob Poushter and Nicholas Kent, “The Global Divide on Homosexuality Persists,” Pew Research Center, June 25, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/06/25/global-divide-on-homosexuality-persists/> (accessed February 15, 2024).

¹⁴ Poushter and Kent, “The Global Divide on Homosexuality Persists.” <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/06/25/global-divide-on-homosexuality-persists/>

There is a lack of historical scholarship on the Lavender Scare. As I learned about The Lavender Scare in graduate school, I began to question how many people know about it? Why do we have to learn about it as graduate students? Why is it treated as a component of dark history? Whatever it may be, most importantly, what is the significance of learning about The Lavender Scare? Before the launch of The Lavender Scare, in 1947 the U.S. Park Police initiated in the city a "Sex Perversion Elimination Program," targeting gay men, all while arresting and intimidating them.¹⁵ A year later, Congress passed an act "for the treatment of sexual psychopaths" in the nation's capital. That law facilitated the arrest and punishment of people who acted on same-sex desire and labeled them mentally ill.¹⁶ Homosexuality was perceived as a lurking subversive threat at a time when the country was coping with tremendous social change as well as rising anxiety about another lurking subversive threat: communism.

Communism would be the tipping point contributing to pain for countless homosexuals in the United States. However, when it comes to homosexuality history, the Lavender Scare would eventually become an event that has practically disappeared from American history. During the early years of the

¹⁵ Judith Adkins, "These People Are Frightened to Death: Congressional Investigations and the Lavender Scare," *National Archives* 48, no. 2 (2016), . <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2016/summer/lavender.html> (accessed February 18, 2024).

¹⁶ Adkins, "These People Are Frightened to Death: Congressional Investigations and the Lavender Scare." <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2016/summer/lavender.html>

1950s, the notion to launch a campaign that would target homosexuals was on the top of the list of several political figures—which included Republican Senator Joseph R. McCarthy (1908-1957).¹⁷ McCarthy became known for his explicit rhetoric towards LGBTQ communities. According to McCarthy, he began to associate homosexuality and communism as “threats to the American way of life.”¹⁸ The Lavender Scare became an event which sought the persecution of homosexuals—men and women—who worked within the federal government in the United States. The Lavender Scare gripped American citizens, as it was implied to them that homosexuality and communism were interconnected. However, at the same time, America was in turmoil due to the Cold War. The Cold War brought communism to American shores. However, that was not the only thing it brought, it also brought the relentless fear towards homosexuality. According to author of the *Lavender Scare*, David K. Johnson, the Lavender Scare is the story of how Washington D.C. and the federal bureaucracy—synonymous in the national imagination—came to be thought of as havens for socialists, misfits and perverts.¹⁹ The Lavender Scare did not just affect people who self-identified as

¹⁷ “McCarthyism/The Red Scare,” Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, accessed February 18, 2024, <https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/research/online-documents/mccarthyism-red-scare>.

¹⁸ David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 6.

¹⁹ Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*. 13.

“gay” or “lesbian” but because of the pervasiveness of the homophobia it unleashed, it affected the behavior of a wide segment of the population.

Although the Lavender Scare happened years before Reagan would become president of the United States, the Lavender Scare became the steppingstone to launching campaigns that shaped the future of the LGBTQ communities in the present day. In the early 1950s, then President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890-1969) took office. Prior to his presidency, Eisenhower was responsible for two of the most important military campaigns of WWII—Operation Torch in North Africa and the invasion of Normandy, which catapulted Eisenhower to fame. Due to his successful campaigns during WWII, his religious agenda in part led him to win the presidential race in 1953.²⁰ Eisenhower adhered to a political philosophy of dynamic conservatism, where he would self-describe himself as a “progressive conservative” to his approach.²¹ So, when the issues of homosexuality penetrated the US military as early as the 1940s, Eisenhower, along with other religious figures, wanted to do something about it. According to author and historian Anne C. Loveland, *American Evangelicals and the U.S. Military, 1942-1993*, Evangelicals began to exert enormous conservative military influence by introducing their religious ideology upon

²⁰ “Dwight D. Eisenhower: The 34th President of The United States,” The White House, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/dwight-d-eisenhower/> (accessed February 18, 2024).

²¹ David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 33.

them.²² The military in the 1940s began inputting policies that affected lesbians and gays, however, these policies were not “effectively” aimed at rooting out homosexuality but those which controlled and defined female and male sexuality in general.²³ The rumor of the time mentioned that “these sordid events and acts” had damaged our prestige as a Christian Nation, and warned that declining public morality in high official places leads to a breakdown in morality everywhere.²⁴

The roots of the Lavender Scare came from a religious dogma in which many Christians believe the United States is founded by Christian ideology, making it a Christian nation. As the Cold War began to affect the larger world, at home many politicians and citizens thought homosexuality posed a greater threat to national security than communism. Many Christians believe homosexuality is a sinful act towards God and his plan of salvation. However, what’s more interesting was the fact that many believe homosexuality was not an inborn characteristic, but one made by society.²⁵ According to Johnson, he remarks how J. Edgar Hoover saw homosexuality “not as an inborn characteristic” of a percentage of the population, but a sin or temptation to which anyone might

²² Anne C. Loveland, *American Evangelicals and the U.S. Military, 1942-1993* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1996), 66-67.

²³ David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

²⁴ Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*, 39.

²⁵ “The Lavender Scare,” National Archives Foundation, <https://www.archivesfoundation.org/newsletter/the-lavender-scare/>, (accessed February 18, 2024).

succumb.²⁶ This connotation indicates how religion helped define homosexuality based on religious tendencies. However, according to the American Psychological Association (APA) it defines homosexuality as a sexual orientation; homosexuality is "an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions" exclusively to people of the same sex or gender.²⁷ Even so, having a scientific definition that helps define homosexuality, a small percent of people will deny it and continue using religion to help define homosexuality. Nonetheless, the Lavender Scare gripped American citizens as it was implied to them that homosexuality and communism were interconnected. Fear of communism, also known as The Red Scare, whipped up paranoia, where Senator Joseph McCarthy took advantage of the post-World War II Anti-communist sentiment to "hunt down" suspected communists in the federal government.²⁸ No one was safe. In fact, anyone who suspected communists were not the only ones McCarthy's investigations targeted, but the public was becoming increasingly concerned about homosexuality in the federal government.

This general awareness continued to fuel same-sex hate crimes and increase the morality panic Americans faced. As the Lavender Scare has a negative connotation, it inspired not only the founding of the first sustained gay

²⁶ Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*, 65.

²⁷"Understanding sexual orientation and homosexuality," American Psychological Association, 2008, accessed February 18, 2024. <https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq/orientation>.

²⁸David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

organization in the United States in southern California in 1951—an area heavily dependent on government-sponsored defense work—but also the later radicalization of the movement in 1960s in Washington.²⁹ As the investigations continued into federal departments, those who were suspected of being homosexual faced the choice to resign or be publicly outed. This meant publishing their names, addresses, profession on nationwide newspapers—*The Washington Post*, and *New York Times* were two who published these names.³⁰

In 1953, and throughout the duration of the Lavender Scare, President Eisenhower launched the “Let’s Clean House” slogan as a promise to rid the federal bureaucracy of a host of problems, including communism, corruption and sexual perversion.³¹ During his presidential campaign—similar to Reagan—Eisenhower titled himself as a “God-fearing man” who was for morality, while setting to remove “wickedness in government” and adding top policy makers that would rise to the occasion to remove all homosexuals for this “Christian nation.”³² Although the Lavender Scare happened decades ago, the overarching question remains, why is it significant to learn about The Lavender Scare? As the lack of historical scholarship on the Lavender Scare has improved little, it has become

²⁹ Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*, 13.

³⁰ “The Lavender Scare,” National Archives Foundation, <https://www.archivesfoundation.org/newsletter/the-lavender-scare/> (accessed February 18, 2024).

³¹ David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

³² Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*, 121.

extremely important to educate future generations. The Lavender Scare was implemented based on a religious dogma. This religious ideology set in motion different responses to other events, including the AIDS pandemic, that religious leaders used to further strengthen their cause.

Exodus

When we put homosexuality and religion within the same sentence, it often ends with religious groups classifying homosexuality as a sin. According to American psychologist Gregory M. Herek, about 72 percent of Christian organizations condemn homosexuals and label homosexuality an abomination.³³ In one 2009 case study lead by Dr. Katrina Kubicek, she quotes a participant who reported “I am always committing a sin just because I’m being me.”³⁴ For many religious organizations, scripture and doctrines are interpreted to strictly prohibit any form of homosexuality. It is this religiosity that stirs up internal conflict within adolescence and adults who identify as homosexuals within a religious organization. For those who identify as homosexual, they often seek

³³ Gregory M. Herek, Douglas C. Kimmel, Hortensia Amaro, Gary B. Melton, “Avoiding heterosexist bias in psychological research,” *American Psychologist* 46, no. 9 (1991), 957, <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1992-04031-001> (accessed February 23, 2024).

³⁴ Katrina Kubicek, Bryce McDevitt, Julie Carpineto, George Weiss, Ellen Iverson, Michele D. Kipke, “‘God Made me Gay for a Reason:’ Young Men who have Sex with Men’s Resiliency in Resolving Internalized Homophobia from Religious Sources,” *J Adolesc Res* 24, no. 5 (September 2009): 601, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2756693/> (accessed February 24, 2024).

help within their religious organization to “liberate” themselves from any form of damnation. “If we interpret and apply religious doctrine to homosexuality, many religious texts such as the Bible forbid any form of homosexual activity thus creating tension between any traditional religion and homosexuality,” states, Oliver B. Papa in his 2015 dissertation for Brigham Young University (BYU).³⁵ Within a Christian organization, most religious teachings focus on individualism, physical expression, and the forbidden activity of any homosexuality. However, it is these tensions that begin to question who is worthy of God's salvation? As other questions began to arise, it was that question that many of the adolescents and adults questioned as they sought help through an Evangelical organization called Exodus.

Netflix’s 2021 documentary *Pray Away*, dives into the history of the conversion therapy convention known as Exodus. Established in 1976 in Anaheim, California, many people who identified as homosexuals congregated at the Anaheim Convention Center where the first annual Exodus convention was about to commence. Originally, Exodus started as a small support group for any “practicing lesbians and gays.”³⁶ However, as many who attended began to see results, as their “gayness” was being prayed away, Exodus became something of

³⁵Oliver B. Papa, “Homosexuality and Religion: The Conflict,” *Intuition: The BYU Undergraduate Journal of Psychology* 11, no. 2 (2015): Article 8, accessed December 29, 2023. <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1037&context=intuition>.

³⁶ *Pray Away*, Netflix Original Series (accessed March 15, 2023).

a grander stature. Exodus is a Christian program that claimed to convert homosexuals, make them ex-gays with a course of Bible study, behavior modification, and peer counselling.³⁷ The idea behind Exodus was “if God is fixing me, it is working.” With the full support of Televangelist Jerry Falwell, and Co-Founder of Exodus Michael Bussee, Vice President of Exodus John Paulk and many more, it was believed that Exodus was the answer to eternal salvation for homosexuals.

One can pose the question if this convention known as Exodus can truly change a person’s sexual orientation? Can prayer and Bible study be the answer for these “practicing” lesbians and gays? Or should lesbians and gays seek professional help through psychological therapy? According to psychologists Christopher H. Rosik and Paul Popper, “therapy that promotes complete acceptance of homosexuality usually progresses smoothly since there is no religious background to resist...often in cases of non-religious LGBTQ individuals, as they approach therapy without any belief that homosexuality is inherently evil or unacceptable to God.”³⁸ By seeking professional help which promotes acceptance, psychologists like Rosik and Popper have established how promoting acceptance within themselves can help individuals who identify

³⁷ *Pray Away*, Netflix Original Series (accessed March 15, 2023).

³⁸ Christopher H. Rosik, Paul Popper, “Clinical Approaches to Conflicts Between Religious Values and Same-Sex Attractions: Contrasting Gay-Affirmative, Sexual Identity, and Change-Oriented Models of Therapy,” Wiley, October 1, 2014, accessed February 8, 2024.

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/j.2161-007X.2014.00053.x>

as homosexuals finally accept their reality without having to choose between two essential and inseparable facets of their lives.

Unfortunately, Exodus used religion as a form to promote their “Conversion Therapy ” to explain why individuals identify as a “practicing” lesbian and gay. According to Oliver B. Papa, conversion therapy can often cause more conflict and distress for the individual because they are continuously told homosexuality is inherently evil and unacceptable to God.³⁹ According to the religious leaders in Exodus, conversion therapy establishes why individuals are gay, however, all while attempting to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity with the use of a religious leader, licensed counselor, or in peer support groups. In addition, these “licensed counselors” gave a detailed description describing how being a homosexual is tied with trauma in childhood that is resulted with direct abuse, sexual molestation, physical abuse by parents, or by inadequate or toxic parenting.⁴⁰ Many of these “licensed counselors” did not have any form of experience in psychology, counseling, or human sexuality.⁴¹ In other words, they had no qualifications. One of these religious leaders that participated in the development of the course material for Exodus was another popular Televangelist Dr. James Dobson. Dr. James Dobson (1936) is an

³⁹ Oliver B. Papa, “Homosexuality and Religion: The Conflict,” *Intuition: The BYU Undergraduate Journal of Psychology* 11, no. 2 (2015): Article 8, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1037&context=intuition> (accessed February 8, 2024).

⁴⁰ *Pray Away*, Netflix Original Series, 15:57-16:14 (accessed March 15, 2023).

⁴¹ *Pray Away*, Netflix Original Series, 16:50 (accessed March 15, 2023).

American Evangelical Christian author and psychologist who stands strongly against homosexuality. He believes that homosexuality is against God's laws and believes that homosexuality can be remedied through prayer and people can become "ungay."⁴² However, as history, psychology, and biology have taught us, that claim is far from the truth. In addition, Dobson received letters from people of the LGBTQ community, highly criticizing his teachings and views against them.

For instance, in one letter it mentions:

I am gay, and I am writing on behalf of many thousands of gay people in this country who have grown to hate the church because of organizations like yours...most of my childhood was spent where I knew no other gay people. I loved the Lord, the church, and my family...You see, from day one of puberty, I was attracted to the same sex...I tried everything I could to go straight—counselors, prayer vigils, reading countless books on the evils of homosexuality, and attending Homosexuals Anonymous; nothing worked. The more I tried to change, the more it seemed just natural for me to be gay. I decided to come out of the closet. The first person I met in a gay club was the choir director's son at my parents' church! He introduced me to many other gays—students in seminary, Sunday school teachers, church pianists, ushers, and many preachers' sons. There were gay people all throughout the church, but no one really knew because, like me, they were silently living their lives far from the minority of loud activists that you see on the evening news.⁴³

This letter gives readers an insight into the realities that many homosexuality individuals face. In this case, this person talks about how he grew up in a Christian church and had accepted the teachings, however as their sexuality began to develop in puberty, they sought help to reverse the feeling. Despite

⁴² *Pray Away*, Netflix Original Series (accessed March 15, 2023).

⁴³ "Letter to Dr. Dobson From a Gay Man," Dobson Digital Library, <https://dobsonlibrary.com/resource/article/1ccb624d-0e07-4d46-9e5e-61a5c613fa11> (accessed February 19, 2024).

that, the treatment would not work, and they finally accepted themselves as they are, and would like for others to do the same.

Jerry Falwell, another prominent Evangelical figure, and participant at the Anaheim convention Exodus, believed that homosexuality was against God's laws. Falwell continuously stated during Exodus conventions "homosexuality is moral perversion and is always wrong, every scriptural statement on the subject is a statement of condemnation."⁴⁴ It is these verbal attacks from people of faith, that LGBTQ+ individuals are pressured, ostracized, criticized and yelled at as sinners—sometimes during church services.⁴⁵ Sociology professors from Wayne State University Amy Adamezyk and Cassady Pitt state that many Christians considered the growing acceptance of homosexuality a threat to their faith and felt the need to defend it aggressively.⁴⁶ Falwell gave a speech named "Homosexuality Revolution" in 1981, where he aggressively mentioned how he refused to stop "speaking out against the sin of homosexuality" and pledged to continue to expose the sin of homosexuality to the people of this nation, as he believed that the massive homosexual revolution is always a "symptom of a

⁴⁴ "Pray Away," Netflix Original Series (accessed March 15, 2023). 20:57-21:10

⁴⁵ Oliver B. Papa, "Homosexuality and Religion: The Conflict," *Intuition: The BYU Undergraduate Journal of Psychology* 11, no. 2 (2015): Article 8, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1037&context=intuition> (accessed February 10, 2024).

⁴⁶ Amy Adamczyk, Cassady Pitt, "Shaping attitudes about homosexuality: The role of religion and cultural context," *Social Science Research* 38, no. 2 (June 2009): 338, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0049089X09000039>.

nation coming under the judgment of God.”⁴⁷ However, as we will see in the following section, Falwell had a lot more to say about homosexuality during the 1980s Aids Crisis.

Aids Crisis and Present Day

Televangelist Jerry Falwell once said, “I believe that God does not judge people. God judges’ sin. And I do believe that AIDS, generally caused and believe to be caused by homosexual promiscuity, is a violation of God’s Laws, laws of nature and decency, and as a result, we pay the price when we violate the laws of God.”⁴⁸ On June 5, 1981, the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) published an article named “Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR): Pneumocystis Pneumonia.” The article mentioned a rare lung infection case of Pneumocystis Pneumonia (PCP) found in five young homosexual men. That same day in New York City, the report hit newsstands, where Dermatologist Dr. Alvin Friedman-Kien came across the reporting, and called CDC report a “cluster of cases of a rare and unusually aggressive form of cancer known as Kaposi’s Sarcoma (KS) found in homosexual men within the New York and California

⁴⁷ “Jerry Falwell on the Homosexual Revolution,” The American Yawp Reader, accessed February 19, 2024. <https://www.americanyawp.com/reader/29-the-triumph-of-the-right/jerry-falwell-on-the-homosexual-revolution-1981/>.

⁴⁸ *Pray Away*, Netflix Original Series (accessed March 15, 2023) 9:02-9:17

regions.”⁴⁹ PCP and KS are often associated with people who suffer from a weakened immune system. The following days, June 8, the CDC received reports throughout the country where similar cases were being identified. This prompted the CDC to develop a taskforce to keep surveillance of infections. On June 16, a 35-year-old, white gay man was exhibiting symptoms of severe immunodeficiency becoming the first person with AIDS to be admitted to the Clinical Center at the National Institutes of Health (NIH).⁵⁰ Unfortunately, he left the center in a body bag on October 28, merely months after his admission to the health center. On July 2, the *Bay Area Reporter*, a weekly newspaper for the gay and lesbian community in San Francisco, published its first mention of “Gay Men’s Pneumonia.”⁵¹ In short, the report encouraged gay men who were experiencing progressive shortness of breath to see their physicians. By July 3, the case numbers rose, identifying 26 gay men ranging from the ages of 26-51, being diagnosed with KS within 30 months. Unfortunately, eight died within eight months of their diagnoses.⁵² By the start of the following year in 1982, the number of deaths climbed significantly. Later that year it was estimated about

⁴⁹ “A Timeline of HIV and AIDS,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, accessed February 21, 2024, <https://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/overview/history/hiv-and-aids-timeline/#year-1981>.

⁵⁰ “A Timeline of HIV and AIDS.” <https://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/overview/history/hiv-and-aids-timeline/#year-1981> (accessed date).

⁵¹ “A Timeline of HIV and AIDS.” <https://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/overview/history/hiv-and-aids-timeline/#year-1981>.

⁵² Lisa Cisneros, “40 Years of AIDS: A Timeline of the Epidemic,” University of California San Francisco (UCSF), (accessed February 21, 2024)

853 people had died in the United States alone.⁵³ In addition, the CDC began to use the term acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) for the first time on September 24.

During the AIDS Crisis, Ronald Reagan was president of the United States of America. Reagan led with a religious Evangelical agenda. At the height of the pandemic, Reagan was oblivious to the heightened fear of a “homosexual sickness” that penetrated this “Christian Nation,” states historian and author Andrew P. Hogue.⁵⁴ However, it would not be until 1985, when Reagan would officially acknowledge the AIDS pandemic—nearly five years after it started. The AIDS Crisis, or so ignorantly known as the “Gay plague,” was commonly believed to affect gay men. Throughout the country and the world, the sickness was apparently first found in the homosexual population. As the nature of the disease caused the rapid death of the individuals with AIDS, many religious institutions have used the AIDS pandemic as a form of propaganda to generate fear in the public.⁵⁵ However, at the same time, religious opposition issued prevention methods such as condoms and a climate of anti-gay rhetoric which put many religious groups into a continuing conflict with public health efforts to contain the

⁵³ Tim Fitzsimons, “LGBTQ History Month: The early days of America’s AIDS crisis,” National Broadcasting Company (NBC), October 15, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/lgbtq-history-month-early-days-america-s-aids-crisis-n919701> (accessed February 21, 2024).

⁵⁴ Andrew P. Hogue, *Stumping God: Reagan, Carter, and the Invention of a Political Faith*. (Waco: Baylor University, 2012).

⁵⁵ Ellen L. Idler, *Religion as a Social Determinant of Public Health* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

epidemic.⁵⁶ In addition, religious leaders like Jerry Falwell further strengthened anti-homosexuality rhetoric among the public. Falwell defined the Aids Crisis with religious ideology by identifying how the disease was only affecting “sinners,” primarily “promiscuous” gays.⁵⁷

The use of religious rhetoric imposed during the Aids Crisis effectively put blame on the victim. This religious rhetoric was continuously being used based on “sin” and against the “laws of God.” By defining AIDS as a divine punishment or as the “natural” outcome of a “sinful” lifestyle, separating AIDS from issues of sexual morality to allow for a more rational response, and expressing compassion for the “sinner” while hating the “sin.”⁵⁸ Falwell continued to vocally use his sermons as a form of propaganda, stating that “AIDS is a lethal judgment of God on the sin of homosexuality and it is also the judgment of God on America for endorsing this vulgar, perverted and reprobate lifestyle.”⁵⁹ Although the rhetoric of the time was blaming the AIDS pandemic on homosexual promiscuity, that was of course far from the truth.

AIDS was not only found on homosexual men, but also found on heterosexual men and women. During the height of the pandemic, many men, and women—both homosexual and heterosexual—died from Aids. In addition,

⁵⁶ Idler, *Religion as a Social Determinant of Public Health*. 375.

⁵⁷ Mark R. Kowalewski, “Religion Constructions of the AIDS Crisis,” *Social Analysis* 51, no.1 (1990): 91, accessed February 24, 2024, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3711343>. accessed February 24, 2024).

⁵⁸ Kowalewski, “Religion Constructions of the AIDS Crisis,” <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3711343>.

⁵⁹ Jerry, Falwell, 1987, “AIDS: the judgment of God.” *Liberty Report* (April):2,5.

during the crisis, many famous celebrities encountered the disease and eventually died. Just to name a few, for example, most notable for his rap career from NWA, was Eric Lynn Wright also known as Eazy-E. Born September 7, 1964, Eazy-E became a household name after establishing a short but notable rapping career. In February 1995, Eazy-E was diagnosed with AIDS after being hospitalized for severe respiratory issues.⁶⁰ Eazy-E would meet his untimely demise and died due to the complications of AIDS on March 26, 1995. Another example was actress Amanda Blake. Born February 20, 1929, Blake was notable for her lengthy acting career. Blake acted alongside Reagan during his time in Hollywood. Reagan and Blake eventually developed a close relationship, and she supported him during his campaigns for governor of California and the presidency.⁶¹ Lastly, another prominent figure was actor Rock Hudson. Hudson born November 17, 1925, was the most prominent Golden Age actor in Hollywood.⁶² Like Blake, Hudson acted alongside Ronald Reagan, where a friendship flourished. Hudson, like Blake, supported Reagan during his campaigns. However, on June 5, 1984, Hudson was diagnosed with HIV. After his diagnosis, Hudson wanted to keep it a secret and continued his life with

⁶⁰ "Eazy-E," Biography, June 29, 2020, <https://www.biography.com/musicians/eazy-e> (accessed February 24, 2024).

⁶¹ "The Amanda Blake Story," INSP, <https://www.insp.com/blog/the-amanda-blake-story/> (accessed February 24, 2024).

⁶² "Rock Hudson," Britannica, updated February 12, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rock-Hudson> (accessed February 24, 2024).

normalcy. Just three weeks before his diagnosis, Hudson was seen with Reagan and his wife Nancy at the May 1984 state dinner at the White House.⁶³ Merely six months later, Hudson died in his sleep in Beverly Hills, California, due to complications of his diagnoses.

Prior to the death of Hudson, Reagan had yet to acknowledge the pandemic. As historian and author Andrew P. Hogue mentions, Reagan was oblivious to it and remained reluctant about it. That is because although his religious rhetoric condemned homosexuality, Reagan's disconnect to the deadly pandemic implied his unwillingness to accept the realities about the "Gay plague" that not only affected homosexual men and women, but everyone.⁶⁴ After the death of his dear friends, that "acceptance" penetrated his mind. Throughout the rest of the presidency, Reagan continued to condemn homosexuals. However, with the anti-gay moral panic that happened during the AIDS Crisis, Reagan's record on the LGBT community issues was the most defined by his shameful inaction during the pandemic, as analysts like James Kirchick of the *New York Times* have argued.⁶⁵

Yet, as AIDS continues to be an issue in modern society, the AIDS Crisis would eventually become the steppingstone into the progress and setbacks that the LGBTQ communities face. For example, in 2022, Florida Governor Ron

⁶³ "Rock Hudson," <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rock-Hudson>.

⁶⁴ Hogue, *Stumping God*, 45.

⁶⁵ James Kirchick, "When Reagan Say Gay," *The New York Times*, March 22, 2022, [When-reagan-said-gay.html](#). (accessed February 24, 2024).

DeSantis signed into law HB 1557, commonly referred to as the “Don’t Say Gay” bill. The bill was effective on July 1, 2022, where they Don’t Say Gay law stated that its purpose was to “prohibit classroom discussion about sexual orientation or gender identity in certain grade levels or in a specified manner.”⁶⁶ Forty-four years earlier, in 1978 California lawmakers were in want to pass Proposition 6 known as The Briggs Initiative. The California ballot measures that would have banned lesbian and gay people and supporters of lesbian and gay rights from teaching public schools.⁶⁷ California ballot Proposition 8 was passed in November 2008. Proposition 8 banned same-sex marriages within the state, and was supported by many religious organizations most notably the Roman Catholic church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, who stood firm on the “pro-family” agenda.⁶⁸ However, fortunately so, the Prop was overturned as it was a direct violation of the Equal Protection Clauses of the United States Constitution.⁶⁹ As members of the LGBTQ community continue to fight for their rights, acceptance in modern society has been much improved. Same-sex

⁶⁶ “What You Need to Know About Florida’s ‘Don’t Say Gay’ and ‘Don’t Say They’ Laws, Book Bans, and Other Curricula Restrictions,” NEA, https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/30424-know-your-rights_web_v4.pdf (accessed February 24, 2024).

⁶⁷ Sue Englander, Paula Lichtenberg, Glenna McElhinney, “The Briggs Initiative: A Scary Proposition,” LGBT Historical Society, September 2018, <https://www.glbthistory.org/briggs> (accessed February 24, 2024).

⁶⁸ “A Brief History of Civil Rights in the United States: Proposition 8,” Howard University, accessed February 24, 2024, <https://library.law.howard.edu/civilrightshistory/lgbtq/prop8>.

⁶⁹ “A Brief History of Civil Rights in the United States: Proposition 8,” <https://library.law.howard.edu/civilrightshistory/lgbtq/prop8>.

marriages at the national level are finally recognized—although some states are using religious propaganda to stop same-sex marriages from happening or most importantly be recognized as a “holy” matrimony. In addition, persecutions like the Lavender Scare have ceased to exist—but who is to say if that is for certain. Finally, in 2023, Pope Francis called for the Catholic Church to be more tolerant and more accepting of gays and lesbians within the church. He urged more common sense be bestowed on pastors and the congregation, stating “by thinking that everything is black and white, we sometimes close off the way of grace and growth.”⁷⁰ Pope Francis emphasize the “unjust discrimination” against gays and lesbians is unacceptable and downplays the idea of living in sin.⁷¹ Those words in the present day are saying something truly extraordinary. As progress has been made, the constant fear of people who identify as homosexuals is still here. The unknown future of these people is not so colorful as it is for others, due the constant threat of the Christian ideology the future for the LGBTQ community remains uncertain.

⁷⁰ Richard Allen Greene, “Pope to Church: Be more accepting of divorced Catholics, gays and lesbians,” CNN, April 8, 2016, accessed February 24, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/04/08/europe/vatican-pope-family/index.html>.

⁷¹ Greene, “Pope to Church: Be more accepting of divorced Catholics, gays and lesbians,” <https://www.cnn.com/2016/04/08/europe/vatican-pope-family/index.html>.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION IN MODERNITY

Looking ahead, the first thing to consider is the most obvious—whether religious values should have a role in politics. One thing is for certain, keeping the wall that separates religion and government should remain at the forefront above all else. However, as long as religion remains a thriving enterprise in America and religious Americans remain active in politics, religion will continue to be a vital part of American political discourse.¹ In recent years, at the forefront of religious ideology, abortion has been the hot topic. In 2022, leaked documentation from the Supreme Court concerning abortion hit news outlets throughout the nation. These leaked documents illustrated the overturning of *Roe Vs. Wade*, which meant that abortion rights will be rolled back in nearly half of the states immediately, with more restrictions likely to follow.² This declaration unfortunately meant women no longer had a constitutional right to an abortion. Interestingly, although the United States is a first world country, laws influenced by religion like these threaten the progress of human rights. As the United States

¹ Andrew P. Hogue, *Stumping God: Reagan, Carter, and the Invention of a Political Faith*. (Waco: Baylor University, 2012).

² Nina Totenberg, Sarah McCammon, “Supreme Court overturns *Roe v. Wade* ending right to abortion upheld for decades,” NPR, . <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/24/1102305878/supreme-court-abortion-roe-v-wade-decision-overturn> (accessed February 24, 2024).

is seemingly going backwards, due to the implementations of religiously influenced “laws,” other parts of the world are moving forward.

In the United Kingdom (UK), the term of abortion became known to society during the thirteenth century.³ According to British law at the time, it followed church doctrine teaching as it mentioned abortion was acceptable until ‘quickening’ (i.e. when movement is felt at 16-20 weeks), which, it was believed, was when the soul entered the fetus.⁴ Five hundred years later, by 1803, the Ellenborough Act was introduced. The Ellenborough Act was introduced by Edward Law (1790-1871), 1st Earl of Ellenborough. The act would essentially pass the death penalty on abortions performed after the time of “quickening.”⁵ By 1837, the Ellenborough Act was removed, and in the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries, a succession of laws was brought in to reduce access to legal abortion. However, in the 1960s, women gained access to the contraceptive pill, and by 1967, abortion in the United Kingdom was finally legalized and accepted under the Abortion Act. The Abortion Act dictates that “a person shall not be guilty of an offense under the law relating to abortion when a pregnancy is terminated by a registered medical practitioner.”⁶ As the UK finally accepted

³ “History of Abortion Laws in the UK,” Abortion Rights, accessed January 5, 2024. <https://abortionrights.org.uk/history-of-abortion-law-in-the-uk/>

⁴ “History of Abortion Law in the UK.”

⁵ “1803: 43 George 3 c. 58: Lord Ellenborough’s Act,” Putting Historic British Law Online, accessed January 7, 2024. [43-geo-3-c-58-lord-ellenborough's-act-1803](https://www.britainonline.com/43-geo-3-c-58-lord-ellenborough-s-act-1803)

⁶ “Abortion Act 1967,” The National Archives, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/87/section/1> (accessed January 7, 2024).

women's rights to abortion, Northern Ireland would lag in seeing the possibility of abortion becoming accessible to their citizens.

When the Abortion Act of 1967 was established, it paved the way to greater accessibility for abortion. The act fortunately was implemented in certain areas, but regrettably the act did not include Northern Ireland. Fifty-two years later, in 2019, abortion in Northern Ireland became legal. In October 2020, the Northern Irish Department of Health acknowledged the legality of abortion but mentioned how the duty of medical practitioners were not forced to do the procedure if it is against their religious views, describing it as “not required to commission the relevant service.”⁷ However, many women in Northern Ireland continue to travel to England to receive abortion procedures—although Northern Ireland allowed these proceedings to happen, but due to religious convictions Northern Ireland women do not feel safe. As the discussion continues in relation to abortion, questions begin to arise as how does religion become intertwined in relation to medical practices that can potentially save lives? Most importantly, how do these laws in the UK and Northern Ireland relate to the United States when it comes to reinstating abortion as illegal? For millions of people, the idea of abortion is considered a sin, as it is something that goes against the sacred beliefs of many religious groups. But many challenging questions remain: how do you tell a mother who must carry to full term, that their baby will die minutes after

⁷ Gwyneth Hughes, *Three Families*, Alex Kalymnics (United Kingdom: BBC, 2021), TV series.

birth? Is it okay for the mother to carry a child to term knowing their death is certain? Or how do you make a mother understand that they will die if they carry on with the pregnancy? I just want to make one thing clear; pregnancy is a beautiful event that happens for most women. Unfortunately, for others that reality does not exist for them—for example, I am one of the thousands of women who struggle with infertility. For these women seeking the help through IVF (In Vitro Fertilization) has allowed them to achieve the thing they desire the most. However, although IVF is an option for them, having a successful pregnancy is not a guarantee.

Recently, IVF has been under attack. Due to religious ideologies, IVF has become the next thing that Christian conservatives have begun to target. In February 2024 Alabama Supreme Court ruled that frozen embryos can be considered children under state law.⁸ That decision stemmed from wrongful death lawsuits filed by three sets of parents whose frozen embryos were destroyed after a fertility clinic patient removed and dropped several embryos in December 2020.

This ruling came to be because according to Chief Justice Tom Parker, along with the Alabama Supreme Court, ruled IVF embryos are children by citing arguments from across the planet and the centuries, all leading to one source for

⁸ Melissa Quinn, “Alabama legislature approves bills to protect IVF after state Supreme Court ruling,” CBS News, March 1, 2024, [Alabama legislature approves bills to protect IVF after state Supreme Court ruling - CBS News](#) (accessed February 29, 2024).

the court's judgment: "God."⁹ The passing of this law was based on religious ideology from conservative Christians like Justice Tom Parker. According to Parker, "[embryos] cannot be wrongfully destroyed without incurring the wrath of a holy God, who views the destruction of His image as an affront to Himself."¹⁰ Parker's statement, along with conservative religious views, alarmed advocates for church and state separation. According to Michelle Boorstein, writer from *The Washington Post*, Boorstein addresses how the "religious issues" IVF faced started during the 1970s and had become available for partners (straight or gay) to start a family with the help of medical intervention.¹¹ As IVF was still in its infancy during the 1980s, then President Ronald Reagan vocalized his opposition towards IVF. Like abortion, Reagan was against it. According to Reagan, "abortion-on-demand is not a right granted by the Constitution, nor is IVF procedures...the truth of human life is dignified under God and respect of the sacred value of human life is not based on scientific revelations, but under the

⁹ Michelle Boorstein, "Alabama judge says God opposes IVF. Religion holds varied views," *Washington Post*, February 28, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2024/02/28/alabama-ivf-embryos-religion-beliefs/#> (accessed February 29, 2024).

¹⁰ Peter Smith, Tiffany Stanley, "Chief justice's Christian reasoning in IVF opinion sparks alarm over church-state separation," *National Catholic Reporter*, February 24, 2024, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/chief-justices-christian-reasoning-ivf-opinion-sparks-alarm-over-church-state-separation> (accessed March 3, 2024).

¹¹ Michelle Boorstein, "Alabama judge says God opposes IVF. Religion holds varied views," *Washington Post*, February 28, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2024/02/28/alabama-ivf-embryos-religion-beliefs/#> (accessed February 29, 2024).

sanctity of life ethics under God.”¹² As Christian theology has grasped American politics, its threshold continues to heighten fears in advocates who push for the separation of church and state. Laws like the Alabama IVF ramifications, advocates like Rachel Laser, CEO of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, note that “Now we’re in a place where government officials feel emboldened to say the quiet part out loud, and directly challenge the separation of church and state, a foundational part of our democracy.”¹³ This embodiment has developed into a brazen event, in which government officials who call for Christian Nationalism at the forefront of American politics have become part of the American identity infused with Christianity.

As academics continue to examine the new thresholds surrounding government and religion, its relevance to the present day continues to shape the American political landscape. In a 2019, a survey by Pew Research Center, it found 63 percent of Americans believe church should be left out of politics, while 37 percent believe it is justifiable to keep religion intertwined with American politics.¹⁴ These 37 percent of Americans with a favorable view believe instituting

¹² “Ronald Reagan: Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation,” *The Catholic Lawyer* 30, no. 2 (1986) 99: accessed February 29, 2024, <https://scholarship.law.stjohns.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2212&context=tcl>.

¹³ Peter Smith, Tiffany Stanley, “Chief justice’s Christian reasoning in IVF opinion sparks alarm over church-state separation,” *National Catholic Reporter*, February 24, 2024, accessed March 3, 2024. <https://www.ncronline.org/news/chief-justices-christian-reasoning-ivf-opinion-sparks-alarm-over-church-state-separation>

¹⁴ “Americans Have Positive Views About Religion’s Role in Society, But Want It Out of Politics,” Pew Research Center, November 15, 2019,

religion in politics does greater good than harm. Their claim is their set beliefs that provide a set of “high ethical standards” which provide useful guidance to a societal, political and personal matters.¹⁵ On the other hand, the 63 percent of Americans who believe church and state should be left out of politics, believe that the interconnection between both is a direct violation of the First Amendment, which would allow religious leaders in politics enforce a set religious dogma unto the American population made up of different religious sects. According to historian Mark Douglas McGarvie, he describes how religion should remain a private matter, with no vested privileges in politics, as it can permeate the society where its institutional structure is focused on American values and not religious ones.¹⁶ The First Amendment in the American Constitution clearly establishes a wall in order to keep the separation between church and state, like the Founding Fathers initially wanted. However, in the present day, the First Amendment seems to pass right over the heads of Christian conservatives within politics. If religious studies have taught us anything, it would be that Christian Nationalism is not a religious creed but first and foremost a political ideology. For that reason, author and historian Mark A. Smith establishes how new values have emerged in society; religious leaders often update their groups’ official positions to maintain

[americans-have-positive-views-about-religions-role-in-society-but-want-it-out-of-politics](#) (accessed February 29, 2024).

¹⁵ “Americans Have Positive Views About Religion’s Role in Society, But Want It Out of Politics.”

¹⁶ Mark Douglas McGarvie, *One Nation Under Law: America’s Early National Struggles to Separate Church and State* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 2004), 189.

support among the rank-and-file. Among Protestants, and sometimes even among Catholics, these processes of change center around “reinterpreting the Bible.”¹⁷ But the role of the church and its ideological disestablishment is meant to focus on the law which would embody Christian communitarian and individualistic perspective.¹⁸ However, the embodiment of a Christian community can effectively affect the political component behind the society—especially if the context is still illustrated in a religiously diverse society like the United States.

When discussing the discourse surrounding Christian Nationalism in American politics, it will continue to affect the ongoing scholarly debates, as well as societal and political literatures. It is important to understand the significance for future generations to be able to comprehend the importance of having the wall that separates government and religion. Christian Nationalism continues to take hold on many political matters, whether it be foreign or domestic. According to Guthrie Graves-Fitzsimmons and Maggie Siddiqi, authors of “Christian Nationalism Is the ‘Single Biggest Threat’ to America’s Religious Freedom,” explain how implementing Christian ideology leads to discrimination and the misuse of religious liberty, which at times becomes violent against American

¹⁷ Mark A. Smith, *Secular Faith: How Culture Has Trumped Religion in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2015), 65.

¹⁸ Mark Douglas McGarvie, *One Nation Under Law: America’s Early National Struggles to Separate Church and State* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 2004), 67.

minorities.¹⁹ This threat that Graves-Fitzsimmons and Siddiqi mentions is demonstrated in modern politics as the 2024 presidential election is underway.

As we have seen throughout, Christian Nationalism has affected politics and society through Ronald Reagan’s administrations. However, although Reagan’s administrations have passed, the residual effects from his administration continue to play out in modern day. Our Founding Fathers fought to have a wall separating church and state. According to McGarvie, the constitutional separation of church and state effectively prohibits a government reliance upon private means.²⁰ In order to recognize religious beliefs as an individual right within the government, the First Amendment prohibits congressional attention to religion, specifically Christian values based on morality. However, as the constitutional design denies the federal government to establish a set religion, recognizing religious belief as an individual right is supported by the Exercise Clause under the First Amendment—giving you the right to worship whom you wish without getting penalized by the government.²¹ In

¹⁹ Guthrie Graves-Fitzsimmons, Maggie Siddiqi, “Christian Nationalism Is ‘Single Biggest Threat’ to America’s Religious Freedom,” Center of American Progress (CAP), April 13, 2022, [Christian-nationalism-is-single-biggest-threat-to-americas-religious-freedom](https://www.centerforamericanprogress.org/2022/04/13/christian-nationalism-is-single-biggest-threat-to-americas-religious-freedom/) (accessed March 10, 2024).

²⁰ Mark Douglas McGarvie, *One Nation Under Law: America’s Early National Struggles to Separate Church and State* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 2004), 48.

²¹ “Your Right to Religious Freedom,” American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), July 17, 2023, accessed March 10, 2024. <https://www.aclu.org/documents/your-right-religious-freedom#:~:text=The%20Free%20Exercise%20cause%20of,because%20of%20your%20religious%20beliefs.>

spite of that, the on-going discourse of separation between church and state continues, historians continue the conversation due to the importance of understanding its issue. Most notably, historians Erwin Chemerinsky and Howard Gillman continue to examine the highly controversial issue of the relationship between government and religion. Their search continues to educate the American society on past and recent issues based on government and religion. Their highly regarded work, *The Religion Clause: The Case for Separating Church and State*, can attest to it.

When addressing the separation of government and religion it has been a long-debated topic in the history of America. Americans should be allowed to make up their own minds about how they choose to worship if they worship at all. However, when it comes to the concept of separation between government and religion, in the early 2020s, that concept is increasingly becoming non-existent. As scholars continue to conduct research, continue to write articles, and continue to educate the American public, Christian Nationalism has continued to take root in American society.²² The turning point of Christian Nationalism at the forefront of politics is all thanks to Ronald Reagan's presidential administration. Because of the Reagan administration, we suddenly have modern day branches of Christianity influencing the government. As we investigate these modern-day branches, it begs a larger theological question as to why five Supreme Court

²² Katherine Stewart, *The Power Worshippers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 277.

justices who have similar ideas of the eternal soul get to establish rulings for the millions of Americans about what rights they do and do not have? Who are they to make these decisions for us? Evangelical Christianity has become a prominent force that determines American social policy and has become the pinnacle of their Christian Nationalist objective.²³ For that reason, homosexuals have become targets due to religious Evangelical Christian beliefs. With their interpretation of the Bible, religious groups have justified their unspeakable acts towards homosexuals. The Christian perspective on life is based on the religious ideal of the “pro-family” agenda, economics, and bodies of oneself which take seriously the sovereignty of God over the world.²⁴ These types of religious interpretations from the Bible do not allow room for acceptance. If God is almighty, if God is love, if God is acceptance, then why is the American population allowing religious leaders to use God as an example to implement laws that target minorities and women.

As we look at this argument from one lens, Reagan’s administration, along with prominent Evangelical religious leaders like Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, have made a moral appeal to the nation which lead to the uprising of the influence in which religion has over the government: if we were a Christian nation as they envisioned it, homosexuality and abortion would cease

²³ Mark Douglas McGarvie, *One Nation Under Law: America’s Early National Struggles to Separate Church and State* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 2004), 191.

²⁴ Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 253.

to exist, and the School of Prayer would have become a constitutional amendment. Ultimately, Reagan along with Graham, Falwell, and Robertson, would become the souls responsible for the events that sparked the religious turmoil we are facing in the present day. As events would state, the Cold War initially started molding the puzzle pieces, which led to the rise of Christian Nationalism during Ronald Reagan's presidency. As Reagan's administration skyrocketed Christian Nationalism to new heights never seen before, the genesis that sparked Christian Nationalism blurred the lines between church and state and conservative American politics.

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